

Interviewer: Well I just wanted to say Mrs. Knight that we are so pleased that you would take the time to share with us an opportunity to interview you and for you to share your story with us.

Knight: Okay

Interviewer: And I'd like to begin my asking you to tell us to introduce yourself to us and the viewers.

Knight: Okay my name is Helga Knight I'm 74 years old. I was born in Boholm Germany that's the northern part of Germany. I grew up there until the war came until we got bombed out. That's when we went to my grandmother but I don't remember how old we were we wasn't very old but I would say eight or ten years old something like that. We got bombed out where we was living. And so there was no place to go and my grandmother lived in Luther Town Lautenberg. So we went to visit my grandmother and that's where we stayed because everything was bombed out. The Americans came and just wiped out the cities I mean in a way that was at the beginning but in the end in a way that was very hurtful to see that same situation here and then have that same situation living from the American people and the American people talking about doing things in other countries you know. There was nothing but women all the men power anything the children my brother was 17 years old when he was drafted at the end you know. So but they came in and just wiped out the cities just bombed bomb bomb after bomb you know. And we was in we lived in a city in an apartment complex so we dug holes from the basement from each apartment just the whole street. We made a hole so that if one got bombed we could crawl through that basement hole into this next basement. So that was a horrible time. I saw a woman standing in the street with a baby in her hand burning to death because the asphalt they threw them phosphorus bombs and the asphalt was so sticking everywhere that woman couldn't make it she it was that's the horrors of war. Now we're talking about Vietnam War but that's the same thing over there. War is always horrifying so no matter where you're at or where you live or whatever war is terrible.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am wow. Well let me ask you Mrs. Knight what was it like prior to the war? What was pre-war life like for you as a young girl?

Knight: It was good we had Hitler was good to the country. He had everybody had a job everybody had food everything was made available. People was working hard but that is what made it flow that the family could exist and families could live good you know. So we had he done a lot of good things for the country Hitler did. And everybody was behind him because he was supporting all the families and all the people of the country. So you couldn't help but be for him because that's the major thing of the population that they're taken care of by the government you know.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am well do you recall hearing conversation by your parents or your grandparents about the transitions that was made by Hitler coming to power and being able to bring the country into an era of prosperity out of the hardships that World War I caused? Do you remember them talking about how hard it was after the first World War and how the economy just seemed to drop off and?

Knight: No I don't know anything about that part.

Interviewer: But you did obviously did see the positive affects you were mentioning of his coming to power and being able to provide.

Knight: See Hitler came to power in what 39? No 33 wasn't it 1933. So I was born in 26 I was only seven years old you know. So I was a child I don't know that much I just know later on in my life and in my country when I became an adult you know.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am. You were talking earlier when we were visiting you mentioned some of the thing he did. What were some of the specific things that Hitler made as a contribution to the country?

Knight: He built the autobahn in Germany I mean from one end to the other it's still there today because it was built so precise and so good that there have never ever been any problem with that autobahn. So everybody had a job you know because it took millions of people to build that autobahn and I don't know how many years it took before that was ever completed. But that was Hitler's major contribution to the country.

Interviewer: Wow well you were talking about we were talking about life in pre-war Germany. What was an average day like for you as a young school girl in the pre-war period?

Knight: Oh well we went to school and we had all kinds of organizations we belonged to like it's more like I don't know what you call it over here. Like Boy Scouts we had like Girl Scouts Camps things to go to. And we had a lot of sport activities that was from the schools for the children you know and so we was never bored on the street. There was always some something going on and something that we was involved in. But that was all done by the government so we had a good life we can't complain at all.

Interviewer: What was thank you for describing that for us. What was it like you said that many of those activities were provided by the government for the people to be able to give them things to do. Well I guess I'm curious my next question could be what was it like to see some of the culmination of the events that were starting to unfold that was leading towards the breakout in war? Were you as a school girl were you aware of some of the things that were going on in Europe and?

Knight: well this was later on when the Jewish situation came up that the Jewish people had such a hold on the German economy that before they discovered that they were so powerful that there was no more stopping the Jew. And so that's when Hitler became berserk because he didn't know what to do so he took the drastic measure rather than to run the people out of the country to do what he did. So that is one terrible stigma that we as German people have to carry for the rest of our life even though we had nothing to do with it. And was totally unaware of it, it sounds so spaced out and when you tell it over here that we didn't know what went on it Dachau or Buchenwaid or the Auschwitz or the we was told those were hard labor camps for people that didn't obey the government or whatever they would put them in there for hard labor camp. So it was all under barbed wire and under and even the people in their own town living across the street did not know what went on inside of there. We was so devastated just like you all when you came and went to these camps. We was as the people of the country we was just devastated and cried and cried and carried on like when they opened it up for us to get in there we was just shocked to no end. That that took place over there that was just horrifying. I walked down the street one time to go shopping and all of a sudden window opened up and here come a china cabinet thrown out of the window onto the street. So the German soldiers and the government all of this was from the government to just destroy everything the Jew had. Which was terrible to us you know but there was nothing we could do nothing at all.

Interviewer: Well I know one of the things you had mentioned when we were talking earlier is how we're given a certain perspective in that with the certainly as you mentioned I'm sure that you all were

horrified when you realized that these hard labor camps weren't just hard labor camps that they were in fact extermination sites.

Knight: Yeah

Interviewer: For a better term. But you had said something that I certainly had never considered in that Hitler you said Hitler went berserk at one point because of just the incredible financial and economic control that Jewish people had on the German people.

Knight: Yes

Interviewer: And would you care to share a little bit more about that? About just the fact that they did have incredible control on things?

