

**Gudrun Ericson**

**Interviewed 11/6/2007  
By Holli Connell  
Midway Village Museum**

Gudren Ericson

Holli Connell: Okay if you could again state your first and last name?

Gudrun Ericson: Gudrun Ericson.

HC: And are you married?

GE: Yes.

HC: Do you have children?

GE: Yes.

HC: How many?

GE: I had five and one is deceased.

HC: What is your educational background?

GE: I was born and raised in Germany. I was born and raised in Dresden. My father lived there for about 2 1/2 years and was transferred to Berlin. He was a minister and as such he had to go to different churches and this way my sisters and brother were all born in different cities. Most of them, we were actually seven children, and three of passed away and they were all born in different cities.

Now my next sister and I we were the ones who were born in Dresden. That's where the Meissen porcelain factories are and the beautiful dome and anyways I was about 2 1/2 years old when my father was transferred to Berlin and I don't remember much about Dresden at all. And we lived in the inner city of Berlin because that was the areas that needed that the folks to be brought to God. And spread the Word. And so we were not in a good neighborhood. But we were happy and we were playing with the neighbors and there was a boy down the street and he was a bully. And I went up to him and I said, and I was going to fight him, and he started and I said to him, "shame on you; you don't want to hit a girl!" And that was the end of that. I started it, but anyways.

But then we moved from one street around the corner to [unintelligible] Strasse [unintelligible] where in the back of the property was a dance hall that was used in the 20s, you know, from the turn-of-the-century up to the time when my father, when the church, bought it out. And you could still see on the walls in those days they had the you know in those days they had the paintings of the girls in those days with the hats and then the short skirts and they had, the flappers, and I remember seeing those. And then of course shortly after the church took over the building, they had it repainted, because that wouldn't go in the church. But it had a second story that was open with the railing where the orchestra would sit. And we used that for the organ it was up there and had a little, when you went the side of it, it had a little area where they use to sit and drink and could waltz around and walk around.

We were lucky because we were the only one on the whole street who had a postage stamp backyard. And there were some trees in there, a chestnut tree. And so we were lucky, we were able to have a little green where we lived. And then they took this part off where the people were sitting and, I don't remember, made it into a little garden or something for the people to grow vegetables or something.

Let's see, now my father was a minister from the Evangelical United Brethren Church from the missionaries from this country went over to Germany and were recruiting new members for to build a church there in Germany for the United Evangelical Brethren Church. And that's how my father became acquainted with them. They were handing out pamphlets to the people and so that's what happened. He and my mother got married and his sister was a little, little strange. Shouldn't say that. But when they got married, my father forgot the key to their apartment. And you know the funniest thing is that Paul did the same thing. He had to crawl in the bathroom window to get in the house and open it from the inside. Anyway my father forgot the key so those two young people sat on those hard chairs because his sister, Louise, was a nurse; she was sitting there watching them the whole night with glaring eyes. So they couldn't do anything, they couldn't even kiss, you know. I mean they were newlyweds, they just got married! Until the next day when something happened that my father sent someone to get the key or whatever. I never heard the end of that, but anyways that's what happened.

HC: So she just sat right there and waited and watched them?

GE: Yes. Now she had no business being with them they were adults they were not scared of monsters or going like that and they were married. Well that's the family. There's another sister on my father's side who was also a little strange, but, I mean it goes through generations.

HC: Now did you go to school in Berlin?

GE: Um, yes I went to grade school for four years. I walked there and it wasn't that far to walk, maybe five or six blocks or so and went there from first grade, there was no kindergarten. They did not have kindergarten, kindergarten in those days was for the latchkey kids where the parents worked and they were in a nursery-type setting. And then when the parents came home from work the mother would go pick them up or the kids would go home because they knew that the mother was back so anyways I didn't go to kindergarten and kindergarten was not a regular part of the school. So I went there for first grade, second-grade, third grade, and somewhere between third and fourth grade I took an exam because in order to go to high school you had to pass certain standards. And I passed the standards and I started, I think it was at age 10, to go to high school. And the nice thing, I must say, that is the one nice thing that Hitler did, he helped the mothers and the fathers to educate the children like the first two did not get any financial help, the third got half and I went for free. The government paid the school so that was pretty neat. So anyways I went there and I took the exam and I passed that to go to high school and then I went to high school for eight years. And I learned English right, and I don't think it started in the first grade but maybe it did. But way back we had English and I remember that they had those old-fashioned seats and the tables came down sort of and they had an ink pot in here, you know, and then you pull the girl in front of you and mess with the ink, well I did that, too. Not just

boys. And one of my teachers said “now don't do that!” “Look at Gudrun, she's a bad girl.” And you know that was very detrimental to my self-esteem. For her to say that I was a bad girl. That's terrible. Well anyways I went into high school and then we started with English, oh yeah and she said I must've started with the first grade of high school, the grade school kids went up to eighth, and then they went to a trade school to learn a trade, like hairdressing, plumbing, you know, that kind of trade. Where the people who went to high school went for eight years and after the fifth grade, I started with the first, second, third, fourth and then I had to make a decision about which branch I was going to go into; they had three branches. That was just like college you know. One was for scientific branch, one was a language branch, and one was the domesticated type, the domestic branch where you learn sewing and knitting and all this and of course I picked the scientific branch because I liked science. But you also learned languages besides. So I started with French and I had French for three years and then Latin the next year I had that for about two or three years depending on when we started. I had about two or three years of both of those.

And then Berlin was bombed and we were shipped out of Berlin, out into the country, into areas that were not bombed or endangered, endangering children. So my sister went into the woody part of (name) and (name) and spent a year or two there and I was shipped out to the Baltic Sea with my class. And we spent a year or two there away from the bombing.

HC: Were you out there with parents or teachers?

GE: Yes the teachers went too. The parents did not.

HC: How old were you when that happened?

GE: That was in 1941 or 42 so that's when the bombing started. The British started to bomb Berlin in 1941. And I think shortly after that we were sent out so that we would not be in danger of losing our lives. We would be safer.

HC: Where in the Baltic Sea?

GE: Right on the coast. In one of the, they took all of these resort hotels and let the kids, I don't know what they did with the owners, but they confiscated the resort hotels and filled them with kids. They were trying to keep the schools together. But somehow I got separated. And I was in a different hotel with different kids I mean the kids that went to a different school. And I didn't know what they were talking about. They were either a year behind or two years ahead or something. I wasn't matched properly. So I have a terrible time especially with math. They were doing stuff. I'm still not good with math but anyways I think we were there for the summer. And then we were shipped back.

In the meantime my father and mother celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. And I wanted to go home. I wanted to be there and I was crying and crying and carrying and carrying on and finally whoever had the decision to make let me go, HS: put me on the train and I went back to Berlin for the 25th anniversary celebration.

So your parents stayed in Berlin?

GE: Oh yes.

HC: During the war than?

