Astle, Margarita

MOORE: Good Afternoon this is Kate Moore for the National Parks Service, and today is the twelfth of July 1994. And I’m in Logan, Utah at the home of Margarita Astle who came from Germany in September 1927 at the age of thirteen years old. Oh why don’t you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth please.

ASTLE: My name is Margarita Elfrida Foerster, F-O-E-R-S-T-E-R Astle. I was born in Germany, Saxony, and June 20th 1914.

MOORE: And what was the name of the town that you were born in?

ASTLE: Neudorf, N-E-U-D-O-R-F in Erzgebirge, E-R-Z-G-E-B-I-R-G-E.

MOORE: All right and what size town was that?

ASTLE: Very, very small. They did mostly mining for silver and quartz. So it was kind of hilly, and size I don’t know.

MOORE: Size was small you say?

ASTLE: Small, mm-hmm.

MOORE: What was your father’s name?

ASTLE: My father’s name was Ernst, E-R-N-S-T, A. Foerster, F-O-E-R-S-T-E-R.

MOORE: And what was his occupation?

ASTLE: He was in the service at first, and then he was retired from that to a conductor in the railroad—passenger railroad.

MOORE: And that was in Germany?

ASTLE: Uh huh.

MOORE: Mm-hmm, and what does your father look like?

ASTLE: He was a very distinguished gentleman—very dark—and he had a little mustache at times. We always thought he was from a Jewish race, but we couldn’t look in.

MOORE: And how tall was he about, would you say?

ASTLE: Oh about 5’5, 5’6, real short.

MOORE: And you said very dark eyes?

ASTLE: Very, very, black almost. And his uh skin was kind of like mine—an olive tint.

MOORE: What about his personality and temperament?

ASTLE: Very outgoing. Um. He could get mad or angry but mostly even-tempered.

MOORE: And what—is there a story about your father that you associate with your childhood?

ASTLE: He was a disciplinarian—very firm and when he spoke you did what he said.

MOORE: And what was your mother’s name?

ASTLE: My mother’s name was Ella E. Fischer, F-I S-C-H-E-R.

MOORE: And uh what was her occupation, if any?

ASTLE: She was a housewife.

MOORE: And describe what she looked like.

ASTLE: She was fair, blonde, blue eyes. Her skin was very fair. Just the opposite, but she was um she wasn’t as friendly as outgoing. She had a different temperament.

MOORE: Like how was her temperament then would you say?

ASTLE: It was soft, feminine.

MOORE: And um what were her chores around the house then?

ASTLE: She was quite talented. She could draw paintings, and things, but she never did that for you know outside. And she did—she’s very good cook. I’m not. And baking, that was—and house—she kept neat and very attractive home.

MOORE: Did you have servants at all?

ASTLE: No.

MOORE: Ok, Is there a story about your mother that you associate with your childhood?

ASTLE: Not really.

MOORE: Ok, what about brothers and sisters. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

ASTLE: I have one sister. She lives in Salt Lake.

MOORE: And she is how much younger than you then?

ASTLE: Six years younger.

MOORE: And what is her name?

ASTLE: Dorothea and that’s D-O-R-O-T-H-E-A Foerster Carlson, C-A-R-L-S-O-N

MOORE: Mm-hmm and um do you remember your house in Germany. You were thirteen when you came. Could you describe where you lived before you came to the United States?

ASTLE: Yes that was in Chemnitz, Saxony. That’s a large industrial city in the south. C-H-E-M-N-I-T-Z now it is Markstadd, M-A-R-K-S-T-A-D-D, and it is a southeastern part of Germany. It is close to Czechoslovakia— spell that, and Austria. And our house was an apartment—six stories and we had a butcher in the bottom and a coroner. And we lived on the first floor. We had the apartment up there. Now that’s one thing you have to understand –the apartments you couldn’t go and just say well I like this and I want to move in. You had to go to the county courthouse and there they gave you an apartment, assigned an apartment to you, and that was yours and when we start to leaving we sold our apartment to a Jewish family. They wouldn’t have had any place to go. And that’s the way they, newcomers would get apartments by buying one from the old people that lived there. And we don’t have any more right to go back.

MOORE:N Now what about lighting, what type of lighting was in that apartment?

ASTLE: Uh gas, they had gaslights, mm-hmm.

MOORE: What about heating?

ASTLE: We had a large, flat coal stove; it was in the corner, and uh that would heat the apartment.

MOORE: What about water, what was your water source?

ASTLE: It came in pipes you know into the house.

MOORE: So you had running water.

ASTLE: Yes, we had running water.

MOORE: What about toilet facilities?

ASTLE: The toilets were we had to go down for or five steps we had to go out of the apartment and go down those steps, and then they had four or five toilets in like a closet you know. And that was for the four or five tenants that lived on that floor, and that was a flush toilet. I know I had to scrub the hall floor every so often when it was our turn.

MOORE: Now did you have a garden at all outside the apartment?

ASTLE: No.

MOORE: And what about furniture? What type of furniture was it store bought?

ASTLE: Yes it was store bought. I know the bedroom furniture was blonde, or light, and they had this marble tops—the dresser, and the kitchen furniture was about like we have now—not these chairs. And we had a sofa in our front room and easy chairs, and I can’t remember everything else. But it was, it was like modern day.