Knight: Well the Jewish people came and walked from door to door to make money they walked from door to door. The German people a lot of people was poor at that time and they'd come and sell underwear, shoes or whatever for a dime a week or a quarter a week. So people could afford to buy it from them and that's what made them so powerful see because they was in every home and every suit. And there was making money and the Jewish people was always protecting each other and helping each other out. And then of course the governmental part we as young people didn't know anything about it until the whole thing came lose you know that they had such a hold. Because they had so much power so much money had a hold infiltrated into the government too. So that's what we was told so.

Interviewer: Did you have families that you went to school with or knew that were Jewish and that or people that owned businesses in your community?

Knight: No had no contact with it at all. Just like I said we didn't even know such a thing existed such a thing until they started throwing the furniture out and tried to ship the Jews out you know. And so really and truly I have not seen for myself that I can say guess what the Jewish people did to the country you know. But that was in generality the comments that why that took place. It had to have a reason some way along the line why they done what they did you know.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am well another question I just happened to think of that goes back to right as the war was beginning to break out. Were you aware as a young as a girl some of the situations that were beginning to evolve and Hitler's and the government's move to move into other areas of Europe. And as far as some of the invasions that began to take place and build up militarily. Were y'all aware you and your family did you hear things on the radio?

Knight: No we was not allowed to listen to the radio it was kept from us see. We had somebody standing outside and listen around the house. And my daddy secretly turned on the radio to hear something you know. No it was never broadcasted we didn't know a thing we was kept. And whoever got caught listening to it wound up in jail. SO it was

Interviewer: When did that start taking place? Was it after things started heating up and?

Knight: Yeah uh huh after the war uh huh after the things got rolling.

Interviewer: I was just wondering if things sort of caught you all unexpectedly that suddenly you find out that

Knight: Well see nothing ever was broadcasted we didn't find out anything you know because unless you listened it was nothing in the newspapers or anything. So we was kept in the dark with that.

Interviewer: So just suddenly you find out later that Germany is embroiled in the midst of war on more than one front. And well that's fascinating

Knight: Well that part we knew that we was involved in Poland and in England and then in all kinds of things. But now my train of thought had left me isn't that awful.

Interviewer: Well what was I'll go on you'll probably think of what you were thinking on. I was just wondering what because every time I'm sitting here I keep thinking of more things. And one thing that I happened to think of is was there a certain perspective that y'all had on say on the British and on the people in Poland. Did when things did when things were mentioned in the paper or anything was there a lot of unity and support of the war effort starting early?

Knight: Yeah

Interviewer: And were there sacrifices that you and your family and people made towards the war effort?

Knight: Yeah everybody had to work everybody had to supply the war and go work in the factories and everybody had to we was the backbone of the military you know. It was we had to do it was young or old men had to go to work and support the war. We was behind the scene.

Interviewer: Was there a very strong sense of patriotism for the cause?

Knight: Yes we was yeah we was good people and we was proud people of our heritage and our world our little world we had. And we was very whatever took place we was supportive of it you know.

Interviewer: Were there let me ask you some questions like the support in the war effort. You said that everyone worked were there I was trying to draw a comparison to come of the people that I've talked to that were on the American home front and how they were supporting the war effort from the American angle. What was it like were there shortages on things were there rationings on different goods and services?

Knight: Yeah we had a lot we had ration yeah. So much of a pound of butter a week and that kind of stuff it was getting short as it progressed the war progressed you know. Yeah we was we had a lot of rationing everything like that was rationed food.

Interviewer: Did y'all have some sort of a system that you were allotted the rations. Did you have any kind of ration stamps or books or

Knight: Yeah

Interviewer: Things like that?

Knight: Yeah yeah we had rations books yeah. Sometimes we had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and stand in front of the store until they opened up at 8 o'clock if you're lucky. They only had so much butter that if you want a pound of butter you better get up at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and stand in the line so that you one of the lucky ones in the front that you get it you know. Yeah it was kind of tough then.

Interviewer: Did ya'll I'm curious if there were certain things allotted like a certain pair of shoes that you could get in a years' time or something like that. So much coffee or so many cigarettes that could be purchased.

Knight: Yeah yeah it was all rationed yeah it was. You had ration cards so many stamps for this and so many for this and when you used them up that was it.

Interviewer: Well did everyone in the family have a ration allotment like the mother and the father and each of the children? Did they have their own?

Knight: I don't really remember that if we had each individual ration card or if we just had family ration cards. All that though everything was rationed.

Interviewer: I just asked that because I was curious because I've been told that here in the states that every child every individual was given a certain amount and some really interesting things were done in that. They were traded and swapped around to be able to get things if someone had a larger amount of say for instance coffee and they needed something else they could trade for.

Knight: See we in Germany as German people the children the parents handled everything. The parents was in charge of everything so everything was kind of kept from the children you know. Dad was in charge so you obeyed and whatever you was told you did and that was it. You know it's not like it is over here we was very under the thumb of parents as children. So that's why we was always obedient to what was said or what we had to do. There was not repercussion that you said I'm not going to do it or the whatever. So it was run by the mother and father.

Interviewer: I've got a question here I've been given by my cohort. The question is how did the war begin for you. What was the initial stages and things that you remember when the war took off?

Knight: That was 1939 I think when the war broke out. Thirty nine what was I 13 years old no it was just broadcasted that we was a t war with who? I don't even know how it started out with who.

Interviewer: I think in 39 the forces I think the German army moved into Poland.