GE: Right. Not during the whole war, my father did, and my oldest sister, they stayed in Berlin for the entire length until they were bombed out. My mother and my sister and I we went to my aunt in Saxony. The sister of the aunt that was glaring. So we stayed in her house and she had a beautiful dining room, living room, whatever with Oriental carpeting and beautiful furniture and you know what, she kept it locked. Nobody could use it, it was just to look at and drool, you know and "Oh my gosh how beautiful!" Well one time she let me use it because I was trying algebra and for some reason I couldn't get it and I couldn't get it and I couldn't sit in the kitchen where we almost lived in Germany. Everything is played in the kitchen the whole home life. Anyway I couldn't because they were yackity, yackity and laughing and giggling and all this and so she finally opened up the door and "Now you don't touch anything." I said, "No I won't, I won't." I sat down and I looked at this and I worked on it and I worked on it and all of a sudden a light bulb went on in here that's what it is! Okay. So, I finally got it.

She had one daughter Krista and arranged the wedding to Fritz. Fritz was a redhead and he drove a motorcycle. And he invited me "You want to ride a motorcycle?", and I said sure. I sat behind him and I was never as scared in my life. I hung onto them and he went GGG up and down the road. There was a little village, a string of villages in they are not mountains in that area but they are rolling hills, something like out in Pennsylvania, only not quite as high. But there were valleys, and there were rolling hills and they were covered in woods. They were beautiful woods and we used to go mushroom hunting in the wood and we would smell and, even now when I go by fresh mushrooms I have to eat one or two raw in order to get that smell back. It tastes just like it smelled. Oh it was beautiful.

So we stayed there I think it was from 43, I think we got there in the summer of 43 or the summer of 44, no, we stayed there from the fall of 43 until the spring of 45. And I went to school there in a little town not as big as Rockford but the cute thing was, you know, being in a valley she lived in one of the on one of the little hills and she could overlook the little villages. There was a choo choo train I mean it was actually a little choo choo train went down the valley and picked up the kids for school in Sweikow and it was a little red wagon with a type of caboose and went to choo, choo, choo. It was the cutest thing and we took and we took that one into the city.

HC: And did it run on the tracks?

GE: It ran on tracks and it was really cute and we took that and went to school there in Sweikow. And then of course they stopped that because the war was coming too close and the Americans had the dive bombers and they would shoot anything moving on the ground and they stopped that and so we had to walk home. They were endangering anything that moved on the ground.

And that one time my girlfriend and I stopped because they were coming overhead and we looked down on the ground and there were these little frogs, like little tree frogs or something like that. And they were all hippy happy hopping and I just stuffed them in my pocket. Oh they're so cute I'm going to take them home. My mother had a fit. But that was actually a nice thing you know what a happy occasion. I didn't care about the bombing or anything. Like when the bombers came over from England to bomb Dresden I was lying in bed and you know we could hear them there was a stream of them, thousands of them. And I was lying in bed and I was singing away and my sister my next sister was under the bed and she was shivering and she was crying. I said what's that matter they are not going to drop any bombs on us. They do not even see us. She was crying and shivering and I was singing up there you know it didn't mean anything to me at that age. And afterwards we looked out the window and when we could see the whole horizon was red from the fires in Dresden. That was a long ways away. Sweikow was over here and Dresden was way over here. Was at one end of Saxony and Dresden was at the other. You could still see it that well.

HC: Wow that was close.

GE: Yes that was close so we stayed there until spring of 45. And my father and my older sister stayed in Berlin. Well, our house was bombed one night and they had precision bombing. They stopped at that house and the next night they came and finished it from that street on over. It was really I mean it was really fantastic accuracy. But they were trying my father and my sister who was handicapped walking tried to help get the people out and there was no sense and they were almost sucked in do you know they called that being sucked into a firestorm? It has the oxygen rushes and it pulls you in if you are not watching and my father was pulled back by some of the people in the building, in the house and then my brother's ammunition, he was in the army. He had ammunition in his roll and it was starting to go off. It was just like fireworks! They were exploding inside when the fire reached that. I wasn't there I mean my sister was telling me.

And then my sister came to visit us and she has guts really, she was rough. I mean she went with her head through the wall you know I'm going to do this or else or not. She hitchhiked to Berlin, laid in the ditch when the bombers came over and didn't pull her skirt up but "Can I get a ride"?

HC: Is she the one that is handicapped walking?

GE: Yeah and she got to [name of town] where we lived with my aunt and if those bombers didn't come over the house one time from the back and dropped a bomb right down at the farmer down the road just maybe 300 yards or so down the way and killed someone but that was the end of us being bothered by bombers except one day we watched a fighting fight in the sky where German fighter planes and American fighter planes putting on a show. I'm sure that it wasn't a show for them but they were this way diving down shooting and it was most interesting for me and then one American fighter plane was shot down not too far. Boy we were getting our shoes on and running down there. It was a tall black guy. I don't know the rank or anything, whoever and I went up and I asked him in English "What is your name?" He just straight forward. He didn't even look at us. He didn't say a word. And then he was captured and taken away but in another village the same valley one guy wasn't so lucky. They captured him and they beat him

because they were so angry at him. They beat him but he wasn't killed. It's war but shortly before that a German, not a tank battalion but one with guns, guns mounted on...

HC: Tanks?

GE: Maybe they were tanks they were going through the valley and past our little village and went two or three villages, one village was right next to the other. Bombers came [yack] bomber we called them, fighter planes and shot them up.

HC: American shot up German tanks?

GE: Yeah, no the American bombers, fighter planes, bomber planes shot the whole battalion up and it exploded and what not. In that village the people were so angry that's when one of them landed, poor soul, they grabbed him and I mean it wasn't his fault you know. You can't blame them for trying to give steam out for something they had to hold in and tried to forget and they can't. They couldn't forget it so that's what happened to them but that fight in the air was most interesting. Like to me it was interesting, not my mother and my sister...

HC: Frightening. Big age difference between you and your sister?

GE: No, two and a half years but she was a different temperament than I. She was very timid and quiet and ...

HC: And you seemed more curious and adventurous.

GE: Yeah and now she completely turned when she fell in love. She completely turned. She met her husband in England as a nurse. She was working as a nurse At Oxford University and he was a Rhoades Scholar from Chicago of all places and they met there and they fell in love and they got married and they came across it's a channel and went to Berlin and then my father married them again in church because they got married at the courthouse. He married them in church and I was there at that time. I happened to be there to visit from over here.

HC: How did you meet your husband?

GE: Well if you want me to tell you that's a long story.

HC: That's okay. If you've got time I do.

