

KM-076

MARGOT LORCH PETERS ZITRON

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GERMANY, 1934

AGE 5

PASSAGE ON "THE AQUITANIA"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Margot Zitron is the sister of Henry Lorch and Louis Lorch, Interview EI-539. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 3/10/1995.

MOORE: Good morning. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service, and today is the 30th of July 1994, and I'm in Columbus, Ohio at the home of Margaret [sic] Zitron, who came from Germany in 1934 at the age of five years old. Why don't you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth, please?

ZITRON: My name is Margot Lorch Zitron, and I was born February 18, 1929.

MOORE: Now, we have here, Margot is your first name.

ZITRON: Yes.

MOORE: It's Margot, not Margaret.

ZITRON: Well, it's Margot, see? They called me Margot, of course, I . . .

MOORE: And your, how do you spell your maiden name?

ZITRON: L-O-R-C-H.

MOORE: And where were you born, in what town?

ZITRON: In Dieburg, Dieburg, Germany, D-I-E-B-U-R-G.

MOORE: And where is that, exactly, in Germany?

ZITRON: Well, it's near Frankfurt, near Frankfurt-on-Main.

MOORE: How big of a town is that town?

ZITRON: Uh, I can't give you the exact amount of people, but it was a rather small town.

MOORE: And do you remember what the town looked like at all?
Do you remember anything?

ZITRON: No, no, nothing at all.

MOORE: Have you ever been back?

ZITRON: Yes. We were back, oh, about four years ago, I believe, and we went to the town, and we found it very interesting, but I could recollect nothing of what I had seen or what I was supposed to remember.

MOORE: What was the major industry of that town? Did anyone ever tell you what it was famous for, the little town?

ZITRON: No.

MOORE: Was it, what was your father's name?

ZITRON: Max, M-A-X, Max Lorch. There were a few Max Lorches there.

MOORE: And what was his occupation?

ZITRON: Uh, he was what they call a fee handler. He was a, he was in the slaughtering business.

MOORE: And how would you describe what he looked like, your father?

ZITRON: My dad was tall, and very little hair and a moustache.
(she laughs)

MOORE: And what about his personality and temperament?

ZITRON: Very easygoing, very rarely raised his voice. And he was just a wonderful man.

MOORE: And is there a story that you associate with your father from childhood? Something that you think of?

ZITRON: My dad had many one-liners, and when he mentioned something, and he was, I think I'm going to become prejudiced, because he was one of the nicest men I've ever known.

MOORE: And how about, what was your mother's name?

ZITRON: Sophie, S-O-P-H-I-E.

MOORE: And what was her maiden name?

ZITRON: Goldschmidt, G-O-L-D-S-C-H-M-I-D-T.

MOORE: And what was her occupation at that time?

ZITRON: Housewife.

MOORE: Housewife. Describe your mother. What did she look like?

ZITRON: Mom was about five-two or five-three, and she was very personable. She dealt very easily with people, and was a good mother. And . . .

MOORE: And what were her . . .

ZITRON: And was not afraid to venture into new things. I think that's one of the things that I remember about my mother.

MOORE: What were her chores around the house? What did she do?

ZITRON: A lot of cooking, and a lot of cleaning up after four children. That's . . .

MOORE: And what was your favorite food as a child, do you remember that, what you liked best to eat?

ZITRON: Yes, her crumb cake.

MR. ZITRON: Her canned peaches.

ZITRON: (she laughs) No, I didn't like canned peaches, that's all. My mother used to can peaches, and I thought someday when I get to be bigger and married I was not going to have anything canned. (a telephone rings)

MOORE: Hold on, we'll take a little break, then, for this. (break in tape) You mentioned that your favorite

food was your mother's . . .

ZITRON: Crumb cake. She used to make a delicious yeast dough, and put crumbs on top made of sugar and nuts, et cetera, and that was my favorite. I liked her baking better than her cooking. Is that on tape?
(they laugh)

MOORE: Well, what about brothers and sisters? Did you have brothers and sisters?

ZITRON: I had two brothers and one sister. There were four of us, and there are four of us.

MOORE: And what are the brothers' names? How about naming the children in birth order, then.

