**Kate:** Good afternoon. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 21st of January 1994 and I’m in Sun City, Nevada at the home of Erich Weingartner who came from Germany but originally came to Ellis Island from Brazil in 1926, when he was 12 and a half years old. Why don’t you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth please?

**Erich:** My name is Erich Weingartner. I was born February 2nd 1914 in the city of Hagen, Germany.

**Kate:** How do you spell Hagen?

**Erich:** H-A-G-E-N.

**Kate:** What size town was Hagen?

**Erich:** If I remember correctly it could have been a city of about 200,000 population.

**Kate:** Do you remember at all what the town looked like?

**Erich:** Yes. I remember there was a river flowing to it, there was a bridge to cross and when you got to the other side you got into the heart of the city. They had a [unclear 00:01:06] house there which is a city hall, monuments there.

**Kate:** What was the major industry of Hagen?

**Erich:** It’s up in the industrial part of Germany. You could call it the Pittsburgh of Germany. Essen, Dusseldorf, Dortmund they’re all in that area.

**Kate:** What was your father’s name?

**Erich:** My father’s name was Ignatz, I-G-N-A-T-Z.

**Kate:** What was his occupation?

**Erich:** He was a plaster; in the States he worked as a plaster.

**Kate:** And in Germany?

**Erich:** The same trade but they called it the [unclear 00:01:47] out there.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Erich:** He did all the nice art and work that you see in the old buildings but you don’t see nowadays anymore, the different circles on the ceiling where the lamps and lights are hanging. He did all that type of work.

**Kate:** Could you describe what he looked like?

**Erich:** He was a little taller than I am, blonde hair…

**Kate:** Which is how tall?

**Erich:** He must have been 5’6 or 5’7. He had blue eyes. He was from a family of four boys, then a girl, and then four more boys.

**Kate:** What about his personality and temperaments? How would you describe him?

**Erich:** It was normal for those days. I got my shares of paddling to put it mildly.

**Kate:** So he was strict?

**Erich:** He was strict.

**Kate:** Is there a story about your father that you associate with your childhood?

**Erich:** I think of many a times that father mentioned to my neighbor. My father came home from the war. I was four years old.

**Kate:** The first war?

**Erich:** First World War. I didn’t know I had a father. Here’s a man in the house telling me what to do and I look at my mama, “Hey mama…” and that didn’t sit right with him; his own son. After a few paddlings I lined up. I found out he was my father.

**Kate:** How about your mother? What was her name?

**Erich:** Marie.

**Kate:** What was her maiden name?

**Erich:** Rosenthal, R-O-S-E-N-T-H-A-L.

**Kate:** What was her occupation?

**Erich:** Housewife.

**Kate:** What did she look like?

**Erich:** She was a dark blonde, also blue eyes. She stood about 5’4, 5’5.

**Kate:** What was her personality and temperament?

**Erich:** Very good; by that I mean that especially when dad got mad she was protective to the children.

**Kate:** What were her chores around the house?

**Erich:** They were many. We didn’t have a washing machine or a laundry machine that we have nowadays so every Monday we would do the laundry real old-fashioned way.

**Kate:** Is there a story about your mother that you associate with your childhood?

**Erich:** Not really just that we used to get mom and dad mad. He used to accuse me of hanging on my mother’s skirt, hold on when you were a little kid on mama’s skirt.

**Kate:** Could you name all your brothers and sisters? I know you have many.

**Erich:** No, I only have one brother. His name was Kuyt, K-U-Y-T.

**Kate:** In Germany?

**Erich:** In Germany and he was 14 months younger than I am.

**Kate:** Could you tell us about your house in Germany? What do you remember?

**Erich:** We didn’t have a house. We lived in an apartment.

**Kate:** How large was the apartment?

**Erich:** It was kind of crumped up for a while then we moved to a larger quarter because we were getting big.

**Kate:** The original, how big was that?

**Erich:** There was one big bedroom. We all slept in one bedroom. There was a living room and a large kitchen. I don’t know if really it was a living room. It was a very large kitchen; you ate and you congregated in the kitchen.

**Kate:** There were three rooms basically, you think.

**Erich:** I think so, yes.

**Kate:** Where was that apartment in relation to the city?

**Erich:** It was in the city.

**Kate:** In the center?

**Erich:** No, slightly off.

**Kate:** How was it heated, the apartment?

**Erich:** It wasn’t heated. We had a big coal stove and that heated up the large kitchen and that was it. For the night it was very cold. Mom used to keep the door open for the bedroom to get some heat to the bedrooms.

**Kate:** Was there a garden?

**Erich:** There was a little something in the back but not much to speak of.

**Kate:** What kind of plumbing did you have?

**Erich:** We had water.

**Kate:** Running water?

**Erich:** Running water but I don’t know if we had hot water. I know the toilet was out in the hallway. We shared with a neighbor across the hall.

**Kate:** Who else lived in the building?

**Erich:** All of us. We lived in the ground floor so there was a couple of storeys above us.

**Kate:** Who did the cooking in your family?

**Erich:** My mother.

**Kate:** What was your favorite food? Do you remember?

**Erich:** Yes, potato pancakes was one of them.

**Kate:** Did you ever help cook at home?

**Erich:** No, not at that point.

**Kate:** Could you describe the kitchen that everybody congregated there? What was it like?

**Erich:** We had a sink on one side, and there was a door to the rear yard, and there was a door this way to the bedrooms which went to the front of the street; the one bedroom. That’s about it.

**Kate:** Did you have any animals at all?

**Erich:** No pets.

**Kate:** What was mealtime like? Describe your daily meals.

**Erich:** We went to school and we were given sandwiches to take along at school time. Evenings was a big supper time when dad came home from work.

**Kate:** Which was about when?

**Erich:** Around six o’clock.

**Kate:** Did you all eat together?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** Were there other family members nearby?

**Erich:** Later on, before we moved out to Brazil, my grandfather died. There was a younger brother to my mother; my mother was the eldest and my uncle he was the youngest. He was a minor and he came living with us.

**Kate:** Are you talking about Germany or…?

**Erich:** In Germany before we moved to Brazil. He was just at that age where he had to learn a trade. He was learning a trade. He had learned a trade as a baker which he didn’t care for; the apprenticeship the whole bit.

My father was in the building trade and he had a business of his own. He had four of his brothers working for him so he took my uncle in too. The building trade was a little too hard on him. My father got in touch with one of his brothers who had moved right after 1918 at war ending down to Brazil. Actually, my father wanted to come to the States but my uncle in Brazil, Adolf was his name, he persuaded him to move down to South America, Brazil instead of moving to the United States. When we got down there my father was greatly disappointed with the economic conditions in Brazil.

**Kate:** We’ll get to Brazil in a moment. Did you have your grandparents living near you in Hagen?

**Erich:** In Hagen no. My mother was a Hessian. They fought with Washington. The Hessians were hired by the British one day to go fight in Washington. They were missionaries. She came from there and that’s where my grandparents lived. We used to visit there now and then. I remember some of the visits going over to visit grandpa.

**Kate:** Were you particularly close to anyone in your family besides your parents?

**Erich:** I was close to my uncle who was nine years older than I am. That’s the brother I just mentioned. He moved in with us and then we had to get a larger flat.

**Kate:** Do you have any anecdotes about any of your family members that you tell about the past?

**Erich:** Not really. Once in a while we had company coming from one of my uncles from my father’s side and they get together and they would talk, you’re a child you sit there and listen. It was interesting.

