

Tape 2

We, we had been talking about your early life in Germany and on this tape I thought we would begin with life about the year 1917, as much as you can remember. I'm particularly interested in, in what people were doing and what they were thinking about, as much as you remember, in that year just that led just before the war. Right, just right before the war.

1913. Well, oh, that's right, 1913. Yeah.

1914, the war started. War in Europe, right. It was during the summer vacation and it was sad because we were out of school and we went back to school.

The war was in full going and we didn't get back to our school because the soldiers had taken over and we had to share a school not too far from us. We went in the afternoons that year and took turns, afternoon school and morning school. Do you remember anything in the newspapers or what the general comments about the people were toward the beginning of the war? Oh, the first I knew, I came out one afternoon and I found some of my playmates crying and we hadn't paid much attention.

It was summer vacation to the newspapers or anything, talking. So I remember that was the first I knew of the war and everybody was terribly upset and quiet. So, but from my reading, some parts of Germany, there seemed to be rejoicing almost at the war.

No, that is not true. That's as far as I know. It was not so.

People were scared, afraid. Well, as the year progressed and the war progressed, what were you doing and what were your parents and so on, what was happening as far as you were concerned in the war? Oh, the first year or two, conditions went too bad, of course. I don't really know.

Until it started on, started to begin, we couldn't get any food. Oh, but when did that begin? That must have been about 16, 17. I'm not certain.

And life just went on as always. We didn't, unless you read in the newspapers, and I don't remember reading much then, that finally my brother was called and since he was a tailor, he was sent to the northern part close to Denmark to sew for the army. And 1915, my brother-in-law had just come back from China in 1914, beginning of 1914.

And he was on a submarine then, and he was, I think we talked about that in 1915, how he telegraphed my sister to come. They were engaged, had been engaged all the time that he was gone to China for three years. And he wanted her to come, and they'd get a kistraung, that's a wedding ceremony.

And so she came back, and she kept on her job and stayed at home. And I don't remember him ever coming home during that time. Surely he must have, because of course here was Marine Harbor, but I just don't remember that.

Or 1915, that was 1914 when he came back. In 1915, after a year or so, he must have come or called and have her come wherever they were stationed. They were mostly on the North

Sea and Atlantic Sea, and I know that they had captured some, now that was after America came into it.

No, America didn't come in until 1917. Well, that was then, because I know we couldn't get any food at that time, and when Didi was home, we had plenty food. Cheeses and canned goods we would get from him that came from ships that had brought food from America to England, and they'd captured them, and that was divided between the people on the ship, and he would bring it home.

Well, did he do his tailoring on the ship? Oh, that was my brother. No, he was an officer. He was in the Navy.

He was an officer in the Navy. And, of course, that's how Frieda met him, because they probably met at a dance, because he came from Itzehoe. That's a small town in Schleswig-Holstein.

That's Didi Reitlein. That's Didi Reitlein, uh-huh. And your brother Willie was... Well, he was never in the Army before.

He was just called in. Well, how, when did you, when were you through school? In 1915, I graduated from our school, and 1915, 1916, I guess. Then I went to business school, and my first job, Didi was home, that must have been through 1919.

When was the war over? 1918. 1918, uh-huh. I was working then.

In the meantime, he had come back. Of course, that's all ahead of time. I haven't told you.

You were in school all the way through the war, then? No. I finished school and went to... I went a year. The course was a half a year, but we went at night.

While I was still in school, I went at night to business school, and then I finished in a year, and so that must have been 1916. I worked at the Unterseeboots-Institution, and that's in charge of the U-boats in Kiel. And one day, we couldn't get in.

The kaputsch had started. That's in 1919. That's much later.

Was the war over then? Yeah, no. Yeah, Didi was home? No, no. Yeah, the kaputsch took place.

Yeah, that's right. I wasn't... I wasn't working after the war started. When the war stopped, we were at once released.

We couldn't work anymore. At the U-boat. Yeah, because England had taken over.