ZITRON: Okay. My sister, Ruth, my brother Henry, myself and my brother Louie.

MOORE: And what is the span of ages between you?

ZITRON: Uh, between my sister and my oldest brother, there's sixteen months, between my oldest brother and myself. I believe three years, three years again.

MOORE: Now, did your mother ever have help at home at all?

ZITRON: Yes, when we lived in Germany she did, yes.

MOORE: And the help did . . .

ZITRON: It was a full-time help.

MOORE: And was that for the children, or what did the help do?

ZITRON: I can't remember what the help did exactly. I would not even, uh, remember that at all, but I know that she was there for us.

MOORE: Do you know anything about the house that your family lived in in Germany?

ZITRON: I don't remember that at all.

MOORE: And did they ever mention about conditions at home before they left? What did your family say?

ZITRON: Well, we were, probably lived very comfortably. And, but as far as other conditions, I don't know. I don't know.

MOORE: Do you know if your family kept animals at all?

ZITRON: No. We personally didn't.

MOORE: So was your house in the town or outside the town?

ZITRON: In the town.

MOORE: Right in the town proper. Would you know if you had things like running water and plumbing inside?

ZITRON: Oh, yes, I think so. I think I would remember if we had outdoor plumbing.

MOORE: And did your grandparents, where did your grandparents live?

ZITRON: Well, they lived in town. I don't remember my grandparents at all. Not at all.

MOORE: Who is closest to in the family, would you say?

ZITRON: Closest to?

MOORE: As a family member, who did you feel emotionally closest to in the family? Brothers and sisters, mother and father, who were you partial to?

ZITRON: Well, I was partial to my dad, and I don't know, I think I was equally close to my family members, my brothers and sister. Of course, we babied my younger brother, and that was a lot of fun. (she laughs)

MOORE: And were you, you said your grandparents lived on both sides. Are they both sides now in town, or just one side, when you talk about your grandparents?

ZITRON: Both grandparents.

MOORE: They lived in the same town?

ZITRON: I believe they did, I believe they did.

MOORE: Now, what about religious life at home? Were you religious, your family, at all?

ZITRON: Yes. My dad was quite religious. And living there only for five years, I don't remember what I did as far as religion was concerned, or what actually he was able to.

MOORE: And what religion was your father?

ZITRON: Jewish.

MOORE: Jewish. And was he orthodox?

ZITRON: Yes, yes.

MOORE: Did your family keep kosher?

ZITRON: Yes, definitely.

MOORE: And was there a place of worship nearby? Was there . . .

ZITRON: I, there was a place, well, the town was so small that, of course, it was nearby, you know.

MOORE: And did your family experience any religious persecution?

ZITRON: Yes, we did, towards the very end, before we came over to . . .

MOORE: Before you came over to . . .

ZITRON: Before we came over to the States, the United States.

Apparently my brother and sister were, we were the only ones in school at the time, and the children, there was a courtyard where they went to school, within the school, and I remember them telling me the story that they had water thrown on them in the winter, you know, and ice formed on them, and that's one thing I remember. And then I also remember them telling stories where we could not visit other families, and there were very few Jewish families within the town, and we couldn't visit any other families that weren't Jewish. That was a dangerous

thing to do at the time.

MOORE: So the children experienced it. But did the parents themselves in the workplace experience any at all?

ZITRON: I don't know. That I don't, I don't ever remember hearing stories about that.

MOORE: Now, your mother, was your mother religious?

ZITRON: Not like my dad was. She was not as religious.

MOORE: And what were your favorite holidays, do you remember, the family holidays?

ZITRON: Halloween. (they laugh) That was a big thing in Europe, was Halloween, in Germany, yeah.

MOORE: Oh. And what did you do there?

ZITRON: Oh, dressed up. Mom made us costumes. It was quite a, you know, interesting. Over here the holidays, Thanksgiving, Thanksgiving.

MOORE: Were any religious holidays particularly important to your family?

ZITRON: Yes, they all were, they all were. Dad kept them all, and we were exposed to all of those and kept them

because of my father.

