

KM-034

CHARLOTTE PINCKERT HARKER

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AGE 7

PASSAGE ON "THE PRINZ ADALBERT"

MOORE: Good afternoon. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 25th of January, 1994, and I'm in Vista, California at the home of Charlotte Pinckert Haker, (correcting herself) Harker, sorry, who came from Germany in 1926 at the age of seven years old. Why don't you begin by giving me your full name and date of birth, please?

HARKER: My full name is Charlotte Pinckert Harker, and I was born August 24, 1918 in Hamburg, Germany.

MOORE: Right. How do you spell Pinckert?

HARKER: P-I-N-C-K-E-R-T.

MOORE: Right. All right. And what size town was Hamburg at that time?

HARKER: Well, Hamburg was the largest seaport in Germany, but we lived just outside, like a suburb, and that was called Berne, B-E-R-N-E, and that was just a little suburb, and that was fairly small. It had a few houses, and I remember going to the pond with our geese and our goat and let them graze and swim and so forth.

MOORE: So what was the major industry in Hamburg itself?

HARKER: Was the seaport.

MOORE: The seaport. And the small town, what did the people there do?

HARKER: Uh, agricultural.

MOORE: Agriculture.

HARKER: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And what was your father's name?

HARKER: Conrad.

MOORE: Conrad. What was his occupation?

HARKER: He was an iron molder. He formed iron molds out of iron.

MOORE: And for what purpose was the iron used that he worked on?

HARKER: Well, for all different kinds of things. One of the things I remember my mother had about six irons to iron clothes with, because at that time they didn't have electricity, and she'd have these irons and put them on the stove and get them hot. Well, because he was in that business, we were rich in having irons for ironing clothes.

MOORE: And what did your father look like?

HARKER: Uh, he was about five feet eight. He had red hair and was very athletic. Small build by today's heights.

MOORE: And his eye color?

HARKER: Uh, blue.

MOORE: And what about his personality and temperament? How would you describe that?

HARKER: Uh, well, he was a little bit on the stubborn side,

and he was rather quiet. He was determined to make the best for his family, so he worked very hard all during that time, and that was one reason we came over to America, because he thought he had more opportunities over here.

MOORE: Is there a story about your father that you remember that you associate with your childhood?

HARKER: Well, he was quite a gymnast. And he would go to these gym classes, and he was always the strongest one, and they'd build, like, pyramids, and he'd be on the bottom, and he'd have two or three men that he would hold up, and then there'd be one on top. So he was always the strong one, and he would, he wanted us to be strong. And one of the things he always had us do if we had, like, pork chops, there was a bone there, we had to chew on the bone (she laughs) to get our teeth strong. So those are the kinds of things I remember about him.

MOORE: And so he was on the bottom of the pyramid.

HARKER: Right. He was the strong, he was a strong man.

MOORE: And with your family was he the same way?

HARKER: Uh, yes. He had the say-so. (she laughs) Like most of them did at that time, you know.

MOORE: What was your mother's name?

HARKER: Hartman was her name.

MOORE: Her maiden name.

HARKER: Her maiden name. Oh, Augusta. Augusta Hartman, yes.

MOORE: And what was her occupation?

HARKER: She was a housewife.

MOORE: And what did her folks do, her parents?

HARKER: Uh, they lived in Hamburg and her father was a cabinet-maker, and they had eight children in that family. They were very poor, the way my father's family was. They had ten in that family. So they had large families, but very little.

MOORE: And what did your father's family do?

HARKER: Uh, my grandfather was a silversmith, and he'd make rings for us when we were little, you know. Of course, we lost many of them, but he was very good at that.

MOORE: And what did your mother look like?

HARKER: Uh, she was very pretty, really, but her hair was dark and she had brown eyes. And I understand that really far back she came, there was some Spaniards in her background, so I think that's why she got the dark hair.

MOORE: What about her personality and temperament. How would you describe it?

HARKER: Well, she was sort of a dreamer. She loved to read poetry, and she loved music, and she could sing very well. Whereas my father didn't go for that at all. But she was the dreamer. And she's the one that really got us, got my dad started on coming over to America, because she wanted that, too, and he was willing to go along with that.

MOORE: It was her idea.

HARKER: Uh-huh. Because she had a sister over here, so to come over you had to have a sponsor, and my aunt, her sister, lived in St. Louis, and she's the one that sponsored us.

MOORE: What were your mother's chores around the house at home back in Germany?

HARKER: Uh, housework.

MOORE: Is there a story about your mother that you associate with your childhood, something she did with you?

HARKER: Well, she loved to sing, and she loved to tell us stories, and she was just the poet of the family. But she'd go along with whatever my dad said pretty well. And he worked hard. As far as any particular story, see, I can't think of any story other than being a dreamer, you know, and that sort of thing.

MOORE: How many children did you have, uh, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

HARKER: Just one brother.

MOORE: One brother. And was he older or younger?

HARKER: Younger.

MOORE: And his name?

HARKER: Frank.

MOORE: Frank.

HARKER: Franz, in Germany, but then when we came over here they changed it to Frank.

MOORE: With a K.

HARKER: K, right.

MOORE: What do you remember about your house in Germany?

HARKER: It was a two-family house, half of it for one, and the other for the other family. And there was quite a bit of yard there. At that time, this was after World War One, and it was important to have a little yard, because you could grow vegetables and potatoes and things like that. And the thing I remember so well about it, our stable was attached to the house, and, of course, we did have an indoor toilet, but it was not plumbed, you know. It was just, my father had to clean it out after it was pretty-well full. And when the house was closed up, why, you could smell the stable, pretty much, throughout the house.