Knight: That's how it started yeah Czechoslovakia, Poland yeah. Well Hitler wanted to concur all the whole Europe. He just went berserk. He just didn't have enough man power to do what he wanted to do and not enough supplies there wasn't enough there.

Interviewer: We're there a lot of constrictions and drafts that went on starting out. Did you have your family affected by that say your father?

Knight: No not early on later on when things started getting thin you know he had too many front lines. England, France, Russia, Poland and it was too many what was Italy too. It was too many lines that he didn't have enough people to support everything properly.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am, I'm curious you were telling us a little bit about the war starting for you with that in 39 and all were there young people in your community that were going off to war young men?

Knight: Not at the beginning there wasn't because we had an army you know that everybody I don't even know anybody who had to serve. I know my brother-in-law my sister's husband was in the army. But later towards the end they took anything 50 year old males. My youngest brother was 17 when he was he wound up in Czechoslovakia and Poland up there. They took everything that walked every man that wasn't physically sick had to go to war.

Interviewer: Wow he was definitely Hitler was definitely trying

Knight: He was desperate for he didn't know no more power you know. Too many front lines.

Interviewer: Sure he did overextend himself.

Knight: Yeah of course we didn't we as the people we didn't like all of that stuff either but there was nothing we could do. We just we just

Interviewer: I'm sorry. What was life like in Lautenberg?

Knight: In Lautenberg? Well when we left home we went to my grandmother because we was bombed out and we of course my grandmother didn't have that much space. So we had three or four of us had to sleep in one bed and you know we were six children and I hate this when my thought gets interrupted. Well we went to school up there in Lautenberg and I don't know even know when did we go up there? We were still all in school we were still small we got bombed out and then we went to my grandmother. And then what was you asking me?

Interviewer: I was just asking what life was like when y'all moved to Lautenberg.

Knight: I don't remember.

Interviewer: You said y'all had moved there to escape and avoid the bombings.

Knight: Yeah

Interviewer: I guess I should probably go back because were those British and American bombings?

Knight: Yes a lot of Americans.

Interviewer: Industrial

Knight: Yeah a lot of Americans. It was going towards the end let's see the war finished in 45. So it might have been in 42. I don't remember when we went to my grandmother when that took place I still was small you know. And like I said it's not here I'm 13 I'm a teenager you're a kid when you're 13 in

Germany. You know you just don't know nothing you're just a kid. But anyhow I forgot what you was asking me.

Interviewer: What was your life like when y'all moved to Lautenberg?

Knight: No you asked me something else before.

Interviewer: Let's see I was asking about I guess one of the things I could ask you about was what it was like being in school and being limited to certain types of media such as broadcast. And perhaps things that you hear in school what was it like when you heard about the entry of America into the war? When they decided to jump in I mean was there a lot of aggravation or animosity that they you know were sort of sticking their nose into?

Knight: Like I say we were kids I don't remember that. I imagine the adults the grownups had that but us me myself I'm in my childhood you know. So I can only speak for what I experienced at that time. And then things progressed from there on that the bombing progressed and everything at that time was trying to destroy the backup part of the army see. But there was no manpower left but we was still working in factories and things and supporting the war more or less to say. So I remember specifically one night it was 2 o'clock in the morning and I lived from Dresden Germany I lived about 60 miles away from there. And it was 2 o'clock in the morning and we was out in the backyard and you could read the newspaper at 2 o'clock in the morning.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness.

Knight: There had destroyed that city that night totally you might as well say blood running down the street. They threw them phosphorus bombs and burned up that

Interviewer: From all the fire?

Knight: And it was such a cultural city in such beauty as far as churches and old things. It was one of the very special cities that was destroyed that night. Now you can imagine if you can read the newspaper 60 miles away what that was the whole sky was just lit up in fire. So that was the Americans bombing Dresden that night. And then it got to we could never go to sleep alarm goes and here we go running for the basement you know. And then my dad had dug a hole in the back yard and put a bench in there so we could get underground when the alarm went off. And then further on towards the end we could never take our clothes off because that alarm might come ten times during the night. And we had to be ready to get out you know.

Interviewer: My goodness

Knight: So it was very very rough as a child to go through all of that. And then towards closer to the end it kept getting worse and worse and worse. And they had bunkers built in town for everybody went in and stayed in there. You know we just moved in there because there was no way we had no more safe place anywhere.

Interviewer: My goodness I mean couldn't imagine what that must have been like.

