

JoAnna Howell World War II Oral History Interview

An Interview Conducted May 11, 2011, by William McWhorter as part of the *Here and There: Recollections of Texas in World War II* Oral History Training Workshop series. This interview was possible due to the generous support of the Houston Endowment and the Summerlee Foundation.

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ABSTRACT

JoAnna Howell (née Wartemann) was born in 1943 in Dallas, Texas, to German immigrants. Her father, Wilhelm Wartemann, moved the growing family around the United States as he looked for work as a refrigerator repairman. The December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor permanently changed their lives. After being rounded up by government authorities, Wilhelm was sent to an internment facility in North Dakota and his wife, Anna, was held at Seagoville Enemy Alien Detention Station near Dallas. Their four children would spend the next two and a half years in foster care at the All Church Home in Fort Worth. Wilhelm was briefly allowed to stay with Anna at Seagoville before being sent to an internment facility in Oklahoma. Later, Anna was temporarily released so she could give birth to their fifth child, JoAnna.

After a concerted letter writing campaign on Wilhelm's part, the Wartemanns were reunited in October 1944 at Crystal City (Family) Internment Camp in Crystal City, Texas. Conditions at the camp convinced Wilhelm to agree to the deportation of the entire family, including his American-born children, to war-torn Germany. They embarked for Europe from New York City aboard the MS *Gripsholm* in February of 1944. It would be several years before the Wartemanns returned to the United States.

In her interview Howell discusses aspects of her family's round up, internment, and deportation, as communicated to her by her siblings and parents. Topics covered include the impact on her family; the separation of adults and children; her siblings' time in foster care; languages spoken at the camp; leisure time; education and school; the family's departure from the United States aboard the *Gripsholm*; conditions in Germany during and immediately after the war; and how various family members made it back to the United States.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

Interviewee: JoAnna Howell
Date: May 11, 2011
Place: Garland, Texas
Interviewer: William McWhorter
Additional Interviewer: Lara Newcomer

McWhorter: This is William McWhorter with the Texas Historical Commission. Today is Wednesday, May 11, 2011. I'm in Garland, Texas, preparing to do an oral history interview with JoAnna Howell, part of the Texas in World War II initiatives "Here and There: Recollections of Texas in World War II." Mrs. Howell, thank you very much for having us into your home. If you don't mind, for the transcriber, would you mind spelling your name out for me?

Howell: Okay. It's JoAnna, capital J-o, capital A-n-n-a; Howell, H-o-w-e-l-l. And my internment camp name, yes, would be Wartemann, W-a-r-t-e-m-a-n-n.

McWhorter: Perfect. Now I know I'm not supposed to ask this of a lady, but for the historical record do you mind telling me when you were born and where you were born?

Howell: Sure. I was born January the 12th, 1943, in Dallas, Texas.

McWhorter: Dallas, Texas. Well, we're here to talk to you about your experience, and your family's experience during World War II, and it's part of a Japanese-American Confinement Sites grant that we have to talk more about the history of Crystal City Family Internment Camp during World War II, which housed – not only the Japanese – but also Germans, who were there first, and Italians during the war. But I believe your family also resided in Seagoville, at least your mom did. Before we get into that context of the story, let's talk about your parents. What are your parents names, and where were they born?

Howell: Okay. My father's name was Wilhelm Wartemann and he was born in Sùpplingen, Germany, in 1900, and my mother's name was Anna Wartemann. Her maiden name was Mahlevitz, and she was born in 1910 in Germany.

McWhorter: And to help us out, would you mind spelling out both of those last names.

Howell: Yes.

McWhorter: Your mother's maiden name and your father's, uh, not your father's last name. You've already spelled that for me, but the German towns.

Howell: Oh, the German towns.

McWhorter: Yeah.

Howell: The German town was Süpplingen, S-u-p-p-l-i-n-g-e-n. The u with the little dots on top. Germany. Umlaut.

McWhorter: Now, if I heard correctly, I wanted to process what you just said, uh, with your father born in 1900 –

Howell: Yes.

McWhorter: ---and your mother born in 1910, they were both born in Germany, is that correct?

Howell: They were both born in Germany, came from the same little town, and my father came to the United States in 1928, and had my mother come over in 1929.

McWhorter: Oh, so they knew each other before they emigrated.

Howell: Yes. Well, they were neighbors – they played together.

McWhorter: Well, bringing them to the United States, what was that reason? Why did your parents decide they wanted to move to America in 1928 and later in '29.

Howell: The reason was my father was in the German Army and, or Navy, actually, and he jumped the ship and stayed in the United States.

McWhorter: Excellent.

Howell: And then got a hold of my mother and had her come to the United States.