MOORE: What was in the stable? What animals?

HARKER: Uh, sheep, goats, rabbits, chickens.

MOORE: Any cows?

HARKER: No, no. Pigs.

MOORE: Pigs. And what was your house made of? What construction?

HARKER: It was like a stucco. Probably it was brick underneath and stucco, some plaster on top, because it was so far north they had to build fairly sturdy houses. And it did have an upstairs, so we had, and it had a wood, not a wooden stove, but a cast iron stove in the kitchen. That's what we had to cook on. So my mother had to build a fire in that every day. And then we had just a little sink with running water, but no drainboards. So you had to use the kitchen table to spread your towel on and put your dishes on. And, of course, no hot water. You had to heat all of that on the stove.

MOORE: And how was the house heated, basically, by . . .

HARKER: By the stove, and there was a stove in the living room and a stove in the bedroom.

MOORE: And you said that the water, the source of water was where? Where did you get water from?

HARKER: Well, we did have a faucet in the kitchen, so it was piped in, that part was. Uh-huh.

MOORE: Did you use a pump at all, a hand pump?

HARKER: No, I don't remember that.

MOORE: What did you grow in your garden?

HARKER: We had potatoes, mainly, and beans and brussel sprout and cabbage, that sort of thing that grows well up in there. And we had some berries, too, like raspberries, and a cherry tree, things like that, apples.

MOORE: Apples. What furniture do you remember in the house?

HARKER: Not, it was very sparse in the kitchen, the table and chairs and there was a cabinet for the dishes. And I really don't remember the living room too well, but I know in the kitchen, Saturday night was bath night, and we had to take a big tub that we stored somewhere, and it was brought into the kitchen. And the hot water, which had been heated on the stove, was put in there, the tub. And then my brother would have his bath first, and he'd go off to bed, and then I would have my bath and go off to bed, and then my mother and

father would have their baths, all in the same water.

But that's about all I remember. I know there were beds there, but I can't really remember what they were like.

MOORE: If you had a larger family, it would have been a worse story.

HARKER: (they laugh) I do remember the featherbeds, the covers, you know, the comforters. They were, we had those.

MOORE: And in the bedroom, how many bedrooms did you have?

HARKER: I think there were two.

MOORE: And where, did you and your brother sleep in one?

HARKER: I can't really remember that. Of course, he was four years younger than I was, but I can't really, so they might have kept him in their while I had the other room, you know. Because he was small, a baby, practically, up to three years old before we left.

MOORE: Did anyone else live in the building?

HARKER: Well, the house was divided for two families, so another family lived in the other half of the house.

MOORE: And they were not related to you.

HARKER: No, no.

MOORE: Okay. Who did the cooking in the family?

HARKER: My mother, of course.

MOORE: And what was your favorite food then?

HARKER: Well, the meals were all very simple. I mean, it was like we had short ribs with string beans and potatoes thrown in. That was a mainstay all the time. And we didn't have very much meat. We'd have a chicken now and then, which my dad had to kill first, you know, and then we had that. But I loved fruit, if we could get fruit that was something, which wasn't very often.

MOORE: So fruit was, you say fruit was a luxury for you.

HARKER: Fruit, yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: Did you ever help cook?

HARKER: Not really, no.

MOORE: And what was mealtime like? What was your largest meal of the day?

HARKER: It was in the evening, after the work was done, and my dad would come in, and then we would have, like, and they were mostly one-dish meals like, because of the stove you'd have to have, cook your meat and then add your string beans and add your potatoes, so just one pop, one dish meals.

MOORE: And were there any other family members nearby? What about your grandparents?

HARKER: Uh, my grandparents lived right across the street. (she clears her throat) My grandparents, and my one uncle and his family. They lived right across the street. So we got to see my grandfather a lot, and he always reminded me of Mark Twain. Because he was so good with the kids, all the kids in the neighborhood would gather round. And he'd tell stories, and he'd cut out paper dolls and things like that, doilies.

MOORE: Now, whose father was he?

HARKER: My dad's father.

MOORE: Yeah. And the uncle was whose uncle, whose brother?

HARKER: Uh, my dad's.

MOORE: So these were your father's family that you lived across the street.

HARKER: Right, right. Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MOORE: And were you, did you see them often, then?

HARKER: Oh, yes, uh-huh. Almost every, oh, every day.

MOORE: Every day. And were you especially close to anyone in the family?

HARKER: My grandfather, my grandfather, at that time.

MOORE: What was his name?

HARKER: Edward.

MOORE: Edward.

HARKER: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And describe where they lived, across the street there.

MOORE: Well, it was just right across the street, and their house was very much like ours. There were two families in it, and my grandfather lived in one half, and my uncle in the other half, and they had a garden,

too, and they made good use of it to raise vegetables and fruit. And they had, they didn't have a cherry tree, but they had a cherry plant, it was like a trellis. They had a trellis on the side of the house, and they would guide the cherry plant. I can't call it a tree. And they had beautiful cherries. I loved to go over there and get the cherries.

MOORE: Was your grandmother alive then?

HARKER: Yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: And what was religious life like?

HARKER: Uh, before, well, I guess when I was born, after World War One, they were Lutheran, basically, but they separated. The state and the church separated. So we did not have, my mother was quite religious in her family, but after that we didn't go to church.

MOORE: Would you say your mother was more religious than your father?

HARKER: Yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: So was there a church nearby where you lived?

HARKER: No, uh-uh.

MOORE: And how did you practice religion in the home? Did you have prayers, or did you say grace or anything?

