

WW II-171

Interviewee: Wunhild Ryschkewitsch

Interviewer: Ann Smith

Date of Interview: March 24, 2011

S: My name is Ann Smith, and I am a volunteer with the Sam Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida and we are in Gainesville Florida today. The date is March 24, 2011. Wunhild, please tell me your full name.

R: Okay, my name is Wunhild Ryschkewitsch, That's a mouth full. [laughing]

S: You probably ought to spell that for the transcriber.

R: Okay, the first one is a typical German name W u n h i l d. My parents put my father's name and my mother's name together and made Wunhild out of it.

S: Oh great!

R: And my last name is supposed to be Russian. My father-in-law was Russian and it is Ryschkewitsch. The way it is spelled, it is a German spelling of a Russian name which is normally spelled in Cyrillic, so when my father-in-law escaped to Germany he had to spell it in German.

S: Sure. Sure.

R: It is long and complicated.

S: Well, it is a story in itself, isn't it?

R: [laughing]

S: Now where were you born?

R: I was born in a suburb of Stuttgart, which is in Southern Germany. It is called Cannstatt. Later on, they got uppity and called it Bad Cannstatt because it has mineral springs. I was born on the twenty fourth of July 1925 in my grandmother's house, in the guest room. When my mother found herself in labor, she ran to her mother's house down the street.

S: Oh, good.

R: And I was born there.

S: And what were the stories, now, was any one else in attendance?

R: Yes, my grandmother and a midwife who, by the way, brought into the world my brother, my sister, and my little sister's children when she was very old already.

S: Sure.

R: And my aunt kept telling me all my life that she loved me dearly--and I loved her--that she received me. She was the only one who paid attention to me. My father counted my fingers and my toes and after they were alright, I got put into a corner. [laughing]

S: [laughing] Oh, my goodness. Now, were you the first child?

R: Yeah, I'm the oldest of five.

S: Of five. So, you had brothers and sisters?

R: Yes, I had a brother, three years after I was born and eight years after I was born, I got a little sister for my birthday.

S: Oh, good.

R: And we've called each other twins all our lives.

S: Really?

R: Then, a year later, I had another little brother. He's my favorite. And then, when I was twenty years, old my mother had another baby and I had a little sister.

S: Oh, my goodness.

R: This was very interesting because she, kind of, was my first baby.

S: Yes, yes.

R: When I had my first child, myself, it wasn't like a first child. I'd been taking care of the babies.

S: So, you were at home when your baby sister was born?

R: Yes, it was right at the end of the War. The War in Germany, in Europe, was over in the beginning of May—I forgot [if it was] the tenth of May, the eleventh of May. And she was born on the twenty fourth of June. It was a very confusing time. My mother having a baby; my brother had been drafted at sixteen into the army and he was missing; and my father had been ordered by the Germans to go to the final fortress that Hitler imagined himself to hold up in the mountains of Austria. He was missing with all his assistants. He was a professor at the University of Stuttgart and he had assistants who were all—they didn't have to serve in the army because they were doing work, you know.

S: Contributing.

R: Air plane engines and . . .

S: Yes, vital to the effort.

R: Yes, truck engines and they were vital to the German War effort. He was missing, also. But he came home. He was kidnapped out of a French prison. The French occupied the Southern part of what is called Württemberg—that is a State. An American colonel, I think it was, went in there because they were collecting the German scientists for the American Army and he kidnapped my father out of jail and brought him home. This was like about three weeks before my little sister was born.

S: Now where was the prison?

R: It was in Ravensburg, Germany which is towards the mountains. And he was there with all the people. There were about six or eight of his assistants they were all in that same jail. The jailor was a former social democrat which now, you know, all of sudden

came to the fore, again and they were abused. They were beaten and one night they were all driven off to a quarry and told they were going to be shot. Then, they were hauled back to prison in a truck. So, he was only in that prison two or three weeks but it was not a pleasant experience.

S: Well, let's double back and talk about when you were young and before you went to school. What do you remember? Do you remember life and the family?

R: Yes, I started grade school in 1932. When I was very small--I must have been about a year and a half or maybe two, we moved to Berlin. I have very vague memories but I do have memories of Berlin. My brother was born in Berlin. Then, my father got the call to have a chair in Stuttgart as a professor and I remember, my mother was so happy, she was crying. I opened all the drawers in the kitchen and threw all the silverware on the floor in pure joy and I never got punished.

S: [laughing] Happy times.

R: It was happy times because my grandparents were all in Stuttgart.

S: In the Stuttgart area, yeah.

R: And my mother, quite often, would haul my little brother and me by train, which was an eight to ten hour train ride from Berlin to Stuttgart. We usually arrived pretty filthy. These were coal powered trains.

S: Right.

R: My mother was very attached to her parents so as often as she could--my dad had to travel a lot--she went to Stuttgart and visited. I do remember some of the train rides and crawling around on the floor.

S: Oh, I bet.

R: And being punished for getting dirty all over. [laughing]

- S: Yes, that dust was everywhere. Um, what was your father's field? What did he teach?
- R: It was automotive engineering, automotive and aircraft engineering. In fact, he was inducted a year and a half ago in the American Automotive Hall of Fame.
- S: Oh, how wonderful.
- R: In Detroit, the whole family went up there.
- S: Oh, that's such an honor.
- R: All my siblings are still alive so we were all up there.
- S: Oh, that's wonderful.
- R: That was a very . . .
- S: How special.
- R: Yeah, that was very special.
- S: Oh, how very nice, how very nice. Tell me about when you were little and you went to school?
- R: Um-huh, we were already back in Stuttgart when I went back in school. I was a very lively child, apparently.
- S: [laughing] From all reports.
- R: And my mother liked to travel with my dad once in a while, if he went to places that she liked. My brother got left with the maid and I got parked at my grandmother's because she could handle me. She taught me how to knit, which was agony. Anything I ever learned on manners, on how to conduct yourself, I learned from my grandmother.
- S: [laughing]
- R: She was my biggest buddy and we had a wonderful relationship—she and I.
- S: Well, that's special. That really is so special.
- R: When I went to school I had to give up my long extended visits at my grandmothers but

she lived on the other end of town but in the same town. I remember one time my parents came to pick me up and I cried because I had to go home. My father said, "This is it."

S: [laughing] [We] can't have this.

R: I had to quit crying because I knew if I [didn't], it would be worse. My dad wouldn't let me stay there. [Laughing]

S: [laughing] And so your next sibling was how many years difference?

R: Three years.

S: Three years--were you play mates?

