

NPS-19

CAROLE MICHAEL

BIRTH DATE: UNKNOWN
INTERVIEW DATE: 10/3/1973
RUNNING TIME: 16:14
INTERVIEWER: MARGO NASH
RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN
INTERVIEW LOCATION: UNKNOWN
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: CHARLENE KEYLOR, 3/1979
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: PETER HOM, 2/1995
**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: JANET LEVINE, Ph. D. AND
PETER HOM, 4/1995**

GERMANY, ABOUT 1940

AGE 17

SHIP: MANHATTAN

PORT:

RESIDENCE:

- **GERMANY:**
- **USA: IDAHO**

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE:

Mrs. Michael is the wife of Walter Michael, Interview NPS-18. Arrival in this country was late 1930's or 1940, deduced from year (1941) her parents came over. Janet Levine, Ph. D, Ellis Island Oral History Project, 2/18/1995

NASH: ...Hamburg, Germany fleeing Nazi Persecution. Mrs. Michael is going to tell us the story of why, well we know why (she laughs) she left, of what it was like a little bit in Hamburg and her trip across and her later adjustment in the United States. Mrs. Michael.

MICHAEL: Well, Hamburg, being an international city, was almost an oasis, at least from out personal point of view in respect to Nazi persecution. I attended a non-Jewish school until almost 1934 without having very many personal difficulties there. But, of course, everybody was aware of what was going on in the rest of the country and the drive and the strive to leave it was very, very strong. We didn't have very many possibilities to leave Germany that my father had a second cousin who only recently had immigrated to this country himself and he was willing to give us an affidavit, but only to me because I was seventeen, no longer needed to attend school and so could have a job when I arrived here. But my parents were older and he couldn't take the risk. So I was the very fortunate one in getting this affidavit.

NASH: What sort of risk would it have involved for him to signan affidavit for your parents?

MICHAEL: If they were not able to sustain themselves, then he would be held responsible until they had their first papers to support them and that was a financial risk that he personally could just not assume. So I was chosen to come. I had a younger sister, two years younger, and she again would have had to attend school. So I... (break in tape)

NASH: Mrs. Michael, tell me how you prepared to leave.

MICHAEL: Well, I think perhaps one incident might be of interest. When I was getting my visa, there are certain examinations that the Consul takes with you because he wants only normal people. So I was asked what was the answer to seven times nine and I was very prompt in answering forty-two, and he asked again and I insisted that it was forty two. So almost my receiving the visa was in jeopardy because I was (she laughs) too confused. Well, one is dreadfully excited before you get the visa. It is a very emotional thing. You want to leave. Everything depends on just that moment, so the nervousness was absolutely understandable. My preparation, aside from the formalities in getting the papers all straight, was just preparing my clothing and that was not very much because I couldn't take very much along. You had to pay for every item that you purchased new, the full amount to the German government. And I remember that I purchased a small umbrella, collapsible umbrella, which was a treasure, and I had to pay the same amount to the German government for that. The rest were just clothing. My parents just didn't want to take any chances in giving me anything that might cause me difficulties in the customs and immigration in this country. So I came with really just a little suitcase and I think when I arrived, we could pay some deck money. I don't remember exactly what it was, but I think I was paid

\$4.16 or \$4.17 when I arrived.

FEMALE VOICE OFF MIKE: Go through the arrival, too.

MICHAEL: The crossing was rough. I was terribly seasick and was only too happy to see land. It was in January and it was one of the worst crossings. The boat was the Manhattan, the sister ship of the Washington, which were two of the largest ships in the United States Line. Beautiful ship. I naturally had third class or tourist cabin which I shared with three other women or girls and one of them was an American citizen. She had an upper bunk and she put on her silk stocking and it was the first time I had seen anything as sheer and as beautiful. So I thought America probably would be alright if they can sell things of that sort over here. When I first arrived I was greeted by the cousin who had sent the affidavit and another cousin who was actually really related to me and she looked me up and down after complaining first that she had waited many hours at the pier. It was very, very cold and she was tired of waiting. And she looked me up and down and asked whether I had other clothing to wear because this was five o'clock and at seven o'clock she had an appointment for me for a job. Well, all my enthusiasm, my excitement of telling them about the crossing, about the family that I left and suddenly was killed. I had a big lump in my throat. The first night I cried although I thought this was not really the beginning of a new life. So (she sighs) after some discussion, I went with them, changed my clothes, was given a sandwich to eat, which I couldn't eat because they asked me so many questions and then we proceeded to go to the lady who was supposed to have a job for me. The lady took pity on me because she felt I just arrived and she was going to stall, giving me an address, but on the 1st of January, which was only three days after my