MOORE: How many rooms were in that apartment?

ASTLE: Well there’s a bedroom and large kitchen in the front room, and then the hallway.

MOORE: And um you said your mother was a great cook. What was your favorite food as a child?

ASTLE: Oh there’s many. Sauerbraten and uh, let’s see. She made something with the hamburger, I can’t I…but mostly it was regular German food and um wiener schnitzel. I guess they know how to spell that.

MOORE: What about the kitchen? Describe the kitchen. What was the kitchen like?

ASTLE: It was a large square room, and that stove was built in, and then we had uh its like a two burner was the gas burner that was on a stand that was belonged to the apartment. And the rest of the furniture, we had a small sofa there, table and chairs, my mother had a sewing machine. She was a good seamstress. She made all our clothes, and a large window and we had what we called jalousins, that’s French, and I think its J-A-L-O-U-S-I-N, and they’re similar to our blinds now, like these.

MOORE: Venetian blinds

ASTLE: Venetian blinds, mm-hmm.

MOORE: And um how did you keep food cool?

ASTLE: I don’t know.

MOORE: All right um now what was mealtime like, did you eat meals as a family or was it separately or?

ASTLE: No eh that was strictly family, except noon. Because the father usually was out working. But the very specific times we had, and you better be there or you don’t eat.

MOORE: And um were there any other family members nearby? Where were your grandparents?

ASTLE: Oh they lived quite a ways away. They lived down in Neudorf and we were in Chemnitz so I didn’t get to seem them very often. But when I did my parents put me on the train. And then I was turned over in a baggage cart for a conductor to take care of me that’s how we went down to see him.

MOORE: How did your father get to work every day?

ASTLE: I guess he walked. Because there were no cars in those days.

MOORE: And um were you especially close to anyone in the family? Who were you closest to in the family?

ASTLE: My sister.

MOORE: Your sister, and um do you have any anecdotes about your family members that you remember?

ASTLE: Well I had two more sisters but one died at almost four years, and the other one died just a week old. But um I just remember a little about it. In those times the people didn’t speak much about it to children about whether it goes on in the family. I remember though we all had Diphtheria, and this four year old, she started—she had it, and we were quarantined then, we had nuns came to—I guess that was their service, and they came every day, and they had black garb on you know and a hood. And um I remember I would get these shots in my leg so I wouldn’t get Diphtheria so much, and my dad and mother, all of us. But she died and I remember that. And I remember then we were moving from that place, the doctor insisted we should get a different apartment and the state, or the city gave us this in a newer section of town, where they had all of these tall apartment buildings. And that’s what I remember when they, you know, buried my sister.

MOORE: And what do you remember about that burial? How was it done at that time?

ASTLE: Well I know they took her to the cemetery at the... In Germany I don’t know if they have it this now or not. They have a large building in front, at the entrance of the cemetery, and in that building, it’s called a morgue, where they put the deceased and they open that casket and they show them that way for two or three days. And then the family goes there, and the burial is from there out to the cemetery. And most of their graves, they had these high; uh um what do you call them? Foundation-like, around the grave, they were encircled and then in the center, the family would plant flowers and take care of the graves. They were well kept these, these cemeteries.

MOORE: And what happened after a burial? Was there a dinner?

ASTLE: I don’t think so. It’s very vague.

MOORE: Do you remember why the doctor told you to get out of that apartment?

ASTLE: It was very depressing for my parents and so they thought a new environment, a new, you know change would be good.

MOORE: All right now what about religious life? What religion were you as a child?

ASTLE: My parents—we were Lutherans, and I remember I went to the Lutheran Sunday school. And I remember you know these churches, Lutheran churches, and Catholic and all these churches are beautiful buildings, they’re just outstanding and they, we used to have our Sunday school class inside in the church, in the chapel, and every two or three benches, there’d be another teacher with another little group of children to teach Sunday schools, and that’s where I started my church training. But then after this sister died then my parents when they moved to a different section they heard about the Mormonism, about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and that’s what they joined.

MOORE: So do you think it was related to the death of your sister?

ASTLE: I think so, because they kind of turned kind of bitter. My dad especially, he said He couldn’t be a just God to take an innocent child like that. And she was a beautiful child; she was blonde just lighter than I am. But, you know it was just the way life is sometimes.

MOORE: Now before that, before your sister died, what were the—how often did your parents go to church?

ASTLE: Oh I don’t know. I don’t think they were over-religious or anything. They saw that I went to the church where we moved, the old place, I don’t even remember where the church was.

MOORE: All right so the new place, where was the church in relation to where you lived?

ASTLE: Just about a block behind us.

MOORE: And how was this new place different from your old place? How was it better?

ASTLE: Oh it was new, a new section, and it was entirely different.

MOORE: How, how so?

ASTLE: The streets were square for one thing, and it was more stores there and um we had a park about half a block from where we are and they had these gardens, and families had their own gardeners there. It was entirely different set-up we were first we were in the old section when we moved up from Erzgebirge, and that’s the place they gave us at that time but the schools were right across the street from there. And so uh, but the new section was better.

MOORE: So after the death of your younger sister, your parents then, how did they get connected to the Mormon Church?

ASTLE: Through me.

MOORE: Through you?