GE: It's a long story. My father being a minister of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in the United States and sent missionaries to Germany received money just like the Marshall Plan was given money to rebuild Germany. The church gave money to rebuild the churches and for some reason being very, had a great ability to handle finances and to be an organizer. Somehow he got elected I'm not sure how he was elected to handle the money for West Germany to build up the churches and so they had conferences every four years in Dayton, Ohio where the seat is of the Evangelical Unite Brethren Church which is now United Methodist. They combined with the Methodist and so when he was at the first conference in Dayton, Ohio that was I think in

1948 because he came back in '46 no it wasn't '46. It must have been '48. He saw a list of some of the colleges; we had two colleges in the state. One was in Dayton, Ohio, the Albright College and the one in Naperville is North Central College and he saw that both of those colleges were asking for one exchange student from the German country, from the defeated Germans so he wrote my name down as a possibility. He noticed that both of those colleges were offering a place for a student to go to college over there so he wrote my name down and one of another girl from our congregation for the other college, the Albright College. They both agreed we had to write letters, I had to write letters, she had to write letters, put our grades on, send our final grades which came after the eight years of high school you went through a week of written examinations and then a week of oral examinations and if you passed you got a certificate. It's like a college graduation, abtuir they called it ABITUR, a special honor if you make it and if you don't you can repeat it again except one girl in my class we all made it and I had to write the letter to the college and send my grades in. And the problem is in the scientific branch there was no typing. We didn't learn how to type. I don't know if they had it in the domesticated whatever so I didn't know how to type. I wrote this letter long hand. I didn't know anything about margins so I started here and then I went over there and then I went over there, long hand and of course the grades were differently written down in Germany than they were over here. Like the "A" was a "1" in Germany, "B" was a "2" and so forth and sometimes the "1" is just like and "F" over here, you know you have a little flag that brings me to another one then I wrote it in long hand what it meant fortunately.

HC: So they're thinking you've got "F's" and it's one and it's highest grade?

GE: Yeah, and so on and so forth I had half A's or seven A's and four B's or something so they accepted me and coming back to the '1" I had an experience in my first physic's test, qualitative physics, qualitative chemistry sorry. The teacher was sort of picked on his nose all of the time, had a problem with his whatever with his teeth but he was talking like this all of the time. Well I couldn't understand him for one thing so the first test I wrote everything "1" well he understood it was a "7" see and so I had an "F" on the test or a "D" or something. I thought what so I marched up to his office and I said this is not an "F" this is a "1. Huh, what? Well that's when I explained we make a "1" like this and a "7" is like this with a cross through it. Oh, okay I'll have to re calibrate it, regard your test and he did and I passed it with a "C" or "B" or something. But nobody explained to him I was the first one from Germany so he had no experience. There was nobody at North Central College that would explain what to expect.

Third Person (husband)?: unintelligible comment.

GE: I don't know he might have...Paul be quiet, what to expect from these foreigners.

HC; Now how old were you when you were admitted to North Central College?

GE: I had graduated from high school at eighteen and it was spring of '49.

HC: So when you, I just want to get this right because this is part of here, arriving here. So you came through the church?



GE: Yes.

HC: And your father, it was through the United Methodist now and that was based in Dayton, Ohio or in Naperville?

GE: Yes.

HC: And so you came over here through that to go to college here?

GE: Yeah.

HC: I just wanted to make sure that I am right on that. When you came over like what was it like traveling over here to get to that school?

GE: It was a nightmare.

HC: What happened, where did it start like after your dad said you can go to this college, you got to fill out paper work and you did it, you were accepted, what happened then?

GE: I had umpteen different meetings so go to because I had to have a visa, immigration, not immigration, a student visa. I had to be examined by the military, the government in order to get a visa. I had meetings to go to be examined if I had any political whatever in the background and I was trying to be non-committal and so when they went out of the room I was sitting at the table and you know at a round table or something and I was sitting like this you know, a real nice girl smiling. They left the papers in front of the head man where Paul was sitting and went out for whatever a cup of coffee or something and I sneaked over and looked and I could see the impression, one sentence anyways, is non-committal and her character seems to be what is that word the lizard that changes color – chameleon. I thought gee that's what they think of me, as a chameleon. If that's serves the purpose I'm okay. I went along with it. I wanted to come to the States. I wanted to have experience with English in the country to become a missionary nurse to go to Africa and so one man from the church apparently a wealthy business man donated some money for my trip here and ...

Third person interrupts with unintelligible comment.

GE: Paul, never mind. That's the way you met me over here. You just be quiet and listen. Okay? If you have a question you raise your hand. So he donated the money I think to the church for this kind of thing to happen for students to come to college over here and I tried to pay the money back in donations to North Central College because I felt I owed them a great debt and anyways that's how I came over. It was through the donations of the business man.

HC: He paid for your way and for the flight and for the paperwork?

GE: Right and then the church decided to give me a total scholarship because well that's what they wanted me to do was to come over as an exchange student. Where would I get the money

for them? I seemed to be worthy of the scholarship and they even gave me an allowance. That was really nice.

HC: Was it for the whole time that you were in college?

GE: I got it for one year and then I wanted to go another year if possible but I didn't have any money and I couldn't expect Paul's parents to pay. I met him in zoology down the road and so I went to the administration of the college. I wrote a letter to the head office in Dayton and I asked if I could please have an extension of the first year and they did. They gave me a total scholarship for the second year. So that was neat. I met Paul in the second year, no in the summer of the first year and we wanted to get married but we didn't know what to do or where to go and nobody in Naperville new. This was something different, something new. They didn't have any experience. So they said well, go to the immigration people in Chicago so I went to the immigration people in Chicago.

HC: Because you were on a student visa.

GE: Right.

HC: So you were from Germany, you were going to school, you guys met and fell in love and said we're going to get married and it was like how do you do it?

GE: How do you do it? And I asked one of the people in Chicago. We went twice. The first time we went and he said are you planning to return to Germany after the school year. And I said not really; I want to get married. I don't want to have my husband here and me there. Well he said you signed a paper in Germany that you would return after the one year and we will hold you to it. So I said I didn't know that and he said ignorance is no excuse before the law. So okay I had a deportation notice to leave at the end of the month so Paul and I tried to find out what to do. Nobody knew at the college, nobody. So we went to Chicago to the immigration office and we talked to the head of the immigration office, Mr. Taylor, very nice, very personable man. He said I know what you are going through. I have a daughter in college too. I know what it is to fall in love and this and that and he said I'll tell you one thing, don't worry about how to cross a bridge until you get to it and that's what you did. You should have gotten married and nobody would have done anything. I didn't know that and nobody knew so he said I will extend your first semester to the end of it and in the meantime you told me that you are getting married by your father, wonderful he said, no worry after that. You see one nice, friendly, understanding person can change my whole life. I mean things fell into place. It was just amazing so my education in Germany didn't cost me anything. My education in this country didn't cost me anything. I went into training at Rockford Memorial to become a registered technologist; that didn't cost me anything in fact they gave me an allowance. I mean I am a lucky person here I am.

HC: Here you are. Wow, that's amazing.

GE: So that is really fortunate, very fortunate person.

HC: Now can I ask you a question not to go back on something but I want to actually understand after you filled the paperwork out, you saw your paperwork, you're a chameleon and okay they are going to let you go to the United States, how did you travel to get here?

