

Interview with Frieda Hermann  
Interviewer: Leigh Anne Howard  
May 20, 2005

**Interviewer Note:** Prior to the interview Ms. Hermann did not want to sign the consent form because she wanted to consider what she said prior to agreeing to sign the form. After the interview I explained the purpose of the form and explained the interview might be used. After that explanation she completed the paperwork.

**Q:** We have been interviewing veterans, as well as civilians, to get experiences and memories of dealing with war, military, that type of thing. Now you, I understand, are a war bride. You were from Germany, is that right?

**A:** If that is what you call it.

**Q:** I think that's what one of the men said, "Oh, you should talk to Frieda."

**A:** Well, my husband was over there in nineteen... uh, well anyhow, we met in '51, and we married in 1953, but there was no war no more. It was after the war.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** I've been in this country since 1953. I am a citizen of the United States, and very proud of it and don't knock it.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** Cause you'd be in trouble (laughter). I'm just kidding now.

**Q:** Okay. Tell me where you grew up then.

**A:** I grew up actually not too far from Russia, in East Russia.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** In 1942 the Russians were coming, and we had to leave or stay. My father was killed in 1942, shot over in England; my mother and I and my grandmother, we fled. The government took us to one area first, but I've been through that whole area. I know when it started, in 1939, we could hear the cannons shooting and everything; bombing every night, the bomb shelters, you name it, but anyhow, I made it! And actually, we came to a different part of Europe. I finished school and made my confirmation, and then we were very fortunate to leave there in 1945 before the war ended. They shipped us to Bulgaria and that was the west later on.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** We were first invaded by the French and French Morocco.

**Q:** Right.

**A:** And then it was like a curse in my life but that is what I did and, you know, then the Americans came. I left, and I went with the Americans to fight in nineteen... ,uh, to the area where the guys from the fight who were in the 18<sup>th</sup> [Field Artillery Unit] were, and that's how I met my husband and some of the guys.

**Q:** Okay. What was it like to meet up with this group of American soldiers the second time given, you know, your experience in ; 39 that you were talking about? What was that like?

**A:** In '39 there was actually "The War of Shalom," you know, I mean, that's when the war started with Russia. I was about, not quite, nine years old, but I'll never forget it, you know. Bomb shelters every night, had to get cleaned up, lay in the bed when the sirens went off.

Interview with Frieda Hermann  
Interviewer: Leigh Anne Howard  
May 20, 2005

**Q:** wow.

**A:** I can laugh about it now because my cousins and I used to dislike the bomb shelters. We used to go out and watch when the planes were shooting each other; we wanted to see who got who. And then when we had to leave, I used to say, well, I want to sit in the train by the door, because if they shoot at the trains if there were air raids, because in one night one whole city was knocked out, And the trains would move out of the train station, and I said if they shoot at us I would get out of the door. You don't have the same fear; it's hard to explain.

**Q:** Uh-huh.

**A:** Let's say it this way, I learned a lot.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** I learned a lot. When we came to Bavaria before the war ended, we only had one room because there was not much housing, you know, my mother and I and then my grandparents. But the people in that town, the Bavarian people, they disliked us. They didn't want to share the housing with us because they would rather it went to the local townspeople.

**Q:** Is this because you were from a different part of Germany?

**A:** Right.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And I told that to my grandfather, I said, "I hate those people." And you know what he said? "If you hate those people, you're just as bad as they are." I had a very good teacher, and he used to always say we are the lucky ones, we are alive. And the Americans came over, and it was great. I mean, we had curfew, but no problem at all anymore. We were rescued actually, and I am glad for that. I'll never forget that, you know. I lost my mother before I was seventeen. So, I was an only child, and I did for my own. How I did it? Don't ask me, but I did it.