R: You know, I didn't realize that until a long time after my brother showed me his album that had a letter in it my dad had written at the night of his birth. It dawned on me (and at that time I was in my fifties) that I'd been my father's first born son. And here came a son and in Europe, they make a big deal out of this first born. You know, it's the carrier of the name. And I must have been a little bit jealous because I remember picking a lot on my brother. We were good friends at times but I did pick on him. And now, I'm sorry because I knew all his life until he grew bigger than I was, I think he always was a little bit afraid of me. [Laughing]

S: [laughing] Formidable big sister. Oh, my goodness.

R: Yeah.

S: What games did you play as a child?

R: Okay, that's a good question. I tell you, my grandmother owned an apartment house and she had a nice back yard that was hers and her husband's. But they had a very broad side walk in front of the house with a street with no cars on it and I learned hopscotch.

S: Yep.

R: Um...the rope--jump rope.

S: Jump rope.

R: Jump rope, walking on stilts.

S: Oh, good.

R: Roller skating.

S: Sure.

R: And I learned it all at my grandmother's because where we lived the house was on a hill and I would have taken my life in my hands going off in roller skates not knowing what I was doing.

S: Sure, sure.

R: Then, upstairs in my grandmother's house lived my aunt, my uncle, and they had a daughter who was three years older than I. She, to this day, is my dearest friend. We would do things like--I don't know the English name. There was a game where there were little hats, and you had to catch up, you had to roll the dice and you got a whole stack of little hats and who ever had caught enough hats in the in the end...

S: Was the winner.

R: And then there was Parcheesi and Dominoes--and then there was Old Maid but we called it Black Peter, which was a cat.

S: Uh-huh, but the same principle.

R: Same principle. Uh, yeah, that was about it. And I loved my aunt upstairs. And I realized now, my grandmother and I would have lunch and then I would go up stairs--my grandmother would take a nap. I think this was all calculated so she could take a nap. I would go upstairs and have lunch with my aunt, my uncle and my cousin.

S: Sure.

R: So, we had a very, very nice wonderful childhood.

S: Yes, that sounds wonderful. Now, when do you remember hearing your parents talk or knowing anything about what was going on in the country?

R: When I went to school, we would assemble either in the gym or in the school yard. There were proclamations that Hitler had just annexed the Saar, which is the Palatinate, which after the First World War went to France. He marched into that and I think this was shortly after he came to power. This must have been [19]33 or [19]34. And then I remember when my parents went voting and my mother would ask my dad 'who should I vote for?' And he said, "Hindenburg."

S: Yes.

R: And she said, "What about this fellow, Hitler?" He said, "He's too young, too inexperienced and too unreliable." But Hitler was not elected; he was appointed. Hindenburg won and he had to form a coalition. These were all far right parties and I guess Hitler's party was the strongest party. So he made him chancellor and within a year he had gotten rid of the communist party, the social democrats, and all kinds of splinter parties. There was a big hush-up kind of thing where a whole bunch—actually, Nazi party guys got murdered at a meeting near Munich. Later on, it dawned on us that they were gay, and Hitler—I don't know what the meeting was about—I really ought to Google it. I bet you that's on Google, somewhere. But they murdered these people. About two or three years ago, we were in Berlin and there is a memorial to all the people from the congress in 1933 when Hitler took over. There must be about a hundred and thirty-eight slate plates with their names on it [including] where and when they died. They all died within six months of Hitler coming to power and it said a lot of

them died in 'such-and-such' prison; one died in one of the Berlin precincts of the police. So they just systematically murdered these people. And then there was a big deal about the Reichstag, which was the parliament, being burned down. We were told in school and everywhere, that the communists had burned it down. Well, I think that the Nazi's burned it down and blamed it on the Communists.

S: How old would you have been when that happened?

R: Seven.

S: Seven.

R: Yeah, because I was almost seven when I started school. We started school in Easter, not in fall, and I was seven that following summer.

S: Did you hear anything about Poland or were you probably too young?

R: No, at that point, that started the war and I was thirteen. We got all gruesome horrible horror stories--how the Poles had attacked German farmers on the border and nailed their children's tongues to the table. Later I realized that old story went around on the other side, that the Germans had done this in Belgium during the First World War. This is just an old story, but it sounds so plausible.

S: And it is just so terrifying for the people who already -

R: The propaganda was incredible. The Poles were sort of, lower cast people--everything born in the East, for some odd ball reason. The Ukrainians always came out better than the Russians or the Poles or anybody else. I have no idea.

S: I have no idea; I don't know what that reason is.

R: Part of the Ukraine, you know, was Austrian for a long time. But that all ended after the First World War--so, I don't know what the reason was.

S: And so, was there talk about it at the dinner table or as you got older, could you pick up

concern from your parents or anyone in the family?

R: Actually no, my mother was totally apolitical and I don't think my dad ever discussed much with her. But I remember my little sister was born in 1933 in July. We moved into a new house so we did not have her baptism until September. It is one of those big deals where the whole family gets together. And I remember my uncle, by marriage, (who was married to the Aunt who lived upstairs in my grandmother's house), and my father--who were old First World War veterans--had a horrendous argument with the husbands of two of his sisters. One was in the SA and one of was in the SS.

S: Oh, really.

R: And they had one hellacious argument. And my mother came running upstairs, you know. I was already probably sent to bed and she said "My milk, my milk, my milk's going to dry up. And they keep fighting down there." That must of have been one of the really big political arguments, shortly after Hitler came to power.

S: Now, when you were in school, I know that they formed organizations for the boys. Did they have . . .

R: Yes.

S: . . . organizations for the girls?

R: When you were ten years old. You had to join the Hitler Youth. If you were German and of good health, you had to join. It was mandatory unless you were a cripple or something else, or if something was wrong with you. My husband, he had to join too. But his father was Russian, and his father never had German citizenship. One day, after they marched these boys around enough and drilled them, he told the guys to shove it and he got kicked out. His mother was beside herself. She said, "You know, you never know." And my father-in-law was Russian and couldn't/ didn't keep his

mouth shut except in public. He was smart enough to know that. And you just sort of got trained to keep your mouth shut. Because it went around that the people who did open it, they disappeared. A lot of this stuff was, you know, so invasive. We just sort of went along with it. Wednesday afternoon there was no school. We always had school in the afternoon but we had to go to the Hitler Youth. And when I was ten, eleven, twelve year old it was like the girl scouts here. You know, we went camping; we made toys for little kids; we had some propaganda and I remember one day we were shown slides and there was this young couple with this real slick convertible and it said you should never wait to have children until you own a car. And I thought how do you manage not to have children? My parents had five.

S: Yeah, how does that work?

R: We were ten or eleven years old, I had no idea.

S: No.

R: I didn't even know where babies came from.

S: No, it was too soon.

R: I knew my mother had them because we were all born at home.

S: That's right.