MOORE: Now, you were five when you came here. Do you remember any games back in Germany that you played or anything? What do you remember of being back in Germany? Do you remember anything?

ZITRON: No, no. I don't.

MOORE: Did your family ever talk about why they came to the United States?

ZITRON: Well, just because of the situation, because of Hitler coming into power just before '34 and my uncle was wise enough to have us come over . . .

MOORE: And where was your uncle living?

ZITRON: He was in New York City.

MOORE: And did your parents ever talk about the atmosphere before you left, in Germany?

ZITRON: Just the fact that they were not able to visit with their friends. They didn't want to expose their friends to any danger, and that was about the only thing that I remember them, you know, saying.

MOORE: Now, when you say friends, you mean Gentile . . .

ZITRON: Gentile friends.

MOORE: So that their social scene changed?

ZITRON: Exactly.

MOORE: And was that a correlation to Hitler into power?

ZITRON: Yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: And so your uncle lived in New York City.

ZITRON: Right.

MOORE: And when did he come over?

ZITRON: He came over many years before as a young man, and he was able to establish himself and then bring the rest of his family over, and we were the first ones to come over after he did.

MOORE: And what was his line of work?

ZITRON: Textile, textile.

MOORE: Now how, he remained in the United States. How did he understand the situation in Germany?

ZITRON: Well, apparently he traveled to Germany. Apparently he sensed enough danger there.

MOORE: So he arranged, who, he sponsored . . .

ZITRON: He was our sponsor, yes.

MOORE: And by sponsoring, how much was the sponsoring involved? What, did he pay for tickets, or did . . .

ZITRON: That I don't know. That I don't know.

MOORE: And your father was working at what at that time?

ZITRON: At that time he was a, well, a butcher, you know, in Europe. And then he came over and worked in my uncle's factory, which was a textile mill.

MOORE: Now, when you say he was a butcher, was he in a specialty shop doing kosher butchering?

ZITRON: No. He was a . . .

MR. ZITRON: He bought cattle and then slaughtered them. (a telephone rings) (break in tape)

MOORE: Now, did your family talk at all about getting ready to come to the United States, what they brought?

ZITRON: No, no, I don't remember that at all. We didn't bring anything as far as furniture and things like that are concerned, of course, you know, but . . .

MOORE: How about religious artifacts? Did you bring anything from home special?

ZITRON: Oh, I'm sure the candlesticks came along, you know.

MOORE: And do you have family photographs and papers?

ZITRON: Yes.

MOORE: So they came, too?

ZITRON: Yes, yes.

MOORE: Did your family, you said you don't remember much, but do you remember what your family said about leaving, anything?

ZITRON: Uh, as far as material things are concerned, or just leaving? I think they were quite upset leaving friends, family and leaving home and coming to a very, very strange country.

MOORE: Did your parents speak English at all before they came?

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: Did the children speak English at all?

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: So do you remember at all neighbors or friends or anyone giving you a farewell party in Germany?

ZITRON: No.

MOORE: How did your grandparents feel?

ZITRON: I don't know.

MOORE: They didn't talk about that.

ZITRON: I don't know.

MOORE: Okay. So, do you remember anything from the, do you know what port you came from?

ZITRON: (she sighs) I don't remember.

MOORE: Do you remember taking a train at all to the port, or . . .

ZITRON: I believe we took a train. I don't remember.

MOORE: That's all right. We can check that, too, with the

family papers later.

ZITRON: Yes.

MOORE: Now, you came by boat. Do you know what the name of the boat was?

ZITRON: The Acquitania.

MOORE: The Acquitania. Do you remember when, month and year?

ZITRON: August. (a telephone rings)

MOORE: We'll take a little break. (break in tape) So you came on the Aquitania.

ZITRON: Aquitania, right.

MOORE: And did you have to wait for the ship? Do you remember anything about that ship?

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: And did your family tell you anything about the voyage?

ZITRON: Uh, apparently it was a difficult one, and my sister was seasick. Those are the only things I remember.

MOORE: Did they mention what class you came on?

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: Did they mention it was . . .

ZITRON: The probably did, I don't remember.

MOORE: And did the family members talk about anything that they'd never seen before when they came over on the boat?