**Q:** Did you have a job? Did you work?

**A:** I did go to work through the school and I there was nothing to do. You know, we were invaded. There was a job opening next door, she and I both took a job and we were bored there, too.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** At that age... fifteen-years old... I worked from in the morning until six at night. But we had the French and the French Moroccan. (inaudible) They were right in our building. (inaudible) I worked there and then I had another job... when I worked in the shoe store. Wonderful family... I visit them to this day, and they do some. Then, I could make more money working for the Americans because my friends did. And I thought, "Well, I would like to try it." But I couldn't speak any English. But I tried and they hired me. The Americans hired me, and I was with the 519... it was the outfit. It was in my hometown. In Oberstadt. And then they got a transfer to Frankfurt, Germany and from there they had to build some buildings for the American families. And they again wanted me to go with them, and I went with them and lived in this town with them. We had a room right in the building in the apartments and that's where I met my husband.

**Q:** What kinds of things did you do? You said they hired you so what were your jobs?

**A:** No that was housekeeping.

Interview with Frieda Hermann  
Interviewer: Leigh Anne Howard  
May 20, 2005

**Q:** Oh okay.

**A:** And take my word for it, I never had to do housework before but, you know, when you are on your own you want to make it out. And I was taught if you don't work you will have nothing because nobody owes you anything. Some people think the government owes you something. It's the same here in the United States (pause) go to work (laughter)

**Q:** So, you were in housekeeping?

**A:** Yeah at that time. And I had wonderful people. In fact, I was together with them here in the United States until they passed away you know the Jackson's in Oklahoma.

**Q:** Wait was this an officers' group? Or... ?

**A:** No. This was Sargent Jackson, his wife, and their son. And I stayed with them. Well actually first I was with Loewenstein's in the 519, and then I left there and went to the Jackson's. They even took me to the airport before I came to the United States. But that's what I did because I actually was in sales before you know (inaudible) but if you can earn a little more on your own... Things were different in Europe than here in the United States. And I had no idea that I was ever going to marry an American, but I made my decision and because I was alone, I didn't have to ask my grandparents and I made that decision although my husband met my grandparents and loved them dearly. And we visit them even after when they were still alive. My daughter met them, too.

**Q:** How did you meet your husband?

**A:** We were at Uncle Tom's; it was a restaurant. You can ask these guys that is where they were hanging out,

**Q:** Uncle Tom's? (Laughter)

**A:** It was right across. It was right across from the building where the Americans live. It was a nice restaurant. All the guys used to go there and chitchat and get together and Uncle Tom loved all the G.I.'s, you can ask them. And that is how I met my husband. The first time he asked me for a date, he told me many times, and Cook can tell you too, I didn't show up. (laughter)

**Q:** That's great!

**A:** But we were married for 40 years before my husband died. Yes. Wonderful 40 years. Isn't that something!

**Q:** You were married while he was still over there and in the service?

**A:** Yes. You had to get married before you could apply for an entrance visa.

**Q:** Okay

**A:** Yeah. We married in 1953 on the second of July and by September I had my papers. And he left by army boat, and I left by plane to the United States all by myself.

**Q:** Is it the first time you had been away from home?

**A:** Yea.

**Q:** And what was that like?

**A:** Uh. strange. Yea, because I had never met his parents you know. But I had no problem with anybody in the States.

Interview with Frieda Hermann  
Interviewer: Leigh Anne Howard  
May 20, 2005

**Q:** And you probably spoke some English by that time?

**A:** I could speak English by that time. Before I came. I just picked it up by sound.

**Q:** That's good.

**A:** And I could apply... You can become citizen if you are three years in this country', if you are married to an American. If you are both from a different country, you have to wait five years. I became a citizen in three years. And my friends all said they were going to help me. They said, "Oh but we forgot we have been out of school for a long time and you have to know a lot about history!" I made it.

**Q:** You probably did know more than they did, with the circumstances.

**A:** I'm proud to be an American to tell the truth. My citizenship papers, they are worth more than anything. You couldn't pay me. You wouldn't have enough money to buy my citizenship papers.