R: Yes, we were propagandized but half of it we didn't understand, and the girl who was our leader was fourteen years old.

S: So she couldn't have had -

R: She couldn't answer our questions we had.

S: That's right, that's right.

R: I remember one camp trip we stayed in a youth hostel and it was cold and we were going to make spaghetti and tomato sauce. Her mother had given her a slip of paper

and it said in order to find out whether your spaghetti is done, you throw them on the wall and if they cling, they're not done; if they fall off, they're done. So we kept throwing spaghetti on the wall and they all clung.

S: [laughing]

R: You had to feed coins into a meter to get gas to heat the water. We ran out of coins, Ann. So, we ate half-cooked spaghetti.

S: [laughing] Wasn't going to work.

R: And my mother didn't like this having to go off with a fourteen year old in charge who obviously had no idea what she was doing. You know, here girl scouts have adult leaders. We didn't. We had other kids, but we didn't mind.

S: Did you have anyone in the family, any of the men, who served in the war?

R: My uncle, I think he went back into the army. He was really an army man, and after the First World War, there was no army. So he was a book keeper in a hat factory and he was not very happy. And I think he went back into the army. They were recruiting before the war started and I think in 1938, he told my dad he was going back into the army as an officer, full time. My dad said, "I always knew you weren't happy with what you were doing." Then in [19]39 in Europe, the war broke out and he was stationed in France. Then, later on, he was stationed in Russia and his last stand was there--at a German enclave on the Baltic that was part of Germany. But there was a strip of Poland dividing it where Dansk is. There was Germany in the west and here was this enclave. That's where they were held up and I don't know whether I'm digressing here, but they had about a hundred and fifty thousand civilians in that town. Some of them got out on a huge ferry and Russian submarines torpedoed the ferry and about twenty thousand people died. They had overloaded the ferry. They had made my uncle into a

General in the very last minutes of the war. The staff decided to surrender, (Koenigsberg was the city) to the Russians and I remember that night it was announced on the radio that Koenigsberg had fallen. The whole staff of German officers was sentenced to death by Hitler together with their families. Well, we were evacuated to the country and my Aunt and her two children were with us. Nobody knew them in that little town where we were out in the country. If they would have been where they usually lived, God knows what would have happened, because that became a habit for punishment. You punished the opposition but punished the whole family. So my uncle ended up [spending] five years in Russia and he came home in 1951-[19]50; Christmas 1950 he finally came back.

S: Oh, my gosh. Did he talk about his experience?

R: Very little. I asked him years later and he said, 'you know, you learn something from every experience in your life.' He said Russia--he was almost sixty years old--'Russia was an experience.' They were in Siberia somewhere, when they were told that they could come home; they went as far as The Volga. They said, "Line up." That was one of the stories that he told me--one of the few. "Count out 'one, two, one, two, one, two'." All the "ones" go home; all the "twos" stay in Russia." And he said he had a young Lieutenant who was among the 'twos' and he ran and jumped into a well and killed himself. My uncle said, "When I came home, the first thing I had to do was go to his widow" and he said, "I never told her." He said, "I told her he died; he died as a prisoner." He said, "I did not have the courage to tell her how close to going home he came and then was denied coming home. So that was one of the stories he told and he said the Russians were so totally unpredictable. They would beat the prisoners and then they would cry and offer them cigarettes because they said they felt sorry for

them.

S: Because they were so conflicted themselves.

R: They were ordered probably to beat them.

S: Sure, sure, sure.

R: I mean these were incredible stories but he didn't talk a whole lot about them.

S: It is these ethical dilemmas that we hear from the World War II veterans where they were raised as a Christian. You're not even supposed to hit a girl and then you go to boot camp and are taught how to kill. Some people can separate that out and some people can't.

R: Some people can't. And a lot of people that come back, it is no wonder they have such a hard time coming back.

S: Of course, of course.

R: Because in a way they're being dehumanized.

S: Oh yes, yes.

R: Its – I can see everything that's goes on in the paper this morning, this guy said – and he's a veteran – war is organized murder.

S: Who would argue?

R: I don't dispute it. It is.

S: And what does it solve?

R: Nothing. In the end you know, after the war was over everybody said, what was it for? We were told it is because Germany needs room, Germany needs to expand to the east, Germany is being attacked, nobody likes us, you know, and the Jews are going to do us in and then all this stuff. The war was over and everybody, you know, after a few really hard years, was a lot better off and the Second World War at least they did

not make the mistake they made in the First World War. The peace after the First World War was revenge.

S: Yeah, yeah.

R: And it literally caused the next War because Germany was really put into straight jacked, so any radical like Hitler could make hay out of that.

S: You take that and use that for material. You just twist it to your own purposes.

R: And if you had people you know, we had relatives in Strassburg and in the Eisas. Well they were French, they were our French cousins, and there's another little story I got from my cousin. This cousin, Frieda, came to visit in Stuttgart after the First World War and she and my uncle and my aunt and all the young folk in the family got a little drunk and they came down the main street at Constatt singing the Marsaillaise.

S: [laughing]

R: And they got arrested.

S: Oh did they?

R: I mean two years after the war was over, you didn't sing the Marsaillaise in Germany.

S: Nope, too close, too close.

R: So my grandfather had to get out of bed and bail them out.

S: Oh my gosh, oh my gosh. Family secrets. [laughing]

R: My father on the other side, he was so conservative he would never have done anything like that. [laughing]

S: [laughing] Oh gosh. I guess personalities in families everybody can pick one out.

R: I think it is hilarious because I remember Cousin Frieda, she was quite a character but she was French, you know.

S: Yeah right!

R: They were annexed. [laughing]

S: [laughing] Well now, were you in Stuttgart the entire time?

R: Well, I was in Stuttgart until – through high school. Now, what they did when the air raids got really, really bad, they evacuated the younger children and they put them into barracks with their teachers. My brother was fifteen and he was hauled off to the Black Forrest, not only to be evacuated but to man in the anti-aircraft. That's what you'll find out in Gerhard's book.

S: I got to that part, yes.

R: He was at the anti-aircraft but we, the last three years before school was out, three last years of high school, we stayed in Stuttgart and whenever there was an air raid at night we just had to just come to school an hour later. And lots of time there was an air raid during the day and our school was right next to a tunnel. Stuttgart is full of hills and they dug a tunnel which is now a traffic tunnel and the cars go through it but that was built as an air raid shelter.

S: I see.

R: We would go into the tunnel and we would slowly walk our way to the other end which was probably a couple of kilometers and the other end I could just go up the hill and I was home.

S: Oh yeah.

R: So, then I graduated in 1944. And um....what did I do? Nothing really.