HARKER: No, no, no. We didn't do any of that.

MOORE: Did you experience any religious persecution?

HARKER: No, uh-uh.

MOORE: What about holiday celebrations? What were your favorites?

HARKER: Christmas.

MOORE: And how was that?

HARKER: Well, it was, first of all, we had the Christmas tree, and they had the candles, you know, not the electric lights, and gifts were always very small. I mean, one Christmas I got an orange for Christmas.

(she laughs) But the Christmas was a favorite holiday. And what, in the way of gifts, too, like, we had other relatives that lived in Hamburg, and, of course, there were children there, and they outgrew some of the toys, and then we would get them, you know. And I remember one time I was to go to my cousin's grocery store for a gift, but we couldn't

afford the train trip into Hamburg to get it. So at that time I was six years old, and my mother took me to the train station and she told the conductor where I was supposed to get off, and my aunt was supposed to be waiting there, and that's the way it turned out. And that night I carried out this grocery store toy, but it was almost as big as I was. And I got back, and I got home all right, but it was already dark, and I had to walk from the train station to the house. And there was snow on the ground, and it was Christmas Eve, and I could see all the Christmas trees, you know, in the windows. And I thought, "This is so nice but I know our Christmas tree is the prettiest." That's, that's it.

MOORE: Let's see. You said that your, Christmas was your favorite. What other religious holidays did you have?

HARKER: Well, there was Easter. But, like I say, we didn't practice religion that much, so it was just a holiday, you know, just a day to have off.

MOORE: What about school life? You went to school.

HARKER: I just went to school one year, and of course they were very strict there, and all I really remember

about that, I guess I turned around the talked to somebody and I got swatted on my hand with a ruler. And this was like kindergarten, so I don't remember too much more about that. (they laugh)

MOORE: That is something you would remember. Was the school nearby your house?

HARKER: I walked to school, and I really don't remember where it was. It was towards the train station and I walked, so it couldn't have been too far away.

MOORE: All right. so your house was how far from the center of that small town?

HARKER: Well, it was part of it, part of the town. It was sort of, I guess, in the center, really, because there were houses further out, and then some towards the train station. The train station was sort of the connection to Hamburg.

MOORE: The school that you went to, do you remember if it was crowded, or how many children there were?

HARKER: I don't really remember that.

MOORE: Did you learn any English prior to coming to the

United States?

HARKER: No, uh-uh.

MOORE: Did your parents know any English before coming here?

HARKER: No, no.

MOORE: And what did you, back, still, at that time, what did you do for entertainment as a child? What type of games did you play?

HARKER: Well, we played outside so much, and I remember that we would gather little thistles, and we could stick them together, and we'd make furniture out of them, and that would be our toys. And we'd take flowers and make wreaths and, you know, tie them together, and that sort of thing. And we'd go down to the pond a lot and fool around there. But then we had chores, too. I had to take the goats out every morning and get the goat at night and that sort of thing. So we played outside, mostly.

MOORE: But you also had responsibility during that time.

HARKER: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MOORE: You said that your mother was a dreamer, and that she

dreamt of coming to the United States and your father went along with it. Do you remember, thinking back, looking back, when this first came up, the whole idea?

HARKER: I don't really remember that, but I know that she started talking about my father going to America first. He had to go alone because they could only save enough money for one to go, and then he was going to come over and work and send the money over for us to go. But I know, it took quite a while, so probably in 1923, '24 is when they were talking about it, but it took a while because we had to be sponsored, too, and that, all of that had to be worked out with my aunt and uncle in St. Louis.

MOORE: What did your family know about the United States before going?

HARKER: Uh, well, now, see, we lived in Hamburg, and after World War One, or during World War One, my mother and father almost starved to death because there was a blockade and they couldn't get food, and that was one of the main reasons they wanted to go, to get away, and . . .

MOORE: And so when did your father finally leave?

HARKER: He left in 1925, a year before we did.

MOORE: Do you remember that?

HARKER: Uh, I remember that he left and he was gone. I don't remember actually going down to see him get on the boat and that.

MOORE: You don't remember any goodbyes to the family?

HARKER: Not at that time, no, uh-uh.

MOORE: Okay. And when your father was away, what happened? How did your family prepare to go?

HARKER: Uh, well, my dad apparently sent money over so that we could continue on living, and then sent enough over to get our passages over, and that took the year, and . . .

MOORE: Where was he at that time?

HARKER: He was in St. Louis.

MOORE: St. Louis, Missouri.

HARKER: Right. Uh-huh. That's where my aunt and uncle lived, and they're the ones who sponsored him. And he was

over one day, and the next day my aunt went out with him to get a job. See, he couldn't talk, he couldn't speak English, but the kind of work he did he didn't need to know the language. And he was a very good molder, so they hired him. So he got work the second day he was here.

MOORE: So, and what part of St. Louis was it?

HARKER: South St. Louis, which is quite predominantly German and Italian.

MOORE: All right. So when you're about to leave, let's say once you had your money for the passage, what did you do with your belongings?

HARKER: Oh, during that year we got rid of the livestock, and I remember the man came over to our house to butcher our pig. What they did, they killed the pig, and then tied it up on the ladder to let the blood drip out. And then he had, like, it looked like a washing machine, and they were in the basement, then they used the different parts of the pig to make sausage and all of that, so they prepared it. And then we took the hams down to a smokehouse, which was in the village, and it hung there in the smokehouse for a couple of

weeks, and then it was all, you know, cured and usable. So during that year my mother was getting that sort of thing all lined up, and she got rid of the furniture. And I think what was left, my grandfather probably got rid of.