So I got a job in the office of the Sprengland Tauchgesellschaft, and that wasn't too far from where Frieda had found... When Didi came home, they got an apartment up there in northern Kiel. And so I know that's when the kaputsch started, because no streetcars were running and we had to walk. Yeah, let's center our attention on the war.

How did the average people... What did you talk about? What were some of the things you did during this time in Germany? For fun? I mean, you were growing up and... Yeah, no dances. Nothing was going on. All I remember is that we did a lot of knitting for the soldiers when we were home.

And I know my teacher, my favorite teacher, was in France. And at first we used to send them chocolates, but later on we couldn't buy any food, so we kept on knitting warm socks and sending them. That's all.

There was no festivities, nothing going on. I know my aunt and uncle often came Sunday afternoons, took the ferry and came over to visit us almost every Sunday. And I don't know what they talked about, because I was not interested.

It was a war and everybody, I think, was more or less afraid, but you didn't just hear people talk about it. What about the government, Kaiser and all so on? He still had to... When did he have to flee? He was in 1918. Well, we hated to see him go.

I know my parents and all of us went for it, but he... Why weren't you for it? We liked him. We liked the Empress especially. Why? She was very beloved by the people.

Why was that? Oh, she used to visit, you know, the cities. I don't remember the Emperor ever seeing him, but I heard the Empress was visiting hospitals and so on. She was very well liked, because you know now when you read it all how it was, and we didn't know how everything was.

We heard just one side of it. So... We were interested and we didn't have our school. Our books were gone.

We had to get new books because the soldiers had taken over and there wasn't time. I guess they just took the whole school. What did they use it for? The training.

It was off from the... out of the city, and at that time it wasn't built up as much as it's now when you've seen it, but it was well situated. Lots of room around it where they could train. What about... Was the Emperor's birthday ever celebrated? Yes, yes, up to the last.

I know that was the day off. We had to go to school and we used to sing the National Anthem. What was the National Anthem? Deutschland, Deutschland, du weiles, and several other songs.

Do you remember any of them? Yeah, but I can't think of them now. They'll come to me later. Yeah, but... We used to go, and that's all we had, and some speakers, and then we'd go home again and have the day off.

Well, then, as the war progressed to an end, conditions got pretty bad as far as food was concerned, partly because of the blockade, I would imagine. It was terrible. You couldn't buy anything.

We got half a liter of skim milk. They owned it because I was anemic, and the doctor prescribed it, otherwise we wouldn't have gotten that. And we went as bad off as some people because we had a garden and we had a few chickens.

You had to share the eggs with the government. I've seen children that looked like old people all wrinkled, pitiful. It was pitiful.

What was your food, your meals? Mostly potatoes. We had potatoes. And because we grew those, what we bought, we got very little meat, maybe half a pound in a week for all of us, and maybe a half a pound of butter a week.

I don't think we got any more. And that had to do, so you know you can't do anything with it. Dad always commented about those times.

What was it, turnips? Turnips and potatoes. Now, they had an acre of land out, too. They rented it.

We bought ours, and we had fruit. Now, that's more than most people had. And we would can them, and carrots and rutabaga and all those things we put down in the earth for the winter.

So we had something in the winter and then it was canned. But we didn't have enough. You told once about going out in the tent.

Did you do it right? No, I think it's all right now. It was so tangled. Now, go ahead.

You were talking about... After the, I went, yeah. Well, that was when peace was declared, wasn't it? When the English came and took the, yeah. Oh, wow.

What happened? It's all right now. When I was in Husum this half a year, I used to go into the country. It was in the country, more or less.

We'd take long walks out into the country and ask the farmers if they would sell us some food, butter, and I would send it home to my parents and my sister, who was very, been very ill when Lisa Lothar was born. But it was awfully hard to get anything because people from the big cities would go out. Now, I remember my mother going out into the fields after they were threshing and pick up seeds of corn, wheat, and they would bring it home.