McWhorter: Well, your pronunciation of German words is far better than mine, would you mind saying "Kriegsmarine" for me?

Howell: Kriegs what?

McWhorter: Kriegsmarine, the German Navy.

Howell: [with German pronunciation] Kriegsmarine.

McWhorter: See, I never can get that right.

Howell: That's what my father was in, the Kriegsmarine.

McWhorter: Did your father ever tell you that he ran into any sort of trouble, having jumped the ship – and that being, when he’s trying to get in touch with your mom and bring her over, did officials say, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! Your husband....”

Howell: Never. Never. In fact, he went back in 1934 to bring back his two younger brothers to the United States. And he had no problems at all.

McWhorter: Interesting.

Howell: He always wanted to become a citizen of the United States, but he was always denied because he was a refrigeration repair engineer, the FBI papers state, and he was never in one town long enough to apply for citizenship. You had to be three years in one state. I mean, he did apply, like eight times to become a citizen, but they always denied it because he moved around so much with his family.

McWhorter: Well, where did he first start in 1929 when he’s about to –

Howell: In Chicago.

McWhorter: Okay.

Howell: In Chicago, Illinois.

McWhorter: All right. So, he jumped ship, makes his way to Chicago, and he starts an occupation there, refrigeration, did you say engineer?

Howell: Well, that’s what the papers say. Actually, it was a refrigeration repair man. And he worked mostly in butcher shops.

McWhorter: Well, it couldn’t have been too much his fault at the time. If it’s 1929 when he’s getting here, and your mother comes a little bit later, and he’s trying to find work. That’s the beginning of the Great Depression. I can see why he’d be moving around trying to find a job.

Howell: Right, right. He did move because I have two brothers and two sisters, and they were each born in different places. You know, Chicago, Oklahoma, Houston, Dallas. So...

McWhorter: So, his job – does it eventually lead him to Texas? From having a sibling born in Houston.

Howell: Yes, it led him to Texas, right.

McWhorter: All right. And your mom, is she also working during the Great Depression? Or is she taking care of the family? Is she a homemaker?

Howell: She was a homemaker. It was during, she was interned, in, uh, December the 7th 1941 and they took her to Seagoville, Texas. And when she got pregnant with me, they let her get out of the internment camp because she had a hard time having me, and so she worked in a laundry mat [sic] for a few months.

McWhorter: Well, your parents are married by this time. They've moved to Houston, you have older siblings –

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: -- you're developing a life for your family in Texas and December 7, 1941, comes around and the United States enters World War II after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. You mentioned that your mother was interned that day. Was she interned out of Houston? Or was she interned out of Fort Worth, or----?

Howell: No. They were living in Fort Worth and they heard a knock on the door in the middle of the night and it was the FBI. And with their nightgowns on and all, they took the family away.

McWhorter: Including the children?

Howell: Including the children. And they took them to the Dallas police station and questioned them. And then the police officer, or the FBI made a bunch of telephone calls and someone came and took all four children away. They never saw their kids again for two and a half years. And my mother was interrogated for, like, three or four hours and taken to Seagoville, Texas, in the internment camp. And where my father went, she never knew. And later on she found out that he went to North Dakota and he was there. And, on good behavior, after he was in North Dakota for a year or so. Good behavior, but they did a lot with the men. They would let the men and women be together, so my father found out where my mother was. The bus took the men to Seagoville, and that's how I was conceived in Seagoville, Texas. So, then, after, like, two weeks they were together.

And then they took my father back, but not to North Dakota, to Springtown, Oklahoma. He was in the internment camp there. And that's when he really started writing letters. He found out a lot of information, my oldest brother told me, who is going to be 75 years old. He says, "Well, Papa told us we would have never all been together again." But, he was a janitor in the internment camp in Springfield, Oklahoma. And he would clean out the garbage and he would look through the garbage and he'd see Department of Justice, Department of this, department of that, Washington, D.C. So, he wrote letters. In my FBI files I have letters. He wrote letters to [President] Roosevelt, to [President] Truman, to all of the different senators he wrote letters. Because what he wanted to do, he wanted to find out where his four children were. And at that time, the fifth one. And he had always heard that there was an internment camp for children, and that leads us to Crystal City. He kept writing letters and writing letters and, so we ended up [there]. Well, he kept writing letters that he wanted to go.

McWhorter: Okay. Thank you for telling me how your father was working to find out where his children are, and I do want to revisit that. But, I want to talk a little more about December 7, 1941.

Howell: Okay.

McWhorter: It's my understanding from reading Dr. [Arnold] Krammer's book, *Undue Process*, that the FBI had files on a lot of people they suspected to be potential saboteurs, potential Fifth Columnists, whether they were American or German American or Latin German American, and then you could apply that to the Italians and the Japanese, as well.