S: [laughing]

R: Because no, I had appendicitis because after you graduated from high school you had to go for a year—for a half a year, work for farmers and you wore a uniform and then for another half a year, worked in an ammunition factory.

S: Oh really?

R: Yeah. And that was – you had to do it. But I got appendicitis so I was excused for about nine months to go to this camp. I had a boy friend and I was very happy because he was a year younger than I was and he didn't graduate until the following year _____. Well when the time came and he got drafted they sent me to what later on was part of Czechoslovakia. I had to go to Austria, and I can tell you later I remember very well when they annexed Austria and then you went on a small train into – it was a small area that Hitler also annexed called the Sudetenland. Which had a lot of German population and had been Austrian and after the First World War it became Czech. And they sent us there and I got there in February and in the beginning of April we could hear the Russian guns.

S: Oh really?

R: And I...

S: This is April 1940...

R: [19]45.

S: [19]45.

R: One other girl and I were commanded to take three of our leaders and carry their suitcases so they could catch the train in Austria and go home and we were left, about twenty girls, all in their late teens. In this camp was one young leader who was no more than twenty five, and she was not from Austria, she was from Germany and she couldn't go home and we had a meeting and we said what do we do now we can hear the Russians coming. And when the Russians come we've had it, we're going to get raped all over the place. So we said will you give each one of us a piece of paper saying that we didn't run away that were released, and sign it and put a stamp on it.

And then another girl and myself were from Stuttgart. We got a train and they had bombed the bridge over Danube and by – on foot. We made it across the bridge that was just still sort of hanging there but you could sort of walk along the girders. We made it over to the other side; we made it to the rail road station and there were no more trains. And we said, “Now what do we do? Hitch hike home? How are we going to get home?” And a train pulled in and it was a Red Cross train--this whole long Red Cross train full of severely wounded German and Hungarian soldiers stopped. It had one doctor on it and one or two nurses. We had our uniforms on. I had given my civilian clothes to a girl who was Slovenian. It had been annexed by the Germans and she said the Russians are already there. If I come home in that uniform there going to shoot me, hang me, whatever. So, I gave her my civilian clothes and I said “I'm going back to Germany; I can still...”

S: Get by without it.

R: “. . .wear it and in that case, that uniform was our advantage.

S: Your ticket.

R: Yeah, and the doctor came out and he said, “Do you girls know anything about nursing?” And we said, “We've had first aid courses coming out of our ears during the war.” In fact I wore a nurse's apron in the air raid shelter and carried a little thingy with me just in case. So he said, “Get on.” And here we were on this train and I remember there was this one guy and his eye was hanging on his cheek. They had put a piece of gauze around it to save the eye but nobody was there to put that eye back in the socket and whether it would of worked, I don't know.

S: Oh, my goodness.

R: And he was groaning and groaning. One of the nurses--they just sort of came through.

I said, "Do you have an aspirin?" She looked at me and she said, "Child, I've got nothing. I have nothing absolutely nothing--no morphine, no bandages, no -- we've done what we could on these people." They were going to Ulm, which is about two hours from Stuttgart and there, they unloaded with ambulances. We helped them and we went to the army hospital with these guys. They gave us a cup of coffee and something to eat. And then we were out on the street. And here came a truck and I think it had milk cans on it. We thumbed them down and they said, "Where are you girls going?" I said, "I want to go to Kirchheim and this one is going to Stuttgart." "Hop on, I'm going to Kirchheim. There were still trains going into Germany. We got her on a train. I will always remember, I walked down the street and there came my mother, seven months pregnant. She had my little brother on her hand and here I came--she just clung to me. She said, "Thank God, you're home, thank God you are home." My dad had to leave, my brother--and that's another really nasty story. The SS drafted all these sixteen year olds. A neighbor in the same small town where we were, her husband had died in the war and she had lost her oldest son in the war. She was hiding this kid, they caught him, and they hung him. And my parents -- this is what my mother told me. She said, "Your dad and I spent a sleepless night trying to think what to do. Should we hide him or should we let him go? And my dad said if he gets killed in the army, it is an act of God. If he gets caught and hung, it is our fault because we were hiding him, and in a little town everybody would have know he was still there, you know. So they let him go. He was sixteen years old and they asked him, they said, "Who can ride a motor cycle?" What sixteen year old do you know who doesn't say I can ride a motor cycle? So they made him a messenger and he got shot off his motorcycle through his back and it took a chip of his spine but it did not get...

S: His central nervous system.

R: His central nervous system. And the Americans came and picked him out of the ditch, put him across a hood of a jeep and, in the next town, they found a small hospital with a doctor and they dropped him off. That doctor saved my brother from being ah...you know, paralyzed for the rest of his life. But then they picked him up after he was well again. They picked him up and put him in a...

S: A camp.

R: A prisoner of war camp. I had gotten home by then. I took the milk truck to meet him, and when I got there, they looked it up in a register. They said, "Well, you know, there were all these young, young kids and the German officer in charge in the prison camp said these are kids. These are not soldiers. Let them go." They said, "Your brother has been released two days ago. So, my brother was on his way home and I was in milk truck with these two burly guys miles and miles from home. We had passes and you could not go more than fifteen kilometers from where you lived. You had to have a permit. We got stopped by an American patrol. He looked at my papers and he said, "Where is Kirchheim?" I said, "Oh, ten kilometers down the road." He said in broad dialect German, "Now you're lying girl! I know where Kirchheim is. My parents are German; I'm from Stuttgart." [laughing]

S: [laughing]

R: And I thought, Oh, my God, he's going to bring me in.

S: You are caught.

R: So he said, "I tell you what, don't do it again. I'll let you go this time but don't do it again."

S: Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

R: I got back up on my milk truck and we had to stay overnight in somebody's barn you know. Here I was with two truck drivers.

S: Well, that's the kind of experience that gives you faith in mankind, in general. All the things that could have gone wrong, but didn't.

R: But you know I can still here the guy's voice when he said, "Now, you're lying girl."
[laughing]

S: . . . and in his German.

R: And in broad dialect I said.

S: No wonder he was doing guard duty. [laughing] Oh, my gosh.

R: Yep.

S: Well when you were coming back, like crossing – across the bridge and waiting for the train, how long did that take you from the time that you got your little stamped piece of paper until you actually got home and saw your mother?

R: Well, I tell you, we got the stamped piece of paper one evening, we slept, and we got up real early in the morning. It must have been five and caught that little train.

S: Was this in the winter time?

R: No, this was in April.

S: April.

R: Now, it was still cold but I think by the time we got to Linz, to the bridge, it must have been middle morning, and must have been another hour before we got to the railroad station. I mean we had to walk everywhere. And I would say by late afternoon we got out of there on that Red Cross train but we got strafed by airplanes.