Each wheat kernel she had to go. Wasn't it terrible? And then she'd bring it home and we would grind it in the coffee mill and made cereal out of it just to have something to eat. You have no idea how it is.

Then after the war, after Didi came home, as I said, Frieda had an apartment and I had a job in the office again. And the carpool, that was when the Navy took over, the sailors, all the ship's yards and everything was closed and the students fighting in the street. Well, officers, I saw some men, I don't know if they were students, they stopped an officer and tore off his decorations.

Everybody was just so tired of war and doing without things and having not enough to live. I imagine the men were desperate. That's what they were fighting for so they could get something to eat.

How long did the kaputsch last in Peel? Oh, I don't remember, not too long. I know a fellow in our office, he was at the university and I guess he went with the students to fight, I don't know, because he was wounded. Do you remember, did that change the government in Peel or what happened? Well, of course, the Kaiser left and went to Holland.

Who came in power, was it him, Lord? No, no, it was the Weimar Republic, Ebert, I think it was. You know, I don't remember too much about it. That was the time I started to go out and the dances started again.

And I remember we had dances, went to fraternity dances and I guess I just didn't pay enough attention to what was going on. So it really didn't affect you too much? No. You know, we got more food then.

Little by little we got more and it wasn't so tight. But we still, we're still terribly short on everything because I went to, my parents and I went out into the country and tried to buy things. But, you know, by that time they wouldn't even talk to you.

You couldn't get any food for the love of money, no matter how much you offered. Later on then, after 18, 1919, why, why would the farmers, didn't they have plenty? No. Because some things we used to import bread, butter and so on from Denmark a lot.

Milk and butter and I imagine meat, I don't know. There just wasn't anything to be had. And I wonder it must have been terrible in England because as I told you, my uncle was interned there and we used to, from the little we had, we used to send him, he just begged for food.

So they must have been starving there. So it wasn't just our country. Of course, England would probably have been worse because they don't race so much, do they? No, not much.

Well, is there anything else about the war period before we stop tonight that you might recall or anything that unusual happened to the family or to you or anything that you recall? Well, just that I went out and worked in a household so we could get some unneeded food too and we get better food there than because they had a big place out in the country. The farmers were the only ones that had flour and milk and butter and so on. Vegetables.

I used to from Husum ship vegetables home because in winter they didn't have much there. Potatoes. Like Dad said, potatoes and turnips and they used to take the peelings from the factories.

The whole potatoes, peelings and all and dried it and ground it up and dried it and you bought that and cooked it and they did the same with turnips. You could get potatoes and turnips that way. It didn't taste good.

Well, you've heard a replay of what we covered last time. Do you now recall anything of the war period that comes to mind that we didn't cover that you remember? Anything that might be of interest in the history of the background of our family? No. Nothing else that you want to talk about? No.

Well, was there anything then after the war was over and the Kopputsch, how did the Kopputsch put you out of work as far as at the U-Boat? Oh, that was at the end of the war. Yeah. That was later, the Kopputsch.

Yeah, it came around 1990. We still couldn't get any food and I think that was what started it all. What did you do then as far as finding a job? Where did you go? I went to work.

I worked in the office. I got another job. Well, I worked for a newspaper concern and for just a while and then my father died and so I was just on vacation.

I had quit my job and I was on vacation in Itzehoe when mother called that I should come home right soon after my dad died and so then I went to the ship's yard where my father had worked all those years and I got a job as a secretary. How did you get the job in the shipyard? That was sort of... Did you have to take a test or anything? Yeah, I took a test and let's see... Where did I work first? Was it... I think first I worked in Schreibsaue that is where they have all the stenographers and you go to different engineers to take dictations. Then later on whenever the girl in the personnel department would go on vacation I would help out there and in the bank department I would help out there.

We were sworn in first. It was a very, very large shipyard. It went all the way from you know where we take the streetcar around the harbor.

Well, it took from the beginning of the harbor all the way into Wellingdorf. All that way was shipyard on Wehrstrasse and Lang to Wellingdorf. You can imagine how big that was.