Knight: Yeah it was very it was very horrifying. And then of course from then on when the war was over when all of that took place and then the war was over and so we were glad it's all over. But then the horror began again because then the Russians moved in the Americans moved in everybody moved in. But everybody was fearful we had such propaganda about the Russian people. Everybody was fearful of the Russian people everybody wanted to go where the American people was. So everybody went on the street we had a little wooden wagon we packed out suitcases and put our belongings in our little wagon. And thousands and thousands of people on the street walking walking towards the American side. We was on that side of the Elk River that's where the Russians was and the Americans was over here and the Russians was and we walked and walked and walked and walked 30 miles I think. And then we got there and we were there one night and the Russians just kept pushing and the Americans kept going. So they just pushed them back and pushed we had no place to go so we had to go back home. So we went back and then that's when all the horror began. The Russian soldiers you might as describe it as a German Shepard who's been on a chair for ten years and you turn him loose. He just go berserk and that's what happened to us women and children when the Russian soldiers occupied Germany. Oh I get so mad when I forget what I want to say. It was wipe wipe wipe it didn't matter if you was 80 years old it did not matter nobody no female was safe in Germany. They found eight year old children with syphilis and 80 year old women dead they solemnized them in the parks and they found them dead in the parks in the morning. And my sister had an experience she was coming from work riding the bicycle and they were laying in the ditches it was kind of in the country side and they were laying in the ditches there. And they grabbed her by the leg and pulled her off the off of the bicycle. And just raped her and beat her up and then I was a project of rape. One night we was in a four family duplex one family over here then in the middle came my sister then came another family and then we was on this end my mother and father. And my older sister was upstairs we all lived in that one complex. So when all this raping was going on my dad said my sister had to come out of that middle apartment move in with us and the two boys I had two brothers. They had to get in the sisters apartment to protect us and we were safe with mother and dad. My sister just had a baby was about five days old. So I was sleeping on the living room on the couch in the living room well there come a knock on the door. No it was on the window and my dad went to the window I was in the living room that's where it took place. He was on the window and he opened the window and there was two Russian soldiers with a machine gun standing in front of the window. So my dad said get out the back door so I crawled I got off the couch and I got on my all fours and crawled to the back to get out and there was two more standing in the backdoor. So I was caught and then the rape process began the rape process my mother and father in the bedroom with my sister and her baby. And my dad wanted to come out to my rescue and he knew they would just wipe him out. My mother begged and begged and begged there's six children here you know. So I fought and fought and fought until there was no more fighting. One threw me on the floor one picked me up one then I they pushed me on the couch and one pulled me on the leg pulled me off the couch on the floor. And strike a match and here came a match and when that light came and I looked up and I looked right in the barrel of that pistol so I just let it go. I just couldn't there wasn't no more fighting available. So that's how we lived too and when the Russian soldiers came into Germany they had robbed everything that existed in Germany went to Russia. It was food every store every the railroad tracks they took all of the railroad disassembled it hauled it out. The bathrooms the sinks the commodes the thing but the worst part about it was we had no food. We had no ration cards we had stores but we had no food. They took everything we as children went to the well more grown children we went to them sores and anything that they couldn't take the sugar, flour and so on and so forth was always in burlap sacks stored in the stores. So they took a bayonet and used the bathroom in the sugar or in the and we'd take and scrap all this out and then get underneath to get us a little flour or something we had to have something to eat there was no food. My momma boiled a pot of salt water and throw that flour in there like it is lumpy let it cook make it lumpy so we had something to bit on. I remember one night I went to bed with a slice

of bread in my hand and I was afraid to eat it because I didn't know whether I would get another piece of bread. So went to sleep with that piece of bread in my hand. The next morning it was hard as a brick but that was the situation. We had no heat we had no clothes in the deep winter we had no food we had no nothing it was horrifying. And I said if the Russians would ever come to this country the first three belong to me. The first three are mine it was no one knows what a horrifying situation that it is to be as a young girl to be raped like that you know. It was just bad all the way around. We'd go at night with a sled on the railroad tracks on the what do they call them carts where they have coals and stuff on them. One of my sisters goes up one and check and see that there is no guards there and that the rest of us is in the back and climbing up on them things and get a few coals lumps and coals. And then take off run home with that with that with those coals so we can have a little warmth in the house.

Interviewer: Wow that I have no words I

Knight: We go we had no shoes the shoes was all wore out take old rags no socks take old rags and wipe them around your feet and then get into the shoes. And then we'd go walking from door to door to the farmers begging for a little something to eat. We may get one potato or two potatoes or something on that order and then by the time we got home those potatoes were frozen solid. But at least we had a little something you know. The people took all their life possessions their belongings all paintings, jewelry and carried it all to the farmers for a little something to eat that's how we was left. That's how Russia took care of Germany when they came in. So that made Hitler a piece of gold you know to look back at that so you never know how good thing can be until they get bad.

Interviewer: I can see why a lot of the German people were trying to get to the Americans because I have heard that a lot of as everything was wrapping up I've heard that a lot of the German soldiers the boys were just elated to be able to surrender and to know that they were going on the American's side to be prisoners. And I just now after hearing that I can see why

Knight: One night my two brothers was living in my sisters apartment so one night one came and everybody had pistol everybody had a pistol. If they didn't have a rifle they had a pistol so here comes one in my sister's apartment where my brother was sleeping he was sleeping on the couch there in the living room. And it's a knock on the door and he busted the window and climbed through the window and my brother he's a man and he keeps trying to tell him I'm not a girl I'm a boy. And he starts taking his clothes off trying to get in the bed with my brother. And when he got to the point he start fumbling with him and found out he was a man he took the pistol and pistol whipped him. all His face he couldn't open his eyes he was so bruised all over because realizing he was lucky that he didn't shoot him that he didn't kill him you know. But that was that was just two experiences out of one family now you can imagine that went on all over everywhere.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am well what did you and your family what did y'all eventually do to be able to avoid more of that to be able to get away from the Russians?

Knight: There wasn't no getting away. We were occupied by Russia there wasn't no more getting away. America was over here you know and Russia took came across the Elk River and took that part of Germany. We was all in Russian territory until the wall came up you know we was all over there my whole family was over there. And the only reason that I got out was my father had a business of he was roofer and he was repairing the big smoke stacks in the factories everything was shot up everybody had no roof or they had a hole in their homes. And we was living in a subdivision and my father had a lot a lot of odd jobs to fix places up to make it livable you know. So he went one evening gave me about oh it