S: Oh did you?

R: Yes, the train would stop and whoever could move, would jump out the window and lie

on to the ground.

S: In a ditch or something.

R: But it had Red Cross all over the top of the train but it was not respected, no. We were shot at. We were shot at by Americans. But the Americans later on were very careful to tell us that they had not done these extensive night bombing. They said, "We only bomb industry during the day time." And it could be, because towards the end of the war, yes, we had a lot of air raids during the day. You know, Stuttgart has Daimler Benz and all this.

S: Heavy industry, sure.

R: They got bombed. My dad had a research institute right at the gates and Daimler Benz. They got bombed. The Institute had one of those bomb shelters. They were like a...a hat. A pointy hat and they were supposed to be safe; they were solid concrete and people would go inside. They had prisoners of war, mainly French and Ukrainian prisoners of war to help in The Institute and he let the prisoners into the air raid shelter and he had to go – I don't know who took him to task. It wasn't the police or the courts because that might have been the end of him but somebody said he let the prisoners in with the employees and he got into trouble.

S: Into the shelter.

R: Yeah, and he said I can't leave these people out there. They had a barracks where they slept. You know, they did some digging for us. Like I said, Stuttgart's full of hills and the house next to us was down below so our kitchen was level with their roof. My dad had an air raid shelter dug into that hill so they could come in from the bottom and we came in from the top. It was a lot safer than our basement and he had some of the French prisoners of war dig that tunnel for him and they would give my brother

chocolate. I don't know – they got packages from home.

S: Did they really?

R: They would bring chocolate to my brother and sister. I learned French in school but we were not allowed to speak to prisoners or else our hair got shorn off if somebody denounced us. So I stayed away from the prisoners I didn't want to get my hair shorn off.

S: And you know there was so much suspicion; who would tell on who.

R: Yes.

S: I mean if you know the intimidation and lack of trust people who you ordinarily would -

R: The problem was that people were hungry.

S: Sure.

R: And people got nasty and if they could denounce somebody that they didn't like to begin with. I have a real funny story about the Lord Mayor of Stuttgart, who later on turned out to be associated with a plot against Hitler in 1944. Nobody knew it but he was a bachelor and he got bombed out of his house. There was a maternity clinic just down the street from us and he got a room upstairs in the maternity clinic.

S: [laughing]

R: And he would take a walk every night, and we knew him so we would say, "Good evening, Herr Mayor". We had chickens, and we had a maid from the country. She got us chickens and we fed the chickens and got the eggs. One night, he stopped while our maid was feeding the chickens and he said, "Maria, how many chickens do you have?" And she said, "Fourteen." And he said, "How many people do you have?" and she said, "Seven." And he said, "Well, you're only allowed to have a chicken and a half per person. Don't you have too many chickens?" And she said, "You know what

my mistress says? She says, 'If one kicks the bucket, we'll have the right number of chickens?'" And he said, "Very wise woman, your Mrs. Kamm." [laughing]

S: [laughing] Isn't that funny. Isn't that funny?

R: That's one story that we keep telling about my mother saying we'll have just the right number of chickens.

S: Yeah, it could happen, tomorrow, you never know. [laughing]

R: Well, we were supposed to have eleven or twelve. Then one night the Marten [member of the weasel family] ate all our chickens. And the maid and I were alone. My dad was still on a trip and the chickens were screaming. We thought somebody was in there robbing and we didn't have the courage to go out there. And in the morning all the chickens were dead. The martens suck out the blood but they leave the chickens. So we plucked all these chickens and we canned them.

S: Good for you.

R: And my mother always came home on weekends. She first went to the market and always went to the same woman in the market. She said, "Oh poor Mrs. Kamm, the tragedy at your house." And my mother said, "What happened?"

S: She must have been scared to death.

R: And she said, "If you don't know, I'm not going to tell you."

S: [laughing] You find out yourself.

R: Well, she finally, literally, threatened the woman. She said, "You tell me right now." and she said, "All your chickens died." And my mother said, "Oh, is that all?"

S: She was so relieved.

R: She thought my dad had had a heart attack or I had gotten killed or something.

S: Lots worse things were happening.

R: Oh, is that all? [laughing]

S: [laughing]

R: So, we had creamed chicken out of the mason jars.

S: But at least you know you salvaged that.

R: Yeah

S: Now the egg production was off.

R: Egg production was gone. [laughing]

S: What were you going to tell me about Austria?

R: Okay, when I was...it was [19]38. I was thirteen years old Hitler; annexed Austria. And Austria had a significant Nazi movement. There was no resistance whatsoever--he just marched in. I think that was in spring of [19]38. And my dad was charged to bring the technical university in Vienna up to par with the technical universities.

S: I see.

R: And they were like institutes that teach technology in Stuttgart. And he was tasked to go to Vienna and see where they were in that curriculum so they could seamlessly, sort of, get into the swing of being a German Institute. He took us; my brother, my mother, and my grandmother to Austria with him. And I thought I was in paradise. Here was Vienna.

S: Yes!

R: Ah! We went to the castle. We got all the stories about Maria Teresa, Marie Antoinette, Mozart, and after my dad was through, we went south and went to Karinthia. There was a lake and my dad decided he wanted to have a little vacation house there. We were camping. We got a room for my grandmother and she was in seventh heaven because she was Catholic and in Austria everybody is Catholic. And

she had a crucifix in her room and everything.

S: Perfect.

R: And to these people to this day, we are good friends with the children of these people. In fact, one of their sons, I had a crush on when I was sixteen. And he died in Finland because we also led a war in Finland. I remember baking him cookies and writing him letters and stuff when I was in high school. But I remember **Hoster** was like a fairy land and here was this lake. It wasn't warm water but it was not icy cold like some of them are. And a year later my dad went around and looked where he could get a lot on the lake and [found] some man who had a huge estate. He had married the daughter of a Barron and she had inherited this whole thing. And he said, "You've got all these nice children. I'll sell you a piece of land. "And besides, the Austrians were dirt poor. When Hitler annexed Austria it was on its last legs.

S: Oh really?

R: Because they had an embargo on Austria. Germans couldn't go to Austria before it was annexed so they actually, financially, had a better deal when they were annexed. They did not object a whole lot, except when the war started and they had to send troops. They had their kids being killed just like...

S: Everyone.

R: The German kids were killed. My sister still has that piece of land and now, she built a real house on it.

S: Really? Oh wonderful. So after you were how old – did you stay in Germany?.

R: We were there during the whole war.

S: And after the war was over do you remember....

R: And after the war my dad – this American Captain brought him back home and then

the que started. A Polish general, a British officer, a French officer came out of the wood works. They all wanted these scientists. See, there was the big deal with the V2 and all this stuff and the atom bomb and all that.