GE: My father made arrangements with one of the church members in Frankfort to have me stay overnight and then bring me to the airport in Frankfort and put me on Pan American Airlines so that's what I did. I said goodbye in [unintelligible] airport. My teacher was there from high school, Miss [unintelligible] was there and I went from [unintelligible] to Frankfort whoever it was I can't remember. They picked me up. They brought me home because my flight was the next day, Pan American go to New York, fly to New York and I stayed overnight. They got me up in the morning. That was the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1949. School already started for two three weeks, the early part of September and then I flew with Pan American. I got sick, oh flying ...it just...It was a propeller plane and it was thirty some hours or twenty nine hours or whatever.

We first went to Heathrow Airport, no to Shannon, Ireland and we had a nice meal there Shannon Ireland and then we flew to [name of city unintelligible] in Iceland because it was a long flight from [name of city unintelligible] Iceland to Gander, Newfoundland and I saw the aurora borealis and I saw it. It's waves like this and then we flew into Gander and I was still getting sick and a neighbor next to me said now you better eat and oh no, you try to eat if it takes you all day and they served Canadian bacon and fried eggs and I thought oh the smell of it made me sick. He said no you eat one bite at a time and sure enough after I finished that breakfast we were landing in Gander, Newfoundland by the time I finished that breakfast. It took me all the long. It felt good. I felt better so we landed in Gander and they found out because of the storm over the ocean, you know it was in September they had to [unintelligible] the plane, go up higher or go this way and that way. They were almost out of gas so another miracle of God, she's going to college I'll make this last and I don't believe what the guy said, the neighbor next to me said he flew all of the time and he said they had only thirty gallons left but it couldn't have been. It must have been three hundred gallons. That's what sticks in my mind. It had a small amount of fuel left so phew. I thought well here we go and we landed in New York Airport, I don't remember which one it was. And the lady from our church in Dayton met me there and took me to a hotel overlooking, oh when I saw the lights. We were approaching in the evening look at the lights it was just unbelievable. You know there was a blackout in Germany. You couldn't see any lights and there the whole sky was burning with lights and that was the most exciting moment to see all of those skyscrapers with their lights blazing. I mean it was just like fireworks like they turned it on for me. It was so beautiful and back there was darkness and I said oh what's that and they said that's the ocean and I said oh that makes sense.

HC: So you stayed at a hotel in New York with someone from the church?

GE: Yeah.

HC: And then what happened?

GE: She took me shopping the next morning. My mother had tailor made me a fitted suit, a travel suit. That's what you wear in Germany and a new hat, new purse, and shoes. I mean I was decked out to kill the world but I mean I needed some modern clothes so we went shopping and

she bought me a dress that was plaid which I loved. It was a pleated skirt and the whole works and then she put me on the train to go to I think, I don't think I changed trains in Chicago, no I went all the way to it was the Burlington Railroad to it must have been the Naperville station and it lasted it must have been seventeen or nineteen hours and I was in a cabin with a bed in it all by myself and when dinner time they gave me a menus and well I never read a menu in English. I didn't know what this meant, what hamburger was or steak what is that? But I recognized the fruit names like apples and melon and oranges and so I ordered a dinner just with fruit. At least I knew what I was getting.

HC: When you got to the school a school had already started and you started and kind of jumped right in how were you received by your fellow classmates? There must have been touchiness at the time because the war was still on like this was '48 or '49. How were you perceived by American students or people who were born here was there a connection with you being German or was it like for them I'm not sure.

GE: They were wonderful. They loved me.

Third Party: They gave her a nickname.

GE: Yeah well the first night of course I had a late lunch in the dining room. The administration was sitting there watching me and I had my ate with a fork and a knife and I had my hand on the table because that's what you do in Germany and I was told how to behave at the dinner table. Anyway they brought me to the dorms. I had a room in the dorm and in the evening the girls on my floor they all congregated in my room. They sat on the floor and I was with them and of course I could speak English. I had eight years of English but they spoke so fast my ears weren't assimilating to the sound of American English and also to the speed so I said slow down I cannot understand you. I spoke real spoke because I had to think. I had English but not conversational so they said we cannot pronounce Gudren or however they pronounced it then. What should we name her and they went from Gudren to blah, blah to Gudy which is almost Judy. How about we name her Judy? I said that sounds good.

HC: So that was your name Judy? Do you go by Judy now?

GE: Many times, no I use my real name on official papers like test results or something or government issue but in college and my work I went by Judy. Not that I particularly like the name but it was close and my mother wanted to call me [Yuta] which is almost like Judy so she got her wish in a way.

HC: I actually should ask some of these questions you have gone along and done so many of these, very interesting story. Okay, how did you, let's get back into this how did you get to Rockford? Like how did you end up in Rockford?

GE: Good question. Some of the classes I took like from Dr. [Eigenbruch] whose ancestors came from the area my father was born and he was a foundling or something and he could speak German and I had a class with him he was teaching zoology. I happened to sit next to Paul with one seat in between and I thought oh is he cute so I tried to talk to him and he wouldn't say

anything and I thought what a snob and then after several weeks in the German Club or the Chemistry Club I attended I found out that he was hard of hearing that he didn't hear me ah ha so that made a big difference but anyways my first birthday that year in '49 which was a couple of months after I came over the maid of honor I had at the wedding she had an aunt and uncle in Naperville and he was a teacher or professor in college and she invited me to make a pie, would you like to learn how to bake a pie? Pies are very popular in America and I said sure what kind would you like me to make and of course I had to pick pecan pie which is expensive to make so we made pecan pie at my birthday and then the doorbell rang and there was this character grinning from one ear to the other, my blind date Martha Bead knew that I liked Paul and she invited him to come to my birthday party and so actually that's how we met.

HC: And so how did you wind up in Rockford though?

GE: Paul's parents lived in Rockford. His father was a physician and he had his practice here in Rockford so that's why we got married here and then I started my training at Rockford Memorial and that was in Rockford so after that I stayed here. Paul was actually born in Chicago while Grandpa was at Northwestern in med school and so I invited everybody from my college days to come to my wedding and some people did and one I don't know how did you became acquainted with Maurice [Vanlandingham]?

HC: I know, his daughter Carol [Tuck]. His daughter is Carol [Tuck] isn't that right? Mr. Van [Landinghan] I think has two daughters or two kids. One of them is a girl. Is he a doctor in town?

GE: He's not a medical doctor. He went to the seminary in Naperville. He became a minister.

HC: No there's a doctor in town, Dr. [Van Landinghan].

GE: Oh no, that's not the one. I know [Van Landinghan] he's a neurologist. No this young man went to Rockford every weekend or so he had the cutest little car, a rumble seat so we sat there in the rumble seat and he would drive us to Naperville and then back again and since Paul's parents lived here we wanted to have the wedding here. Some people did come from college and attended the wedding. Now of course my father was over here again during that conference time in 1950.

Third party, probably interviewee's husband Paul: That's how we happened to pick the date because they could set it up during vacation from school and he was here in the country at the time.

GE: He had to travel with a group of ministers to the different churches in the different countries, states in the union but he was coming back in the winter time and his train got stuck because the snow was so deep. He made it in time and he and Maurine [Van Landinghan] gave the ceremony or held the ceremony. My father in German and Maurice in English.

HC: What about your mother was she able to come over.