MOORE: And was there any tearful . . .

HARKER: Well, it was very, yes. By that time I realized, and I knew that it would be a long time before I'd see my grandfather again, and my other relatives, so that was very tearful, and I remember that part.

MOORE: What about, because your mother had the dream, and because your father went along with it, obviously they were motivated, but did you, what was the atmosphere of selling off the belongings?

HARKER: Well, it wasn't sad, really, it was exciting. You know, they were excited. They were looking to a new future, to America with the gold sidewalks.
(she laughs) So there was, the only sadness was leaving the relatives, as far as I remember, leaving the relatives and probably not seeing them again.

MOORE: And did your grandparents express anything about this

move to you or to anyone?

HARKER: No, no. They were just sad to see us go, I could tell that. But that's all I remember about that.

MOORE: And so what happened, when you left, it was time for you to leave. Was there a party for you, or a dinner?

HARKER: No, no. We just, you know, said goodbye.

MOORE: And how did you get to where you're going to leave?

HARKER: I believe it was on a train to the boat. See, this Hamburg being a harbor, we got on a boat. It was called the Prince Albert [sic, Prinz Adalbert]. And that left, and it made a stop in England, and some more people got off.

MOORE: Let's go back a little bit. What did your mother pack? What did you take with you? Or was it . . .

HARKER: Uh, well, I know that the one thing she wanted to take with her was her sewing machine, so she packed that, and she packed a doll that I have. But the other things, other furniture, she didn't. You know, we had some clothes, but that's all I remember as far as that.

MOORE: Did she pack anything for your little brother, special?

HARKER: I'm sure she did, but I don't remember what it was . . .

MOORE: Do you have anything from that time in Germany now that you own?

HARKER: Uh, no. She did pack, like, she used to make a cake in this particular mold, and I do have that, and also the bread pudding can, canister. And I still have those.

MOORE: So she did pack some of those things.

HARKER: Yes, uh-huh, right, right.

MOORE: And how did you get from your house with your belongings from the train station?

HARKER: Well, the things that were packed, they must have been shipped on ahead, and I don't remember a lot of luggage, really. But as far as, probably that went on ahead, and we had some hand luggage.

MOORE: Did you take any food with you?

HARKER: Not that I remember.

MOORE: All right. So who was on that trip, was in your family? Who left?

HARKER: My mother, my brother and myself.

MOORE: And so three of you are traveling.

HARKER: Three of us were traveling.

MOORE: And you were, at that time . . .

HARKER: Seven.

MOORE: Seven, and your brother was three years old.

HARKER: Uh-huh, three.

MOORE: And your mother was how old, would you say, approximately?

HARKER: Let's see, thirty-five.

MOORE: She was about thirty-five.

HARKER: Uh-huh.

MOORE: All right. So, you left from Hamburg. You said you took a train. Do you remember that trip from the

train to the boat?

HARKER: Not too well, no, I don't. I remember the boat more than the train.

MOORE: What do you remember about the boat?

HARKER: Uh, well, I got seasick. (she laughs) But also, on the boat, I had to watch my brother quite a bit, because on the deck, the portholes were open, and he could have slipped right through there. They didn't do anything about those. And the reason I had to watch my brother quite a bit was because my mother got seasick almost immediately. So she was sort of out of it, and I didn't get seasick until later on.

MOORE: What class did you travel?

HARKER: The, uh, well, it's the lowest class.

MOORE: Third class, steerage?

HARKER: Yes, yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: In the bottom of the boat.

HARKER: Uh, well, not, no, not in the bottom. We did have beds.

MOORE: You had your own cabin . . .

HARKER: Yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: With beds.

HARKER: Yes.

MOORE: And was the trip particularly rough?

HARKER: Yes, for thirteen days. It took thirteen days to get over.

MOORE: And so you had primary care of your brother while your mother was sick.

HARKER: Well, I'm sure I didn't the whole time, but that's what I do remember quite a bit of the time, and I was so worried that he was going to fall through this open porthole.

MOORE: And so was it fun, though, on the boat?

HARKER: Oh, yeah. We had, we had a lot to eat.
(she laughs) I remember that. We had things that we never had before, so that was, well, I don't really remember, but it just seems so different.

MOORE: So the food was an adventure, too.

HARKER: Yeah, somehow. And seeing all those people and, of course, there were a lot of little kids I could be with, too.

MOORE: Where did you eat?

HARKER: It was sort of a main mess hall type of thing, with tables and everybody sitting at long tables.

MOORE: And did any family members come with you to see you off when you left?

HARKER: Uh, at the train, but not at the boat.

MOORE: Who came at the train?

HARKER: Uh, well, my grandfather and my grandmother and some of my aunts and uncles from my mother's side. They were pretty close.

MOORE: Did your mother think she would ever go back?

HARKER: She wanted to, but I don't know whether she thought she would. I think once they got over here that wasn't possible for a long time, so she kind of gave that up, that thought.

MOORE: So were your parents intent to come here for a short

time, make money and go back to Germany?

HARKER: No, no. They never said that. But they were homesick for quite a while, so I think they would have liked to have gone back, and I do feel that if it hadn't been for my brother and myself they never would have come over, because they wanted to do that, you know, mostly for the family.

MOORE: When you went to the ship, backing up a little bit, did you have to wait for it to leave, did you stay overnight in Hamburg?

HARKER: No, I think we got right on it.

MOORE: So the train you went right on.

HARKER: Right.

MOORE: Okay. Do you remember the month and year the ship departed?