ZITRON: No.

MOORE: Did they talk anything about coming into New York Harbor?

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: How about, anything about Ellis Island? Did they say anything about that?

ZITRON: When we were there a few years ago my sister recalled the fact that my mother sat there and cried for hours on a bench, and I was quite disturbed, of course.

MOORE: And did she mention anything about a physical examination?

ZITRON: Yes. My dad, there was a time when we did not think

we were going to be able to stay because my dad had one arm, losing it during the First World War in Germany, and we did not know if we were able to stay or not. But fortunately we were able to, and my uncle was able to begin with the process, you know, make sure that we were able to stay.

MOORE: Were any of these people from the same town on the same boat?

ZITRON: That I don't know.

MOORE: And were you detained at all at Ellis Island, do you know?

ZITRON: Overnight, yes.

MOORE: And did your family ever have any comments about your Ellis Island stay?

ZITRON: No, no, except for, you know, my mother breaking down.

MOORE: Now, where were you headed when you came from Ellis Island?

ZITRON: To a town called Hudson, New York, upstate New York.

MOORE: And do you remember the address of that, where you

were?

ZITRON: 163 Green Street.

MOORE: And what type of house was that?

ZITRON: It was a two-story double, a large house.

MOORE: And whose house was that?

ZITRON: That was someone's home. We rented this half of a house.

MOORE: And tell me about the conditions of the house. How many rooms were there for you?

ZITRON: Well, there were at least four bedrooms, and an attic that my sister and I shared.

MOORE: And did you have indoor or outdoor plumbing?

ZITRON: Indoor, indoor plumbing.

MOORE: How did you light the house?

ZITRON: Very much, very much.

MOORE: No, I mean, how was it lit, your house?

ZITRON: How was it, oh, how did we light our house? Uh,

electricity.

MOORE: You had electricity, okay. And do you remember going to school for the first . . .

ZITRON: Yes, yes. I don't remember going to school for the first time, but I do remember school. I don't remember the first day, four days of school, but I do remember school.

MOORE: And so you came in August. Did you start school immediately?

ZITRON: Yes.

MOORE: And did you, how did you learn English?

ZITRON: Just by listening to others, and there was no one that spoke German, so I had to learn to speak English.

MOORE: And was there anyone who particularly took you under their wing or anything to help you?

ZITRON: Not that I remember, not that I remember. Not any one personal . . .

MOORE: Teacher or . . .

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: Were there other children that were foreign in your school?

ZITRON: Not that I remember, no.

MOORE: What was the name of the school? Do you remember? It was an elementary school?

ZITRON: It was an elementary school. I'm, no, I don't remember.

MOORE: Hudson, New York.

ZITRON: Hudson, New York, yes. It could have been State Street. I don't remember.

MOORE: And do you remember any, having any difficulty, people calling you names or teasing you for being foreign?

ZITRON: No, that I don't. I don't think that even happened. I think they were more excited about having someone who didn't speak English and willing to help them, you know.

MOORE: What about the adjustment of your mother and father?

ZITRON: My mother seemed to adjust quite easily. She, as I said, she was one of these people that was able to go

into new situations, and she went to night school to learn English, she went to the movies, and she was able to have friends around her very easily.

MOORE: Did you have financial difficulties when you first came to the country?

ZITRON: Not that I remember.

MOORE: Was your mother able to have hired help?

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: So that was the difference between . . .

ZITRON: She did have someone, every, I believe, maybe sometimes every week. I don't even know if it was every week or every other week.

MR. ZITRON: That was years afterward.

MOORE: And so your father worked in a textile factory.

ZITRON: Yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: And tell me the course, then how did he adjust?

ZITRON: My dad adjusted very easily, very easily. He never complained.

MOORE: As the course of the political events in Germany, did your parents follow closely what was happening?

ZITRON: I'm sure they did, but again, I was not aware of any problems or . . .

MOORE: Now, what about religious life, then, in this country? Was there any change in coming from Germany to here?

ZITRON: Apparently not, because our dad was able to find an orthodox temple in town, and we went right on with our lives as far as religion was concerned.

MOORE: And so that you, you kept kosher at home still?