arrival, I started the job as a governess to two children. We are still friendly with those people. In the meantime, these children have married and have children of their own, but it's a very wonderful relationship. They took me into their home and they recognized that I wanted more than just being a governess. So when the time came for my parents to get affidavits, they also sent an affidavit in addition to the one that my cousin sent, or my father's cousin. And so my parents were able to come to this country in March of 1941 with one of the last boats that brought immigrants from Germany. They had to take the Siberian Express, go through Russia and leave from Yokohama and arrive at Seattle, Washington. I did not want them to come to New York because I had seen a lot of the immigrants. I was not very happy with the conditions under which they lived and the job opportunities for them, so I thought it would be better for them to live anywhere else in the country but in New York. And since they arrived in Seattle on the West Coast, I thought we might as well start on that end. So I bought a bus ticket. In fact, before I did this I went to the public library to look up where Seattle really was. People here in New York didn't know where Seattle was and they thought the wild Indians were still on in there. So I got my information from the Encyclopedia Britannica and it sounded all very good. They listed the number of parks and there were many, many parks in the city (tape recorder noise) and it sounded scenically beautiful and so I thought there was nothing wrong in taking a chance and going out there and when I told people here they thought there was something quite the matter with me to make this long bus trip. I think it took about five days on the bus night and day driving through the country. It was very exciting and I remember I had seen "Fantasia" and "The Rights of Spring" and it showed sort of the evolution of man and driving through the mountains gave me that feeling that Disney had interpreted in his movie. I

remember lying on the floor of the bus to see the tips of the mountains which otherwise you just couldn't see. Well, I came through snow and winter weather and across the Rockies and, it was, spring. It was beautiful. The flowers were in bloom, the trees were green and I immediately liked Seattle, what I saw. I had some contact with the Council of Jewish Women and one of the ladies gave me a tour a day or two before my parents arrived and I really felt that this is where we ought to stay. My parents had tickets to take the train to New York in their pocket, but we felt we could always use that. We were going to try first what Seattle had to offer. They liked to stay in Seattle and had little jobs in homes. They went as a couple to clean house. My father cleaned doghouses and made them so clean the dogs didn't want to go back. They didn't recognize their house anymore. Later on, my mother, as she always said, she made holes in donuts. She was working in a donut factory packing the donuts in boxes. She worked in a tie factory making little knot in the inside lining of the tie. My father worked as a janitor in a hospital. He said he was working himself up and he was standing high on a ladder cleaning the ceiling and the attitude was positive and marvelous. When we got a job, we celebrated with coffee and a piece of pie. And when we lost a job, exactly the same way. So with their outlook and their positive thinking, the beginning was not bad at all. They were able to purchase a little house after a number of years. They saved. They were very, very, very stingy with what they were spending their money for, but they never denied themselves anything that was really important. We walked to work. We saved the nickel because we much rather spend it on theatre or movie or something that was important to us. They brought hardly anything with them, a bundle of bedding, a few selected books for a very, very, nice...

NASH: What books? Do you remember?