must have been about five or six o'clock gave me a stack of bills and he said I want you to go and collect some of this money for me. No I've got to go back prior to that I get a letter my mother had a stroke and my brother was small and she could not take care of him. So I was allowed from the German employment office to stay home because everybody had to work you know everybody had to have a job. So I was allowed to be home on account of my mother's condition so then when the Russians came in the employment office sent a letter for me to come to the employment office. And I showed that letter to my dad and he said well go down there and see what they want. All the Germany army camps was occupied by Russia made into hospitals and VD it was ramped oh it swallowed Germany. So these Russian soldiers that had venereal diseases was in these hospitals. So then I got this letter my dad said go down there and see what they want and so they wanted me to go to work in one of those hospitals. But the news had already seeped through town that when the girls go in there and work they will come in and lock the door and rape the girls in there. And so when I come home I told my dad and he said no he said you go back down there and you tell them to put you on a farm in a factory or wherever but you will not go to work up there. So I go back down there and I tell them what my I'm okay because of my dad you know we were just protected with our parents. My dad's gonna take care of that so we go down there and two days later come a oh here we go no when I went back down and told them were my dad said where I could work and where I couldn't work. And they said do you know what it means to refuse an order from the Red Army? No my dad take care of it you know so I go home and I tell my dad and he said well we'll see what comes. So then came I was out no wait a minute was I there? Yeah I was there no I was not there either but I wasn't gone yet. A Russian like the CIA and an interpreter came on a motorcycle pulled up in front of my house to come and get me. My dad said that I wasn't there oh that was the night when I was collecting his bills. He sent me out there in the subdivision to collect his money and then I came back about seven o'clock I walked in the house and gave him the bills and the money. And he said there was a suitcase sitting on the floor. And I thought we had company I told my dad I said whose suitcase is this? He said this is yours, for what? He said you've got to leave they were here to come and get you they said they'll be back tomorrow. And it was already people vanished by the thousands I mean they was hauling people to Siberia just to beat them in. So we knew what was at stake people just they just never did come back home they just vanished nobody knew where they was at what happened to them or nothing. They just kidnapped people right and left so he had already we knew all this was going on. So while I was out collecting the bills he informed got information on everything. There was a crossing ah must have been about it was an hour and half train ride there was a border crossing where they exchanged guards. So my dad done got all the information told me I had to go catch the train took me to the train station put me on the train and go to this particular restaurant up there when I get there. And in that restaurant they was helping all the people to get over the border that was in trouble you know. So when I got there the people said, it was 11 o'clock at night, and the people said in 30 minutes the guards come in and they exchange. It's a 30 minute space in between the old ones come out and the new ones go back out. So there was this 30 minute space for us to go across.

Interviewer: Wow

Knight: So here I go but my father had worked in a lot of repair shops in factories where they had the smoke stacks shot up. So instead of taking money he took alcohol he was working in this alcohol factory. So that was our bargaining power you give a Russian a bottle of vodka and he goes to a farm and steals a cow and puts it in your backyard. So finally we got the bargaining power with the alcohol. So he put two bottles of vodka in my suitcase so here I go I was what 17, 18 something like that. Here I go across that border 11 o'clock at night the dogs are howling and I don't know where I'm going woods is woods. Do I need to go stay to the left to the right, straight? I just kept on walking I kept on falling I kept on walking all of sudden comes a light. Here comes two guards with the machine guns in the woods. I speak no

Russian they speak no German and here I am a young girl my heart done left me I knew I was gone. I opened my suitcase and I showed them them two bottles of whiskey in my purse in my clothes and here just shoved it to them you know take it take it. And they looked at everything over and then finally they told me go on. I survived. So then I walked and walked and walked but I did not know was in the Russian territory still or was I going back into Russian I had no sense of directions of any kind. Three o'clock in the morning I'm still walking in the woods then all of a sudden I managed to be on I see a light but I knew it was a street light it was a car light. So I knew I was somewhere where I could get closer to contact but I didn't know whether that was still the Russian army. So I get closer to the street and kind of hide in the bushes you know to see what comes up on that street. And here came an American the big truck not the jeep the one in between. And I saw that big white star on the door and aw I was just elated I made it with nothing. Here I'm like a wild animal in the woods a girl at three o'clock in the morning what are they gonna think who I am you know. No nothing no pocketbook no nothing just in the woods. So they put me in the backseat of that thing I don't care where they take me but I'm safe now. And there is two benches in the back of that thing so I sit on there and they drive like a maniac I was falling from one side to the other and finally the thing stopped. And I looked out the back and we're still in the woods. So they stopped told me to come out and I was in the process of getting raped by the first American I saw. So I run and hollered and hooped and I barked and what saved me another car was coming. One stayed with the vehicle and one stayed with me. And when this street light came this one whistled and then he run back into the jeep and they took off. I survived that too but then I was in West Germany who are you? I could not call my parents because they was under surveillance they would have hauled my whole family to Siberia. I could not contact I stood as young girl there on the streets and cried God out of the sky no no nobody no place to turn to and you couldn't get a job without a passport and no passport without a job and all of these obstacles. So I was in this they had like VP camps like they do when they come from Hessian they had these places for the people to stay. So I went in there and I stayed and I don't remember how long did I stay there and then but I could never contact my family that was my. My father died and I never knew I never could say goodbye to my dad and that was the worst part of it. But anyhow I survived it all and I went to this restaurant one day and ate lunch and they was looking for a waitress. But I couldn't get a job without papers so lucky the bosses brother was chief of the Communal police. So then I told him my story and begged and cried and told him what happened to me and he gave me a job and then he had my his brother get things going to get me a passport. And that's how and that same restaurant is where I met my husband and that's then brought me. I remember way back my sister and all three of us girls went to a fortune teller and my sister's husband got killed in the my older sister's husband got killed in the war. And that fortune teller told all of that she told everything. And she said I would take a trip across a big water with a man in uniform. I said that silly thing the police must come arrest me and cross the Elk River or whatever. But that was my prediction from her that I make that trip with that uniform across this water. That was really later I went back to that and I said she predicted my future already then when I was a young girl.