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: When your father and mother were taken from their home in Fort Worth, on December 7, 1941 – and taken to the Dallas Police Station by the FBI, were they ever told that day – and if it's not that day, well, within that time frame – were they ever told that they were being held as enemy aliens because they weren't citizens yet?

Howell: No. They were never told that, because I asked my oldest sister, and they were never told anything. They were never even told why they were picked up, only that they were Germans, and that they did say that there was someone at work that turned my father in. Because my father, at that time, was working at a furniture store in Fort Worth, and there was an American man that wanted his job. And that's what it says in the FBI papers, also, that man's name is scratched out, so I don't know who the man was. I'd like to go call him. [laughter] So, no, they were never told why they were picked up or ---

McWhorter: Well, from the file that you've seen and from talking to siblings, maybe you talked to your parents about it, did either your mom or your father ever have the opportunity to go before an enemy alien hearing board, where they presented their case to three people who then took that decision locally and sent it back to Washington, D.C. where the judgment was administered nationally? Did they ever go before the hearing board?

Howell: No, they did not go before the hearing board. I don't think anybody went before the hearing board.

McWhorter: [Fellow Crystal City internee] Art Jacobs' father did, that's how we know about it.

Howell: Uh huh.

McWhorter: And he showed us, like you have, great letters. He showed us a letter of someone in the neighborhood who said, "I want to vouch for this person."

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: So I wanted to see if there was anybody in the neighborhood that might have been vouching for your parents.

Howell: Yep. Yep. Well, see, they were not very long in Fort Worth when they were picked up. So, there were not very many neighbors that knew them – all, you know, just that he was a hard worker, trying to make a living to support four children, and in the middle of the night they were yanked out.

McWhorter: Well, it's amazing that it happened so quickly. I've heard, in many instances, where it did happen the next day, you know, December 8th, 1941 --- but, December 7th?

That was pretty quick. What I'm showing you right here are two digital scans. And don't worry about the fine print, but they're newspaper articles: one from San Angelo, west Texas, and one from Houston, saying that enemy aliens in Texas must go to the post office and register. And this is dated February 6th, 1942 and this is February 23rd, 1942. So, they're saying, about a month or so after the [United States enters the] war, "If you're an enemy alien in the United States, you need to go register." But, as we discussed earlier, if they already had a list of a few ideas, and if somebody turned in your father to that list, they were ready that day to start making arrests.

Howell: Right. But, they did have to register. I remember reading that in some of the files here, but I remember my father had to go register, like in 1937. And I think they lived in Chicago at the time. You know, to let them know that he was not a citizen and he had to register in the United States.

McWhorter: Well, that, that is just amazing to hear. This is the first time I've heard of this so quickly. Not that it hasn't happened to many, many others. But, the velocity in the FBI arriving in Fort Worth to, you know, arrest your father – who is obviously caught up in something far greater than him, like so many were – is very impressive. Thank you for sharing that. Now, your siblings, just like you – all born here in the United States – all American citizens --

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: -- are taken from your family. And you were discussing how your father, you know, looked in the trash. And he looked for addresses, and he looked for names.

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: And he was writing letters. "Where are my kids? I want to know where my kids are." Your siblings, like you, who are American citizens, where did your father end up finding you guys? Well, not you, but them?

Howell: He wrote to someone in Fort Worth. And, so a case worker wrote him back. I've got the letter in here also, and the case worker wrote back and says, "Your children are in All Church Home in Fort Worth, Texas." With the address and all, saying, "I

don't think you want your children back because I feel that y'all are not fit parents since y'all, both of you..." – both parents were Germans and the children were American citizens. That's what was told to my father. And he kept trying and trying and trying, you know, to get the children back. And finally, you know, he did get them back. And they were just little, they were so nervous. When they were picked up and taken to the All Church Home Orphanage, my oldest sister was eleven. And the youngest one was just three. And then there was a nine-year-old and a five-year-old --- in pajamas they were picked up and taken. And then the whole thing is, the children, they were put in infirmary for two weeks because my oldest sister heard them say, "They may have the Nazi disease." So, they were not allowed to be around any of the children in that home. And, so my sister said they really felt weird, you know – being by themselves – the four were by themselves at the time and then later on when they were let out, the boys – in that home, they were all in one room and the girls were in the other one. And the boys had to help in the home there – do the yard work and all, and the girls had to work – help in the kitchen. But, she says my little sister that was three years old, she cried every single day for her mama – because she was still a baby. So....