ASTLE: I was a, I had a girlfriend across the street, and she and her mother and her grandmother were members of the church. And you know in those days we would trade pictures or little booklets and things, and I gave this girl a pansy. It was a picture of a pansy, it was a pretty picture. And she gave me a little pamphlet called “Friendly Discussion,” and I brought it home and put it in my toy box. And my mother always, at night she cleaned the box out, and she found that and the next morning she asked me where did you get this? And it scared me. I thought I had done something wrong, and I told her from my friend and so she read it and evidently I hadn’t read the pamphlet myself but evidently it sparked something and so she asked this girl if her grandmother would take her with her to the to bible class, which was on a Wednesday and that was a long walk from our place to where they held their church, and they had to go through an old, old cemetery. But she of course was very kind, and she said yes I would be happy to take you. And so that’s how they started. But my dad, he didn’t want anything to do with religion after that. And so then mother, the missionaries, they got hold of them, and they came and they gave my mother this Book of Mormon and so she read that and it sounded true to her, and so she, a wise woman you know, she opened a certain section in the book and she laid it on the table and my dad being a conductor, he was uh comes at late hours, and when he came home he saw the book and he read a little and he got more interested and more interested. So then, they asked if the missionaries would come to the house and teach them. It was just strange how all of this worked together, and so they had the missionaries come once a week, they came to dinner, and then they told them about the gospel. And I remember this, times were not plentiful, but we never suffered, we weren’t hungry or anything, and but all week long mother would save specialties so she could have that big meal for those two young fellows that came form America, and that’s how it just all started.

MOORE: Did they speak German to you then?

ASTLE: Yes.

MOORE: Yes they did.

ASTLE: It was all in German because those missionaries had to learn German.

MOORE: Well then how did your life change after that?

ASTLE: Well for one thing the church they have what they call the…I cant think of…oh come on here…word of wisdom, and by that, we believe in no smoking, no drinking, hard drinks, liquor and that, of course my dad he smoked tobacco he smoked pipes or cigars because he would get a lot of cigars on the trains. And so uh when my sister died with Diphtheria, when the doctor checked him he said ‘you don’t need any shots you got enough poison of nicotine in your throat, its white.’ So he wouldn’t give him any shots. Now you see how strong that tobacco was. But he drank beer, and we always had what we called in Germany liqueur and we had a coal man and his wife would bring coal in before winter. And they would bring some liqueur and mother would buy it and we put it away and it was usually fruit liqueurs and I know they had chocolate liquor but that’s another story. And so when they started investigating the church, they um, dad says ‘well I’ll have to try and if I join that church, I want to do it right,’ he said. So he quit smoking in three days. That’s how strong, if he decided something, he went through. Then they used to have on Friday nights, he had some friends come in and they would play I don’t know cards or something, and they would take beer—and make beer soup. I don’t know now how you do it, but they heat the beer. So then he quit all that, and then they didn’t want to drink the liqueur so they gave that away, and they had one bottle before they joined the church and I got a hold of it. I was just a youngster, you know before they joined it so I must be seven years old. And mother and dad when they had washed face then they went to the mangle to iron their clothes, and so I was with my sister alone, and like children I…we snooped around, and we found that bottle of chocolate liqueur, and well it looked interesting, I think the bottle was green. I don’t know, and so I was giving my sister some of that, and I drank some of that, and we ended up under the table. Sound asleep when the parents came back so I can’t say I was never drunk because I was. That’s just advisedly.

MOORE: Now what about your holiday celebrations, how were they in Germany?

ASTLE: Oh the Christmas is a big holiday. We always have two holidays, that’s a National, and uh you have Christmas Eve where they really celebrate and we have goose for Christmas and a big tree and its usually very well decorated. We have Santa Claus comes on Christmas Eve, and then Christmas day you play around, and the next holiday, the next day, you go visiting friends and family if you have them. And then let’s see there is about two or three weeks before Christmas, where they call it…oh what we call that day when Santa Claus comes around to see if you’ve been good all year and you have to usually recite something and their Santa Claus has a long coat on and big pockets and he has a switch in the pocket and in the other hand he has a bell and he comes to your door and he rings his bell and then all the children you run around scared, and he talks to you and he wants to know if you’ve been good, what you’ve done in school, and he knows everything. Its uh I guess more of a scary tactic for the children, but it was fun and I remember it.

MOORE: What about school life, do you remember school?

ASTLE: Yes the schools are separated. I mean boys and girls. You never have them together. And um school—you sit in your desk and fold your hands and you are quiet you don’t talk, and of course the discipline is different than we’ve ever had here. I know that I had in New York. But um I guess the teaching is harder—they push harder than they do over here, and always have done. I know I was thirteen when I came over here and I had already—they teach you knitting and crocheting and tatting and all of these hand crafts and we had already had to make a pair of socks or stockings, and they’re not easy to knit because you have to—your toe and your heal but we had—they had taught us that. I had made…we had learned hard dollar and cut-out work and we had to make a handkerchief holder, and they graded us on this and we learned all kinds of fancy stitches for embroidery work and so over here they don’t do that.

MOORE: What about subject, was your favorite subject in school?

ASTLE: I really can’t say if I had a favorite one or not. I know I liked numbers.

MOORE: Now did you learn English before coming to the United States?

ASTLE: Yes two years I was… but that wasn’t general. They took the ones that were in a certain –what do you call—category, a certain average? What do you call them?