MICHAEL: Yes. There were some art books. There were some books on fairy tales which we as children loved very much, which were very special because of the illustrations. I still have them. I treasure them. But most of them stayed behind. Some music because my mother used to sing and she brought some Schubert, Vida and Shumann and scores from Mozart's operas, they brought those. But actually it was very, very little. Before you leave, you are nervous, you are excited. You want to get out. You really don't know how to decide what it is that you want to bring along so you grab a few things and leave most of the treasures at home. But, in any event, they had the little house and my father later on had a nicer job and my mother kept on working until her retirement age and then enjoyed her retirement really and coming to stay with us in New York because this is where we finally arrived at. But perhaps it's of interest to know how my husband and I became citizens because we think it is a little bit unique. He was in the service at the time. It was early 1943 he was sent to Idaho under the ASTP program and only citizens were allowed to be sent and he was not a citizen as yet.

NASH: And what was the ASTP program?

MICHAEL: Army Specialist Training Program for people who had some background in engineering. So he did have his first papers and the Army arranged for him to have a special hearing with Judge Black in the courthouse in Seattle for him to be sworn in to become a citizen of the United States. And the had all the formalities although he was the only one being sworn in as a citizen. Usually you have the examination beforehand and then

they collect quite a few of these newly made citizen and go through the ceremony with a group. But he was the only one. The courtroom was empty and all the witnesses, just a few witnesses were there and that was all. So it was quite impressive. I wasn't even there. But I could ask for my citizenship papers because now I was married to an American citizen after three years instead of the usual five. At that time we were in Idaho at the University of Idaho and I was still a so-called enemy alien. On the West Coast, all the Japanese citizens and the German citizens were classified as enemy aliens during the war.

NASH: Even German Jews?

MICHAEL: Even German Jews. It was sort of a contradiction and an irony in the whole thing, but we were classified and had restrictions and that is we could not travel without permission beyond the five or ten mile radius around our home and we had to be at home at eight o'clock every night. After we were married, we got the permission for me to travel to Idaho and that was then my residence, in Idaho for that time.

NASH: In Idaho, they didn't have the same laws?

FEMALE VOICE OFF MIKE: Yes, they had them in Idaho.

MICHAEL: They had them in Idaho also as far as I remember. But I was restricted. I could not travel away from Idaho without permission. Now I got a letter from the Department of Immigration to appear for my hearing to become a citizen. And knowing that you only first go for examination and then after several weeks or months you will be called to be sworn in, there was a

delay in time and the University could not spare me because at that time I was an instructor of German in the ASTP program. So the dean telegraphed to the Department of Immigration and asked them to please combine the examination and the swearing in procedure, but we didn't hear. So the day came and I prepared for the examination, learned a little bit about American government and American history to answer the questions. And we haven't heard so we thought it would be best for me to go to Seattle and I traveled to Seattle and I arrived at the courthouse and my witnesses were there and we sat and we sat and the appointed hour had long past and nobody had called my name. So we went to one of the attendants and told them about my problem and they said, "Well, we have just sent a telegram to Idaho giving you a new date when you should appear to be sworn in on the same day as your examination." But here I was now. So that seemed like a minor disaster and there was quite a discussion among the officials there and they finally decided as long as I was there they were going to give me the examination. And after I passed the examination with some little obstacles because we had some complications with our marriage dates, and that was also due to the permission that I wanted to travel in order to travel on a three day honeymoon. In order to leave my house, I needed to be married to either a soldier or an American citizen before I could get the permission. So we had our wedding, the legal wedding in the courthouse in order for me to apply for this permit, and then a few days later we had our wedding in the temple and that temple date is our wedding date that we recognize as our wedding day. The other thing was just a legal thing. So in the examination when I was asked when I got married and I gave them the date for the religious wedding, he questioned me and thought there was something wrong, and it took me a while to realize that he meant the legal wedding

date which was on my papers. Well, anyway that was straightened out and then they conferred and decided since I had this trip, under the circumstances under which I had made it, they were going to see if Judge Black, the same judge who had sworn in my husband, was free, and he was free and again I was the only one who was sworn in. I got the whole ceremony with all the speeches and all the honors and all the pomp and the beautiful courtroom in Seattle and I think that is rather special that all routines can be broken if there is good reason for it. I think that really makes us think very highly of that particular event since my husband and I both were sworn in by the same judge on different days, months apart. We think this is a very special thing.

NASH: Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Michael.

END OF THE INTERVIEW