**Q:** What are some other memories that you have about the time period?

**A:** From Europe I had a wonderful childhood, very good. The war was terrible, I know all about it, with the bombing and losing homes, you name it. But, I'm the kind of person who pushed the bad things aside to think of all the good memories. I had a real good childhood, you know, except the war. Then naturally losing my parents you know. But I am very fortunate to be real honest with you. I always say I'm very thankful for every day I look out my window and I'm the luckiest person. I have a lot of friends. But from Europe, yes it was terrible, the war was terrible. Take my word for it. I observed everything about it. But I think if you want to you learn through that and I think you appreciate things more and everything else. (inaudible) You know I've been coming to this reunion. I have never missed one time.

**Q:** Really?

**A:** No. When my husband passed away in January 1994. I said, I wasn't going to go naturally, and he says, "If you don't come, we tie you up." And I came, and I have never missed. If I don't come with them then I fly out. I am fortunate I can do that, and I have been all over the United States, too, for the reunion. I never missed one.

**Q:** What was your husband's name? And what did he do?

**A:** He was a corporal in the army. While in the army he was Donald Herman. Then he was in the tool and dye [business].

**Q:** I'm sorry?

**A:** He was in tool and dye afterwards. He was in management, and that's how we moved away from the city because he couldn't take the pressure anymore. We moved up north in our weekend house by Lake Tahoe in Michigan, not California. There is one in California; ever been there?

**Q:** I have not been there.

**A:** Most beautiful lake you have ever seen. I've been to Nevada, and Lake Tahoe is half in Nevada and half in California. But I have very good memories all the way through. I think of the good things, too, you know. I figure when you went through, I think if you went through you learn a lot.

**Q:** More for you it is essentially, too.

**A:** Yea and you know some people don't... they get bitter or whatever. I don't... sorry. Because why? We all have good days and bad days, I do too, but I don't let it out on other people. Yea I think you learn a lot. Not only the bombing, the people that were killed, the ration cards. We had worse ones than what my mother-in-law told me they had here. But naturally we had a lot of relatives from other homes.

**Q:** A lot of what?

**A:** A lot of relatives that were fine. That is on my grandparent's side, so we always had some. Until we had to leave then, naturally. We looked twice at a piece of bread before we ate it. But even when I worked already that's one thing about it, I had good food, but the bread we still had to watch because you only got one pound a week. If you ate it up before then it was gone.

**Q:** So, everything was rationed?

**A:** Oh yeah.

**Q:** For the citizens as well as whatever?

**A:** Everybody. No matter who you were. No money in the world could buy you anything that they had ration cards for. Sugar, for you name it, for everything. Even clothes.

**Q:** Yeah? Conserving the textiles.

**A:** Although my mother had at that time when she was still alive friends that were seamstresses. They did a lot of sewing. My mom's friends always had clothes made for me, so I was really fortunate. I always had nice clothes to wear. If you can take a dress that you outgrew and take the other one if the colors match the seamstress knew how to make something nice. I remember that real well.

**Q:** That is a very different time period from today where I think of my students when they wear something once, and they may not ever wear it again. So, it is a completely different way of using your resources.

**A:** Absolutely. You just... learn that we can handle it. I think our younger generation would have a hard time because to be real honest with you I myself too... we are the spoiled Americans. You know they live good in Germany I know even when I go for a visit. But we, we are very fortunate to live in this country and that is my opinion. It's interesting and you cannot explain some of the stuff when you say what would you do if... I remember the war was already on, and the soldiers would, the German soldiers would come through my hometown, and they'd take our schools over until they went on to Russia. I'd take my bike and I'd go out to the summer farm. I was a city kid that loved to go on the farm to ride horses by my relatives. But they had a prisoner of war there; he was a French soldier and he had to work there. And there was a Polish girl that had to work for my relatives. We were outside, and I was by the horses and all of a sudden comes a plane during the day and was shooting at us. What do you do? You don't know. It happened so fast that when people say, "Well I would do such and such." But it's amazing and I still see to this day the poor girl that had to work for my relatives, how she cried, and I don't even remember her name, but my relatives were very good to her. Just because Hitler started this war doesn't mean all the Germans were bad.