McWhorter: So your mother is detained in Fort Worth, where she's living at the time, and then she's sent to Seagoville which is an internment camp in Texas during the war. Your father is detained in Fort Worth and he's sent to North Dakota.

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: After a visit with your mother, he's sent to Oklahoma. He's working, trying to find out where his kids are. I'm sure your mother is worried and trying in her best to find out information.

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: Eventually your mother finds out she's pregnant with you. December the following year, Crystal City Family Internment Camp opens. Your siblings are being held in an orphanage in Fort Worth.

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: When, about – do you know the day or do you know at least the month of the year – did your father come from one place, your mother come from one place – maybe pregnant with you, or maybe having had delivered you, and then your other siblings come – when were you reunited?

Howell: Okay, we were reunited in October of 1944. I'm sorry, 1943. October 1943.

McWhorter: Nearly two years after.....

Howell: Yes. I was born then, in January – and October, I would be nine months old when I... So, it was only my mother and myself first that came. And then, all of a sudden this car pulls up with four little children in there. A case worker brought the four. So, then we were all reunited at Crystal City in a small two-bedroom house. And, my sister said my mother, the first thing she did, she bought some material and kind of put material so that the boys were separated from the girls, you know, so they'd have like separate rooms – the kids.

McWhorter: That must have been a joyous experience that day for your mom to see that car door open.

Howell: You know what, it really was. It really was.

McWhorter: And is your father at the camp by this time? In Crystal City? Or does he join you later?

Howell: He joined about the time the kids got there.

McWhorter: Okay.

Howell: So, October the 13th all of us ended up being together. My father got there, and my mother was there already a little bit earlier with me, and my two brothers and two sisters.

McWhorter: Now, you're all together in the middle of the war, October 1943. Germany is very far away from being defeated.

Howell: Yes.

McWhorter: They've suffered terrible losses at Stalingrad, and Kursk that year. They've lost North Africa. Italy has been invaded. But they are far from being knocked out. They still control continental Europe. Japan, on the other side, has lost a lot in the South

Pacific, but nowhere near the home islands. They still control the Philippines. The war is far from over. So, you guys are still being held in an internment camp that has, not just Germans, but also has Japanese internees, and it has Italian internees. And it has not just internees in the United States, but internees coming to the United States from Latin America. Now, being 9 months old when you get there, I don't expect you to have a lot of memories of what life was like in the camp, but did your parents ever talk to you – did your siblings ever talk to you about what they thought of the camp? You know, the housing conditions, the schools, the landscape, the heat of Zavala County, anything?

Howell: Right. Well, my brothers and sisters – we were actually only from October to February at Crystal City.

McWhorter: You were there for a very short time.

Howell: Very short time. Until they shipped us back on the [MS] *Gripsholm*. And, but they did say, like my brothers and sisters, they couldn't speak German, and most of the kids that were at Crystal City, they all spoke German. So, they were kind of left out a little bit. So, they all went to school, but my brothers and sisters didn't go to school at that time because they kept – my father kept reading that they were going to be sending the internees back – some of them back, and so he – right away – went down and says, "I want to be shipped back." Because, he says, "I feel like I could have a better life and support my children in Germany than here."

McWhorter: Which is currently at war with half the world.

Howell: Which was at war.

McWhorter: And he thought that was a better place to go.

Howell: Exactly. And, so, we went back like everybody else – like quite a few other people did, February the 14th, 1944.

McWhorter: Again, I don't expect you to remember, but did your parents tell you how they left? Did they take a bus, maybe to Uvalde [Texas], and get on a train and head to the East Coast?

Howell: They left with a train and they went to New York. And from New York, they got on the ship. On the *Gripsholm* ship.

McWhorter: And it's my understanding that during the war, the protectorate nations that may or may not have been neutral completely during the war – Spain for Japan, Switzerland for Germany – worked with the International Red Cross, worked with the German government, the American government, maybe the British/Allied governments, certainly the Latin American countries that participated in those internees for an exchange process. And, we're seeing your father taking his family voluntarily, and many others maybe not voluntarily on multiple – maybe two, maybe more than that – exchanges to Europe. And you guys are going across the Atlantic. The Atlantic is a combat zone. Your father is thinking to himself – it's better for us to go across submarine infested waters –

Howell: And it was –

McWhorter: -- to a country that's at war with the world, than stay here and the way you were treated. That must have been a profoundly difficult decision for him to make, or one that he had to stick to once he decided he was going to do it.