**Kate:** What about religious life? Were you religious at all?

**Erich:** Not very.

**Kate:** What denomination were you?

**Erich:** My parents had a bit of a problem there. My father was a Catholic; my mother was a Lutheran Evangelical. In German they call it Evangelische but it’s Lutheran Protestant over here. Came Christmas time or Easter that’s when the problem came. Which church do we go to? My mother only go to the Protestant church, the Lutheran. We usually wound up over there but there was an argument about it.

**Kate:** Your father wanted to go to?

**Erich:** Catholic. Father comes back from the war, he never said it to me but I assume that’s where he was, he comes back from the wars and his two boys are Protestants.

**Kate:** Describe the church that you did go to; the Lutheran church. Where was that and how did it look?

**Erich:** I remember being in there and in the old times church in Germany, the pastor was up in the [unclear 00:12:33]. He was up high looking down upon his flock, his parishioners. He’d be up there saying the sermon.

**Kate:** When you did go to church when did you go with your mother?

**Erich:** Just over high holidays like Christmas and Easter.

**Kate:** Did you have at home any religious practices? Did you have prayers? Did you say grace?

**Erich:** Very small I imagine we did but I really don’t remember. We didn’t sit down and have grace before we ate.

**Kate:** Did you experience any religious persecution or prejudice of any sort in Germany?

**Erich:** No.

**Kate:** Holiday celebrations you mentioned them; what were some of them that were the best?

**Erich:** Christmas was always nice.

**Kate:** Describe that.

**Erich:** We had the Christmas tree. We were allowed to come along to shopping with dad for Christmas tree and we enjoyed carrying it home, then it had to be trimmed but then those days the kids were put to bed and when you got up the next morning, all the gifts from Santa Claus were under the Christmas tree.

**Kate:** How did Santa Claus come to the house?

**Erich:** He came dressed as a Santa Claus, not very much like ours. The European Santa Claus looked a little different. He also had a [unclear 00:14:11]. It’s almost like a boom. He smacked you with it if you weren’t a good… he’d ask you, “Were you a good child? Did you behave?” If you weren’t, you got one across the behind.

**Kate:** He came to the house when?

**Erich:** Actually this was a couple of weeks before Christmas.

**Kate:** Little Christmas celebrations?

**Erich:** No, St. Nicholas Day. It could be the first week in December there about. I remember that.

**Kate:** He came into the house, was that a good thing that Santa Claus came?

**Erich:** Yes but he was also trusting and intimidating. He’d scare you more than not scare you.

**Kate:** Did he bring anything with him or anyone with him?

**Erich:** The way I remember he came alone and he had a bag. He’d have walnuts, hazelnuts in the small bag. Being it was shortly after the war there wasn’t so many gifts to be had.

**Kate:** What did you eat at Christmas dinner and when was it eaten?

**Erich:** My mom used to bake. She’d roll out… that’s where maybe I helped her, rolling out the dough. She had these little cut outs, the hats, Santa Claus, Christmas tree and so forth, cut them out on the dough, put them on a pan and put them in the oven.

**Kate:** What did you eat for dinner?

**Erich:** It’s kind of hard to remember. I know meat was scarce. We had only meat once a week and that was on Sundays but we ate vegetables and potatoes. My mother was good at making nice potato dumplings and like I mentioned, potato pancakes.

**Kate:** What about school life? You attended school in Germany?

**Erich:** Yes, up to the fourth grade I went.

**Kate:** Where was the school that you went to?

**Erich:** Walking distance.

**Kate:** Of your apartment in Hagen?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** Do you remember any specific teachers or playmates there?

**Erich:** Very vaguely.

**Kate:** What was your favorite subject?

**Erich:** History.

**Kate:** How large was school and how many students per class?

**Erich:** That’s hard too.

**Kate:** Do you remember anything about the class?

**Erich:** Yes I remember. Once in a while we’d have, the weather permitting of course when we got spring going into summer, we’d have a walk to certain areas looking up places of history; historic places.

**Kate:** Your class consisted of how many students?

**Erich:** 25, 30.

**Kate:** Did you learn any English prior to coming to the United States?

**Erich:** Not in Germany; In Brazil I did.

**Kate:** How much did you learn in Brazil?

**Erich:** Enough to be an interpreter when we got on the ship.

**Kate:** For whom?

**Erich:** The purser asked us certain questions and he spoke English and I had to do the interpreting all the time.

**Kate:** For your family?

**Erich:** For the family; for mama.

**Kate:** Back in Germany what did you do for entertainment as a child? What kind of games did you play? Do you remember any?

**Erich:** Yes, almost anything. We didn’t have a soccer ball so we kicked the tin cans around.

**Kate:** Do you have any childhood stories? What did they tell about you when you were a child? Anything you did that was particularly damn or brilliant?

**Erich:** No, not really. Our family didn’t get together that much to talk about some of the habits when we were small.

**Kate:** Do you remember who decided to come to United States? Do you remember any initial talk about that?

**Erich:** Yes. One summer, in Germany they had from school, board of education was in on it, that the city children could go to the peasants in the outlying countryside. I wanted to go. I begged mama, mama finally she said yes and I did go with quite a group of children. We got to small cities where the farmers were; the peasants. They had cows; they had horses and so forth. Being I was raised in the city.

When I came back from that, it must have been there about the duration of summer. We were back in time to start school again in fall.

**Kate:** How old were you again?

**Erich:** I was nine years old then. When I came back then I heard mom and dad talking about we’re going to go to Brazil. This was discussed while I was on the farms on vacation with the farmers. When I came back then that was discussed.

I remember my dad got the steam ship tickets and I went as a minor but when you’re over 10 you had to pay full fare. I paid half fare. We left in February and in the meantime I became 10 on February the 2nd and there was trouble with the travel agency. They wanted my dad to pay full fare for me but my dad went out on the point that he made application for passage when I was only 9 years old, not 10.

**Kate:** What do you remember about the preparations beginning? What happened when you went to Brazil? Did you have to sell…?

**Erich:** Yes, mom had felt so bad about this; all her beautiful kitchen furniture.

**Kate:** What furniture was in your apartment?

**Erich:** In the bedroom we had a nice bed and we had a foldable closet. We didn’t have walk-in closet like we have here, not in those days anyway. That was a beautiful piece of furniture. We had nice kitchen furniture. Everything had to be sold and left behind and with that money dad helped buy the steam ship tickets to go to Brazil.

**Kate:** You had to sell things before you had the tickets?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** What was that scene like? Do you remember? Was it emotional for your mother?

**Erich:** Yes she felt terrible, gave that all up. I remember her crying about it.

**Kate:** Who did the selling? She did?

**Erich:** It was mutual between my father and my mother.

**Kate:** What did you take with you? Did you take anything special with you to Brazil?

**Erich:** Yes we had some special things we took along.

**Kate:** Like what?

**Erich:** Albums. We didn’t have that much either. You had no TV in those days. We didn’t have a piano or any of that stuff.

**Kate:** Did you take personally anything special for yourself?

**Erich:** My clothing, my school books, my report card.

**Kate:** What did you pack these things in?

**Erich:** In wooden crates. Also I found out later that my father, making it out with his brother in Brazil, he ordered some molds to mix these concrete sewers for underground. My dad bought a certain of them, had the mold created and shipped them also down to Brazil.