**Q:** Of course.

**A:** It's just like our soldiers had become more you. It's the same like with the French soldier; he taught me how to speak French and I would teach him German. And he had a family home in France, and I remember when we had to leave Germany before the Russians came my aunt and uncle they said to Andre, "Andre, if you can make it home because, you know France isn't far from Germany. Make it home." They told him to just go (inaudible) because they were the enemy. You know there is good and bad all over the world, and Hitler started this mess and got all of us actually in trouble so that's the way it was. But no, I think I learned a lot through that. Especially to somehow get along on my own too. (laughter) But I hoped there would be no war ever for everybody actually; that's not fun. Because you have blackouts, you have every night bomb shelter, and all that kind of stuff. Not fun. I know what the other people go through in other countries, but I tell you something. When the Desert Storm was on, I

lived in the country and the people always say, "Oh the poor innocent, the poor innocent" but, nobody thinks about our soldiers in the United States that get killed. And then we are supposed to do nothing to nobody. They started the war, get them. I mean who started it? Hitler started it, and we were the innocent, too, but why blame it on somebody else. I always say this, even when I go to Europe, no politics in my book.

**Q:** Right.

**A:** With people over there they always say (inaudible). You know, we are the good Americans, we have a handout. When they need us... (inaudible). I do not like that and if you come to this country and you don't want to do, like speak our language or anything here then go back home because (inaudible). It's just like when I go back to Germany on a visit. Just because I was born there but if I don't like it over there, I'm not a German citizen anymore. If I don't like it, I don't have to go there, then don't go knocking. It's the same if I go to Canada or any foreign country, if I don't like it, don't go. And I believe that when people come here in the American dream. They want everything, well not everything, but they want something for nothing. Our country here has all the immigrants and the immigrant's neighbors coming. Have you ever read the book from Tom Brokaw?

**Q:** I have not read that book yet.

**A:** The Greatest Generation?

**Q:** The Greatest Generation. I've not read it yet.

**A:** The Greatest Generation speaks about our own. It is really, I mean it is fascinating, I got all the books. My kids in fact bought them, my granddaughter even bought me the other one because she knows how much grandma like biographies. But you know, it is true the immigrants' need has come true and some people come and want us to give them everything for nothing and my grandfather says, "You don't work, you won't have nothing." Isn't that right?

**Q:** Yeah, yeah.

**A:** Who owes me anything? Nobody.

**Q:** Other memories? Other stories you can think of?

**A:** My brain isn't working right now. I forget I'm an old lady. (laughter) Oh, I don't know. I had very good times I had a wonderful childhood I really did. Otherwise, except that one period there you know. And the best part is I lucky to be an American. That is my greatest.

**Q:** So, you came here in '53?

**A:** Yeah 1953.

**Q:** And then in '56 is that when you became an American citizen?

**A:** 1957. I became a citizen by the time it got through.

**Q:** '57

**A:** Phew was I scared. Well you know you have to learn a lot, but I made it. And I'm proud of it really and I'm proud to live in this country so that's why I say I am a fortunate person. Stories... there probably is a hundred million of them. I don't know, can't think of anything, I always like to think of the good things. Push the bad things on the side and enjoy life and I do. And I believe too that if you elect a president, we should all be together and help him out at that time until we had a choice to elect any

person ever. I am proud that I can vote; if you don't become a citizen you can't vote and I am. I don't like the in-between and have all this bickering.

**Q:** I don't have any other questions, but I appreciate you talking to me. I know you were a little reluctant but, it seems very helpful.

**A:** Well, here what am I going to say?

**Q:** Yeah people always say that, then an hour and a half later...

**A:** Have you ever been to Europe?

**Q:** I have, actually I've been to Germany.

**A:** What did you think about it?

**Q:** I enjoyed it. I was able to stay in a home with some people for about four days, so it wasn't just going from hotel to hotel. I'm trying to think; I was in Mainz.

**A:** Mainz? That's by Frankfurt.

**Q:** Yeah that's where I actually stayed with the family there for a bit. Then towards Stuttgart, and I stayed I guess about three or four days by the Black Forest.