GE: No not then. She came over with my father's second trip four years later when he baptized Barb the one that was killed and she stayed in my house for about seven, eight months and she-we were poor as a fish mouse or whatever, church mouse that's it and I was working days at the hospital and then weekends at the restaurant to make money because Paul was a pharmacy student or apprentice or something and we made like \$25 a week or something; anyways we couldn't afford to go out to California and my sister came over in the meantime and settled down in California so she hasn't see my mother since 1951 and my mom has since passed.

HC: Did any other family members come over after you?

GE: I was the first one and then after that came my sister, the handicap sister and she met her husband on the boat coming from England and so they got married and then my other sister, my next sister was the Nurse at Oxford University Clinic and met her husband there. He was a scholar, student and then they came back to the States. He was from Evanston, Illinois so we all three girls wound up here and nobody with my parents. My brother went to med school and was a physician in Munich, in Augsburg in southern Germany and they had four children and they couldn't afford to travel all of the time.

HC: Did your father come over to the States then every year.

GE: No he was here twice; one time for a conference in 1950 and the next conference in 1954 and after that he retired.

HC: And your mother only came here once?

GE: Yeah the one time.

HC: So you spoke English upon arrival but could you read English?

GE: Oh yes.

HC: You could read some English and you could speak some English.

GE: I could read quite well.

HC: You just needed to catch up with the American dialect?

GE: Right and the speed if somebody talked half way slow I could understand what they said but I couldn't answer that fast.

HC: In Germany did you speak English in your home?

GE: No that was just a language that you learned in school like French or Latin you didn't speak French at home either.

HC: While you were in Germany before you came here you attended church and now when you came here did you also attend church?

GE: Oh yes.

HC: Were you in any other community groups or at college or when you came here to Rockford actually? Like when you came to Rockford did you join a church and any other community groups?

GE: Yes we joined St. John's United Brethren Church it used to be on West State Street. It's now a different church. We got married there then we went from there because we lived on the east side we went to a church that was closer. We went to Bethesda. Paul grew up in Bethesda Church. He was one of the first kindergartners there. We bought a house close by and we went there and my oldest daughter was married there and then after a few years the other kids came along and there wasn't much to do there for the young people's groups so they heard about I can't remember now.

HC: Not First Assembly?

GE: No.

HC: First Lutheran?

GE: No, well anyways it was the church First, no. They're on Wood Road and we went to that church and they had a beautiful arrangement for teenagers and so Heda made a lot of friends so after that she got married in that church. So after that we went to First Free Evangelical. First Covenant was the one on Wood Road and I painted that and I have a picture hanging somewhere in the house. I painted that. I dabbled with water colors. You see we couldn't do that in high school because there was no water color to have. Everything was burned out and broken down all I had was what was from a dime store like these little water colors and I painted the paper and I got an "A" in art. At least I had the initiative to do something to get what I wanted. I wanted an "A" and I said what do I have to do and here they are and they were black and dark red. I must have had a lot of anger in me because I didn't paint any flowers or pretty sunsets, dark clouds.

HC: Did you join any other groups when you came to Rockford?

GE: Well, I joined bowling and I went to a ladies circle at Bethesda Church and at First Covenant and then I always wanted to play golf. I played at two golf clubs and I sang in the church choir for many, many years and then I lost my voice. I was yelling at the kids too much, the octave between low and high. So I can go down to the base easily but not too much high so I sing base and the one above, tenor. I try to and then oh I joined the Rockford Symphony Choral and I sang in that for several years and that was beautiful; that was interesting. We presented Elijah and you know those oh it was gorgeous and one other one, one other works well where a drink was.... It was a German piece that had and I could sing the German but they didn't want me to. I had to sing it in English and there's one song where the students in Germany were

[unintelligible] and beer steins and drink so that was kind of neat then they changed hands, the director of the Rockford Symphony Choral changed hands. There was somebody else taking over and he didn't want me to sign because he said you as a woman tenor will destroy the quality or sound of the men's tones so I couldn't.

HC: So you retired from that.

GE: Well I retired from that and I have a very loud and a very deep voice and I would have loved to sing in that after this other guy quit but he said no I'm sorry we can't sue you. Another words you destroy the sound of ten or fifteen tenors, come on give me a break. Maybe I should take that as a complement.

HC: Well you have a strong voice.

GE: Well my father always sang hymns in church you could hear him over the whole congregation. I have the voice like he had-loud.

HC: No microphone.

GE: No microphone. They asked me to sing a solo in church in Naperville in my first year and I sang a Christmas song the one that my mother sang to me when I was very, very ill as a child. I was comatose for about six weeks. I had a combination of pox diseases. One was mumps, one was chicken pox and the third one I don't know maybe encephalitis complication. Anyways I was comatose for six weeks and she had to carry me and sing to me that song and so in her honor I sang that song as a solo in church.

HC: What was the name of that song?

GE: [Unintelligible] No I can't sing it. From heaven above ...it's a Christmas song. It's a German Christmas song. See I can't reach the high notes.

HC: It's a Christmas song.

GE: And so that's what I sang. I sang it in soprano. See I was still singing soprano and then I went into alto....

Paul (interviewee's husband): Nice to meet you.

HC: Nice to meet you.

GE: Yeah he has to go to the doctor. He fell off the bike and has a big blood clot in his leg and has to have it looked at. Anyways, I practically sang all different kinds except base and I could sing base many times. I had a wide range and my youngest daughter, Heda came to me one time, she went to Moody Bible Institute, before she went to Moody Bible Institute they all played instruments. I all had them take violin and when Pat and Barb they had spinal deformities from what somebody told me sleeping probably on foam rubber mattress. They didn't get the proper



support so their spine went like this outwards and they were in body braces you know like plate here, leather and all the way around the hips and we had to screw them so they wouldn't go up because they were going like this, one shoulder was going down and the back was getting more and more crooked so they were playing the bass fiddle because they could play while they were standing up. Otherwise my daughter played violin. My daughter had Mrs. Armstrong as a teacher, Helen Armstrong. Do you know the family?

HC: I recognize the name.

GE: Yeah their daughter is a famous violin...well she took lessons from her and Heda was singing and she said I want to take voice lessons. I said why don't you just concentrate on that because you can play it all of your life but singing you can't sing all of your life. "Mama let me give it a try," so I said okay I was finally worn down. I'll give you voice lessons, I'll let you take voice lessons for one year and thank God I did that because she has the most beautiful soprano it's like a mezzo soprano and it's just...She went to Moody and she sang in the Moody Choral and oh at home where she lives in North Carolina she is often the soloist and it's just wonderful to hear and the older she gets the more beautiful her voice gets because she is in her mid forties now, my baby and so she is at the height of her talent. Yeah Heidi tried it but she kept breaking the reeds, she wanted to play the trombone or whatever, no the clarinet. She kept chewing on the reeds and they finally told her forget it kid and Pat well after the experience and the body brace she didn't play the violin anymore but now she sings and plays the guitar. So they all learned to play at least one instrument and then we have the spinet organ in there that Paul had a coin collection and she said the coin collection isn't going to do us any good. I'm going to sell it and buy us a piano so he bought us a spinet piano. It was used but it was from Jackson Piano but it was a nice piece and there it stands there. It was blond furniture in those days, everything was blond. Well we had it stained to be walnut like this this is walnut so we played on it and I had some lessons on it. I had piano lessons. I played the violin, the flute, the piano and I sang in the choir and my father made me go to theory type classes of learning the music, how to write it, how to compose, which part, the different chords and the clef and all. I hated it. I think I only went once or twice. I hated it I couldn't stand it but my oldest sister she just plays...My father he had a little organ where you pull out the stops and then you pump it. He had never had a music lesson but he could play the black keys, the white keys with his ten fingers. He would accompany the choir or we sang a lot, before the meal and after the meal and he would play a lot.