We get down to Brazil they found that the city people in the small town, the council people, weren’t ready for this great improvement putting sewers into the town. Now my dad is stuck with all these molds. A lot of money sunk into that. We were running ads. We were in the city of Porto Union.

**Kate:** What did your family say that it was going to be in Brazil? What did they explain to you about going to Brazil?

**Erich:** There wasn’t much explanation. I remember in school when the teacher found out, and that was a lady teacher, that we’re going down to the land where they have the monkeys.

**Kate:** Were they very excited about going to Brazil?

**Erich:** Yes. We boys were very excited.

**Kate:** You went to Brazil and within a short time you came to America to Ellis Island. What happened that made you want to go to America?

**Erich:** When my dad got down to Brazil, we all did together with my uncle, there were five of us, my dad was clearly disappointed of the economic conditions down there. His statement was, I heard him say it more than once, “There’s no future down here for my boys”. We’ve gone back to 1925 and really there wasn’t much.

**Kate:** Before we started this interview you mentioned the economic situation in Germany as bad.

**Erich:** That was bad too.

**Kate:** What were the reasons for them going to Brazil?

**Erich:** To get away from the poor economic conditions in Germany at that time.

**Kate:** Your father was working as a plaster.

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** Did he have work?

**Erich:** Yes. For a period of time he went, and some of his brothers went with him, being that we lived in the western part of Germany which borders close to France. My dad and his brothers they went to work to France. They got worked in France and got paid in francs at a building trade.

They’d come home on weekends and dad would leave money. Mama would only exchange francs into German marks as she need it because the next day those German marks weren’t buying anything that they bought today.

**Kate:** What year was that?

**Erich:** That was in 1923.

**Kate:** Did you have any personal experience in the difference in buying power when you went to the store there?

**Erich:** Only when mama sent me down in Hagen to go down to… it was a grocery store the style of a supermarket, of course smaller. They call it a konsum. They sent me down for a loaf of bread, get this get that. I was beginning to learn at that age the difference in buying power. Yesterday I could buy a loaf of bread with so and so many marks mama gave me, next day I needed double those marks to buy the same loaf of bread.

**Kate:** Did they tell you this about the economy? Did they mention that as a reason for leaving?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** You remember the trip to Brazil? How was that like in a boat?

**Erich:** It was very nice. 21 days on boat.

**Kate:** What class did you…?

**Erich:** Steerage.

**Kate:** Were you sick?

**Erich:** The first three days I thought I’d die.

**Kate:** Was your whole family sick on that voyage?

**Erich:** It was February. I’d never seen a steam boat before. We get there in the evenings up to Bremerhaven; we didn’t leave from Hamburg we left from Bremerhaven which is in Wassenaar, Bremen.

**Kate:** How did you get there?

**Erich:** By rail road to north Germany.

**Kate:** Did anyone give you a party before you left?

**Erich:** Not that I know of.

**Kate:** Do you remember saying goodbye to relatives?

**Erich:** Not directly, no.

**Kate:** So you went by train…

**Erich:** To Bremen. We spent a day or two in Bremen and then we go on to a museum there.

**Kate:** Where did you stay in Bremen?

**Erich:** In a hotel and then we got on the ship that looked so huge. It was evening, we got on and the moment we got into that we got down the steerage oh my God the smell.

**Kate:** Of what?

**Erich:** There’s a certain smell. I’ve smelt it again every time I went deep sea fishing out of [unclear 00:28:04] Island for tuna or for blues later on. When you go down into the bilge you get that smell from the boat. This steamer had the same smell.

**Kate:** It’s not something you want to smell?

**Erich:** No but you get used to it. You had no choice.

**Kate:** What accommodations were there down in the steerage?

**Erich:** You had a bed here and you had a bath above and it was all wide open.

**Kate:** Like a dorm?

**Erich:** Yes, big dorm.

**Kate:** You went 21 days; what was the food like?

**Erich:** The food wasn’t bad. I would like to add that once it’s been February, we got out into the North Sea big ice was flowing around. We got to the English Channel the water was rough. That’s when everybody got sea sick; going to the English Channel. The ice flows in the English Channel also. Then we got down to Vigo, we stopped in Vigo.

**Kate:** Where’s that?

**Erich:** That’s Portugal. We took on migrant workers that worked down to Buenos Aires. There was no room for them. They slept on the deck of the ship. They only spoke Spanish and we only spoke German but we got along.

Then we got to equator and the weather is getting better. By this time nobody is sea sick anymore and you start enjoying this trip. Being we were boys we were all over the boat from the front to the rear. They had a ceremony when they crossed the equator. I don’t know if they still do it but those days they did. The whole ship and crew participates in that, and passengers.

**Kate:** Over the equator?

**Erich:** Over the equator? Neptune comes out and he’s got this big fork in his hands and you get baptised. They had a big campus. They’d sent him to here, with a border horse on the back, and force him to go forward and while he’s going through he’s getting paddled from the top down.

**Kate:** With what, paddles?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** Everybody?

**Erich:** The crew. We didn’t participate but we were watching.

**Kate:** Every time the crew went over the equator they had this ceremony?

**Erich:** That’s right, for the passengers, for everyone. That was part of the entertainment.

**Kate:** Do you remember the views from the deck as a child? Did you play on deck?

**Erich:** Yes. We had deck chairs. They had a big campus but that was on the way coming up here. That was a couple years later. They had amusements. You made your own amusements. The men were playing cards, the German those days that were playing cards was known as 66.

There was another game they played that was known as skat, S-K-A-T. We whiled the time away. For the dining room they had big tables and they had a white table cloth on it. A lot of food was preserved; came out of cans.

**Kate:** When you got to Brazil where did you land?

**Erich:** We landed in Rio de Janeiro. That was our first stop. It was hot. Winter in Germany at that time it’s summer south of the equator. All of us Germans with our heavy winter clothing they were passing out; adults. Dad got fainted. We were overdressed and it was so damn hot down there. We got used to it.

Then they took us on an island known as Ilha das Flores; Island of Flowers. That was the Brazilian equivalent of Ellis Island. All the immigrants got taken there by small boats, ferry type boats. There again the accommodation was very much like on the ship. One big room, a dormitory type like steerage, a bath here and a bath there and we slept.

**Kate:** How long were you detained?

**Erich:** We were there for two weeks. They had to make contact first with my uncle down there that we were on. In the meantime we were slated to go and everything got called off, my brother got sick. He got a touch of malaria. That drew us back another week so we were there at least two weeks then he got well and then we proceeded.

**Kate:** You got down there and you were detained because your brother has malaria. From there where did you go?

**Erich:** From there we went down to Paranqua; Brazilian name.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Erich:** P-A-R-A-N-Q-U-A. It was a coastal city. From there we were put on the railroad. We had it tough. Brazil is very much like this country up here; the structure of it. They have the United State of Brazil down there like we have the United States of America here. They have an independent state down there just like we have an independent state because years back they were a colony of Portugal that’s why they speak Portuguese there, not Spanish.

We got there to Rio Grande do Sul and then we got into Parana. The railroads down there they look like the old locomotives with this wide [unclear 00:34:46], they’ve got the chimneys on the front. That’s what they had down there.