Interviewer: Wow

Knight: But through it all if it hadn't been for my good Lord he kept me. Now when I left home that night when my suitcase was packed I was sitting at the table and my dad said sit down here. And he said before you leave he said I want to show you something. He said you see this end of this table he said when you fall off of here you see how deep you fall? And onced you've fallen off of here you're done you never get back up here. That was my guideline that my father gave me through my life. I was all of a sudden a young girl my world was open I could do what I want to do nobody restrict me nobody told me you can't do this or you can't do this and the whole world was open. But it was always when it was getting a little bit off the wrong track I always was able to manage to come back on the right track.

Interviewer: Well you said that was the last time that you saw your family was that did you were able to get in touch with them later after your father had passed away?

Knight: Yes yes when I met my husband and married my husband my mother she was a widow and she was allowed to come for a visit to the they let people come out only one at a time. They didn't let man and wife come if I had a brother the brother can come but the wife can't come. Well then the next time the wife can come then the brother because they knew if they let the couples come they ain't coming back. So I had a visitors pass for my mother to come and see us, we wasn't married then. And I had this little bitty apartment in a basement see during the war all the government took charge of all the apartments and everything because of all the people being homeless and everything. So they took charge if you own an apartment complex let's say with ten apartments you nine of them belongs to the government. The government sends people there to rent from you. One you can keep for yourself and do what you want to. And my landlady she was a widow woman also and she had this little basement apartment that I me and Dolton had rented. And she was she could do with that what she wanted to do. So when my mother came on a visit to me she her and my landlady just hit it off good you know. So they became friends right off from the beginning. And they went had a good friendship then she had to go back home and she said why don't I let my mother come you know. Well she couldn't come with nothing she couldn't bring nothing you know just her clothes. Here's a woman 56 years old and with her clothes on the street with no husband that wouldn't work. So she found somebody in East Germany that would take her apartment all here furnishings everything that she had. She sent me packages with her clothing and the things that was dear to her bed linens and that kind of stuff kept sending packages to me. And then at the end when she had no we was getting married that time she had a pass to come to the wedding. My brother I had a little brother he was 13 years old at that time and they were allowed to come to the wedding together. So then when she came to my wedding and she had sent those packages and we was getting married and we was going to get quarters American quarters then she could the apartment down there. So that's how we got her out of East Germany. And then but here's the thing here is this woman she's still obviously 56 years old with no nothing she had to sell this apartment to this lady. Give her the key and she give her a thousand marks for everything like it was. It had to be under the table under that nobody knew about it. She got on the plane and she got her key. So but here she was with nothing that thousand West German marks had to be converted one to one when she got I mean East German money went four to one when she got into West Germany which brought down to 250 West German marks. At that time the converted into the dollar at that time was \$60 for \$60 you get 250 west marks. Here's this woman with all her life and everything with nothing. Well we had we had bought double bed couches and furniture and silver and dishes and the whole nine yard to come to the states you know. Well I told my husband I said I'm sorry I cannot go with you. It's no way that I can take all this stuff and put my mother on the floor over here no. And I cannot leave her II just cannot go. So then he said well we're just gonna leave everything to her. And I said I'll give you the opportunity to tell her. While she sat in that chair her clothes were just drenched with tears. She said I know your my son-in-law but she said you are a total stranger and you give your all to me she just couldn't get over that any human being could do that to her. That then gave her a foot hold over there then my sister that was still over there done the same thing and let them come out. And this little boy this little brother that came out to East Germany is now a multi-millionaire in Germany Mercedes dealer. Came from nothing from nowhere and I am so thrilled and so proud. Everybody tells me you ought to be driving a Mercedes. I said listen here this boy don't owe me nothing. He's got my heart and soul that I was able to give him that opportunity to become somebody that he could not be over there. They had everything was rationed they only got an orange a couple of oranges for Christmas they never saw the food Russia hogged all the chickens they raised and all of that. They took you just can't imagine how these people

lived over there under the Russian even after I had come over here I had a brother over there see. One brother stayed.

Interviewer: The oldest brother?

Knight: Yeah now my oldest brother passed away but the next one. He stayed over there because he had wife and child over there see so he couldn't come. And here family everything was over there and she wasn't able to leave everything behind for her connection you know. So he wound up staying he was behind the iron curtain. So when I became 60 years old he was allowed to get a pass for a silver wedding anniversary a golden wedding anniversary or a 60 year birthday or a wedding they was allowed to come out of East Germany. So I had to go to the court house here and get documents and all kinds of stuff and send official that I am here that I live here that I'm 60 years old and send all that to him over there for him to even to verify that they even could get a pass. And then they waited until the day the night before he could come they never let him know anything. He was living in fear that he don't get to come and then the night before he was ready to leave they told him he could come. And that's the first time I saw him in 25 years my brother in the east. So now that's all open you know so that's how I got my family out of there.

Interviewer: Wow that's a

Knight: But it was a rocky road. But God give me the strength and still today made a better human being out of me through all of these trials and tribulations that I had to go through. He kept me on the right road. Without him I could have never survived I could have never when I stood there on the streets and cried at night in the sky and no nobody there to you have to walk in them shoes in order to understand what that is you know.