Howell: Right. And the reason he wanted to do it, like I said, he thought it would be better. But, once he got to Germany he found out it was worse. Because, you know, with the food rationing, no food to eat, and it was, it was really, really bad. And we had absolutely nothing, although, since all five of us children were American citizens, the American Red Cross gave us – once a month – a package for the children – with food in it – coffee, tea, cigarettes –

McWhorter: Everything a child needs ---

Howell: Everything a child needs [laughs] – chewing gum, food, you know, but what my father used to do – he used to take the coffee, because neither one of them I guess drank coffee, and would go to his hometown of Süpplingen, that's where the big sugar factory was – and he would exchange the coffee for sugar.

McWhorter: Trade and barter.

Howell: Yes. But, getting back to - you were asking me about Crystal City, if my brothers or sisters remember anything. After seeing that *Dateline* [television episode], and I gave my brother the tape of *Dateline*, and it shows the guards sitting and guarding the children playing outside. He was sitting on his recliner, and tears were coming down. And he was only 7 years old at that time, when he was at Crystal City. And he says, "I remember that as if it just happened." He says, "Those American guards had the guns on us children as if we were going to escape." And he says, "I remember that so clearly."

McWhorter: This photo that I showed you a few minutes ago – you can see in this black-and-white photo that we have right here, the Federal High School. There's the basketball court...

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: There's some children standing right there, and there's the guard tower overlooking the playground.

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: So, there's photographic evidence of how close it was, you know. And then, your brother's first-person perspective of what it was like, you know, was that guard playing? Or was that guard with a major chip on his shoulder and he sees every German as a Nazi?

Howell: Exactly.

McWhorter: Either way, you can see how close it is to one of the schools.

Howell: Yeah. But, what could a little child do?

McWhorter: Well, speaking of little children, do you see this photo right here?

Howell: Yes.

McWhorter: It's a bunch of children playing. Don't say what it is yet. When I did an oral history interview with another lady, Heidi Gurcke Donald, I am from southwest Texas. I was born in Uvalde, 45 minutes north of Crystal City. When I saw that photo, I thought that the little German children, and the little Japanese children in this photo may be playing Ring Around the Rosie. And she told me, "No! We're

playing....” Uh, literally, “Sleeping Beauty, the Thorn Rose.” And she explained to me what they were playing. Of course, you’re nine months. I don’t expect you to be dancing around in that circle right there, but this is a reason why we do these oral history interviews. What your brother just shared with you – that first person perspective – and us doing all the research that we may have with Army Corps of Engineer maps and nice color or black and white photos, still, until you know someone who’s been there, they can’t tell you exactly what took place there, so...I appreciate you sharing your brother’s perspective, as well. Have you ever heard from anyone you’ve talked with, have you ever heard from any of your siblings who were there, if they remember the camp having some sort of demarcation point, some sort of segregation point. And not segregation as we understand it in America along racial lines....

Howell: Right.

McWhorter:but segregation in accordance with the Geneva Convention, which said that if you’re going to have an internment camp, it has to be one nationality there. So, with the Germans arriving in Crystal City first, they worked really hard to get this camp going because they didn’t have a choice. They said, you know, you will work, this is your home.

Howell: Right.

McWhorter: Many Japanese arrive later, again, without a choice. They’re being brought to this internment camp – lived there alongside. And you see from the aerial maps, a section for the Japanese, a section for the Germans, the Italians lumped in with the Germans. You see German schools. You see Japanese schools. But you see one high school, with them coming together. We’ve been told that there really wasn’t any sort of fence that separated the two. Because I’ve talked with people you know, and they said, “We would just walk our way through and go to the swimming pool.”

Howell: Exactly.

McWhorter: We would walk over to the football field. We would drive the ice truck through and deliver ice to the houses. Have you ever heard or talked with anybody that has ever said, you know, that there was some sort of physical barrier inside the camp that you could tell – this was the German side and this was the Japanese side. Or.....

Howell: I had asked my sister that question and she said usually the Germans stuck with the Germans and the Japanese stuck with the Japanese. You know, that they really didn't mingle that much, until they came to the pool. Everybody got in the pool together and played – the kids. And I don't know about the soccer players, if they played soccer with each other – that I do not know. But, I've seen pictures of kids sitting in the school and they were mostly all just blonde children sitting together.

McWhorter: When they came to the pool, they all sat together.

Howell: They all sat together, didn't they? Right. Look at this.

McWhorter: We're looking at a photo right now of one of the diving boards over the deep end of the swimming/irrigation pool at Crystal City, and it shows several teenage, maybe younger children, both Japanese and either German or Italian nationality, and then a couple of smaller children. Excellent. Well, we're certainly learning a lot so far. How about when the ship arrived at continental Europe? We've been told that, from oral history interviews with merchant marines, that the ships would arrive sometimes at a port in France – even when France was occupied by Germany. And the Red Cross would facilitate a land bridge into Germany. We've been told that Portugal acted as a neutral country and that ships met at ports in Portugal and then by train, people were taken to Germany. Does your family know how they got from the ship to Germany?