The locomotives’ fuel was wood. We travelled so many miles and then we’d stop and you would see the lumbar was all stacked up. They had crews living at certain spots. That’s all they did; chop the wood and supply the lumbar to buy for the rail company. We loaded back up again and we continue.

**Kate:** How many years did you stay in Brazil?

**Erich:** Two and a half to be exact.

**Kate:** How long into that stay did you know that then when was this decision to come to America?

**Erich:** The first year we went down there.

**Kate:** Why did they pick America?

**Erich:** My dad wanted to come to the States. His brother persuaded him to come to Brazil instead.

**Kate:** Your father then brought up the idea again?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** Do you remember when that was?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** What was your mother’s reaction?

**Erich:** Was all for it but there was not enough money for all of us to come and you had to wait also for the quota system was in effect. It isn’t like now you walk across the Mexican border and you’re in. Those days you had to wait for a quota.

Some saving had to be done. For a period of time there was no butter on the table. We had honey instead; put honey on a slice of bread and that was the sandwich. But the trip was on. There was enough saved so dad could buy himself a steam ship ticket.

In the meantime he made application with the German consul that he wanted to migrate from Brazil to the United States, and he went.

**Kate:** What year?

**Erich:** That must have been ‘25. He come out to New York and he worked in New York a while. He couldn’t speak any English so he couldn’t break his trade. I know he worked as a dishwasher for a period of time. The advantage of that was if you worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant you at least got a meal.

Later on he went up Mount Kisco, New York. By that time he learnt English and he got in touch with a builder through a phone number, he got hired and he worked as a plaster. In fact my dad later on he worked for all the big building companies in New York. Kennedy was one of them. He helped put up [unclear 00:37:27] City, he helped put up the Empire State Building. My dad plastered the ceiling on the 102nd floor in the Empire State Building.

The day before it opened, I was going to trade school at that time, he took me along with him. We [unclear 00:37:44] and he got challenges on the bottom by the elevator operator. My dad told him something and the other guy said okay and up I went up to the 86th floor. I didn’t get up in the tower but up to the 86th floor. The next day Governor Al Smith opened up officially the Empire State Building.

**Kate:** We need to go back to Brazil a bit. Your father got here and he was at Mount Kisco he’s working as a plaster, and then what happened?

**Erich:** Then the following year we came up.

**Kate:** You went from Brazil to New York?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** From where in Brazil?

**Erich:** We were in the small town of Porto Union under Liberty Iguaçu.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Erich:** I-G-U-A-S-U. Incidentally, my uncle had a son and his mother died in child birth so when I was down there he was a little mannino. Mannino is Portuguese for boy. I carried him around. Two years ago he came up here to visit me from Brazil.

**Kate:** Part of your family stayed in Brazil?

**Erich:** Yes my uncle stayed down there.

**Kate:** When you came, you came with whom, your mother?

**Erich:** My mother, my brother, and my uncle; the one who was a minor at that time when we left Germany. My mother had legal rights over him. He was my mother’s brother. He was a Rosenthal.

**Kate:** You came together… where did you leave from? What port did you leave from?

**Erich:** Santos.

**Kate:** Santos to New York?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** How did you get to Santos?

**Erich:** First of all we were back in the [unclear 00:39:58], small town of 4,000 population that time. We went to school down there. School was not compulsory in those years in Brazil but my dad wanted us to have education so he sent us to school.

In the meantime my uncle had moved to Curitiba. He got notified by mail and he came back to us and the four of us got on to the boat and we rowed to Sao Paolo.

**Kate:** Curitiba, how do you spell that?

**Erich:** C-U-R-I-T-I-B-A.

**Kate:** The house that you lived in Brazil, was it an apartment or a house?

**Erich:** It was a house. That house was little less than half finished. My dad bought it. Someone couldn’t finish for whatever reason. He finished it by working Saturdays and Sundays and in the evenings when he was done with his regular job, came home for supper and had two or three hours’ time before it got dark. He went up, it wasn’t too far from where my uncle lived, and they nailed it together. It was all boards, no insulation.

**Kate:** How big?

**Erich:** First of all the house was up on blocks. I know as kids we used to run under the house and play under the house. We had a kitchen, we had a storage room, and we had a bedroom. Dad put a stairs up and there was two clothes space bedrooms upstairs with ceiling; added rooms.

That house was all finished and we had moved before my dad left for America then mama was alone with us two boys. My uncle was in Curitiba by this time already. We managed.

Things got a little rough and mama got to scoop pail out and mop. I went along with my mom, my brother wouldn’t go. We used to [unclear 00:42:39]; mop the floor, clean the [unclear 00:42:44]. In those days [unclear 00:42:45] were standing on every corner. It’s another dirty habit that was eliminated, thank God. In order to get a couple of… down here that time the currency was reis; now I think they call it cruceiros.

**Kate:** You’ve got to spell these for me.

**Erich:** C-R-U-C-E-I-R-O I think it is.

**Kate:** You went with your family to Santos by train?

**Erich:** Yes, we got to Sao Paolo finally. Mom wanted to go as a domestic. She had to work to support herself. My uncle found work in the building place They were worried over the boys.

My mother went to a church. She had information from some source, speaking to neighbours. She went to the church. They in turn had some old age home on the outskirts of Sao Paolo. The area was known as Santa Ana. She spoke to the pastor down there who was in charge and my mother would pay. The church was happy. They also had orphans. There was an orphanage. It was a combination; old age home with orphanage.

**Kate:** Your mother went to work in Sao Paolo?

**Erich:** She did, as a domestic and we got put into this orphanage.

**Kate:** What year was that?

**Erich:** This was 1926. It was prior to us coming to the States.

**Kate:** So she was trying to save more money?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** And put you in an orphanage?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** How long were you there?

**Erich:** Couple of months, three months four months waiting for the quota, for a notification from the German that we were getting permission to enter United States.

**Kate:** How was it?

**Erich:** A little on the primitive side. The children were mixed. There were some real Brazilian children, there were some children there that actually had no parents. It was well-organized. Two sisters were running it; two German sisters. I never saw a man around there so they must have been bachelor girls. They were running it and I’d say they were doing a good job.

I was practically one of the oldest ones there. I was 12 years old at that time. We had to pitch in in the kitchen, help with the kitchen work, then when meal time came, there were long tables like picnic tables with benches, we had to set the tables and also clear the tables off after eating was done. They had a chef that did the cooking and the two sisters they were more in the managing of it than they were hired to help do the job.

They had dormitories; one for the girls and one for the boys. Every morning we had to get up and we had to attend school. I was put in charge [inaudible 00:46:26]. There was a German school out there. It was up on a hill. It had a German teacher there. Everything was bilingual down there.

I remember this teacher being in front of the classroom with a violin. This was music study. He taught us the Auld Lang in German and Auld Lang in Portuguese and every time I hear that I can see the teacher in front of me; it becomes a lullaby with a violin he’s there teaching us how to sing it and I couldn’t sing a note.

**Kate:** This went on for a couple of months. Did you see your mother during that time at all?

**Erich:** Yes. Every weekend my mom and my uncle would come up and pick us up.

**Kate:** And take you where?

**Erich:** Into Sao Paolo and in order not to spend much money we went to these historical places. South America is grateful to have all these museums up and they’ve got the statues out of so and so. We went buzzing in there and we usually have a cup of coffee and piece of [unclear 00:47:58] and that was our outing.