HARKER: Well, let's see. It was the end of April, because we arrived in New York thirteen days later, and that was May the second or third, because I know we arrived in St. Louis on May the fifth.

MOORE: Okay. What were your parents' expectations about

America, do you think?

HARKER: Well, I do think they thought it would be easier than it was. I mean, my father had to work quite hard . . .

MOORE: Here?

HARKER: Here. And he thought it would be easier. The thing that they didn't think about but they realized later was that they had so much more freedom over here, and I remember my mother saying now she understood what freedom was, because she didn't have that before. I mean, they had to always be kind of careful what they said. And there wasn't the class distinction over here. I mean, if you met someone who was a doctor, you could treat him just like you did the garbageman. I mean, there wasn't that class distinction. Over in Germany, if you were a doctor, why, you were looked up to all the time. There was a definite class distinction, which she didn't realize until she came over and she felt that people were just more equal and treated that way.

MOORE: Was that what you mean by freedom here, not having to watch what she said, I mean, by the class distinction,

or what else?

HARKER: Well, you could get involved in more things without being checked on, which they were to a certain extent.

MOORE: In Germany.

HARKER: In Germany, even at that time.

MOORE: What things, like?

HARKER: Well, later on, I can't really think of anything then, but later on the background of the families were checked, you know, by, like just before, during World War Two, to see if there was any Jewish blood on either side of the family. I don't think that was true in World War One, I don't really know. But I just know that I can remember my mother saying, "Oh, he's a doctor," just as if he was God, you know, almost, which she realized over here that wasn't the way it was. You were more interested in the person, what kind of person it was, instead of what he owned or what his position was.

MOORE: Now, when you got, when the boat came towards land, do you remember seeing land for the first time?

HARKER: Uh-huh. I remember the Statue of Liberty. We all got up there, and . . .

MOORE: And how were you notified of this? Were you sleeping, or . . .

HARKER: No, I think we just all, the rumor just got, well, we're getting close. Pretty soon we were all looking for the Statue of Liberty.

MOORE: Someone told you it was there?

HARKER: Uh, well, it was almost understood, you know. We'd been on there, we were going to arrive in New York on such-and-such a day, and it was that day, so that's the thing you looked for. If you're going to New York you're going to see the Statue of Liberty.

MOORE: What was the atmosphere in the boat when that happened, when you saw land and the Statue?

HARKER: Oh, everybody was really very excited. Yeah, it was very exciting.

MOORE: And, so you saw the Statue, and then where did the boat go?

HARKER: Well, it landed, and I know then we were, we had to go

through Ellis Island. I don't know just, I mean, I remember the boat, and I remember Ellis Island, going through this huge building in Ellis Island.

MOORE: And what was that like?

HARKER: That was horrible because, it was horrible for me because when I left Germany I had a neck infection, and this was before penicillin, and it was infected, and I had to have it wrapped because it was draining, and my mother was worried that I wouldn't get through here, you know, through the health checks here, and she worried about that. So I was scared about that. And when we were in line to get through, the couple in front of us, the woman, there was something that she had that she did not pass to go through. So the man got through, but they didn't know what to do. Should he go on through? Should she be sent back? So that left, that was quite dramatic. And then our turn was next, and my mother was worried about me, and . . .

MOORE: So what happened with that couple in front of you? What was the reason?

HARKER: They were, well, they just, he broke down and cried, and she did, too.

MOORE: So both were crying in front of you.

HARKER: Yes, yeah.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

HARKER: They were very excited, and they didn't know just what to do. Then they stepped out of line, of course, and I don't know what happened after that. But then it was our turn, and my, I could hear my mother saying, "Oh, I hope we get through," you know, and that sort of thing.

MOORE: And did you have any medical examinations in Germany before coming over?

HARKER: Well, I had gone to the doctor because of this neck infection. I had infected glands, and they didn't heal because it didn't have the antibiotics. So they lanced the one, and all the infection sort of moved over to that, and it was draining out of that, so that took about six months.

MOORE: And what happened, then, when you went through your medicals? Did you have a medical examination at Ellis

Island?

HARKER: When they checked you through, yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: What happened then?

HARKER: Well, he said that was all right, not to worry about it, it was doing fine. So we got through to a degree.

MOORE: So you sort of had to sweat it out, though.

HARKER: Uh, yes. And that, that's what I remember, the waiting and the wondering, you know, and that sort of thing, so.

MOORE: And how was it, what was it like inside the Great Hall at that time? Was it, How many people were in there?

HARKER: Oh, it was just a long line. Just, I couldn't tell you, oh, a couple of hundred, I guess.

MOORE: What were the conditions? Was it dirty, clean, what was it?

HARKER: Well, I don't really remember that too much.

MOORE: Just the people.

HARKER: Yeah, uh-huh.

MOORE: And, uh . . .

HARKER: And they were all, they all seemed to be kind of nervous, because they all, you know, wondered whether they were going to get through.

MOORE: What about the officials that dealt with you for the examinations?

HARKER: Well, I remember the doctor, and he really was very nice. He could see that my mother was quite worried, you know, and he kind of smiled and said, "Oh, you're going to be okay." Just, you know, and that sort of thing.

MOORE: And did your mother understand anything the doctor said?

HARKER: Well, uh, I don't, she seemed to understand it, but I don't know whether he talked German or not. I don't remember that.

MOORE: And so you were passed.

HARKER: Yeah, and my brother and she were passed, too.

HARKER: Right. And so, from there what happened?

HARKER: Then we got on a train almost as soon as we could.

MOORE: Did your father come to get you?

HARKER: Not in New York. See, we had to go to St. Louis.