ZITRON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And did you ever have any persecution in Hudson, New York at all for being Jewish, with other people?

ZITRON: Jewish, no, no.

MOORE: Did your mother, of the two parents, did it stay the same that your father was more religious than your mother in this country, too?

ZITRON: Yes, yes, always, yes.

MOORE: And did the children maintain the religious . . .

ZITRON: Uh, my sister did. My sister maintained a kosher home. I did not after I was married.

MOORE: All right. Now, your father was in a textile factory. Did he stay there for years?

ZITRON: Yes, yes, until he retired.

MOORE: Until he retired. And how long did you live in Hudson, New York, then?

ZITRON: Well, I went off to school after I, oh, dear, I was five when I came, and I left when I was seventeen.

MOORE: You stayed in . . .

ZITRON: To go to school, yes.

MOORE: Did you move from that residence, the rented residence?

ZITRON: No, no. I just went to school after that, and I never really came home to live any more.

MOORE: Did your parents ever move from that residence?

ZITRON: From that initial residence, you mean the first house?
Yes, yes.

MOORE: And where did they move to?

ZITRON: They moved to an apartment, into, well, again, an up and down, you know.

MOORE: Now, you mentioned that your father and mother learned English.

ZITRON: Yes.

MOORE: What did you speak at home to each other?

ZITRON: German.

MOORE: German.

ZITRON: Yes. And, of course, some English.

MOORE: So it changed, mixed.

ZITRON: Yes.

MOORE: Did you teach German to your children?

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: And did you speak German, do your children speak German with their grandparents?

ZITRON: No, no.

MOORE: What did your parents expect about the United States, do you know? Coming here, did they have any expectations?

ZITRON: I don't think they had much as far as expectations were concerned. I think it was just a matter of survival. But I don't know how much they expected, truthfully.

MOORE: What happened to, what happened to your grandparents, then, in Germany?

ZITRON: I don't know at which point my grandparents . . .

MR. ZITRON: They were, uh, what do you want . . .

MOORE: It just picks up every sound . . . (referring to the microphone)

MR. ZITRON: Oh, I'm sorry.

MOORE: That's all right. Do you know about your grandparents?

ZITRON: Uh, I don't remember at which point they passed away.

MOORE: And do you know why they passed away? Were they . . .

ZITRON: Just age, I'm sure.

MOORE: They weren't persecuted?

ZITRON: Not that I remember. In fact, they may have passed away before this time, you know. I did have a step-grandmother, my dad's stepmother, who came over to the States after quite a few years.

MOORE: Now, describe a bit the course of your life. So you said you went away to school at seventeen. Where did you go?

ZITRON: I went to Plattsburg State Teachers, and I was there for three years, and then married and did not continue my education. And how much do you want to know of this?

MOORE: Well, your husband, how did you meet your husband?

ZITRON: I met him, he went to Champlain College. And he, that was in the same town, and that was a two-year school, and I met him there. And we were married in '49, and that was the reason I didn't continue on with school, because he was going to Troy, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, that we were there for a couple of years . . .

MOORE: And was he . . .

ZITRON: . . . until he graduated.

MOORE: . . . an immigrant child or was he . . .

ZITRON: He was, yes, as a matter of fact, he came from
Austria.

MOORE: And was he the same faith as you were?

ZITRON: Yes.

MOORE: And so he came from Austria in what year, do you
remember?

ZITRON: No, I don't. No, I don't. I'd have to really think
about it. I don't remember.

MOORE: What did you speak with each other?

ZITRON: English. And if we didn't want the children to
understand, we spoke German.

MOORE: Okay. And you had children?

ZITRON: Yes. I had the two . . .

MOORE: And what was his surname?

ZITRON: Frank.

MOORE: Frank.

ZITRON: Frank.

MOORE: That was his first name or his . . .

ZITRON: His first name.

MOORE: And his last name?

ZITRON: Peters.

MOORE: Peters. And you had children with Frank Peters.

ZITRON: Right.

MOORE: How many children did you have?

ZITRON: Two girls.

MOORE: Two girls. And what do they do, the girls?