**Kate:** When did you finally realize you’re going to go to the States?

**Erich:** We were there then we got notified from Santos. The German consul was in Santos. In fact I’ve got the passport, I’ve got the steam ship ticket that we came up on.

**Kate:** Do you remember the moment when they said you’re going now?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** When was that?

**Erich:** I looked at the dates this morning. It was August 2nd stamped in the passport to go United States.

**Kate:** What was the [inaudible 00:48:40] about that? Your attitude.

**Erich:** We were happy of course. On August the 3rd we entered the Western World ship; we boarded the ship on Santos in 1926.

**Kate:** How did you get from Sao Paolo to Santos?

**Erich:** They had a railroad running from Santos to Sao Paolo. Sao Paolo is high up in the mountains; Santos is a port city and you could smell the coffee. That was the coffee town in those days. You could smell the coffee miles away already.

They had a railroad running. It was a British railroad. That was fuelled with coal and on certain stretches of that trip, it was a two-hour railroad trip from Sao Paolo to Santos, they had to hook up on a cable car. They had a third rail between the two rails where the wheels run and they had cogwheels on it. In other words when you’re climbing up the train would not fly backwards.

At that age you notice everything. I remember that very well because we made the trip to Santos and Sao Paolo couple of times before it all finalized [unclear 00:50:05]. We stayed overnight in Santos and next day we boarded the ship.

**Kate:** What was the ship like?

**Erich:** It was the Western World in the Monsoon line. It was an American line. The name of the ship was Western World. It was nice. Everything was painted white and that’s where it all came in. We got on and the pursers start asking questions, mama looks at me and I… while we lived in the orphanage, that’s where they also taught me English and it helped. I had to do the interpreting from Portuguese, German… when mom and I communicated most of the time we spoke German and now we get on the ship they only speak English. I did the interpreting, we managed.

The purser understood me. He wanted to know who’s this who’s that. I said, “That’s my brother.” “Who’s that?” “Mother.” Those words are almost the same as German. Then we got on steerage. We slept that night next morning we wake up we were in Rio de Janeiro. We had couple of hours so we walked through Rio de Janeiro sight-seeing then by afternoon we had to be back then the ship left. It was a 12- day trip to get up to New York.

**Kate:** How was the trip?

**Erich:** Very nice. It was a little rough in the beginning but on this trip, it was my second ocean voyage, I didn’t get sea sick.

**Kate:** Did anybody with you get sea sick?

**Erich:** Yes, quite a few people on board were sea sick.

**Kate:** How about your family?

**Erich:** My brother got sea sick, mother got sea sick a bit but after two or three days they straightened out.

**Kate:** What was the food like on that boat?

**Erich:** I’d say it was good. It was an improvement over what we had in Brazil. Things were meagre down there.

**Kate:** Did any family members see you off on that boat?

**Erich:** No.

**Kate:** When did the ship depart? The month and the year.

**Erich:** August 3rd 1926.

**Kate:** The dining room?

**Erich:** It was large. The sleeping quotas were at steerage again.

**Kate:** Do you have any anecdotes about that voyage? Did anything funny happen?

**Erich:** No, but I do remember the crew members dressed in white, rank-wise maybe just below the captain. The crews they walked among the passengers and check out how everything is, everybody fine.

One of them was very nice. He had American coins. He had a dime he pointed out, and then he had chocolate; Kisses, so we got some of them. He gave us [unclear 00:53:36] there, make friends, give you a dime and then [unclear 00:53:39] and that happened.

Another inciden I remember is as we got up to the States, the weather got warmer although Brazil was warm already. They didn’t have a party on the ship for crossing equator. It was only doing down to Brazil from north [unclear 00:53:57] crossing the equator coming up. But as we got on Florida we saw a lot of sea weed floating in the ocean and we were told that’s the Gulf Stream and that in two or three days we would be in New York.

**Kate:** Do you remember seeing land for the first time in New York?

**Erich:** Yes. We were coming up and everybody wanted to see the Statue of Liberty. We knew it was there; we were told about it. Everybody was on the rail waiting to see it and they saw it. It was a hot day. It wasn’t too cold but it was cloudy, the skyscrapers looked so dark.

**Kate:** What was the atmosphere in the boat?

**Erich:** Everybody was happy. We didn’t pull in to Manhattan. We pulled in on the Jersey side. It might have been Hoboken or one of those places. We pulled in there and first class got let off, then we got taken on to a ferry type boat to Ellis Island from there.

**Kate:** What do you remember about Ellis Island?

**Erich:** I remember we were all going in and everybody else is going in. There they checked us out physically examination.

**Kate:** What did they do for the examination?

**Erich:** They look in your eyes. I remember my mother taking great pains that we washed our eyes out while we still lived in Brazil because she had heard rumors that there you had poor eyesight, they won’t let us into the country so in Brazil we were given eye drops every night. We passed that with no eye problems at all. We got told, “You go down here” and my uncle went down that way. Him being an adult on his own by now, he got let off.

**Kate:** You mean he went out directly?

**Erich:** Yes. My mother, with two minor children, they wouldn’t let her go. My dad didn’t know we were coming up from Brazil. Mail communication 60 years ago was a lot different than it is now. He didn’t know we were coming up. They mailed out telegrams. Mother had an address of where he was but the telegrams all came back. He had moved from one furnished room to another. Finally one called him and he came. That was after three days.

**Kate:** You were detained three days?

**Erich:** Three days.

**Kate:** Where did you stay?

**Erich:** On Ellis Island. We had nice sleeping quotas, nice white sheets, clean beds and food was good.

**Kate:** Did you stay together?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** You weren’t separated from your mother?

**Erich:** I don’t think so.

**Kate:** When you got in there do you remember the great hall?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** What was the atmosphere when you first went in?

**Erich:** As a child it didn’t hit me too bad but everybody was sitting on their own. You had all different nationalities of people there.

**Kate:** Was it crowded?

**Erich:** It was pretty well filled up.

**Kate:** What were the conditions like? Was it maintained?

**Erich:** It was good; nice and clean. Anything coming up from the South Americas was an improvement.

**Kate:** You stayed there three days and you said the meal was good?

**Erich:** Yes. When the meal was all over we even got ice cream. That was a big thing.

**Kate:** Was there anything new you never saw before there?

**Erich:** No, because I’d been on the island down in Rio. They took us to class there and they start teaching us English on Ellis Island.

**Kate:** They started giving you English lessons?

**Erich:** Yes. They had a classroom there and they took the children in for classes.

**Kate:** Did your mother go for classes too?

**Erich:** I don’t remember whether mom came along or not. She might have stayed in the big room and they just took the children into the classroom and teach them English.

**Kate:** Where you slept was kind of conditions was that? You said there were sheets and there were pillow cases. Where were they?

**Erich:** That again was sort of a steerage type thing. Sleep here, no one slept above but everything was nice and clean.

**Kate:** Your dad came to get you. Where did you go from there?

**Erich:** My dad comes and they have us all prepared to leave. We were in a room very much like if you have to go and see a magistrate in a court house. Whoever sat up there, could have been a judge or acting as a judge, he was the man that made the decision.

First thing was to have my dad up there. My mother had to sit up there then the two boys get called up. The questions were, “Is that your father?” “Yes.” They want to be sure that we got in the right hands. I think that’s what it was all about. We got cleared there. We had our suitcases with us already.