S: I see.

R: They wanted to pick their brains. And my dad said, “ A, the Americans rescued me, and B, if I go anywhere, I’ll go to America. I don't want to go to Poland or Russia or anywhere else.” And in the Eastern zone, when the Russians marched in, they did the same thing. They hauled these scientists off to Russia and some of them didn't fair real well. But that gave them an advantage and that's politically what the Americans were so afraid of--because they did have these people over there. So, my dad left for the United States in September [19]45 and I remember him writing us a letter about Thanksgiving. We didn't know what Thanksgiving was and he said we got invited by a bunch of German people who flocked around to greet these people. It was in Dayton, Ohio at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. Then, it took two years before we got to join him but the scientists had made a contract. They said, “We are not leaving Germany unless we can later on bring our families and unless while they're still in Germany you give them some extra food coupons,” because that was really the worst times. The war was not as bad as the time afterwards. So we got some extra food coupons. We got paid – my dad got paid and the American army paid us but in German money. And my dad would start sending care packages home. And they always had cigarettes in them. The cigarettes, you could trade in for food, for anything.

S: They were like a...

R: I got my first formal; I got a piece of silk for cigarettes.

S: Really?

R: For a whole pack of cigarettes, I got three or four yards of light blue silk and I got my first formal. God, that was the day. And you could always find people you know to sew stuff for you. People didn't have jobs and they were in dire straits.

S: Sure, and what was your father doing, then? Did he stay in Dayton?

R: Yeah, he was in Dayton and they said they would give him something to do but he said that there wasn't much to do. They were just picking their brains. And eventually, we lived in the barracks at Wright Patterson. The kids went to school in a small village next to the base. We went there two years ago after all of those years not having been in Ohio. And I went to college because I had finished high school and a lot of us kids went to the University of Dayton which was the only University there. It was a Catholic University. And they were Marionist brothers and most of them had Germans names. And in Ohio, we were welcomed with open arms. I never had anybody be nasty or saying, 'you are a dirty rotten German.' The first year, I baby sat a lot even during the day time--took little kids to the swimming pool and stuff. The second year I got a job as a nurse's aide at Good Samaritan Hospital. There was a British girl and one time at lunch she decided I had thrown bombs on her. And I said, "Who, me? Do I look like a -- I don't think ever in my whole life have thrown a bomb at anybody?" But she got nasty, and I came back to the floor. My head nurse said, "What's the matter?" And I poured out my heart and she said, "Don't worry, don't worry." People can be nasty. The next that girl had been fired.

S: Is that right?

R: She fired her. She said, "You have no business attacking another employee." And then one day I went up to the lab. I said, "I want to study medical technology; do you guys have a job?" "Oh, no, we don't have any jobs," but the secretary must have told

the nun who ran the labs and I'll never forget it. I was hanging up curtains around the beds, you know?

S: Oh yeah.

R: I was standing on the ladder and she came in and she said, "Is your name Wunhild?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Come on down; I want to talk to you." And she said, "What can you do in the lab?" And I said, ". . . only what I did in high school." She said, "Would you like a job in the lab? We'll teach you." So, I had a part time job in the lab and she taught me everything I've ever learned.

S: How wonderful!

R: And her name was Grimmelsman and she was German. [laughing]

S: How wonderful!

R: We have a funny story when I got married my name was Kamm, K-A-M-M. The whole hospital was in an uproar because when they needed us, they paged us and all of a sudden, I got paged as Mrs. Kamm. I used to be Ms. Kamm, Mrs.R., Mrs. so and so. George came to pick me up and she said, "George, why don't you change your name?" Russians are so not really liked around here. And she said, "It's much too long a name. Why don't you change your name?" And he said, "Sister, why didn't your father change his name?" And she said, "Oh, he did; he took the last N off of Grimmelsmann."

S: Oh, no!

R: But she told me all these stories from Cincinnati, way back, you know, that's a real Catholic town.

S: Oh, it is.

R: Their mother house was Mount St. Joseph and how she grew up with – there were five

kids: one was a bishop, one was a priest, two were nuns and the fifth one had eight children. He ran away from all this religious stuff. But she grew up in a real German household.

S: How did you meet George?

R: Okay, I met him in the barracks at Wright Patterson. We got there in June and he got there the following January. My mother said we finally got hot water because there were six apartments--it was like a "U". There were seven. One, two, three, four, five, six, and the one in the middle was the biggest because we were five kids. And there was a little thing there with a boiler. You had to put coal on the boiler and make hot water. When George's dad had duty, the men took turns doing that. We always had cold water. So my mother said we finally got hot water when the young Mr.

Ryschkewitsch came from Germany.

S: The young one, hum.

R: And he took care of that hot water and he was good at it. The semester started in January and he went to the University of Dayton. And we liked each other from the beginning. We had a nun when we had orientation and she said, "I don't want you girls to ever share a locker with a boy." Well a locker cost a dollar a semester and we decided if we would share a locker, we could pay fifty cents each.

S: Makes sense to me.

R: So we shared a locker but Sister Immaculata taught a class and the door to her class was right next to our locker. So, at eight o'clock in the morning, she always saw us. I do not want to see your heads stuck in a locker together; she made it sound like we were having intercourse.

S: [laughing] Oh absolutely, right there in the hall in front of her.

R: Yes, but she finally got over it. She was a strange woman. I had a nun in English who gave me an 'A' in English and I didn't know English that well but I could read it and write it. She would call me out in front of the class and we had a lot of G. I.s. She said, "This girl came from Germany two months ago and she can write something down for me grammatically correct; she doesn't make mistakes. Why can't you guys write?"

S: Really, you were an example of something to shoot for.

R: They all looked at me.

S: Who do you think you are?

R: Right, you know. Well, Sister Fidelis died of cancer and I met Sister Immaculata on the street and I said, "Oh, I'm so sorry about Sister Fidelis. She was such a wonderful woman" and she pointed her finger at me and she said, "Child, do you know that's what we live for all our lives? To die." And I said, "Okay." [laughing]

S: You got it all wrong, you got it all wrong.

R: I thought, if that's the way you want to run your life.

S: It's her heavenly reward.

R: And the funny thing was she got to be a hundred and three years old and I know because Erma Bombeck went to school at the same school as I did. I didn't know her well but I knew her. I got Erma Bombeck's memory book after she died and they had this long list of people she mentioned.

S: She remembered.

R: And Sister Agnes Immacuala was one of them. And by that time Sister must have been a hundred and one years old.

S: Really?

R: She lived forever.

S: Isn't that amazing?