It was the Kaiserliche Werf and then by the time I got in, of course, the Kaiser wasn't there. It was renamed Deutsche Werke. Did you have any interesting experience? How long did you work there? Until you left Germany? Until I left Germany.

Did you have any interesting work experiences? Were there people that you met? Oh, yes. I liked lots of people there. At last I was called to this department.

My boss, the boss that was wanting me to come there was raised in England and his German was not too good. And so he wanted somebody that knew some English. And he had a secretary he liked very well, but she was transferred because she couldn't get along with the big boss.

And so she was transferred and she became my brother-in-law's secretary. He was a diploma engineer on the shipyard. And that's Niklaus Klein.

Yeah, that's Niklaus Klein. And I came there and I told him that I did not want the job because I was going to America. And he said, would I please come and stay as long as I could? I don't think he believed me that I was going to America.

He thought I was just not going because it was so hard to get along with his boss. He had a hard time getting along. And he dictated and made mistakes.

That was just too bad. So I had one encounter. The first one, he called me in.

He just called for a secretary in. And I got bawling out about something I had done wrong in one of the letters. And I went back to Schoentzsch, that was my boss, and I said, well, I was leaving.

I wasn't going to take it. And he went into the bus and he came back and he said that the boss was apologizing. He thought it was the other girl had done it.

He just didn't like her. He just didn't like her. But I made lots of friends there.

When I left, they had the office. You want to hear that? Decorated all in forget-me-nots and had gifts there. It was a big office.

Dr. Wolf gave a speech and everybody cried but me. You were happy, huh? Well, I wanted to go. You know how I am about traveling.

Well, did you meet anyone there that you still correspond with at work? Not yeah, Marie-Jane Grace, you met her. Hoick is her name, married name, and she lived, we were all often dated and went out together and she lived not too far from us and you saw her house was bombed and her husband was in prison camp in England, didn't she say England? And she rebuilt her house stone by stone, of course there are brick houses, and herself and she did a mighty good job, didn't she? She sure did. Well, when did you meet Dad? Oh, long before.

When did we come to this country? 1924. Well, must have been about 1920 we off and on went out together first and then I went out with other people and he did too. We just didn't go steady like they say here till finally we did get engaged and decided to go to America.

Uncle Hannes had invited me to come and I asked him if Dad might come along. He, at the beginning, wanted to go to Detroit and work for Ford. He was so interested in Ford automobiles at the time because they didn't have very many automobiles in Kiel at that time.

So, but he got started here in Indianapolis and stayed. Well, when you decided to get married, did you have a ceremony or did you have a party? No, we just had a party almost all day, almost all week long. The main party engagement was announced that people at our house and our family and then we had a party of our friends would come, you know.

You know, our houses weren't too big, but it was in summer and we celebrated out in the garden. Agnes baked a great big flammkuchen. Oh, she could bake so beautiful cakes she could make.

oh, mother baked and dad's mother baked and she could bake good. She was a good cook. Well, what prompted you and dad to decide to come? There was just no way.

At the time I wrote, dad was out of work because Brown closed their office where he was an engineer. They closed their office in Kiel. They still had one in Hamburg and he lost his job and he was out of work.

You know how he told you how many many many, well I guess thousands of letters he wrote. You just couldn't get any work any place. So just oh it took a long time.

We had to get our visa and there was what do they call it you could just quota and so you had to wait your turn and it took, well it might have taken half a year at least or a year. In the meantime dad got a job at the shipyard where I was working as an engineer, not in the

same office way off, but he was working there. And you still, even though you both had jobs Oh yes, we wanted to go.

It was just it was terrible over there after the war. You just didn't, couldn't make any headway. You couldn't get ahead and so we felt we would be better off going to this country.