We headed for the ferry and the ferry took us to South Ferry [unclear 01:00:08] and we get off there and had the elevators. Sixth Avenue, Ninth Avenue, Third Avenue, Second Avenue elevators were still up. I said to dad, “Which one, dad?” He says, “The third one.” So we went up to the Third Avenue elevators and we got off at 28th Street or 29th Street on the Third Avenue those days. In that corner, my dad was living in a furnished room. We got there and naturally then he rented another furnished room; the two boys in the furnished room for sleeping nights and mom and dad in the other room.

In the street we were ashamed because we couldn’t speak English and strange enough we didn’t go down the street immediately and start playing with the neighborhood children. We just sat up in the window looking out. There was a market and train I see in those days. Outdoor market with the push carts, and we were watching up the city going on and it was interesting.

In the meantime mom and dad they went up and looked for an apartment and they wound up in Yorkville in the 80’s and they found someone that was selling an apartment with the furniture. Mom and dad bought that one.

**Kate:** Bought an apartment?

**Erich:** Yes, with the furniture in it.

**Kate:** Or rented it?

**Erich:** No, bought the apartment then paid the rent. They bought the furniture.

**Kate:** They bought the furniture then paid rent?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** How big was that apartment?

**Erich:** It had two bedrooms, it had a kitchen. It was a cold water flat.

**Kate:** What was the address of that?

**Erich:** 524 East 82nd Street.

**Kate:** What was your father working as at that time?

**Erich:** He was working as a plaster.

**Kate:** Did your mother go to work?

**Erich:** No.

**Kate:** Did you go to school?

**Erich:** Yes. 78th Street New York Avenue, PS 158.

**Kate:** Describe when you first went to school there did you have any taunting there? Did people make fun of you?

**Erich:** Yes. I came home one day with a shiner. My dad says, “I hope you won. If you didn’t you’re going to get one from me”.

**Kate:** What was the fight about?

**Erich:** We had a guy in the class of Italian descent and he was taunting and we wound up at 79th Street New York Avenue we got into a fight. I couldn’t box. From Germany I was used more to wrestling. You wrestled a guy when you had an argument with him, pin him down. He starts swinging and showing off, my eyes start popping and swelling. I had a blue eye so I started swinging too. I swung and swung and finally I connected. He’s lying on the floor. The man on the corner, it was a drug store, he came up and picked him up. That was the end of that. I walked home. We lived 82nd this is 79 so I walked home. I come home mama, “What happened to you?” so I had to explain.

**Kate:** Was there only one person or was it lots of kids who made fun?

**Erich:** Just primarily this guy.

**Kate:** How about your teachers were they nice to you?

**Erich:** They were nice to me.

**Kate:** Do you have any anecdotes about learning English?

**Erich:** It wasn’t tough at all. But after this fighting incident, next day we had to see the principal and come into classroom with a shiner. The whole school knew it. By that time the principal knew it already so I got called in and had to explain to him. The other guy got called in too but separately. We didn’t go in together. The principal’s name was Mr. Weinberg. He listened to my story and listened to the other and nobody bothered me anymore. They left me alone. There was no more wise guys in the school.

**Kate:** In that apartment that you lived was there indoor plumbing?

**Erich:** Just cold water.

**Kate:** What about the toilet facilities?

**Erich:** I think they had private toilets.

**Kate:** What about heating?

**Erich:** A cold stove in the kitchen.

**Kate:** Describe a little bit then, your life after that. What did you do? Professionally what schooling did you go?

**Erich:** I graduated the grammar school at PS 158 in end of June 1929. The Wall Street guys came that fall. In the meantime my dad always said, “My boys are not going to get in the building trade. It’s too tough. What are you going to be?” I said, “I want to be a cop.” I never grew tall enough to become a cop.

My dad came home with a story he says, “The printers are making good money.” I said, “Okay, I want to become a printer”. Nobody would hire me. The crash is on, we had no family connections with anyone that was in the printing trade. I remember one time my mother went with me down to the Staats Zeitung on Hell’s Square, Lower Manhattan.

**Kate:** The what?

**Erich:** Staats Zeitung

**Kate:** What’s that?

**Erich:** That was a German newspaper. S-T-A-A-T-S and Zeitung is newspaper. The paper was published to the war years in World War Two. They had a front page, ‘An American Newspaper in the German Language’. That was the slogan.

**Kate:** So you went down there?

**Erich:** Yes, for information; how to get into the printing trade. They spoke to my mother. They couldn’t do much but they gave us a few suggestions and I went to a trade school up in Harlem Vocational High School on 138th Street between 5th and Madison Avenue right alongside the Harlem River.

I remember going up with a Lexington Avenue train, get off at 135th Street and walk over the Harlem River Bridge to the school. They taught there the printing trade, the electrical trade, carpentry, and other trades too. We had academics in the morning and we had shop practice in the afternoons. That was a two-year course. I’m 15 years old at this time. I had bookbinding very good and I picked up on it pretty good. A dorm with a linotype machines where he had five linotype machines…

**Kate:** What kind of type?

**Erich:** Linotype. That’s what I became; one of those operators and I think I was the only one in the whole class who became a linotype operator. For these five machines the teacher’s name was Shannon. He had always one boy down there services those five machines. That boy was graduating and I’d been there a year so now I’m in my second year. He always had a test; a spelling test and a machine test for the class who would get that job.

I did alright in the spelling and I did alright in the machine [inaudible 01:08:31]. He got me excused from all the other academics and also from all other shops such a bookbinding, presswork. I didn’t have to do it anymore. I stayed in that linotype room of his and did all the servicing for the machines.

I had to take the machines apart, I had to put it together, oil it up put it back together. It didn’t hit that I would never become a linotype operator. There they had dummy keyboards and you had to learn the fingering system. That’s the first time in a linotype you had to have your left hand in this position to work the ETAIO Inc. in this [unclear 01:09:17]. They keyboard had 96 buttons. I said to myself, “I’ll never learn this thing.” I did; I learnt it.

**Kate:**  So you became a…

**Erich:** A linotype operator.

**Kate:** Then what happened?

**Erich:** I’m two years out of there then I had to look for work. Now it’s 1931. I was in employment agencies and answered newspaper ads and running around. Finally I got letters wrote of here and there. There was a fellow by the name of Weinberg who answered one of my letters. When I went to see him, he was a handicapped man. He owned the place, had two linotype machines. He had a club foot. He hired me. Got to talk later on when we graduated he said, “Whatever you do when you get out in the world, work for nothing just keep your fingers on the keyboard. Don’t forget the fingering of the keyboard”. He hired me for a couple of bucks a week and I worked for him a while.

It happened that we lived 84th Street by this time, Four East 84th [unclear 01:11:07] was opening up underneath, three or four steps down they had apartments in some of those old houses. This house was being converted and they moved linotype machines in there. I saw that as I was on my way home from the subway. So I stopped one day and got talking to him. I got hired at $15 a week. I worked for him for years.

**Kate:** How many years?

**Erich:** Till I got the union card. He organized the shop.

**Kate:** Did you remain a linotype operator all your life?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** Did you marry?

**Erich:** Yes, I was 31 when I got married.

**Kate:** Did you marry someone of German descent?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** How did you meet?

**Erich:** We met in a bicycle club. I became a biker. In the meantime of all this I got into sports. I took some boxing and I found out that was not good. The other guys had a longer reach. I only had three to sleeve length. The boxing game they go by weight and I was 135 pounds. I’m 5’5, 135 pounds, and the other guys are 135 pounds and he stands 5’8. He’s got a reach that much longer than I have.