R: But all these nuns – and they were not the same kind of sisters we had at Good Samaritan but we were surrounded by them – and Good Samaritan--I will never forget Good Samaritan. I advanced in the ranks. [laughing]

S: [laughing] Well, tell me how you got to Gainesville.

R: Okay. George got a job offer. He went to graduate school; we got married, which was sort of unusual. We got married while we were still in undergraduate school and then I decided I had a job. I had passed my national certification and he was going to go to graduate school, and his mother was beside herself. How could you? You don't have a nickel to your name? We did fine. I mean this was the time when we made a hundred and eighty bucks a month.

S: It was so much more than anybody had seen before.

R: Yeah and within a year we had a baby and we managed that one, too. Then we moved to Columbus and within three and a half years he got his Ph. D. and then his ah -

S: Both of you were citizens by now?

R: Yeah, we became citizens in [19]55 in Columbus, Ohio.

S: In Columbus.

R: George and myself and my sister--her husband was American but he went to school at Ohio State, too and we three did our -

S: Studying.

R: Our exams and our studying and everything together. My sponsor was somebody who worked with me and his sponsor was one of the other graduate students. My sister's sponsor was her husband and so, in [19]55, we got our citizenship.

S: Oh great.

R: We came in under an act of congress. I have a brother who bitches about illegal immigrants and I said, "Dee, you were an illegal immigrant." He said, "No, I was not illegal, I came in under an act of congress." So within a year, we got first papers but we had to go to Canada and immigrate.

S: Oh really?

R: We drove from Dayton to Niagara Falls in the middle of winter. The Niagara Falls in the middle of winter are gorgeous.

S: I'll bet.

R: They are full of ice and rainbow icicles. My dad decided we had a car but we might as well walk into the United States.

S: Really?

R: So, we walked across the bridge on foot. We had to go to the Canadian Embassy, get papers, come back over the bridge and then they sent our papers to Washington. Then we got our first papers. George and I, when we lived in Ohio, we liked Canada for summer vacation but we had to have a re-entering permit because we were not citizens. But five years after that we got our citizenship, and it only took five years, then. Now it takes a lot longer. A lot longer. And it didn't cost a penny. I've been told you know, I'm involved with the naturalization ceremonies at the court house. These people pay eight, nine hundred dollars.

S: Oh, I didn't know that.

R: We didn't pay a penny. We might have paid a buck and a half for the papers you know.

S: I didn't know there was a cost.

R: There shouldn't be. But there is now, now they have to hire lawyers and God knows what.

S: I didn't realize that.

R: Times have changed.

S: That makes it a terrible hardship.

R: Our first son, when we were not citizens, was born in Dayton.

S: Natural born.

R: And the other one was born in Columbus. And then after saying I'll never have a baby in the summer, I had Francie in Gainesville in a non air-conditioned hospital in June. And I tell you what--I could see my outline in the bed. Oh God.

S: Was that in Alachua General?

R: Yeah. The old Alachua General. The old yellow one. And I told George, I said, "Don't bring me flowers; bring me a fan." So, he came with a bunch of yellow flowers and a fan. And the other thing I found out, we were always cold in winter. We had this space heater and it wouldn't heat the house. And somebody said, 'you open the door on the side, you take your fan and you blow into the heater, and all the warm air will blow out the top. My fan lasted me for years. That fan, I got when Francie was born.

S: The memorial fan.

R: Yeah.

S: You'll never forget it.

R: and I tell you what, I had a private room and it had – private room, bathroom in between, and another private room. We shared a bath and the woman on the other side was from Lake City. We left the door open and we would talk through the bathroom to each other.

S: How wonderful. You are probably not the first or the last that happened that way.

R: And one night the doors were open and there was this huge number of women out in the hall—they had given everybody enemas and they were lining up for the one toilet in that old hospital.

S: Oh, my gosh. That wasn't good planning.

R: And we said, "Come on in, girls."

S: Yes. No one is using this one. Oh, my gosh.

R: Yeah, well, people don't know. One time, my daughter, she was not even a year but she would sit on the counter when I baked a cake. She would get to lick the beater. Well, poor little kid--she stuck her hand in there while the beater was running. And I chased down to Alachua General and carried her up the steps. I said, "Somebody has got to see her. I bet she's got broken fingers." Well, her fingers were so soft that they got badly bruised. But they put me in a closet. I said, "What am I doing in here?" And they said, "You can't sit in the waiting room; there are all these black people."

S: You're kidding?

R: So, I was sitting. I said, "I'd rather sit out there with all the other people."

S: How about a chair in the -

R: They said, "We'll leave the door open a crack." It was a linen closet and they put a chair.

S: What year would that have been?

R: Okay, she was born in [19]58; that would have been [19]59.

S: Because when Shands opened, it was segregated.

R: Yeah, yeah. I know.

S: You know two bathrooms, and two drinking fountains. It never would have occurred to

us to put a black person and a white person together.

R: At Good Samaritan, the whole ground floor, was for black people. But I have a little story about Francie when she was about three. We didn't have a Sears store; we had a catalog store downtown. They sold lawn mowers but nothing else. And there were stairs going up and here were the two water fountains. There was the white and there was the black.

S: I remember that.

R: And the white was too high for her to get a drink of water but the black she could go up these stairs lean over the banister and get a drink of water out of the black fountain.

S: By herself, um-hum.

R: And I was at the catalog desk and one woman shook me. She said, "Your girl, your girl." And I thought 'Oh my God, she fell down the stairs or something.' And I looked over and she said, "She's drinking out of the colored fountain." And I said, "Yeah, is it colored water or what?" She almost slapped me; she was mad. But that was the first thing – I'm usually not that mean but I—that was the first thing that hit me because she had scared me. And second, I thought what a stupid thing to say.

S: And I've heard numerous stories about children asking their mother. And innocent things you know, and that's what I mean when I say you have to be carefully taught.

R: After segregation was abolished, we had an organization called Gainesville Women for Equal Rights. We had it before. And we invited Dr. Bank's wife and a whole bunch of women and they joined us. And she would tell us that she could not try on a hat.

S: That's right. In Wilson's department store.

R: In Wilson's department store.

S: That's right.

R: She couldn't try on any clothes. She said, "My husband likes to play golf. The only black colored golf course is in Ocala. So he has to drive to Ocala to play golf." He was a nice man.

S: Oh I know.

R: Our family doctor was Dr. Blank

S: Um-hum. Yes. I remember him.

R: Oh, I loved – we loved that man.

S: I remember him.

R: And he and Mr. Banks--they got along wonderfully. But one time Francie, I think she burned herself on the iron and Rometta was driving the car. And I said, "Rometta, take her down to Dr. Blank's office. You know where it is and I'll meet you there." I was working. And I got there and Rometta was sitting in the black waiting room and Francie was sitting in the white waiting room. And I said, "Evan, what's she doing in here?" She is supposed to be with Rometta." "We can't do that; there is a law. She can't go to the black waiting rooms."