And then you had to apply for a visa and We had to go to Hamburg, you know and apply for a visa and make the arrangements to come and then finally be sailed from Hamburg. But now, there was something unique about the boat you sailed on wasn't there? Oh well, it was the Thuringia and while dad was working at the shipyard, he designed the electrical installation that means for all the ship, not only for the lights, also for the machinery for two boats, the Thuringia and the Westphalia and we could have come sooner but dad wanted to wait till we could go with the boat that he designed. And of course he was interested in that and everything went well.

Did he get to inspect the... Yeah, I guess so. I was so seasick, I guess he went all over the boat and he told the captain that he designed it. How long did you have to wait before you got notice that you could come? Uncle Hannes invited me and when I wrote and he said yes he would send the ticket for dad because of course our money at that time was all inflated and dad of course, after we arrived, he paid off whatever it was.

What was the inflation period like? It was terrible. I was working at the ship's yard and they printed money so fast you've seen that little those coins I had, they were out of what was the metal yet? The real light. Aluminum.

Aluminum. And they had to print it so fast because it just from day to day the money wasn't worth anything and the poor old people just think they couldn't they couldn't grasp it that the money wasn't worth anything. You had to go and you get paid.

Finally we got paid. Later on we got paid every day in the office but we used to get paid only once a month and when it started first and I was going on vacation and I was supposed to get my money ahead of dad had to come with a wheelbarrow or with something to bring it home in big sacks I couldn't carry it. Just my money for two weeks and you had to go and spend it as fast as you could you couldn't buy any food you just had to buy whatever you could get.

That's how I happened to buy the marker set for you that you have now and the silver marker spoons because it was no use to keep the money till the next day. You had to spend it. You had to spend it.

Some places they get paid twice a day? No, once a day as far as I know. And then at noon, now dad got paid, he was at that time still working for Brown Bavarie and at that time he got paid in the morning and at noon hour they went out to spend their money. Because all the offices were paid once a month before the before then.

How did you spend your money? I mean you bought the marker set and things like that. Well you bought, Herb, what you could. If you didn't, you didn't have anything.

You bought what you could. You bought clothes. You could buy clothes.

Some. Yeah. Not wool or anything like that.

That was in 23 and 24 wasn't it? Yeah. That must have been in 23 Herb. When had you applied officially for going to America? I don't remember.

I imagine a year. See we came in 25 didn't we? We left I don't remember. 25.

No we got married then. 26. We came in, we left in May 25 and we got here in June.

We were late. We hit ice and we should have gotten here in 10 days and it took us 14 days. What about old people and things when you left? Family and so on? Well, Angus came to the, of course Niklaus was had lost his job of course in the shipyard.

Everybody did. And he or he was transferred to Hamburg. Yeah, he was transferred to Hamburg.

And before that even, of course he couldn't find a place to live so Angus and the children stayed in Wellingdorf in their own house and Niklaus was just having a room in Hamburg and when we went to Hamburg, Dad would stay with Niklaus and I stayed with Liesel Fleck. That was the one Liesel Büttner was her American name. She lived in Hamburg then.

I stayed with her. And of course when I left from Kiel, all my friends were at the train station and Dad's friends and everybody was at the train station. My sister of course, my mother was and she was getting old.

And and in Hamburg Didi and Niklaus and Liesel Fleck went with us to the boat. Did you have parties and so on? Yes, we had parties before as much as parties went at that time. Yes, we did have parties.

What Did you receive any partying gifts or things that you still have? Yes, my office gave me a service spoon. That wasn't my office. That was the other office on the same floor.

I don't remember what I got. I got some books and things. Oh, I don't remember.

Of course we brought everything along we could. We even brought the furchen. What was the trip over like? Well, it was fine through the channel but going through the channel it was getting pretty rough and everybody was getting sick and I was sharing my cabin with two ladies from Hamburg One was from Hamburg and one was from someplace else.

They were sick and that was enough for me to get sick and I was in my cabin the rest of the trip. We had very rough weather but the girls in my cabin were all right after they had gotten over it. Do you know why when I get sick once I'm sick? Anyway, the night before we were to dock this one girl she came in and she brought a bottle of some kind of liquor in.