**Kate:** So boxing was out?

**Erich:** Boxing was out.

**Kate:** And so you went to biking?

**Erich:** Yes I got into bike.

**Kate:** And you met your wife in a biking club?

**Erich:** At a bicycle club, yes.

**Kate:** She’s German too?

**Erich:** Yes. She was born in Manhattan.

**Kate:** Did you speak German to her?

**Erich:** Yes.

**Kate:** You met your wife, you were 31 years old; how long before you got married?

**Erich:** She was married so she had to get divorced first. Her husband joined the club and on social occasion, all the bicycle races, he brought his family along. He had two girls and he had a wife but it turned out the marriage was on the way down already. He was having extra-marital affairs.

I met her there but it didn’t mean a thing. We were friendly; we got introduced and talked, and then [unclear 01:13:44] and then he moved to California. When the war was on he wanted me to ship him his bicycle to California. He had to write to his wife and then I had to go up and see the wife because she had the bicycle. I took the bicycle to a bicycle dealer to crate it and then we shipped it out by UPS to California.

**Kate:** Must have been some bicycle.

**Erich:** Racing bicycles, not these regular ones. I got to know the wife better and she got divorced. In the meantime I’m living alone with my mother. My dad got sick; he got Parkinson’s and in 1939 in July he went to Germany because the doctors over here couldn’t do a thing for him. It’s the first Parkinson’s disease. They didn’t know much about it. He was hoping that in Europe they could help him more. He’s out there and the war breaks out September 1st. Hitler, the crazy, matches into Poland. My dad went through a whole mess in Europe.

While he’s over there and the war is on, I’m with mama. My brother got married in the meantime so mama and I are alone. That kept me out of the war for towards the end then finally the draft board got me down, they set me for physical, I passed that, and then they changed it. They wouldn’t take anyone over 29 anymore. We were starting to win. The United States was starting to win.

I was just over the 29 so I never saw any service and I didn’t get called because my mother kept me out of the war. She had nobody else; father in Germany. My brother he served.

**Kate:** What happened to your father?

**Erich:** My mother died. She had ulcer perforate in the intestines, got peritonitis. In those days we didn’t have penicillin yet. If there was penicillin I think we had it only for the armed services. She passed away.

**Kate:** In what year?

**Erich:** ‘45.

**Kate:** What happened to your dad?

**Erich:** I got married about three weeks after my mother died. I was free. We were living in West 75th Street, furnished, wife with her two daughters. One fine day we get a letter by way of Red Cross. It’s my dad from Germany. In a nutshell the care packages were bribed out and then we established communication with the mail.

My wife was working and I got a steady job at the news finally as a sub. I worked as a sub at the New York Daily News from 1936 to 1944 before I got a steady job. I subbed at the Wall Street Journal, at the New York Times, at the Daily Mirror, at the [unclear 01:17:38] and at the Daily News but in the Daily News I stayed. I had my traveller’s card deposited there so I was establishing priority, seniority there for a job.

**Kate:** Did your father ever come back to the United States?

**Erich:** No. Parkinson’s was so bad that he couldn’t make a trip. We asked him whether he wanted to come back home and he said no. I went out to see him in 1948 on a compassionate visit. I had to go down to the Pentagon building, mama came along. We had a car we drove down that night. By morning we were in Washington, we went to a restaurant…

**Kate:** Who was mama now?

**Erich:** My wife. We had breakfast and we freshened up then went over to the Pentagon. I had to see lieutenant so and so. They gave me clearance to go on a compassionate visit to Germany.

I left from La Guardia airport in a converted B17 converted to passenger service. We flew to Gander, Newfoundland. From Gander, Newfoundland we flew into Shannon Airport, Ireland. We had a passenger aboard who wanted to go to Scotland so we flew up to Prestwick Airport, Scotland. From there we flew into Amsterdam and there we were held up because there was an airplane accident on the Berlin Airlift. [unclear 01:19:18] so we were sitting there. They wouldn’t let us out of the airport because we had no visa for Holland.

**Kate:** But you eventually saw your father?

**Erich:** Yes. We got into Frankfurt that night and then I got myself a way out on the railroad then I go down to [unclear 01:19:41]. You might have heard of Baden? We were not far from there.

**Kate:** Would your father have come if he would have been able to come physically back to the United States?

**Erich:** He would have come back. He was an American citizen all this while.

**Kate:** When you look back on your life in terms of evaluation for your family coming, how do you view your immigration to the United States?

**Erich:** One of the best things that ever happened. I thanked my father for bringing me to the United States while I was out there. I says, “If you hadn’t brought me to United States I’d be in Russia pushing up daisies”. He was crying; he was so happy that I recognized the fact. If I’d stayed in Germany I would have been in the military over there. I wouldn’t have survived so I thanked him for bringing me to the United States.

**Kate:** Your father felt that his decision to go to the United States was a good one?

**Erich:** Yes, definitely.

**Kate:** Your mother?

**Erich:** Also.

**Kate:** And your brother?

**Erich:** Also.

**Kate:** How about your cousin?

**Erich:** My uncle? Also.

**Kate:** You think that everybody viewed this very positively?

**Erich:** Absolutely.

**Kate:** I’d like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for helping us in participating in this.

**Erich:** Incidentally my dad died the following year, 1949. He was born ’88 but then he died in ’49 so by then he was 61 years old.

**Kate:** Did you or any of your family members ever want to go or return to Germany to live?

**Erich:** No; visit yes. I haven’t been back since. The story of my wife is she was born in New York. She was four years older than I was so she was 1909 and her father and mother immigrated to the United States from Hungary that time before war number one. They met on a ship and they married in New York. A brother was born then my wife was born in 1909.

There was an inheritance to be collected over in Hungary. You couldn’t get the money out of the country so they went over there, she was a couple years old, and the World War number one breaks out. Her father got drafted over in the Hungarian army, survived it, the war is all over with and he says, “Why should I go back to the States? I fought for the country I might as well stay here.” He was back in his hometown.

He didn’t like it too much over here. He was a bricklayer and the pace of laying bricks was too fast for him. I heard that from other people. They came from Europe and they couldn’t stand the pace over here. They were more take it easy over in Europe.

**Kate:** You knew of Germans who did go back?

**Erich:** I’ve heard of that. This was one incident. He got back and got hang up in the war and he said, “I fought for the country I might as well stay here”.

**Kate:** Did you have more children than your two daughters?

**Erich:** Yes. My wife had two girls by her first husband; my wife had two daughters by her second husband. I got a Carol, my first born. She called last night. She lives in Clifton, New Jersey, and my Brenda calls every Sunday. She lives outside of Boston in Massachusetts.

**Kate:** Is your wife still living?

**Erich:** No she passed away a little over two years ago. Second stroke; she got the first stoke in… we were visiting. We lived 13 years in Phoenix, Arizona. Sun City; from New York we moved down there. That was back in 1976. We used to come up here and visit. In one of the visits, Joanita my daughter who lives next door, daughter by marriage, she’s single. She lived on the other end of town and we’d stay there. She had an extra room, extra bathroom for us and we’d sometimes come up for two or three weeks. We had the house set when Joanita would go to New York and visit.