We were bombed out and we got an apartment sharing it with two other parties, one bathroom, one kitchen and it was a stove where you put wood and coal in it.

HC: Just like a big wood stove?

GE: Yeah right and he would sit in the evening by the wood stove and sit and write his sermons because it was warm so finally those two other parties moved out and we had the whole apartment to ourselves.

HC: Was it like a one bedroom?

GE: It was well they used two of the rooms for each and then we had two other rooms and the kitchen so we expanded. My father then had then his office and then my mother saved from her household money she saved a long time and she bought us a piano. She said it was a thousand marks and she saved it from her household money and that was one of the nicest things that she ever did because we played on it and then my older sister has such a talent that she just plays. It was wonderful. It was real nice.

HC: Wow I love music I mean I think it's so great. I don't play an instrument. I can't sing. You see where it can add quite a bit to your life.

GE: Oh yes. The same with painting. I love to paint. I did some water color, took some lessons and did some water color. I exhibited one and I got third prize at the hospital art fair and I made a picture for each of the girls and when Eric was a little fellow, the daughter of Louise. I painted him a picture of Hansel and Gretel where the bad witch is out there and the wolf is running and trying to get them, chasing away. He just gave it back to me last year. He didn't want to have it in his college dorm room anymore.

HC: How sweet, you know I only have a few more questions here because I think we totally talked these questions into really good stories which is nice. I haven't really had to ask you a thing. You filled it out perfectly.

GE: I'm sorry; I should have waited for you.

HC: No, it's fine; you've hit all of these points. One thing I am going to ask before I ask the last little bit is we didn't touch on it. When you came here did you drive? Did you have a car? How did you get around the college?

GE: I stayed in the dorm and the college was a campus like Rock Valley. You had to walk to the different rooms, library, dorms. It wasn't that far. You didn't need a car. I took the train from Chicago to Naperville when I came over. They picked me up and I think we did go to Chicago a few times but it was with another college roommate or friend who had transportation so we went with him but not very often.

HC: So when did you first drive? Did you drive in Germany?

GE: No

HC: So when you came to Rockford it was the first time you drove?

GE: Yeah, Paul inherited or bought for ten dollars or something his dad's car. It was a convertible, a Pontiac convertible and it was a stick shift and here in Rockford he showed me how to move the stick shift the "H" and how to stop and I said okay let me try it and it was a dead end street like a circle and I couldn't stop. I said I can't stop and I went "woom" right into the curb. Oh thank God I didn't hit the tree. I was scared to death so move over and let me drive so little by little I learned to drive and you know I drove for four years before I had insurance, I mean a driver's license. I never knew I had to have one. No one ever told me that I had to have a

driver's license. I go four years and then finally I heard about that and I said gee you know what I drove for four years Well you better get down to the motor department and get a driver's license. I said yeah, okay, okay.

HC: I'm going to ask you these last few questions but the other one thing I want to hit on is you came over on a student visa.

GE: Yeah

HC: And then you got married here?

GE: Yes

HC: Your visa was extended.

GE: Right, for the second year.

HS: When did you and if you are become a citizen?

GE: I married a citizen so the time length in between applying and becoming was just two years or five years. I don't remember exactly. It wasn't that you automatically became a citizen. That was in the twenties or thirties or something when you married. You had to leave the country, go across the border wither to Mexico, Germany or to Canada in order to apply for an immigrant visa. So that's what I did. I took a flight to Detroit and then up to Winnipeg or Ontario where there was a bridge that crossed the border between the two countries and I went across the bridge and I was in the immigration building for about a half an hour.

HC: Across which to countries again?

GE: From the United States to Canada. It was either from Detroit or Ottawa or Winnipeg. I can't remember now the exactly where everybody goes to change their visa. It's just across the river. I applied for it I don't know if they gave it to me right then and there or if they mailed it to me and then I flew back to Rockford and I got my visa.

HC: So you never went back to German?

EG: Not as yes, no I was a citizen in '54 I became a citizen. I was going to deliver Pat at Christmas time and I was like this and the guy said you know Mrs. Ericson if you find out that you are having contractions you feel free to come up front and I will swear you in right then and there. I said thank you.

HC: Where did you have your swearing in?

GE: Here in Rockford.

HC: Do you remember where?

GE: At the court house. I think it was the Winnebago Court House if I remember right. I had to have one or two witnesses who knew me for x amount of time and I did and I did not have contractions. That was in November and she was born just before Christmas but I thought that was so cute, if you think it's time you just run up here.

HC: How funny so what did you think about this country before you came here and have your ideas changed?

GE: I thought America was, you know in Europe the United States is America. Everybody calls it America not the United States. They call you're going to America. That means the United States. I think that it is a wonderful country with all of these different opportunities but I wish they were more geared to fulfill God's laws of loving they neighbor as thyself and helping and having a little bit more honesty and integrity especially in the politician range and I think it was wonderful the way the country was pulled together when the war broke out, Afghanistan or the other wars and especially when the United States became involved in the Second World War how they said goodbye to their loved ones and how they came back and embraced and loved. I thought it was wonderful. When our soldiers came back from the war many lost them with their legs around their feet swishing, crawling on the streets because they didn't have any shoes because their legs were shot off. My brother had to walk home from Italy over the Alps. They had no transportation. They were not welcomed back. They were the reason they lost the war. You know you guys didn't win it for us and there was nothing that grew because the tanks plowed across the fertile land and no agriculture could be. In fact we ate dandelion greens. We went out in the fields. I picked nettles, the fresh sprouts and my mother cooked them like spinach and so we ended up getting sores from not getting any vitamins and I have one down here. It evolved into a [German word] which was a boil. It was this big full of pus and they lanced it and the guy was half in another world. His knife slipped and so it's a jagged. It was not a nice clean cut but all the stuff came out. The pus came out. It had to or I would have died of peritonitis and my mother had one on her arm. It was this big from not having any immune system and not getting shots to be able to come over here that it got infected. And no kidding it was this big of a sore on her arm.

HC: So before you came here you did think positively about America?

GE: Yeah.

HC: And that actually hasn't changed except that now you have been here...

GE: I have seen the dark side of America which every country has but they have so many opportunities to do good and so many helpful people here that it is a privilege to live here. It really is. I mean they bend over backwards my neighbors to help. They say can I help you if they see I was doing something like raking or lifting, can I help you? In Germany nobody would do that.