She said, now I'm going to see that you get up because they have a wonderful party on board. Oh, they had ice cream. Great big bombs of ice cream.

Beautiful. So I drank some and do you know I got up and I went to that bar and when one of the officers danced with me he said, where have you been? I've never seen you. I said, Robin Fisher.

What was it like landing then? Well, we had trouble landing because Dan and I were both going to Uncle Hannes first, you know. And they first were going to marry us. Oh.

So we didn't want it because Dad had promised my mother he would get a hat first before we get married. And I kind of wanted me to stay with them for a while to get to know this country and she wasn't very well. She wanted me to be with her and help her.

And so I stayed a year with them. Well, now getting back, did you go to Ellis Island? No. No, we didn't have to.

This was a boat well we were on the boat first class because I only had first, second, and third class. And the captain ate with us. Not our table, but theirs.

So we, I don't know did they stop and leave the third class off? It seems to me like oh, Herb, I know Dad would remember but I don't. Well, how long were you in New York then? Well, we left right the same day. We took a cab we took a cab to the train station.

And there was one fellow, he was a Jew he was with us in the cab and he sure knew how to get along. That cab driver charged us five dollars and he said, well, that shouldn't really, it was such a short drive. That was an immense drive.

He knew what he was doing, you know. Well then, I don't know if he had the train tickets or if he had to get them, but he kind of knew his way around. And we were all in the same train and I think we were on the train overnight if I'm not mistaken.

Is that the time you wore the long johns? Dad wore the long johns? Yeah. And they were so hot then. Yeah, and he went and took them off, didn't he? He'd go to the john.

Yeah, and took them off. I guess that's what he always said. And, you know, we are not used to this heat in summer.

And that was June. And at that time they didn't have any air-conditioned trains, you know. And we would buy they'd come to the window like they did, you know, with food and we would buy bananas or crackers or something to eat.

As far as I know they didn't have any diners then. Did you remember Uncle Hans? I had never seen him. Oh, you had never met him.

He left when he was very young, didn't he? Well, he was only sixteen. And, you see, that was way, way before I was born. And they met you then in Indianapolis? No.

They didn't know we were coming. You see, our boat was so late. And we got our tickets.

I guess we paid for them or did they include the ticket? I don't know. Anyway, there was nobody home when you got there. When we got there.

Did you take a cab? We took a cab and he understood. We gave him the address. And he was the cab driver was a friend of one of the toys.

Next door? Yeah, not next door. The day after, the house after that. A friend of Tamara's.

And so we told him and he left us off. And Dad gave him a tip and he wouldn't take it. Oh, my God.

That was different than New York, wasn't it? Uh-huh. And he knew. He probably knew we were coming, you know.

But we didn't understand what he was saying. So he left us off and we went in. And on the front porch, you remember the front porch? Oh, yeah.

We sat there waiting when they came. And Dad had that great big hat on, you know. That was just a new hat and that was all the style over there.

who was it that said, was it Otto said? He knew right away that was us when he saw us on the porch. So that's that's about it. That's how you got started.

Uh-huh. What was your first year like over here? Oh, I enjoyed it. I really did enjoy it.

I met all kind of Clara's friends and they all seemed to like me. And I was especially fond of Miss Fritz's next door. And many people just were so nice.

Tender Lily and Tender Katie. Everybody was nice. And uh Lisbeth Geisler had left a year before to Germany.

We took her to the boat. She sailed right from the Kiel Harbor. And we all brought her to the boat.

She also worked for the Deutsche Wecke. And she went up to I think it was Iowa. Do you remember Iowa? And she lived in Iowa then when she got married.

And she met her husband. She met her husband on the boat over. And so after I was here she was going back to New York to get married to this fellow.

And she visited us and stayed a week at Santa Clara's. And you still write for her. Yeah.

She's in New York. She's been back to Germany only once. I don't know if she doesn't write much but she always writes.

Once or twice a year. I don't know.