S: They had separate waiting rooms.

R: They had to calm me down. I said, "I sent her down here to save time instead of chasing home, picking her up taking her down. I told Rometta to bring her down; it will go faster. I couldn't believe it. And he finally said, "Calm down, the law is the law and we can't do a thing about it." They had a...I forgot her name, the Florida Surgeon General was a woman. And she had a meeting with a black nurse in Tallahassee and she reserved a back room at a restaurant to have lunch with that nurse in that back room. They came in and arrested her, because she had lunch with a black woman. George was in charge of arranging for an American Chemical Society meeting and

they had black people there; it was a national meeting. And the caterer said, "You know, we have to put them at a separate table." And George said, "That won't work." The caterer said, "[I] tell you what we will do. We put these tables an inch apart and we pull the table cloths over it and nobody will be the wiser." That was the Student Union at the University of Florida. A least they had a little sense about it.

S: At least, they were going through the motions.

R: But they said, "If push comes to shove and somebody tries to arrest us, we can say, 'see'."

S: We can say no, it is at different tables.

R: It wasn't the same table.

S: It was the same table cloth but...

R: Unbelievable.

S: That's when – I think that's when game playing began because people were going around and saying that that doesn't make sense and why are we doing this.

R: Well, we had a little episode. Rosa was from Jonesville and she worked for the neighbor down the road. Rometta was from Archer and she stood at the kitchen window. Rosa walked through our yard to catch her ride and Rometta said, "What's that nigger doing in our back yard?"

S: [laughing]

R: And Francie tagged her and said, "Rometta, don't say that, that's a bad word. " Rometta said, "Little girl, you can't say it, but I can."

S: Takes one to use that word.

R: And they call each other 'nigger'.

S: yep.

R: You know.

S: That's right, that's right.

R: But good old Francie was so confused because she was taught never to say that.

S: Now, what exactly are the rules here. [laughing]

R: [laughing]

S: No wonder our children are confused.

R: We got from the war all the way to segregation.

S: Well, no see, you don't know it but you've made all these wonderful transitions you know. So I have Alachua Country issues for the Matheson Museum of Alachua Country and I have the German perspective of World War II. So see, we've covered my topics.

R: We've covered a lot of topics. [laughing]

S: We have good stories. I like your examples of some of those things. You know sometimes people will say this is the way it is or they'll use descriptive terms but without the real stories about the things that really happened or examples of those kinds of things it doesn't make it as real.

R: I tell you what, when I was ten years old, I got selected to march out front in a parade. Merely because I was blond and blue eyed. I had no other credentials...

S: You knew very well.

R: No, I didn't know.

S: Oh you didn't?

R: No, I didn't know why I was selected and I had braids. I didn't have short cropped hair. All these little things--I had a friend whose mother was Belgian, and people would make slight remarks about her and George said he experienced it having a Russian

father.

S: I imagine.

R: Because later on when you grow up you realize how superficial these distinctions – I mean -

S: So thin.

R: How lucky can you get to have blue eyes. Well I had two blue eyed – we were asked in school, do both your parents have blue eyes because they were making maps of – well, they were trying to teach us genetics but there were a lot of Germans that didn't have blue eyes.

S: Of course.

R: You know.

S: Amazing.

R: Well, we didn't until long after the war, um...in order – my father was an employee of the state of Württemberg. And he had to bring an Aryan proof that he was Aryan. He couldn't have – a professor could not be half non-Aryan.

S: No.

R: Maybe an eighth Jewish, but even a quarter, didn't do. So, we had to check back to our great grandparents. I still have the paper and that was one time they had to dig into it and figure out who was who. Years later my cousin is Francophile and she always spent a lot of time in France. She speaks French fluently and she looked up my grandfather's name that was J-O-B. Job, [it was] like Job in the Bible. She found out that the Jobs in France were all Jewish and they came in from the Middle East in the middle ages through Turkey to Marseille. And, for some odd ball reason, some of his ancestors became Huguenots. They converted to Protestantism. Now, they were

persecuted as Huguenots. That's how they ended up in Strasbourg because that was not French at that time. And I asked my dad one time, "How would you have felt if we would have found that out in Hitler's time?" He said, "I would have been afraid."

S: Absolutely, absolutely.

R: And this is way back, I mean when did they become Huguenots? I don't know, but they were so staunch that when he married a Catholic girl, they were up in arms. She had to get married in a Protestant church and write a paper that her children were going to be Protestant. She was—actually, I think—she was excommunicated. She went to Catholic Church all her life and I know when she died she had extreme unction. But I don't think she was able to go to confession but she wasn't able to have uh – ?

S: Communion.

R: Communion. They were horrible.

S: Well, I think that happened with my great grandmother who was really stern.

R: You know, I have heard more about stern grandmothers – I have a good friend, well, Natalie Berger. She is Jewish and her father came from Hungary but she said she had the meanest grandmother you've ever heard. [laughing]

S: [laughing]

R: I said I had the nicest grandmother.

S: Well, I was going to say everybody else I've known on both sides of the family, not only did they have wonderful senses of humor, but were huggers and loved the children and had a heavy duty family orientation.

R: She must have been bitter about something.

S: Yeah and she's the one that when she came to this country refused to learn English. And yet, on her death bed at age ninety six, she counted from one to a hundred in

English, in perfect English. They said that she had lost her teeth and the last six years of her life, she lived on only liver wurst and beer.

R: [laughing] Not a bad idea.

S: And I thought that's got a lot of nutrients from my perspective. She probably did very well.

R: Well you know my kids, they don't speak German. Well they try, my oldest son does. But one day he said, "Mom, when you and dad had secrets, you started talking German. We understood everything."

S: Sure. [laughing]

R: [laughing]

S: It's kind of like spelling words that you don't want the kids to understand and then they just pretend they don't understand.

R: Even the G O D knows it what it means. [laughing]

S: Well Wuni, this is just wonderful. This is just delightful and I want to officially say this.

R: I hope you get out of it, I talk an awful lot. [laughing]

S: That's what it is all about; I told you my challenge is to shut up because it is not about me. Officially, thank you. Thank you for your time and thank you for your stories.

R: You are very welcome; it has been really great and fun. I tell you what, I've learned a lot because my nephew put all five of us on chairs and he turned on the tape recorder. He said, "Now, you talk about what you remember of the war in Germany. Well, it got into a free-for-all--my brother saying something like, "No, you don't remember that right. It was such and such." I think what Eric has to do is sort out and maybe even send us a questionnaire or something. He's serious about it.