Interviewer: I think it's amazing that your family planned it your father had that suitcase packed for you and enabled you to get out and then that enabled you to be able to get the rest of them out. And did your mother did she enjoy being able to live

Knight: My mother did not live very long my mother was I lot both my mother and my father at the age of 58. My father died of tuberculosis but they was eight years apart. So my mother dies of liver cirrhosis she was also 58. I got to mother funeral but I never got to my dad's so. My husband was in Korea I was here my mother in Germany. Three people in three different worlds but I was able to go over there and stay with her until she passed on. And when I walked through that door she said I'm ready I knew you wouldn't leave me behind you know so. A lot of lot of hard times in my life a lot of hard times.

Interviewer: Wow I'm curious I've got to ask you about meeting Mr. Knight. You said you met him in that restaurant you were working at.

Knight: Yeah

Interviewer: What was your initial meeting like?

Knight: Oh I was mad at him I was mad at him. I had a green, he said I think it's a red one, I had a green felt jacket on and a green beret. My hair was frosted and I looked good and he sat oh me and my girlfriends sat down at one table way on the other side of the restaurant and we had them German beer coasters and he kept flipping them thing to my table you know. Made me so mad because I felt so

degraded you know him sitting up there who do you think I am to. So then when they closed up there that night we were fixing to go someplace else and he wanted to know he wanted to go with us. I said well the street is there everybody can walk on it you know. And then he said he was a master sergeant in the army and I said well who 28 years old he either got a wife over here or paying for one or I didn't fall for all of that you know. And I said you're a master sergeant and you're walking you don't have a car? No he didn't have a car so all that was too phony for me. Well we went to that restaurant and we danced a little and he come and asked me to dance. But he told his buddy already he said I'm gonna wear that green beret before the nights over.

Interviewer: He was very confident wasn't he?

Knight: Yes he wanted that green beret before the nights over. But then we went home and he walked me to the house and he said he'd give me his ration card to aw he was gonna meet me the next evening. I said yeah uh huh I ain't even going in that restaurant be a fool coming there and he don't show up you know. Because a master sergeant at that age good looking like he was you know no he ain't fooling me. So anyhow I said yeah you give me your ration card and tomorrow you go to your company commander say you lost your ration card get a new one. So what's that mean for me I can't he felt like that was the only secure thing he could give me? So I said well the next day evening he asked me to come and meet him at that restaurant and I went and I was in the restaurant was kind of in an L shape and I was in the front and he was back here. So I went in there and he wasn't nowhere in sight so I ordered a cup of coffee and I sat there and drank my cup of coffee and I was fixing to leave and here he come out of that back room. And I thought to myself what a coward he sits back there and don't even speak to me or nothing you know I was fixing to walk out the door and here he came. Oh I'm sorry I didn't know you was here and that's what it is tomorrow it will be 46 years ago.

Interviewer: Well happy anniversary. Wow. Well I hope it's okay I had to just hear that story.

Knight: Yeah that's how come that's what that fortune teller told me I'd take that trip across that water that's why. She had that predicted for me.

Interviewer: Well did y'all have any problems communicating with each other? Did he speak German or did you speak English I'm just curious?

Knight: Well the restaurant I was working if people came and ordered food and I didn't know what it was. I asked there was a soldier in there every night one of them steady and he spoke perfect German so if somebody ordered a ham sandwich I don't know what a ham sandwich is so I go to him. I say what's a ham sandwich and he'd tell me then in German so I'd go order it and then I'd carry it to them. And that's where I picked up and picked up but that had also a drawback on it. So one night he said what if you ever meet somebody you really like you call him an SOB. I said all night long I just kept repeating that word I didn't want to forget that word. So the next time we went to a dance my girlfriend and I this guy come and asked us to dance several times and he sat down and pretty nice guy. And I patted him on the back and called him a SOB he jumped out of that chair and turned white as a sheet. I didn't know what in the world she said what did you do? Well I said so and so told me to say that you know. But I didn't say SOB he was really really but he didn't show his face in the restaurant for a long time he knew what he done to me. So but my life is good God gave me the strength. We didn't have much we came over here with a suitcase we didn't have nothing when we got here. Everything that we have accumulated I worked for I build the garden I painted the house I God gave me the energy and the strength. I didn't have the money for anybody to do it so I had to do it all myself. But my father said

there is no such a thing to say I can't that word does not exist. If I can't get a job he says I'm going to Africa and paint a camels butt black but I'm gonna have a job. So he instilled all that in me as I grew up you know too much power really strength for a woman I didn't really need that. But then when the situations came if I didn't have that power I would have not survived I would have not made it through it you know. It was good.

Interviewer: Wow well what I don't even know where to begin to ask any more questions. I'm just curious how were the people in West Germany were they overall if they were they aware of because of the people like yourself that were able to cross over from the eastern block were they aware of the atrocities? What was the general attitude towards the Americans being in West Germany?

Knight: The attitude towards the Americans in West Germany? Oh there was a good attitude because America helped Germany rebuild you know. Gave the money even though we paid it all back but still it was they made available because gosh our cities was demolished demolished demolished. Germany was flattened out with bombs you know so we really had a lot of work to do. But the German people don't sit still you give them a little bit of ground and they're gonna do something with it. They're not gonna sit still they've got that drive to make it better than what it is you know.

Interviewer: Well I just I have a couple more questions. One is how is what you've shared with us about your experience compare with how Americans describe the war? Have you found any?

Knight: I don't from observing sense I've been in this country I've been over here now for 46 years. I don't think there is no people over here that could ever endure what we endured. Because there's too much wealth and too much there is no pain there is no so you take all that away I believe it just go for a flip it could not you know you have to be come up as a child already in those situations. To strength to have to survive all of that. I don't think America could ever face that kind of atrocities that we went through. My from what I went through and what I see here.