One of them, three days before we were slated to go back to Phoenix, my wife gets a stroke about nine in the morning. We was having our second cup of coffee and we are talking along, every conversation is in English, and she starts slurring her speech and she starts talking German and when I look at her, her eyes start rolling. I grab her; she didn’t fall. I said, “Honey you had a stroke.” “Huh? I had no stroke.” I got on the phone, 911, and I called Joanie up. They were home in no time and we put her in the Sunrise Hospital.

She was in there 12 days then head on to UMC for 50 days for therapy; speech therapy and physical therapy. She got through that very nicely; speech came out very nice, physically she was a little affected on the left side. Her memory, the old things from years and years ago she remembered very well but what happened yesterday she couldn’t remember. But we could converse and we would travel back and forth for years.

Finally, down at Sun City, I get up one morning and I get chest pains. By afternoon I still got the chest pains so I said to my wife, “Honey I got chest pains all day.” She says, “Why aren’t you going to a hospital?” So I called them up, the Boswell hospital in Sun City, and they told me to come on down. No sooner I drive myself. I left my wife alone now, nobody to take care of her. Not that she needed care but if anything goes wrong there was nobody there to help her.

They gave me a thorough examination; must have been three hours or more and then finally discharge me and they said what I had was anxiety pains. I said, “This is a sign”. It happens to me there’s no one down here to take care of mama, we’re moving to Las Vegas. Mama was all for that. She loved Las Vegas. We put the house up for sale and this is when the big problem started in Phoenix with the Keating Five. The S&Ls were swindled and more houses were being sold. I couldn’t sell my house so we had enough to put down payment over here but then it came that I had to pay cash for this one here or take a mortgage out. I took a mortgage and then I needed another mortgage. I had to take a bridge mortgage.

We’re living up the house down here, I got a mortgage, I was paying three mortgages at one time. Finally we sold the house down there and that solved everything. The house there sold, that mortgage got absorbed by the man that bought the house. The bridge mortgage I paid off with the profits, and this house was mortgaged already so I only got one mortgage. She liked it up here and she said, “I don’t ever want to go back to Phoenix.” The doctor told me first when we had her in Sunrise Hospital back she’d die.

We moved up here in July of ’89. Mama had her first stroke in 1987. He said the next one’s going to be it. We’re sitting here watching… It was a sad evening. We were watching the [unclear 01:28:12] right on that sofa there and we’re making comments about the different actors. Then it comes on the Golden Girls, then came on the Empty Nest but this time it’s 9:30 PM thereabout. I’m sitting on that end; mama’s sitting where you are so naturally she’s this side of me and I’m looking that way.

I make conversations I don’t get an answer. Take a look, my God, the silent killer. Face all distorted. I jump up; get on that phone, 911, Joanie is in Los Angeles. She went down with a couple of girls on a shopping spree. The 911 were up here in a couple of minutes. I knew it was the end. Her whole body was shaking. They came up and fire engines came up. They took her down. I left a note for Joan and locked up the house for her. She got three dogs they were all there so I took care of them. I got in the car and I got down here and I help mama.

I made a phone call; I got Joanie on the phone. I says, “When you come down let me come up and get you.” I drove up and got her and we both came back, and mama was recognizing us yet. She smiled at me, she squeezed Joanie’s hand, and from there on she was out.

The peak pressure to head up put her up in intensive; [unclear 01:30:06]. I said, “We signed one but I haven’t got it with me.” No life support. Then they put mama up into the fifth floor into another room they had up there. She had her eyes closed and all she was doing she was just breathing as far as I could see. The doctors never came by. That’s what I have against the… I used to like that Sunrise Hospital but I don’t care for them anymore; the attention we got.

These doctors knew that was hopeless but they didn’t tell us. We couldn’t see a doctor; the doctor never came up when we were there to check on my wife. She lying up there three days, four days. She died three of four days before her 81st birthday. That was 1990 November.

**Kate:** That was the big tragedy in your family then?

**Erich:** That was the biggest. After the war my brother and I had a falling out and I moved out here. There was no goodbye, no nothing. He stayed on his side of town and I stayed in my side. One fine day back in 1983 I get a phone call from some district attorney’s assistant locating missing persons. The gist of it was he finally found me after looking. He got my address from the New York Daily News and he wanted to inform me that my brother died. He had no children.

Far as I’m concerned that’s the biggest tragedy; losing my wife three years ago. We got along very well; lasted 45 years.

**Kate:** Did your children speak German?

**Erich:** Our Carol did very well while we still lived in Flushing, New York in Fresh Meadows area. She went to Francis Lewis High School there and she had to take foreign language.

**Kate:** Now that you are alone here but your children live in this country, did it ever occur to you to retire back in Germany?

**Erich:** Never. I haven’t been back since 1948.

**Kate:** You don’t have any desire to go back?

**Erich:** No. All my uncles that knew me, nine of them, they are all passed away by now. We did have visitors a year ago. I get a phone call one day here; a young girl on the phone. She says after a few words… she spoke English. She says in German, “Ich bin Weingartner” I says, “Who was your father?” She says, “Adolf”. “Adolf? Adolf lives in Brazil.” His son was here over two years and visited us; stayed 12 days with us. She says, “Yes.” “What was your grandfather’s name?” She says, “Frits. I said, “He worked at a brewery?” She says, “Yes.”

Frits, the grandfather who worked at a brewery, had two sons. One of them he named Adolf so there’s two Adolf Weingartners; one was in Brazil. He passed on already but he left a son by the name Alberto, whose mother died in child birth. He was up here in Brazil with his wife. He’s got a couple of sons. They are doing very well. One works a phone company in Brazil.

This young girl she was born in 1961. My wife and Joan they went out behind the Iron Curtain to visit her father. Hungary by this time is Romania. They got behind the Iron Curtain, they visit her father and Joanie’s grandfather, and on their way back they stopped to visit my relatives in Germany. While they were there a baby was born. That’s the girl that made a phone call but this time she’s grown up.

She came with her husband. He works for a bank out there in Germany. They both spoke English. They took a tour from Germany to LA, rented a car, and drove to [unclear 01:35:18]. She called from [unclear 01:35:20]. I said, “How will I know you as I’ll come down to meet you?” I go down to [unclear 01:35:27], people walking by. Finally, that must be her. I picked the right one. It was her. I called Joanie in the meantime. Before going she’s working for the Colorado [unclear 01:35:44] and told her that we’re going to have company for the evening. So I brought her up and we talked and then we went out to dinner. We went over to [unclear 01:35:58] had something to eat.

They had rented a little automobile and they travelled all the way from LA to here, next day they were headed for Death Valley and from there I guess back again. I haven’t seen them since. They went back home and they had a little son born and they named him Simon, S-I-M-O-N. I thought what the heck is Simon? Naming somebody Simon? But that’s what the modern Germans are doing now. They’re getting more odd names.

When we got into grammar school in PS 158, the teachers couldn’t say Eric. My brother’s name is Kuyt. I got renamed Richard, they called me Dick for the duration I was in school, my brother got named Harry. Now Eric is a common name and Kuyt’s a common name but 60 years ago that was an unusual name.

**Kate:** Again I’d like to thank you and I’d like to tell you that we will send you this.

**Erich:** I enjoyed doing this. I find you both very nice. You made the job easy for me.

**Kate:** This is Kate Moore signing off in Sun City, Nevada on January 21st 1994 for the Ellis Island Oral History project.