MOORE: Grade average.

ASTLE: Grade average, yeah, and then they took you and put you in what they call higher school, and I know I had a, we had a green and white ribbon across our front—not front—our dress and we had a cap like a student cap with green and white ribbon around it. That was our uniform; we wore uniforms out there.

MOORE: Now what was the name of that school that you went to?

ASTLE: It was just higher school, and I guess at that age and then from there I don’t know—fifteen or sixteen—they probably evaluate you and you go on.

MOORE: It was a higher school and which town was that?

ASTLE: That was in Chemnitz.

MOORE: And how far from home was that school? How did you get there?

ASTLE: I can’t remember I guess we walked.

MOORE: What about… how many students per classroom were there?

ASTLE: Oh…

MOORE: Fair guess would you say?

ASTLE: Oh, maybe twenty.

MOORE: So it wasn’t particularly crowded?

ASTLE: No, no it wasn’t.

MOORE: And the school itself, the building, how big was it?

ASTLE: It was a pretty good-sized brick school—brick buildings and they had high wire fencing around the whole playground and all.

MOORE: Now what year did your family change, how old were you when your family changed to the LDS church?

ASTLE: I was about close to eight.

MOORE: Did you ever suffer any persecution in Germany for being, uh, Mormons?

ASTLE: Uh my parents were disowned by both families, and uh, well your neighbors you know they kind of looked at you, but you just went your way.

MOORE: What about at school, were you singled out at school at all?

ASTLE: Not so much in Germany, but we were too young. But in America you just kept quiet. You went your way and they went their way, and so I didn’t have any problems. I had friends, and I had a black girl who was a friend of mine, Jewish friends, I had Catholic girlfriends. And we got along fine. We accepted each other as a person, not what religion you belonged to.

MOORE: And that was in New York?

ASTLE: That was in New York.

MOORE: Right, well back in Germany what did you do for entertainment as a child?

ASTLE: I didn’t get much entertainment because I was handicapped. I just got over that Rheumatic fever, and uh so the doctor the only way they treated it is this hot packs and rest. So you were in bed most of the time.

MOORE: What age did you have Rheumatic fever then?

ASTLE: What age?

MOORE: Yeah.

ASTLE: Between six…about six, I imagine.

MOORE: About six years old.

ASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MOORE: So from six to thirteen you were still ailing a bit, or?

ASTLE: Oh, yes. I could not go swimming. They wouldn’t let me. And uh my friends we used to have these wooden hoops you know you run with them and play ball and you roller skate and stuff like that, and I was not allowed to do that but that was all we knew, was during that period that uh you should take it easy to get over it.

MOORE: Now how did you come to the United States? What motivated your family and who came first?

ASTLE: My father came first. He came in June because uh financial problems turned up, and so there was only enough money for one, and my mother and my sister and I—they had sold the apartment—so we moved in with a widow lady whose son was on the mission and there was that bedroom available, and we came in September then.

MOORE: Now your father sponsored his own trip?

ASTLE: Right.

MOORE: How did he get through? Who sponsored him in the United States? Did anyone sponsor him?

ASTLE: I don’t think so. We were going to come to Utah and then when he had to come alone he decided to stay in New York, he had um, a cousin there, a married cousin. And that’s where he stayed.

MOORE: Where in New York?

ASTLE: Uh, Astoria.

MOORE: Queens.

ASTLE: Queens. Mm-hmm.

MOORE: Ok, and what was the cousin? Hold on we’re going to switch the tapes now and take a break here.

MOORE: All right so your father came first to the United States, you said he came to a cousin. What was your cousin doing at that time in New York, professionally?

ASTLE: Her husband was in a jewelry business.

MOORE: And your father, do you remember your father leaving?

ASTLE: Yes.

MOORE: And do you remember selling the apartment?

ASTLE: Yes.

MOORE: And what was the attitude of your parents towards this move?

ASTLE: They were quite—oh what should I say—happy or joyful to look ahead, see what their new life would be like.

MOORE: And why did he come here? What was your family looking for here?

ASTLE: Well it was the main thing was the church because they felt they would be better accepted and opportunities would be more open.

MOORE: For them here?

ASTLE: For them and for us two girls.

MOORE: And were they going anywhere specifically, originally to Utah? Why there? Why to Utah would they want to?

ASTLE: That’s the head of the church, that’s where they wanted to be with their own people.

MOORE: Now your father came in June, and what did he find his work here?

ASTLE: Uh he went in Germany, when he was with the railroad, then they retired a lot of people or laid them off or transferred them from their passenger division to their freight division. Of course on the railroad you work Sundays, and my dad didn’t want to do that anymore so he put in for retirement and he was in his thirties, and this was unheard of for a young man, but it came through his retirement so he received a pension. And so then he had to find another job and change his occupations, and he tried several things and then in Chemnitz it was the…or… was the Reineke. I think that’s R-E-I-N-E-K-E, Machinist Factory. Large concern. And that’s where dad went and started as an apprentice and that’s how he learned to be a machinist and when he came to America he went to uh—oh dear—to this large factory they have uh… they make large chandeliers for railroads and the iron gates and all of this kind of stuff and that’s where he got a job and worked quite well while he was there.

MOORE: Now back up a bit before your father left, did your parents sell their furniture and everything?

ASTLE: Oh yes.