Interviewer: Well what I'm just curious to go along with that what advice would you give future generations based on your experience?

Knight: Future generations I don't know you talking about the war?

Interviewer: Well I think some of the things that you've shared with us about the strength that you were able to get from your father and of course the strength that you were blessed with of God blessing you in the midst of all the tragedy and the hardships that you faced as a young woman. I'm just curious what advice you would give to young people with potentially facing hardships and things in their lives?

Knight: I'm sure there is in the country and this kind of upbringing is but generality in the cities it's very it's not enough depth soul that available in the young people. It's too shallow it's too I have a son an adopted son that's 35 years old. I can't even convey my story to him because he don't want to hear that stuff you know. Like it didn't exist now he may listen to the tape when he hears the tape. But as far as me that I find that with a lot of young people. They're just living from day to day life in the fast lane I wish they could have a little more everything is too loose everything is too given and cars and these clothes. And I don't know how to express it that's depths missing and that's what's wrong with the generation their bored they don't know what to do. I wish I could share my story with them what a human being here I am 74 years old and what I went through and what I have accomplished in my life. And it's only due to not having heartaches pain gave me strength I can't look back and I can't say that it

was bad because I may never have been this person today that I was that I am now had I not gone through all of these trials and tribulations in my lifetime. And I wish this young generation but the parents I see the parents as the fault because they say oh we didn't have nothing and I grew up with nothing. My kids is gonna have, kids don't know how to handle that. It's too much they don't I'm 74 years old I just now got here. They want their 25 and 35 they want to be here where I am. It took me 40 years to get here, they want it now. But that's the sad part about it you know. Because it's a different country and it's a different altogether different than what I grew up with so it's hard for me to even say because it's not taught this way like we was taught you know when we grew up.

Interviewer: Well I just want to I want to thank you so very much for being willing to share your story with us.

Knight: It's all helter skelter I guess I should have had notes or was able to have it a little more together.

Interviewer: No ma'am it was wonderful. I appreciate so much you taking the time to share a good chunk of your life story with us about what it was like and your experiences growing up and.

Knight: If I'd have took out the time and made me notes I'm sure there's a lot more that I skipped over and hopped over you know but in general you got a good picture as to what it was.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am I think you were able to

Knight: The worst thing in this world for any human being to have or to be is to be hungry. Hungry and cold is the two most devastating things you can go through in your lifetime. Everything else you can manage but can you imagine as a mother and father to sit there with six hungry mouths to sit there and you can't give them nothing to eat? Nothing to I have to look at my parents what they went through and my father what he went through that ordeal that night for his child to suffer like she did in there. And pleading for help and not being able to come out there and help her you know. That takes strength and endurance and that's today that goes back to these flowers I told you. I can't throw things away when I see all this waste in this country. Here's people go to bed hungry at night that don't have nothing. Why can't the rest of us give the stuff rather than let it go in the dumpster but it's easier it's easier that way. It's not this country got too much wealth and too much and yet they're should not be a hungry person to go to bed at night all that's available. So it's to me it's managed wise or whatever the situation is but I say we're supposed to be the richest country in the world why do we have hungry people? We didn't we weren't hungry under Hitler we got hungry under the Russian people when the Russian people came you know. God I've got scares where we had to go in the woods and cut had one of them old long saws one handle over here and you pull and I cut a tree down and put it on the sled and bring it home to saw slipped and cut my fingers all to pieces. And but that I don't know what to say that gave you character that made you somebody to survive through all of these things you know. And I wouldn't trade that for you for all the millions the money that's out there when you have that soul satisfaction inside of you you know. That's where it's at. My husband made a statement to my brother the millionaire and said I don't have much but I have enough and that's the key to serenity that's the key if you've got enough there's always more out there but if you've got enough. But you look and you look at everything that's here I went and got \$50 worth of paint it would have cost me probably \$1000 for somebody to paint the kitchen but I didn't have the money but I didn't stop stopping didn't do it. I painted the bricks it's all my labor labor labor labor labor labor. And the joy of the labor is the end result when somebody comes in here and says God isn't that pretty. That belongs to me that's so soothing to the soul when you that's the reason I told you I felt the connection everybody can come in here and half of the nails on that deck

is put in with my hand and the hammer. I was part of everything that we done because we didn't have we didn't have money but we made it happen.

Interviewer: I am just so thankful that you take the time to share with us today.

Knight: I'm glad I was able to. I don't know what really what I contributed my life story I mean I don't know what you do with my story. What significance it was for me to give you my story.

Interviewer: Definitely to as we talked before to just the unique perspective because our perspective

Knight: Just to see inside what went on?

Interviewer: Yes to be able to see from the eyes of a German citizen because we only have the perspective that we're given through the interviews with American soldiers and their families. And to be able to have you share your perspective as a German school girl who grew up in the midst of pre-war Germany and then saw the emergences of Germany to be embroiled in the midst of world war and just to know what it was like the hardships that you faced and that your family faced. And then to go through the experience of having your area your home to taken under the control of the communist of the Red Army. And then to know how horrifying and how atrocious

Knight: America does not realize and does not know what we would have to go through if this country were ever invaded. You don't realize what that can do I mean because there might as well took a rope and tied it around our neck because that's what it was. My mother sat up and night and nit and nit and nit and take an old sweater and pull it apart and make a little one and all of that kind of stuff. Take blankets and sew them together make a coat out so we'd be warm and aw here comes the boss. So

Interviewer: Yes ma'am well thank you so very much and we appreciate you inviting us into your home and sharing and we just appreciate it. Thank you Mrs. Knight

Knight: Alright

Tape ended