Howell: Yes, they – my sister was telling me that they left on the *Gripsholm* for Portugal, Lisboa, Portugal. And they stayed in Sintra for a while, and, there she is a little girl and she got that little pin in Sintra. You can see Sintra written on there.

McWhorter: Excellent. This is a nice little quarter sized pin.

Howell: And they travelled by bus. And they stayed there for about two weeks, in Sintra. And then they went from Portugal, from Portugal they went to Spain, France by train. And then they stayed in France in a real, real big fancy mansion hotel, and they were wined and dined. You know, children being small, and being in a nice, big hotel – they really – it was maybe like a Holiday Inn, but they thought it was really fancy and neat looking. And after they were in France, then they went by train to Saarbrüchen, which is [in] Germany. And that's where they took everybody.

McWhorter: Is that in the north or the south of Germany?

Howell: You know what, I don't know.

Newcomer: Could you spell the name?

Howell: Yeah, it's S-a-a-r-b-r-u-c-h-e-n.

McWhorter: Thank you.

Howell: And once they got to Saarbrüchen, our family got really a wake up call. They couldn't get any food, my brothers needed some shoe strings – you couldn't even get shoe strings for the shoes. No food to eat, they had ration cards. So, my father thought, "Did I make a mistake, or not?" Okay?

McWhorter: Well, it's impressive that the German government would open up its arms at a time when they're facing the crunch from both sides to "new" German citizens.

Howell: Exactly.

McWhorter: If your family is leaving the United States in February of 1944, and they're being taken by ship, it's not going to be there the next day. So, it's very possible your family is in Portugal in March or April, the spring of 1944. By the time they make it to Germany, they're very close to have been in France just mere weeks before the Allied invasion of Normandy, and once that happens, the compression on both the western and the eastern sides of Germany gets stronger and stronger. And you see a lot of men, a lot of young men, and a lot of men in their 40s, which your father would have been in, and even older than that – being impressed into the

Volkssturm, the people's army. Did your father ever mention if he was asked to carry a rifle for the home guard?

Howell: No. You know, that, I don't know. They never talked. He never talked about it. My mother and father never talked about anything, but I asked my sister what happened at, you know, once you got to Germany, because we had to struggle. We had to struggle harder than what we did in America, you know for food. And then we ended up going to my grandparents' house. Well, you know, during the war, going with seven people, they didn't have any food to feed seven people. So, my mother stayed there with me, since I was a baby and my other sister, the younger – next to the younger one, that was, like, six years old. We stayed there for about two or three weeks while the bigger ones had to go with my father to look for a place to live. So, my father kept saying, let's go to Wilhelmshaven. Wilhelmshaven is a port town on the North Sea, close to Bremerhaven, and he thought he could get a job there. And, so, he did. He got a job and we lived in a small, one-bedroom apartment. But by that time, then, the bombs started falling. So, we mostly lived in the bomb shelter for the next few years. And my sister, who was, like, by that time 14, 14 ½, she was always responsible [for] me. Because the Allies would come down and drop bombs and she says, "I remember just sliding in a creek, you know, just to be missed by the bombs." And they more or less lived, we lived in a bomb shelter. And then when the bombs quit falling for a little while, my father says, "Let's go back to the apartment." When he went back to the apartment, a fire bomb had been thrown in there. So, the little bit that we did have was blown up by the fire bomb. So, then we went back into the bomb shelters and after that, the government gave us government housing. And we lived in the government housing until we came back to the United States. But, my two older brothers and sisters, they came over in 1948 by themselves. One was 17, the other one was 15. There was a family in Denton, Texas, that wanted to adopt the two when they were in the home in Fort Worth, and she kept in contact

with them. So, they, she kept writing to them, “You want to come back to America?” Because they were citizens, and they wanted to come back.

McWhorter: They had to be sponsored back.

Howell: They had to be sponsored back. So, they were sponsored back by Mr. and Mrs. Mansar, [that] was their name, in Denton. And my brother was 15, my sister was 17, like I had said. They worked very hard to make enough money, and since they were citizens, they could sponsor us. So, my middle brother, who is 75 now – he was born in 1936 – he came back in the summer of 1952 by himself. And then we came back in October of 1952 - by ship to Galveston. And then we settled in Galveston for about three years, and then we moved to Houston and that’s where I met my husband, after I went to school.

McWhorter: I’m glad that you were able to describe that, because so many people are disconnected from World War II because of the time and the distance of the past six and a half decades, but life has to keep going on...