MOORE: Do you remember what they kept?

ASTLE: Well mostly household items, no large pieces like any furniture. I know I kept my big doll. I had a beautiful, great, big baby doll, and then my mother gave it away in America. But there wasn’t any toys or things like that that we could bring.

MOORE: Was there anything in the family that you kept? A bible?

ASTLE: No. My sister got my dad’s and mothers’ bible, but it was a small one. And uh no there wasn’t anything like that.

MOORE: Now when your father left did you give him a farewell party or dinner?

ASTLE: I don’t know… his friends might have but I wasn’t included so I can’t remember that.

MOORE: And where you lived while he was away was a bedroom of someone’s apartment?

ASTLE: Uh huh, right.

MOORE: And what was that like? Did you have to go to a new school or anything?

ASTLE: Yes, but it was only, they knew it was temporary my school records and things had all been packed and shipped. So they took me in, of course they probably filed information from the other school.

MOORE: Ok so you came in September do you remember leaving and packing to leave?

ASTLE: Well there wasn’t too much to pack because the other things had been packed—we thought we would all go together at one time. So what we had…we went up to Hamburg.

MOORE: How?

ASTLE: By train.

MOORE: Did you say goodbye to relatives before you left?

ASTLE: No, they didn’t want us to go, and they were going to keep me, my grandparents, and so we didn’t go back down to say goodbye. But uh we went up to Hamburg and I’ve always been frightened of water, and when we had to get across the gangplank, you know, I thought we was going to fall down between the ship and the docks. But uh we saw that big ship it was the West Phalia, W-E-S-T, P-H-A-L-I-A, I think it is, and uh we had very, very rough crossing.

MOORE: Now what did you bring? Did you bring any food with you?

ASTLE: Oh no.

MOORE. No. Any were there any other families from your village that went?

ASTLE: No, we were the only three from our group. But we made friends on ship. It was a full ship; it was over-crowded.

MOORE: Did you have to wait over night?

ASTLE: To get on board?

MOORE: Yes.

ASTLE: We could have then, I don’t remember that. I just remember going into, up the ship.

MOORE: What were you wearing?

ASTLE: Oh don’t ask me, a dress, I guess (laughs). I don’t remember those details.

MOORE: What were the conditions on the ship? What type of accommodations did you have?

ASTLE: We had a cabin with I think there were four bunks, but it was just mother and us two girls in it.

MOORE: What class was it?

ASTLE: Passenger I guess. And uh I know we had a…it was like a…what do you call it? A closet, so not too big, about this size, and they had a water basin in it and a mirror and things like that. But um we were all seasick; it was horrible.

MOORE: And was it the first time you had ever taken a trip on water?

ASTLE: Yes.

MOORE: And it was the first time for your mother?

ASTLE: Yes.

MOORE: And what about the food? Were you able to eat the food?

ASTLE: Very good food. It was a Cunard line. C-U-N-A-R-D and very good cuisine, very good, and the service with the stewards was very good—was excellent. They had a ship doctor there and he really went out of his way to meet all of the passengers and see that they were ok.

MOORE: Speaking of doctors—did you have a medical examination before you left?

ASTLE: Oh yes, about a year before. In those days each country had a quota to come to the United States and when the quota was full, you just, too bad, you have to wait another year. And we had to go to Berlin, which is a large city up north from us, and we there we have the American doctors that check you, and really give you a complete check. And on my visa was a large letter. We never paid any attention to that. And uh my mother had varicose veins, large ones, and she was afraid they wouldn’t give her a visa, and then they wasn’t going to give us even the entrance visa to come. And then there was a friend of my dad’s was there, of ours, and he and his family and he says oh I’ve known this girl all of my life, and she’s ok. So they put that on my letter and that was it. So we got our visa but when we then tried to come in, that’s when our problems started.

MOORE: All right so lets back up a little bit. Do you remember, what do you remember about the boat trip? Anything happen that you had never seen before on that boat trip?

ASTLE: Yes, they buried a baby at night.

MOORE: How?

ASTLE: They wrapped it in oilcloth or something like that and then they had a big shoot, and they shot it down into the ocean, and there was some—lay priest—or someone there. I noticed he was saying a prayer or whatever, and I know I cried, I said that wasn’t right. And we saw, when we came closer to this side of the ocean, we had a lot of porpoises following the ship, and they’d fly out of the water. And then on the water, there was uh, we came to the Gulf Stream and there was this kind of orange like, a cork, was on the water. And I kept asking what that was, and there was an old English gentleman; he had crossed the ocean many times and he said that’s the Gulf Stream and he said if you jump in that, that’s warm, and if you jump on the other side, its cold. It was kind of strange to accept that, but anyway that was one of the things.

MOORE: Did you find any other German children on board?

ASTLE: No, strangely we were the only two German girls, little ones.

MOORE: Mm-hmm and what about um…were you able to go on deck?

ASTLE: Oh yes, we were out thirteen days, and eleven days I was seasick. So when I came out on deck every once and a while, and you see the ship go with the waves, and even today when I see that on water, it just makes me sick.

MOORE: So do you remember seeing land for the first time or hearing about land?

ASTLE: Well we got into Boston first. We landed there and we saw, well we saw land and I thought it would be where we would get off, and they said no you have another day. And so we saw Boston.

MOORE: And then did you when, you went to New York then?