MOORE: And your mother had, had she ever been out of Germany before?

HARKER: No, poor thing. (she laughs)

MOORE: And did she speak any English?

HARKER: No, no.

MOORE: So how did you get from Ellis Island to the train?

HARKER: I guess she got instructions from somebody, and we did get on the train, and we had to be on the train . . .

MOORE: That's across the country.

HARKER: Two nights and one day. And no Pullman or anything, just, you know, sitting there, which was all right. But I don't remember how we got there, but we . . .

HARKER: What about money and things?

MOORE: Well, I guess she exchanged that. Maybe, see my aunt probably instructed her in all of that, with letter-

writing and so forth. And she must have had some money, because while we were on the train she gave me a nickel and I bought what this little package, it was only about that wide (she gestures), and it was the smallest package in this tray this man, you know, how they go through the trains selling things. And I thought, "Well, this is the smallest package. This must be the best candy there is." So I got it for a nickel, but it was five sticks, and I ate them, but I didn't like them, but I did eat them, because I spent the nickel. (she laughs) You know what it was, don't you? Gum.

MOORE: Oh, gum.

HARKER: So I just swallowed it, and I thought that was funny. (they laugh) And the man, the man on the train, I had not seen a colored man before, and this one, I'd never seen one as black as this one. He was very nice, but he was so black that when I got in the aisle to walk down the aisle I saw this man, and I just sort of backed up because I didn't, you know, it's the first black man I had seen one.

MOORE: And so what else did you do on the train?

HARKER: On the train? Well, I know I got grapes and I got an orange. So that, I don't remember too much about the long ride.

MOORE: What was your mother's attitude towards the train trip and the traveling?

HARKER: She was tired. She wanted to get to St. Louis and settle down.

MOORE: And in St. Louis, was anyone there to meet you?

HARKER: My father and my uncle, and he had a Model T, I remember that. He came to the train station with a Model T. And, of course, at that time, they had to start the engine by cranking it in the front. And I was so, you know, he'd get in the front and crank it, and it would start the engine. And I thought, "Oh, I hope he hurries and gets in there before it takes off!" (they laugh) It was amazing. He always did. So that's what I remember about the train trip from St. Louis to the house.

MOORE: So do you remember reuniting with your father?

HARKER: Oh, yes, because he was there, too. Yes, oh, that was great, yeah. First my mother said he'd gained weight,

which he did.

MOORE: And then where did you go from there in St. Louis?

HARKER: Well, my aunt had this, it was in South St. Louis and she had this three-story house that they had, and a family lived on each story. So we lived on the second story that they had that vacant and ready for us, so that's where we went.

MOORE: And how big was that?

HARKER: It had a kitchen, a bedroom, a living room and in the hall there was a place for a cot, and that's where my brother slept. And I slept in the living room with the davenport that opened up into a bed, and then my mother and father had the bedroom. It was a one-bedroom house.

MOORE: And so, what was the address, do you remember?

HARKER: 2755 Allen. (she laughs)

MOORE: In St. Louis.

HARKER: St. Louis, uh-huh.

MOORE: And what did your father do, then, for work?

HARKER: He was still a molder. See, now this was about in 1926 and '27.

MOORE: And then, okay. So where did your relatives live?

HARKER: They lived in that same house, yes. So they lived downstairs, and we lived upstairs.

MOORE: And do you remember going to school?

HARKER: Uh-huh. I went to school. That wasn't too far away. It was the Hodgins[ph] School. And they didn't have the bilingual class, so they stuck me in the first grade, and I was tall, so they put me in the back, and there I was, you know. And the kids called me "Kraut," they made fun of me. And, but I had to go to school. So I sat there, and sat there, and gradually I learned a few words, but I was ten years old before I got out of the first grade, because I didn't pass anything because I didn't understand. So, but then, after I . . .

MOORE: At seven? You were in first grade at seven?

HARKER: Well, I was, see, seven. I didn't go to school right away, and then my birthday, then it was summer vacation, so I was eight. So then that September I

was eight and I went . . .

MOORE: You spent two years.

HARKER: Two years in the first grade, yeah.

MOORE: And then how did you learn English? Was it just that way?

HARKER: That's right, yes. You pick it up, and you pick it up fast because, boy, you've got to, you know.

MOORE: They just kept you back in the meantime.

HARKER: That's right. And then, of course, they had summer school. And then once I started to, was able to speak English, I went to summer school, and then I skipped one grade. So I graduated at thirteen, which is the average age, you know, for graduation.

MOORE: Were there any other German children in your neighborhood?

HARKER: No.

MOORE: Were there any other immigrants?

HARKER: Uh, not that recent, no. No, there was a family from Roumania there, but we didn't get together because

they couldn't understand us.

MOORE: So the children who were teasing you in the beginning spoke English natively as children.

HARKER: Uh-huh, uh-huh, yeah. And, uh, because it was such a short time after World War One they, you know, we were the Krauts. We were, then my brother was beat up a couple of times because he was German which, that's the way it was.

MOORE: And how did you feel about that? Did your family talk about that at all?

HARKER: Uh, they talked about it, but what could they do? They just said, "Well, do the best you can." And I did.

MOORE: How about your father and mother's English? How did they learn it, or did they?

HARKER: They did. My mother was quick to pick it up. She was quicker to pick it up than my father. My father always did have the accent. He couldn't, (she speaks with a German accent) this and that, you know, you couldn't get the "th" sound out. But he could read pretty well. I mean, he would form the words in his

own way, and he got the idea of it. And my mother, she really got very good. In fact, when I went to high school I'd have to ask her how to spell a word, because she would remember it, whereas I didn't bother.