HC: Has your move here turned out like you thought it would? Like when you left...

GE: Oh it's better than that. I have children; I have a family, a home, a husband. I have a car I mean what else could you want? I've got a wonderful church to go to, nice minister, I have friends so it has been really a wonderful thing for me, an opportunity that not too many people share that I was how I was able to come and the people I met and the husband I met in college. When I stop and think I really have been very fortunate, very blessed.

HC: What has been the best part?

GE: The best part?

HC: You have quite a few.

GE: I do, to have wonderful children, to give birth to them, to live in a wonderful house to furnish it and decorate it. I have a wonderful husband who allows or makes it possible for me to go over there, take some cruises, who loves me and wonder friends and a wonderful church. I don't know there's so many great things.

HC: What has been the hardest or most disappointing part of you coming here?

GE: Of my coming here? Well I don't want you to print that.

HC: We could ask you that later if you don't want that on the record.

GE: One of my children has been very disappointing. She has a lot of problems, emotional problems. The most beautiful one of them all and that has been the hardest thing in my life. Other than that I don't know.

HC: Missing family?

GE: That's another thing I wished I could have them live closer. They are so sweet. They call me, Heda the one there, the youngest one calls me every weekend to find out how I am doing. Pat calls me at least two or three times a month and Louise in Cleveland calls me every weekend and that's just three of them and the other one doesn't call me which I am grateful for which is not nice to say but there is so much pain involved with her that I would rather not even talk to her and it's so hard that that is the millstone around my neck. I mean I have so many wonderful things and so fortunate to have them but there is always one little glitch in the computer.

HC: What do you miss most about your former home?

GE: The food, speaking German, driving through the countryside. You know Germany has everything, mountains, the big mountains and then there are smaller mountains, then the plains and then the ocean and I was in all of them. The wine country where my nephew lives. He took me to show me around. It's the most picturesque. You know when they show the advertisement for Werther's candy, that's what it looks like. I mean it's the most beautifully country in the world, those areas. But there are some beautiful areas here but they are so far apart that you can't see them all the time.

HC: What kind of food do you miss?

GE: Sauerbraten and potato dumplings and red cabbage and certain too I make it sometimes but it's a lot of work the roll-ups. My husband decided that was his favorite dish. You take flat steaks you know the little ones like sandwich steaks and you paint them with mustard and you sprinkle chopped onions and bacon and you roll them up dip them in flour and fry them on all sides, put a little juice in it and put a little wine in it maybe and make the gravy with ginger snaps and sour cream, have [German term] and my mother used to take a lid from her pots and chop up with a knife and the little pieces would fall in boiling salt water and they are like home made noodles and red cabbage. I wanted that for my graduation from high school dinner and if she didn't do it. I do that every so often because you have to marinate a good rump roast and you have to marinate it for almost a week in liquid of water and vinegar and different spices and you turn the thing once a day for about four days or so. It's really good.

HC: Have you gone back to visit since you've been here and if so what was it like?

GE: Since we moved to this house?

HC: Since you've moved to the United States.

GE: Oh, yes.

HC: Have you gone back to Germany?

GE: Yes, several times not very often in 1957 is the first time I went there and I stood out like a sore thumb. My clothes were ...I had bought a matching sweater outfit with a skirt and turquoise and it looked beautiful but people they could tell I was an American from three blocks away. I mean they were so different the clothes that I felt almost conspicuous. The funny thing I do if I am in a streetcar and I bump somebody I say excuse me. I mean it just comes out normally, [unintelligible] and pardon me that's English too. But they were nice; they were friendly to me and I was just glad I lived here and not in Berlin at the time. There are still quite a few ruins there and the next time I was there was in '66 when my mother was so ill and then she passed away three months later. She was in the hospital with a stroke and a heart attack. I think she recognized me. I think she did. That was the second time and that was in close to the area where my father was raised and retired to after Berlin. It was in the middle of a beautiful countryside too but my mother hated it. She was a city girl. And these were farmers and people that spoke this low German and she didn't understand half of it. But she loved pastries and if they had a pastry shop in that little village. She just made a bee line for it every afternoon and talking with people that were on the same level of education not that the others weren't. But she had sort of an [German word]. They had a charisma that they matched.

HC: She was kind of talking with people at her level that had the same kind of interests.

GE: Yes she had several...

HC: What did you call it?

GE: [Oustshouse]

HC: And what does that mean?

GE: Why did I say [oustshouse]?

HC: I don't know that's what you said [oustshouse]. From the pastry she would go and meet with them at that level and you said...what did you say again.

GE: I don't remember.

HC: Does that mean anything.

GE: [Oustshouse] means to change something for another thing. I give you this and then you give me back what I want.

HC: Maybe in a sense the conversation was the exchange.

GE: That must have been and she was there every day. That was the highlight of her afternoon bless her heart and once we made arrangements over here, my sister in California, my sister in Boston and I to talk to her three party telephone call and we got together and they had to run from the post office where the phone was over there, run to the little house, drag her out and we talked and it was so nice. She was so thrilled because you know you don't have telephones in each house. The post office did and the mayor did but nobody else.

HC: When was that?

GE: That was in the, must have been in the late sixties maybe or the middle sixties maybe and she lived in the house my father was born and raised in where all his sisters and brothers lived and it was very damp and cold because it was stone and when I visited her in the hospital it was in July and I had a corduroy suit on and long stockings, knitted stockings it was so cold and damp. The weather was not very pleasant maybe it was that year they had a summer that was kind of cold but the people loved me. Oh the farmers there and the same with my sister the one in Boston She went there with her two little boys when her Rhodes scholarship husband got a scholarship to go to Russia to write his thesis on Letters of Tolstoy and so she stayed at my house with the two little boys. They carried those kids on their...this is Pastor [unintelligible] grandchild and Edith was liked too because she is a bubbly person now she was. She was always quiet as a child and so they had a hunting fest in the fall where they will dress like foresters. The [unintelligible], the beard from the wild boar or something on their hats.

HC: Feather, a piece of tail?

GE: No it's something that they got going here growing.

HC: A goatee

GE: A piece of the beard that they put on a hat. It's a show that they might be hunted down la wild boar that's how it started and he was made the king. He was made the king of the hunting people and they had a wonderful time and they learned in German schools, German grade schools. They learned pretty fast and then when they came back the younger ones wrote the English words the way they sounded you know.

HC: Like phonetically?

GE: Yeah. He wrote it that way because we had completely different spelling because in German we pronounced the words the way they are written hunter here would be [hunta} you know. This would be [papia] not paper. Now telephone is the same. [milche] is milk and [zana] is cream so [butta] is the same. My father was able to read a little bit of English because he was raised in that Saxony where they went to conquer in 1066. You know, William the Conqueror and some of those originally words are the same, was the same in Low German or English and different things that hadn't changed so much but he couldn't speak the Low German. But he could read it and he could read English a little bit that way.