ASTLE: Yes.

MOORE: So what do you remember about that?

ASTLE: Not too much except we were all excited to think that we finally had reached our goal, and we wouldn’t be seasick anymore.

MOORE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

ASTLE: Oh yes. They called us and they said there is the Statue of Liberty. So we went past it; we all waved; it was exciting.

MOORE: Did you know what the Statue of Liberty was?

ASTLE: I didn’t know what it was, really what it stood for, it was just a beautiful statue and it was great to see after nothing but water.

MOORE: So after the Statue of Liberty, and were people on deck… you said … was it festive?

ASTLE: Well everybody—they were kind of quiet. They would *ooh* and *ahh* you know, and everybody was happy to think it was almost the end of our trip.

MOORE: And what happened after that? Tell me what happened after the Statue of Liberty?

ASTLE: Well my dad and his cousin’s husband, they came on board, like all the other passengers had friends or family. They came on board and it was a happy reunion, and then people were called out, names were called out, and you go and leave the boat. Go on dock, and everybody got called, and everybody got called, and we were still standing there. And finally my dad went to talk to the captain and they said well you can’t land, they can’t land. You have to leave them, so he went and said… he came back and he said they’re going to take you to Ellis Island. We’ll meet you over there, and I said I want to go with dad, and they said no you can’t. And so dad and his cousin and some other people that were not on board that were friends, they went in a motorboat to Ellis Island and then after a while they had that bigger boat, larger boat, and they put quite a few people, I couldn’t tell you how many, and they put us in that and took us to Ellis Island and of course we were all excited and didn’t know what it was all about and what was going to happen and as we embarked from the boat and saw this big building, red brick building, and then we went there, and it looks as far as I can remember it looked like we had these metal stalls, like they have for cattle, you go here and you go there and you know they divided you up. And we went there, then they took my mother and dad in separate locations, and my sister and I were sitting, kept in one room, I don’t remember, but we were kept out, and they examined them and mother thought again she thought well here it goes, my veins. And you know she looked at her legs, the doctor checked her and he says you are all right. She looked and she said she could not see a vein. That was really something. And then my dad, they checked him out, he had to jump rope, he had to run, he had to go up and down steps, and everything under the sun, and to see whether that heart problem that I had was hereditary. And of course dad was a strong man, and then they called his place, his place of work, and to find out what kind of a man he was, what kind of a worker, and how he got along with people. And then they called the place where he had an apartment for us, and they asked the neighbors how kind of a man, if he had a lot of parties and things. And then finally they gave us the ok they said well…he had to sign a letter though for the government that he would see to it that I would never fall a ward to the state of New York or go on welfare, and then we came out and they brought us back, and we got our luggage from the big boat.

MOORE: Walk back a little bit. What language did they use when they talked to you?

ASTLE: I think they used German or they had an interpreter there.

MOORE: Were they polite to you?

ASTLE: Well because I can’t say that because I wasn’t in with where my dad and mother was, but they treated us two girls quite nice.

MOORE: So was there a real fear on your part about not getting out?

ASTLE: Well yes we didn’t know what to expect, why we were there. We heard a lot crime, women, and children, you know, and others because it was a lot of them in there; it seemed like that room was full.

MOORE: What were the sanitary conditions like of the place where you were kept?

ASTLE: I can’t tell you. There wasn’t any rubbish or stuff on the floor there where we were.

MOORE: Altogether how long were you at Ellis Island then?

ASTLE: Oh several hours.

MOORE: Did you eat there?

ASTLE: No I don’t think we did.

MOORE: So finally you got your luggage you said?

ASTLE: Uh huh.

MOORE: Now back up to the heart part, I’m sorry. Um what was the situation with your heart then? What…why was there a concern about your heart?

ASTLE: I had um from Rheumatic fever, there was what they call Rheumatic heart, and it damaged the left ventricle.

MOORE: Ventricle, yeah.

ASTLE: Yeah, that muscle that whatever it is. And so it left a murmur at times, not all the time, and that’s what was wrong and it’s been all my life. Every once and a while when I go to the doctor, they hear the murmur and then they don’t. And now, my heart goes crazy. It runs away at times. My pulse is very fast, one, two, three strong pulse then three light ones, and that is from there. I’ve always thought in later life maybe I’ll have to have a heart transplant, but so far I’ve been fine.

MOORE: So it was because of that?

ASTLE: Because of that, for a thirteen year old child.

MOORE: Now was your sister healthy?

ASTLE: She was healthy, yeah.

MOORE: Ok so what happened after that? We got to the point of you getting luggage?

ASTLE: Ok then my dad and his cousin, they took us… oh I don’t know where we went on the subway or whether he got a taxi. I don’t know how we got to their apartment. Then they took us to our apartment.

MOORE: What were the addresses of those apartments? Do you remember?

ASTLE: No I don’t. But his cousin lived in Astoria too, and I know we thought it was just heaven. The furniture was old. He you know, they bought used furniture but it looked to us just beautiful, we were so happy, and we had a bathtub, which we never did have in Germany. You had your tub you brought in on Saturday nights or so, and the food he had so much fruit there on the table. It was really—we really thought we had were come to the home of plenty, and then the next thing was, they took me to the school and because my English was a little different and not as fluent as they had, they started me in the first grade. And in those days it didn’t make any difference if you spoke English or not, you were on your own. They didn’t have special teachers, or special help, nothing. And you just worked yourself up. So I went from first grade and then you know jumped a grade or two usually when they thought I was ready, and that’s how I went through school. And when I think what they do today to these immigrants, I just shake my head. We didn’t get help, none of the immigrants did.