**A:** Okay. Baden-Baden maybe around there.

**Q:** Yeah, Trieste? Trieste? Freiburg?

**A:** Freiburg yeah.

**Q:** Okay I stayed not too far from Freiburg for a couple days.

**A:** Yea I have friends living there, in Bavaria, too.

**Q:** Yeah, I'm trying to think of the other places in Germany. Munich I was there for a couple days and I toured some of the other countries as well, some of France and Austria and Switzerland. I was in Prague for a couple days.

**A:** Have you ever walked from Bavaria to Austria?

**Q:** I have never walked from Bavaria to Austria. Have you ever walked?

**A:** A circle maybe (laughter). Well, you know my second home is Oberstadt which is a resort, and okay when you have the map, Oberstadt is right here in the middle and here is Switzerland and Austria. We would take a cable car up in the mountains and I would say to Nichole<sup>1</sup> "We're walking to Austria you know through the woods, beautiful. We have dinner there and I says if you want to go back by bus you can do that." "Oh Grandma, can't we go back the other way?" And I say, "Sure so we go back the other way, take the cable car, and go down." It started out... this is a story. My grandson when he was twelve, he is twenty and a half now, when he was twelve, he told his mother, "Could you ask Grandma if I could go with her to Germany?" And she says, "You have never been away from home." He says, "You trying to talk me out of it?" So, they ask me, and I say, "Sure but, Grandma's going for five weeks." He enjoyed every minute of it because I have friends naturally by Stuttgart and Karta and so forth, and I took him everywhere. He observed all of that and he really enjoyed it. Then my granddaughter she was more homesick, she said, "Can I go with you Grandma?" When she was ten and a half and when she came back, she says, "With Grandma you don 't have a chance to get homesick because she keeps us busy for

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<sup>1</sup> Nichole is Frieda's granddaughter

Interview with Frieda Hermann  
Interviewer: Leigh Anne Howard  
May 20, 2005

four weeks!" (laughter) "You don't, I'm on the go all day long with her." I took both of them, there's the smallest country you heard of Liechtenstein.

**Q:** Oh, yeah.

**A:** My grandkids have been to Liechtenstein, to Austria, to Switzerland.

**Q:** Wonderful opportunity and experience for them.

**A:** Yeah, well I feel honored that young kids asked an old lady if they could go with her. This to me, you know you take a twelve-year old with an old woman, and the same with my granddaughter. But they loved it and my granddaughter says she would like to go again.

**Q:** Yeah, yeah, very good.

**A:** But yeah so that is one story that is really great. I will always appreciate that the kids wanted to go with me, and we had a good time all the while. So, I have a friend, their daughter loves to go to Germany. She is over there right now. They live in Connecticut, and she won a full ride scholarship to New York, and she was teaching over there. And we only got one hour. She came back, and she loved it after her year was up, and she got married last year; it's a year now. I went to her wedding. I went because I know them so long, and her husband is becoming a doctor. He is in Peru. So right after the wedding, he had to go back; he is still studying. She's 26 and he's 27. She's back in Germany again working; she loves it so much, and he's studying to be a doctor. How they do it? Don't ask me! But he's going to go over when he has time off, to Germany, to be with her over there.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** That's love though.

**Q:** Like I said I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me. I know you were a little...

**A:** Yeah, I don't know, you know, when you're... I might have a big mouth but sometimes I shrink into a little person.

**Q:** I know you said you didn't want to sign any paperwork.

**A:** Nuh uh.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** I can sign just my signature, but you won't be able to read it.

**Q:** Well, this is a consent form that says we can put this in our archives. So, if you'll just sign on that line.

**A:** Okay. Okay but I will sign my legal name.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** That's not my legal name.

**Q:** Okay, and if you'll print that same name there.

**A:** You know how to pronounce my name?

**Q:** Probably not.

**A:** Everybody. I laugh all the time



Interview with Frieda Hermann  
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May 20, 2005

**Q:** Elfriede?

**A:** Elfriede.

**Q:** Elfriede. Alright, let me get your address because I will at some point transcribe this...