MOORE: What was your favorite subject in school, then?

HARKER: It was math.

MOORE: And do you happen to remember any teachers or playmates that were particularly, you were fond of in school?

HARKER: Well, I did have one, Margie. She was my first and good playmate, but she had told me, she used to pass by my house, and I'd be there in the yard by myself, because I didn't have anybody to play with. And then after we got to know each other she said, "You know, I always thought you were crazy, because nobody was with you ever, and you didn't talk to anyone." So she said, "I just thought you were crazy." (they laugh)
Lovely way . . .

MOORE: You're not crazy, you're foreign!

HARKER: That's right. (they laugh)

MOORE: Did you experience any other persecutions for being German in the States, later in life?

HARKER: Uh, well, when I finally got over it, I did develop a problem. As I got a little older, I started to stutter, which didn't help in school either, you know. I mean, I had to, I don't think that was persecution. It was just trying to learn the language, and to put up with some of the kids that were teasing me that I developed that. But I had a Mrs. Huer here, she made me get over it by putting me up in front of the class every day to recite something whether I stuttered or not, and it finally helped me get over that. So she was a good, but it was hard because there was, right in the front there was a boy, I remember, by the name of Leroy, and he would look up at me and he'd go "chi-chi-chi." (they laugh) So those are the kind of things you remember.

MOORE: How horrible.

HARKER: Yes. But I think in the long run they make you stronger, then after a while you don't really care, you just go on.

MOORE: Well, what about religious life once you got to the States? Did you change or stay . . .

HARKER: Not really. I didn't really, no, no. In fact, I never really did. When, after I got married and I sent my kids to church, you know, because I thought that that was the thing to do.

MOORE: Well, how did your family members adjust to life in America?

HARKER: It was very hard for, they never reached out very much. See, my dad was already forty, my mother was thirty-five, so they never reached out. They did have a few friends who were also German. But now, like at school, like they have the PTA, Mother never went to that, because she didn't feel like, she felt inferior all the time. She addresses people always as mister or misses, never on the first-name basis, so they didn't adjust very well. And they, my mother was very homesick. I mean, she'd dream about going back.

MOORE: Do you think that they felt they made a good decision to come to the States?

HARKER: Oh, yes, yes.

MOORE: Did they ever say that to you?

HARKER: Yes, they did, they did. Afterwards they got over all of that, and things were better, and they felt they made the right decision.

MOORE: What about during World War Two when that started, and there was anti-, you said, anti-German sentiment. Did your family at all suffer from that?

HARKER: Uh, no, no. I mean, every, see, we'd been here quite a while at that time. One thing I wanted to say about that, at that time my brother was about sixteen, seventeen, and he was going through the teenage stage, which was hard on parents. And at that time Hitler was coming to power, and he had all the youth, you know, under control. And my mother thought, "Well, maybe that would be good. He would be under control more and straighten out." He wasn't bad or anything. He was just kind of mixed up as a kid. So she wrote my uncle, and this was about 1939, just before everything started, '38, '39. And he wrote back and he said, "Whatever you do, do not send him over here." He saw what was starting to happen, but he couldn't do anything about it. He said that would be a

terrible mistake, so don't. So she didn't, you know.

And then she, then we saw what was happening.

MOORE: So basically, was there was a flow of information over here about what was happening in Germany?

HARKER: Uh, to a degree, but they couldn't be, they couldn't be as open as they wanted to be. They couldn't say the things they really wanted to say, I don't think, at that time.

MOORE: Did any family tragedy occur during those years following you coming to the United States?

HARKER: Well, my grandparents passed away, and I think some of, a couple of my other relatives too, but that was it, so it was very death. And my mother's mother did, too. She passed away. So that was very hard on them. It was hard on the kids, too, but more so on the, you know, my mother and father.

MOORE: Did your parents stay at the same address with your . . .

HARKER: No. We lived there about a year, and then my dad decided to be more on his own, and we moved to, in the same neighborhood really, but to our own flat on

Oregon Avenue. I don't remember the street, the number. But we lived there for a few years, and then my dad bought a house, which was still in the same neighborhood, but he finally decided that it was the way to go, and he was able to do it.

MOORE: When your parents looked back over the years at their decision to come, how did they view their coming to the United States toward the end of their life?

HARKER: Well, they always felt they made the right move because it was a lot easier for them, too. And for us, of course, it was a lot easier, because in the meantime, and especially after the war they found out how hard our relatives had it, and some of them were bombed out. And so they felt more and more that they made the right decision.

MOORE: Because of the safety during the war?

HARKER: Uh, well, the safety, and the freedom you had here which you didn't have there, because it got to the point where we couldn't write letters. You know, they were censored. So they realized that they did, but they still, it was still their homeland, and they miss that and they miss the relatives a lot, you know.

MOORE: What about your life? Briefly describe the course of your life. What happened?

HARKER: Well, after I finally made the adjustment and I had it very nice. I enjoyed, I didn't finish high school at that time because then the Depression came, that was the thing. So my dad was just over here, what, four or five years and the Depression came and he was out of a job. By that time he had enough money to do something else, so we bought what you call a confectionery. It's a little, like a candy store where kids come to eat their lunch. So at that time I was fourteen, so I quit after one year of high school and helped in that. But that lasted about a year because a confectionery you have open from morning until late at night, seven days a week. So, and it really wasn't making money. We weren't that business type of people. So it meant, by that time my dad got a job, so we sold that, and then moved to our, that's when he was able to buy a house, and we lived there.