MOORE: Were you ever…suffer any persecution for being German at the school? Did anyone ever make fun of you?

ASTLE: Oh once in a while a Jewish boy would take call and say um…sauerkraut or kraut-head. Kraut-head. Mm-hmm

MOORE: But that wasn’t common?

ASTLE: No.

MOORE: And your teachers?

ASTLE: Very, very good teachers.

MOORE: Um now tell me a little bit about life with your family members’ adjustment to life here? How did your mother adjust to life in the United States?

ASTLE: My mother and dad went to night school. They weren’t here very long, they went to night school to learn English and they told us girls not to speak German in the house because they had to learn English and so they had to learn it from us, and from school and that’s how they adjusted. Then they went to church and of course there were quite a few Germans, but in New York we’re scattered…you don’t live as close as you do out here in Utah, I mean with next door neighbors as LDS so it doesn’t bother you. But dad got along good at work; we didn’t have any problem really.

MOORE: Did anyone ever want to go back to Germany to live?

ASTLE: No, I’ve never been back and never had a desire to go and I think that was because the family kind of cut us of, and so we said ok. But after a while mother and dad started writing to their parents. But we’ve never wanted to go back. Mother went back once, and of course she was the rich American, they said. And she wasn’t. But uh she left all of her clothes over there, and came back with empty suitcases. My dad went back twice but he was very upset, because of what he found, the conditions.

MOORE: Yeah, when did your parents go back and what year?

ASTLE: I can’t tell you when my mother went back. My dad went back… oh dear…it was after the war. But I don’t know what year it was.

MOORE: East Germany did he go?

ASTLE: He went to East Germany and he got permission to get in, and if they had ever caught him, he had the book of Mormon in German, translated, to give to his sister over there, and if he as caught with that it would have been too bad. But he wasn’t. But he was very disappointed; he’s uh landed in Frankfort with the airplane and from there he took the train to get into East Germany with special permits. He had to declare how much money he was taking in, and that he could take out but no more. And uh he said the railroad from Frankfurt to I don’t know how…well I guess to the East German border there where the Russians took over, was good, but when he got into East Germany he said it was terrible. It was dirty; the service was very poor. But that’s what happened you see.

MOORE: Um what about your sister, how was her adjustment?

ASTLE: Oh she adjusted well. She started school in kindergarten, and she went right on.

MOORE: Did any family tragedy occur during the time that you lived in this country when you came here?

ASTLE: No, we’ve been lucky. Of course both my dad and my mother are dead now so.

MOORE: What years did they die, your mom and dad?

ASTLE: My mother died about three years ago. She was 97, and my dad died…let’s see…19 years ago.

MOORE: And um do you think that your parents’ expectations as such were fulfilled in this country?

ASTLE: I think so. I think so. They had better times here, better life, and they progressed so. I never heard them complain about anything.

MOORE: Now briefly tell me about your life. Now um you went through the American school system in New York. You moved, you had mentioned beforehand that you had moved from Queens to Washington Heights in Manhattan. Now what year was that?

ASTLE: Oh let’s see that was about in 1932 or 1933.

MOORE: And what brought your family to that location?

ASTLE: Well it was usually the neighborhood changed and my mother, she was uh, what shall we say? She liked certain groups of people, and when they changed, when they moved out and others moved in, she didn’t like, so we moved.

MOORE: And did your father continue in the same line of business?

ASTLE: Yes, uh huh.

MOORE: Did your mother work outside the home at all?

ASTLE: She did for a little while she worked in um where they make these radio batteries and things. And there was a man in the church that uh he had that factory in New Jersey and she moved…she traveled with the two men over there. And so but she did maybe two or three years, that was all. Its just she didn’t have anything else to do.

MOORE: Now what about your education. How far did you go through school?

ASTLE: I graduated from elementary school, and then I was about seventeen/eighteen. I had to catch up, you know. I went to…no sixteen. I went to Drake’s business school and that was two years, and I signed up for a court stenographer and I just got the job and then I was called on a mission for the church. And so I went, I came from New York, went to the Northern States, which is Chicago headquarters, and that’s where I met my husband. And he came from the west. The west and the east met.

MOORE: And what was his background?

ASTLE: Um his father—they had in Wyoming at first—they had a cattle ranch and then they moved to Providence, Utah. And they had silver foxes they raised and they had chickens, a lot of chickens.

MOORE: Now how did you…was it love at first sight or what was the situation with meeting your husband?

ASTLE: No, as missionaries you know you get together every once and a while and there’s of course on a mission you don’t do any dating and there’s no “hanky panky.” Its just uh you make friends and so we just hit it off as friends, and of course there was quite a few other missionaries that I was corresponding with, and then when my mission was over he had been home a year before I came home. And so I had to go to Salt Lake to report to headquarters. And there was quite a few missionaries who got together and we had a party, and he was there and he said I’d like to get better acquainted with you, and I said well there’s always the mailman, and I went home to New York, and we corresponded. And then I decided, I told my parents let’s move out to Utah, where I had lots more friends out here you know, and so we came out in March of ’40. Nineteen.