Howell: Sure.

McWhorter: ...even during a war, and your dad had to find a job.

Howell: Exactly.

McWhorter: You know, just because bombs are falling on German industrial areas, trying to knock out their ability to wage war, just because the Allied armies are advancing, and will eventually will be overrunning portions of their defense, uh, western wall, doesn’t mean your dad still doesn’t have to work. You know, so trying to find a job in the middle of this, and being able to find a job, that’s an excellent perspective. That’s the first person part of World War II history that you don’t hear. You know, you see the great, grand maps of which army went where, what battle [were] fought on which date, but I really liked what you said there. And I’m also very happy to see that these Texans from Denton, did you say the Manzars?

Howell: Mansar.

McWhorter: The Mansars were able, like we talked before this oral history interview – before internet, before phones, before iPhones—able to stay in touch because they met

them through the orphanage. Stay in touch, maybe knowing that you guys went to Crystal City. Staying in touch maybe knowing that you eventually went to Germany, being able to get letters over to you, staying in touch afterwards. Because Art Jacobs talked about the same thing, how he and his brother were sent back to Germany, how they had to find their grandparents, but their grandparents had little to nothing to help them as well. You know, so you had to find your way. And then, thanks to somebody back in the United States, sponsoring and getting them back.

Howell: Back to this good country.

McWhorter: And then you got back because your family got back. You know, it's a wonderful epilogue, you know, to the sincere injustice done to your family.

Newcomer: Mansar? Would that be M-a....

Howell: M-a-n-s-a-r. Mansar. Phillip was his first name. She was German, he was American. She came over from Heidelberg years and years ago. In fact, my sister just gave me this old photo album with all the photos in there. And I made a few copies, but they're in there, the Mansars. They were wonderful people that tried to help us. But, you know, as soon as we came to the United States, my father wanted to have a job, and he wanted to make something out of himself. And we did. We did. They all did real well, and my two brothers and my two sisters did very well. I did very well. So.....

McWhorter: Well, with Germany being partitioned the way it was after the war, there's a lot of Allied personnel in Germany after the war. Art talked about, right before the end of the war, seeing Army soldiers, American Army soldiers... And he talked about post-war, definitely seeing Army and Army Air Forces folks all over the place because they're helping reconstitute Germany's economy, trying to help the civilians, trying to make sure that the Germans have been defeated and there's no resistance held up in whatever portion of the country there might be. Did your parents, did your siblings, maybe you by now, have any memories of seeing the

Allied armies coming, and if so, did they ever say, “Hey, hey, hey, we’re American kids. I was born in Houston.”

Howell: Right. You know, I was too young, but my brothers – both of my brothers – one is deceased now, but both of them had talked about how nice American soldiers were to them. They’d always say, “Come over here,” because they knew that they were Americans, “I’ll give you some chewing gum.” Or, “I’ll give you some chocolate bars.”

McWhorter: They could see it in their face and they could hear it in their accent.

Howell: Yeah. Because, see, my brothers and sisters, they could not speak German at all. And the reason I speak German so well is because that’s the first language I learned.

McWhorter: If you can learn it when you’re young it’s a lot easier.

Howell: And I learned it when I was young, and then I was married for 43 years to a German man. And he’s the one that really got me involved in this also. And then, now with Avery, my husband, second husband – he’s been wonderful, and done a lot of work on it, and helping me. I just, what I want, I just want for the Americans to acknowledge us, that this really happened, because they’re just kind of sweeping it under the rug. Like my little grandson in, he lives in Katy, Texas. And he’s in the, I guess, 8th grade or 9th grade – they were discussing the internment camps, but you know what? The teacher didn’t want to know anything about the Germans. She says, “No, it just says all about the Japanese here.” But at least I am so happy, in the Texas schools they’re going to have to teach it now, this next year. Did you know that? It’s wonderful.

McWhorter: Well, I always end an interview by asking the same question, but this time I’m going to ask two, because Lara had one.

Howell: Okay.

McWhorter: Lara’s question, oh, by the way for those hearing this in the future, Lara Newcomer, contract historian for the Texas Historical Commission is sitting here and Lara wanted to ask a question about your father in the Navy and jumping ship.

Newcomer: Why did your dad decide to jump ship in 1928?

Howell: I think he was just a young, dumb little guy and he knew the good opportunities there are in the United States, because he came from a small, little farm town, and they didn't have anything. And he just knew America, money grows on the trees, money is laying everywhere. I'm going to make something out of myself.

Newcomer: It wasn't a political, anti-Hitler, I've got to get out of Germany....it was....

Howell: No, not at all.