MOORE: So after that, working in the confectionery, what did you do after that?

HARKER: Then I went to business school instead of going back

to high school. Then later I took some courses in high school to make it sort of the equivalent of high school. And I went to business school, and I went to work. And I worked, let's see, I worked for a couple of years at a religious publishing company.

(she laughs) And then I, I went to work at Century Electric, because that's where my dad was working and he thought it would be nice. And I got the job, but right at the last minute the man says, "Oh, by the way, are you a citizen?" I wasn't, because my dad did not become a citizen right away, and then when I turned eighteen I had to become a citizen on my own. Well, then the war started. Well, they weren't going to give out citizenship papers to you enemies, which I was, in a way. So I didn't get the job because I was, I wasn't a citizen. But I did get a job at Butler Brothers, and I worked there for six years. But while I was there I thought this was kind of interesting, the personnel department called me down and an FBI man was there, and he wanted to talk to me. And he said, "Do you know a man by such-and-such a name?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, do you, he was in your class at night school." And then I remembered that I took a physics class, and he was in that class,

and I talked to him because he could talk German. Well, they were trying to find him, and they, I don't know how they found me from that class, which was two or three years ago. And I didn't even remember the man, except I remember talking to someone. And I said, "I don't know anything about him." And they, then they asked me, "Well, what do you do on such-and-such a night a week?" And I said, "Well, on Thursday night I go square dancing." And he said, "Well, that all checks out." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, we checked your mail." They knew what I was doing. So I don't know if this man was . . .

MOORE: He was German speaking.

HARKER: German speaking. That's all I know.

MOORE: They checked your mail.

HARKER: They checked to see what was in my mailbox, you know, what sort of letters I'd get, and they checked my activities because apparently this, they really wanted to get a hold of this man. And any connection they could make with someone else. So that was . . .
(she laughs)

MOORE: That was during the war?

HARKER: Uh, no, this was already after the war. Yeah.

MOORE: All right. So, how did you meet your husband, and what happened?

HARKER: Oh, I went to a U.S.O. in St. Louis, Christ Church. They had, in fact, we'd gone there, a group of us, because we'd go square dancing there, and then they had the U.S.O. where they had the soldiers come in from Jefferson Barracks, and they had dances and ping-pong and things like that, and that's how I met him. But he didn't know I was German. And then he was only there a short time, he was shipped over to England, and he'd write me, and he'd complain about these Krauts. (she laughs) So then I told him.

MOORE: So, well, he didn't mind too much. He ended up marrying you.

HARKER: Well, his mother was German, Pennsylvania Dutch.

MOORE: So, and then what happened after that in your life?

HARKER: Well, then I worked in, I worked for six years, like I said, at Butler Brothers, and then I went to work for

National Retail Farm Equipment Association. I worked there for a while, and then my husband, Harlan came out of the service. But he lived in California, so I decided, we decided that I would come out here. I knew somebody out here. And I lived in Los Angeles and got a job in General Mills, to find out whether I really wanted to marry him. And that's how we met and we got married.

MOORE: And did you have children, or . . .

HARKER: Yes, We have two children.

MOORE: Their names?

HARKER: Uh, Carol Harker Moeller. She lives in Rancho Palos Verdes. And our son is here in La Costa.

MOORE: And his name?

HARKER: Larry Wayne Harker, and he's a pharmacist. And my daughter, she was a stewardess. That's how we got to go back to Germany, because she was a stewardess, then we could make the trip back, several times. And then after she got married she's a medical technologist, so.

MOORE: Did you teach German to any of, to your children?

HARKER: Uh, they, I did, and I tried to keep it up for them, and they took it in school. But they didn't retain too much of it, because they didn't, uh . . .

MOORE: You spoke to them when they were children?

HARKER: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MOORE: So they spoke German at one time.

HARKER: To a degree, to a degree. And then my mother and father always spoke German, so they heard that quite a bit. And, really, I retained quite a bit of it. If I, like we go traveling, you meet a lot of German travelers, so I try to talk German to them, and try to keep it up.

MOORE: And, so now at this moment in your life as you look back, how do you view your parents' immigration, in relation to your life.

HARKER: Well, I realize that they had it very hard compared to us. I mean, they just worked so hard, and their scope was so limited. They were focused so much on work and just that that they didn't do a lot of the things that

we do now. Now, for two reasons. They didn't, and then the availability wasn't there for anyone at that time. You know, I mean now almost everyone's gone to Europe once or twice, whereas I was the only one when I was young that had ever been across the ocean from, like, school and that community. But now that's much more prevalent. So as far as, they felt they did the right thing, and they later enjoyed life and saw the fruits of their labor, I guess that's what I should say.

MOORE: And how do you feel? Do you feel at all as a "hyphenated" American, meaning German-American?

HARKER: I feel very American, really. I mean, I'm always glad to see and read about, to see my relatives and read about Germany. I'm always ashamed of what happened, World War Two, you know, the Holocaust and that. But I'm very American. I know they all had a hard time. All the European countries have a much harder time than we do over here, and I view that as, I'm glad I had a hard time, because it makes it easier to cope with things. I feel some of us, some of the younger people especially, they haven't had it tough enough, they don't know what it's like. And one of these days

they're going to have to face that, and I hope they can.

MOORE: I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Ellis Island Oral History Project for helping us out and hearing your story, and we'll send you a copy of this, as part of our archives.

HARKER: Well, that would be nice.

MOORE: This is Kate Moore with Charlotte Harker on January 25, 1994, signing off for the Ellis Island Oral History Project in . . .