MOORE: So your whole family moved out here?

ASTLE: Uh huh, the four of us.

MOORE: And what did your mom and dad think when you moved—went back there and said let’s move to Utah?

ASTLE: Well they had decided long time ago that it was time to come out here. And so they/we decided ok, so they gave their furniture away, and we came up here. And we had quite some experiences in that car. We came out in an Oldsmobile. And it was in March, and so my dad says we can’t go the middle route. There were the three fifty highways, one north, one through the middle and one through the southern part. So we took the southern part, and when we got down to Richmond, VA where you’re supposed to turn, one of our rear bearings turned out, and so we were there for a while to get that fixed. Then from there we went on and we got into Kentucky and the hotels were not as plentiful as they are now, and eating-places weren’t. So we had uh a booklet from the AAA that said so many miles to the next eating-place or to the next cabins. They were mostly cabins. And so if you don’t get there by five, don’t go on further because it’s five to six hundred miles. It ended up at five o’clock at the nearest place. We got into Kentucky and we were in this cabin, and as we were about ready to go in the morning, on the radio they said all low lying people you get out of here. They’re having floods here. We read where we were was flooded, and so we went on further and we got on to the next highway, and they were building it was uh highway construction workers and uh these fellows were coming towards us and they were motioning with shovels and we didn’t know what was wrong and one fellow lifted the hood up from the side and flames came up so they threw sand in our machine—in our car, and of course they killed the flames, and we went on to the gas station, and they had to vacuum the machine out. Then we came on to Denver, although I don’t think it was quite Denver, but we got into Colorado and we were going to go over, and they said you can’t go over you have to go further south, its all snowed in, so we had to go further south to get into Utah, but it was quite a trip (laughs).

MOORE: And when you were coming into Utah where were you coming to live?

ASTLE: We stayed with some friends at first and then we soon got a place in First Avenue in Salt Lake City. We got an apartment, we got all new furniture. My dad got to work at the grain elevators as long as it was work. And so uh that’s where we lived, up in the avenues for a while.

MOORE: And what happened with your boyfriend at that time? You were in contact with him still?

ASTLE: Oh yes he came down from Logan every Saturday, and he had one excuse after another about why he was in Salt Lake. But that’s how our friendship developed.

MOORE: And ok what was your husband-to-be’s profession?

ASTLE: Well he was a poultry man and silver fox or whatever that is.

MOORE: Mm-hmm, silver fox. We’re going to change the tape here and take a break for a moment.

MOORE: All right so we were at the point of asking—talking about the fact that your husband-to-be found every excuse to come to Salt Lake City? And what happened after that?

ASTLE: So that was in… ’40, 1940 and then in September of 1940 he came down and brought me a ring, and then we got married in February of ’41.

MOORE: And this is wartime soon so?

ASTLE: Well uh its still not war yet, but it was getting close. It was getting close. I was an American citizen because I married an American, and became naturalized, and that’s for the first time that had lived long enough in one place. And then um let’s see in the following year, in March of ’42 our first son was born.

MOORE: And was your husband ever drafted for…?

ASTLE: No, he was older.

MOORE: He was older.

ASTLE: He was um 36 I think when we got married.

MOORE: And you were how old when you got married?

ASTLE: 25. He was 37.

MOORE: He was 37. Mm-hmm so he didn’t have to serve?

ASTLE: No, he didn’t.

MOORE: Your first son, so how many children did you have?

ASTLE: I had three boys.

MOORE: And what were their names, what are their names?

ASTLE: Ernest, who is 52 now, and Dale, who is going to be 50, and John, who will be 48 in December.

MOORE: And so when you look back on your life now, you’ve lived in many places in the United States or you’ve had quite a life here in the United States. And you’ve lived also in what was East Germany, now is Germany. What do you think about your family’s original decision to come here?

ASTLE: I think it was a good one for all our life. We’ve had better life here and we’ve had better opportunities here. Just all around it was better.

MOORE: You came here for the church primarily. How has that been for you here as compared to what it would have been in Germany?

ASTLE: Well its entirely different here, we’re more organized. You have more members, and you work more together, and uh well its just different from what it was.

MOORE: Did you raise your children in the church also?

ASTLE: Oh yes. Uh huh.

MOORE: So they have in turn become members?

ASTLE: Oh yes, they’re members. That’s all they know. I have never questioned it. I feel good about you know if I had any questions, I would go after it.

MOORE: In terms of your nationality, how do you feel—what nationality do you feel now?

ASTLE: I’m American and German born. I guess that’s about it.

MOORE: And so do you keep up—did you pass on German to your children?

ASTLE: No I’m sad about that. I can’t speak German, but I can read it, I can write it, I understand it.

MOORE: Do you keep up with reading and writing?

ASTLE: Yes I…its…that hasn’t stopped me from that but speaking with other people is the problem, you know, to find the person that you want to converse with.

MOORE: So basically you’ve dedicated your life to living in the United States?

ASTLE: Oh yes, this is my life. This is my county now.

MOORE: I’d like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for taking the opportunity—giving us the opportunity to speak with you.

ASTLE: Thank you.

MOORE: And this is Kate Moore in Logan, Utah on July 12th 1994. Signing off for the Ellis Island Oral History project.