HC: Do you think you will spend the rest of your life here?

GE: I hope so. I have my family here. That's why I became a citizen as soon as I could because of what happened in the Second World War with the Japanese they rounded them up and put them behind bars in California, separated the families. I never wanted to be separated from my family because I wasn't a citizen. I became a citizen as soon as I could.

HC: Understood, that makes sense. I could see doing it as well. If you have children which you do what do you want them to know about the culture of your homeland?

GE: I would like them to know the history of the country, the beautiful songs that the country songs that the different areas have, the gorgeous churches that are left with the gilded ceilings, the traditions, parades where they all come in their native clothes, the [German word] costumes, keep that up.

HC: Here's a funny little question. What do you like to do for fun?

GE: Well right now there's no bowling so I can't go bowling. I used to golf but I fainted twice in the heat so I couldn't do that anymore. I love to have flowers and plants and I love to read. I read all of the guess what kind of books. I like to read.

HC: Are they good ones.

GE: Well books that mirror the type of life I grew up, the blood and guts and fighting. I use to dream a lot that I was a soldier or lieutenant in the Army that I was going to shoot people down.

HC: You like to read military or war stories.



GE: Yeah and also medical dramas. I don't read too many beautiful books I should read. That I had to do in college. That's not nice to say because that's not a Christian way. My minister would go like this. My daughter would go MOM!

HC: What has been the most difficult thing to adjust to in America?

GE: Well I don't know. I am totally adjusted. When we went back to Germany in '72 for my brother's 80'th birthday and he said this is my American sister. They called me the American because I totally changed even my mouth, my English and German teacher said that my mouth is different when I talk now. It moves in a different way so I am pretty much totally adjusted to here and I would miss the freedom, the choices that I have here and nobody telling you you can't do this or that's not right or you don't say that. They leave it up to you to use your discretion whatever you do and guide you or give you suggestions towards a decision you make but they leave it up to you. That kind of freedom I would miss and it's not that way in Germany.

HC: What were you most nervous about when thinking about moving here and settling down? Is there anything that you were nervous when thinking about coming over here?

GE: I was so excited that I didn't have time to worry about it. Well when I moved to Rockford I was a little nervous about people accepting me because I was from Germany because it was still very close after the war. You know the war ended in '45 for us and this was within five years so I was a little bit apprehensive about how they would treat me or what they would think of me so I tried to do everything right, tried to hit the highest notes and do the best I could and finally then we had a chance to make a friendly exchange, get along okay not that I didn't get along but I had more of a sisterly exchange with my fellow students at the hospital.

HC: And again you are the first person I interviewed from Germany and especially around that time and I asked before if you were accepted right away but you were nervous of that coming into a new community.

GE: Yeah.

HC: Even though you had been accepted at your college you had been in the United States probably for a couple of years but that still was there.

GE: Well we got married in '50 and then we moved to Rockford in '51 and then I started training in my profession in '51 but I was still being a new town I didn't know anybody. I was kind of afraid and apprehensive that I might not be accepted that I might be looked down on as being a Nazi or things like that but I never had really any experience that anyone called me that. They might have been thinking that but I tried not to act in the way that they would have a reason to call me Nazi. Now when my daughter called me you're a foreigner she was pretty mad at me because she had a bike in the back of my car and I drove backwards because I didn't see her bike and it ended up like a figure eight. She said oh you are a foreigner. I said well thank you. We were all foreigners coming to this country sometime. She was a little snoot. She's very determined a very head strong girl, typical German and Swede. There's a combination that you can't beat!

HC: Oh funny! There's one more question and I promise to let you go. I have probably talked your ear off as much as you've talked mine.

GE: Yeah probably.

HC: How do you feel about the current debate in this country about immigration?

GE: I feel that they have to stabilize the immigrant law, stabilize the amount of people they let in because if they let in the whole world there is not enough food to feed the whole world for what's here but they should also come to a better agreement with Mexico. I think there are a lot of Mexican people that could serve and benefit the United States with their knowledge, with their work and not make it so hard for them to come to the United States so they would not have to crawl over fences and under fences at night, relax and stabilize the immigration laws. They have certain numbers for other countries I think but the problem with Mexico is this is a land of opportunity of gold growing on trees they must think. They expose themselves to such danger some times. There was something again on the news last night where so many and they find their carcasses or skeletons and that's terrible that should never happen. They have to do something and I don't know if a fence stretching all the way from one ocean to the other would do it but it was just like after the war when East and West Germany were divided by the wall and nobody could cross either way and the Russians and the German Gestapo, not the Gestapo, the German Army under the Russian leadership would shoot their own people trying to crawl all over the fence, over the wall and reach their loved ones on the other side. That is terrible. That should never have happened. It's a border between two countries or a border in a city or whatever separation should never happen.

So many patients came and they wouldn't be able to speak English. Their husbands barely talked but a lot of the wives didn't and yet they are all on public aid, or most of them and they should be able to learn or to be made to learn the language of the country they live in. I think that goes together, to have the benefits of living here with having to speak the language. That goes for Chinese, for Russians, for anybody.

HC: That's also a very good point that has been brought up.

GE; I mean I had to be able to speak English.

HC: I hope that they will be able to figure something out. Being bilingual is a good thing but if it has to be a bilingual country I think is very difficult.

GE: Yeah, they are trying to have street signs now in both Spanish and English...

HC: There are many places that you see it. Hospitals do it now. Hospitals use both Spanish and English in some of their literature.

GE: Well the thing is there are a lot of people fresh to this country that haven't learned English yet and haven't managed the language they need that but after they've been here awhile I think that you should be able to speak English.

HC: Well thank you this has been great. I just have some paperwork for you to fill out.

GE: Oh no.

HC: It's not too bad.

Interviewer gives instructions on how to fill out paperwork.

HC: Is your husband a painter? I see your truck out here.

GE: Paul is a painter. He had so much trouble hearing in college that he had so many holes in his earlier education because of his hearing loss he couldn't make it in pre-med and so it was the same there and then he started to work with Sundstrand and after a while one of the Presidents or top guys ask if he wanted to be a corporate painter and Paul says oh yeah. He was at Sundstrand a corporate painter for I think fifteen years and he was befriended by one of the ... at Sundstrand Company and had to paint for him and went [German] and founded his own company.

HC: Do you do that a lot use German words?

GE: Well it's coming easier as I get older. You know we had a patient at the hospital that was Norwegian and she spoke English but when she got into her senior years she reverted back to her mother tongue and seems like I'm going that way.

HC: It's funny I'm seeing what you are doing and I laugh because my mother will do it and she will say you know what I'm trying to say but she doesn't speak another language. You speak German first because you know what you mean. You're going to revert back to German I think.

GE: Sometimes it's easier see German language has more words than English I think for descriptions of items. There's feelings and emotions. There are so many words in the German language. Now when I had French in college that was something. I had French in high school but I had forgotten quite a bit. I had French in college and I would read the French and then in my mind I had to translate that into German and go back to English and then say what it said. You know miss so and so.

HC: Funny, three languages just to get one word out.