McWhorter: Because it's a few years before – I think it's 1933 when the Nazi Party comes into power. Hitler's making waves in the late '20s, but he's not in power yet.

Howell: Exactly.

Newcomer: Did your mother ever talk about Seagoville? I mean, do you have any....

Howell: No. Do you know, she never talked about Seagoville. In fact, I never even knew about Seagoville until the first reunion of Crystal City that we had. And they were talking about Seagoville – there was an internment camp.

McWhorter: And you said, "Hey, that's where I was born."

Howell: Then I put two and two together, and it shows in here the telegrams that were sent from Seagoville, Texas, trying to find my father – to let him know that I was being born and that mother, my mother was having a hard time having me. That's when I heard about Seagoville.

McWhorter: Well, we always end an interview by asking the same question. Is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we haven't discussed yet.

Howell: I think we've discussed – everything that I know, I've tried to tell you. You know, and I still keep searching, and keep searching and get more information, more information. And every once in a while, you know, my sister will tell me a little bit more of this or that. But, like yesterday when I called her, she was telling me about this, that the children were put into an infirmary and that they were not allowed to be with the other children because they maybe had a Nazi disease. See, that's – so she'll come up with little things to tell me and she's very well in her mind. She's got a mind like an elephant. And I told her, I says, "Margaret, at the next

reunion in November, you're going with me." So, hopefully I can bring my brother and my sister to the next reunion - November 2011, I hope.

McWhorter: And we plan to put this All Church Home orphanage on our site list now. Because if your family's held there, there were probably other internees' children held there.

Howell: That, I don't know – who was all held there. Because I asked my sister one time, I says, "So, what kind of kids were in there? Were they put up for adoption?" And she said it was more like a foster home, or what – some mothers were having a hard time because they had too many kids, or they couldn't take care of their children and they were placed there. And I've been wanting to go there, because I talked to her just yesterday and she said she understands there are cottages there now at the All Church Home. I used to call it "Old" Church Home, but it's All Church Home. And I have the address and all, and we're going to be going to a party next week in Fort Worth, and we're going to leave early because I want to go by that address and see if that place is still there. But my sister knew about the Gladys Home for Unwed Mothers. She said that was right down the street. And that home is still there right now. People can go there and adopt children at that home. So, I'm wondering if this All Church Home is still there.

McWhorter: You'll have to take a look.

Howell: And I've got the address and all, and I will take a look. I want to go. I want to see.

Newcomer: You mentioned that the Mansars wanted to adopt your older brother and sister. So, if your father had not managed to get the family back together, the four children would have been adopted out? Is that.....?

Howell: Probably so, because that's what the case workers wanted. The main woman that was in charge of the home, or of the state, had said they were Americans and my parents were German, and my parents were not fit to have American children, that they should be adopted out.

McWhorter: I wonder what that state agency would be called...see if the state archives has records on it.

Newcomer: Maybe child protective services?

McWhorter: Maybe, if it existed back then.

Howell: I could look through all the papers and I can email you the address of the home because we want to go there.

McWhorter: Yes, please do.

Howell: I mean, we went to the house, you know, that they picked us up. And, so, I want to go, you know to the..... Oh, here are the kids. This was in 1943 when they were in the home. What I did – I just made copies of the photos, you know.

McWhorter: Outstanding. Yeah, we'll definitely....

Howell: And if you turn it around, that was when we got off the ship in Galveston and we went to Houston, to the Houston Zoo – up on top there. There's me, the youngest one, and then my sister with the pigtails right next to me there. Yeah, she just died a couple of years ago – last year - and my mother and I. We came over. We came over together. Let's see. Yeah. This one and this one, and my father and mother came over together. And then these are my two – this is my oldest sister with my oldest brother. They came over in 1948 – in fact, I went to Denton and I got an article. I knew they came over in 1948, and I was trying to find an article at all about them and this maybe would be interesting, too. "Children of War Arrive in Denton" – this is my brother and sister.

McWhorter: This is a newspaper article.

Howell: That's a newspaper article that I got out of the 1948, out of the, what was that called? I searched and searched, then I found it.

McWhorter: This is excellent.

Howell: Uh, microfilms?

McWhorter: Mmm, hmmm.

Howell: I knew it was 1948, and I went through all the papers and I found that.

McWhorter: Very lucky. Mrs. Phillip Mansar.

Howell: Uh huh.

McWhorter: 413 Panhandle.

Howell: Yep.

McWhorter: Well, thank you very much.

Howell: Well, you're quite welcome.

McWhorter: We really learned a lot from you today, and we appreciate it.

Howell: Okay. And if you need any information, or any pictures or what, I'll be more than happy to make copies and give it to you.

McWhorter: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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