ZITRON: My girls are, one is a computer operator in Florida,
and the other daughter lives in Chicago, a housewife.

MOORE: So you spoke as a secret language, German.

ZITRON: That's right.

MOORE: Now, how do you view your parents coming to this country? What's your attitude toward that? Was it a good decision?

ZITRON: Well, looking back, of course it was a good decision, and also looking back I thought it was a very brave thing to do, to start life again with four children.

MOORE: And how old were they when they started again, your parents, when they came to this country, approximately? You were five. How old were your parents?

ZITRON: Well, I'm sure they were in their forties.
(she pauses) I don't know.

MOORE: Now, did your parents ever mention anything about their original decision to come here?

ZITRON: No.

MOORE: Did they ever talk about how they identified themselves as a nationality? Did they look at themselves as German or American or both or what?

ZITRON: Well, they looked at themselves as German initially, you know. And then they were American very easily.

They adapted very well.

MOORE: Did they ever think of going back to live?

ZITRON: No.

MOORE: Did they ever want to?

ZITRON: Not that I know, not that I ever heard them mention that. No, no.

MOORE: Was there, did they frequently talk about the old country at all when you were younger?

ZITRON: They spoke about people, friends, relatives, the home that we lived in, yes.

MOORE: And did you ever consider going back to live?

ZITRON: No, never.

MOORE: And how do you view yourself now in terms of nationalities? How do you identify yourself?

ZITRON: As far as, well, American first, always American. And I think that's where it is, you know, as far as I am . . .

MOORE: Do you think of yourself as German also?

ZITRON: Yes, yeah.

MOORE: What about, you said you went back four years ago.

ZITRON: Yes.

MOORE: And what was that like?

ZITRON: Very interesting. The, my family went en masse. My brothers and my sister and myself and my husband, and my brother's wife. We all travelled back to Germany, to Dieburg. And they were very gracious to us as far as showing us the town and, of course, it was new to me because I don't remember what it was like before. The only thing I do remember was that there was no more synagogue. That was completely gone. And that all, you know, that was, stuck out in my mind.

MOORE: You mentioned you and your husband. This husband is after this other marriage.

ZITRON: Yes, yes. My husband died. My husband died when we were, he died in forty, I believe '47. I forget now.

MOORE: That's all right. But . . .

ZITRON: It's about twenty-five years ago.

MOORE: Twenty-five years ago. And so you remarried?

ZITRON: I remarried.

MOORE: And how did you meet your husband?

ZITRON: I met my husband through his son. I knew his son before I knew my husband, and he used to know my daughter, and they used to pal around together.

MOORE: And is, your husband's name is . . .

ZITRON: Morris.

MOORE: Morris.

ZITRON: Uh-huh. M-O-DOUBLE R-I-S, Zitron.

MOORE: Zitron, right. And is he, where was he born?

ZITRON: In Cleveland, Ohio.

MOORE: And was his family from an immigrant family, too?

MR. ZITRON: No. Well, everybody came over, but my father came over in 1914.

MOORE: Okay. So you mentioned that you went back. When you went back with your brothers and sisters to Germany, what did you, did you . . .

ZITRON: My reaction? And, well, I felt as if I was doing something that I always wanted to do to go back and see so-called "roots." And I was impressed with how much they wanted to show us, and in a sense make up for things that had happened there. (a telephone rings) (break in tape) But they all tried very hard to be nice to us, and the magistrate and the mayor were successful at it. I was not as comfortable in Germany as I thought I would be. That was, I think, my problem. But it was a very, very wonderful experience.

MOORE: Did your brothers and sisters tell you stories, then?

ZITRON: My sister mostly. My brother seems to know, remember quite a bit more than I thought he would, yeah.

MOORE: And did they, was that the first time all of you had been back?

ZITRON: Yes. No, my sister had been back before that, but it's the first time we went back as a family, yes.

MOORE: All right. I'd like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for helping us and sharing this information with us, and we'll send you a copy of this by, I

KM-076/ZITRON

think, December. So this is Kate Moore signing off in Columbus, Ohio on the 30th of July, 1994, with Margaret Zitron, (correcting herself) Margot Zitron, for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.