McWhorter: This is William McWhorter, military historian at the Texas Historical Commission, and today is Friday, February 13, 2009. I'm at 1510 San Antonio Street in Austin, Texas sitting here today with Heidi and Bruce Donald, and we're going to conduct the oral history of Heidi Gurcke Donald and her experiences—

H Donald: Gurcke.

McWhorter: Gurcke—at Crystal City Family Internment Camp. So now for the record and for the transcriber, would you please tell me your full name?

H Donald: Heidi Gurcke Donald.

McWhorter: Well, Heidi, thank you very much for joining me today. It's my pleasure to get to meet you. And let's begin by talking a little bit about the context of your life. Where were you born?

H Donald: San Jose, Costa Rica.

McWhorter: San Jose, Costa Rica.

H Donald: Um hmm.

McWhorter: And how long did you live there?

H Donald: Just a few years. We were taken away by the U.S. military before I was three.

McWhorter: Before you were three. And while you were living in Costa Rica, what family members were there with you, such as parents, brothers, sisters, extended family?

H Donald: My mother Star Pate Gurcke, and father Werner, my sister Ingrid, and then there was also my uncle Karl Oscar Gurcke, his wife—and her name is a great long Spanish name. We just called her Tiapani—it was Carlotta on and on and on—and her daughter Ermida.

McWhorter: Very nice. And if I have this correct—and I'm sure the transcriber will appreciate it—Gurcke is spelled G-u-r-c-k-e.

H Donald: Yeah.

McWhorter: And Heidi is H-e-i-d-i, and then Donald as it sounds.

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: Well, let's see. Costa Rica and a very young age. How did your family get to Costa Rica originally?

H Donald: My father was born in Hamburg, Germany, as was his older brother, Karl Oscar, and apparently we had family there. So after World War I as soon as the boys got old enough to be allowed away from home, first Karl Oscar left for Costa Rica and then a few years later in 1929 when my father was barely twenty, he went to Costa Rica. They both intended to live there the rest of their days and they both loved it very, very much.

McWhorter: What brought them to Costa Rica. Why did they choose Costa Rica as to any other place in the world?

H Donald: Well, as I say, I think—for one thing, Latin America had numerous colonies of Germans. Yeah, almost every country in Latin America

had a lot—a large German population—but I think Costa Rica because we did have distant relatives there that had moved probably in the late 1890s or so. Loringle is a name that comes into mind, and it was Mr. Loringle who gave my father his first job working with a pharmacy as a pharmacy representative until my father struck out on his own.

McWhorter: And what did he do on his own?

H Donald: He was an importer, basically sort of a middleman between foreign manufacturers of things like buttons, umbrellas, textiles, watches, and he took care of all of the getting things into the country, which wasn't an easy job because of all the different kind of customs and things like that. And then the retailers received the goods, so he was sort of the middleman between those two.

McWhorter: I see. Well, it's never polite to ask a woman this, but for the historical record, may I know your birthday?

H Donald: March 8, 1940. Yes, I'm comfortable with that.

McWhorter: You're going to have a birthday coming up very soon then.

H Donald: That's right. Yes.

McWhorter: Well, today, in case I haven't said it already—I'm pretty sure I did—is February 13, 2009.

So let's see here. Living in Costa Rica, born in 1940. By that time in Europe several countries are at war.

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: How did your family being of German descent hear about news coming from Europe at that time?

H Donald: I should preface this story with the fact that most of these—the information isn't truly my memories. I sat my mother down when she was eighty-three or so. I finally told her, "Either you're going to tell me now, or this story is going to go when you do." It took over a month of her being asked questions, crying, and in some cases hardly getting a word or two out before she'd cry. My father never talked about any of it, so some of it is from my mother's memories. My father saved a lot of papers, and I found all—he was a great duplicator, so even prior to carbon paper he made copies of every letter he sent to all the authorities and things like that and tucked it away. So I found that after he died, and then also of course, the National Archives have been helpful.

So now I've lost the thread of what you were—oh, about the war. Nineteen thirty-nine my parents knew because my father had family still in Germany. His many cousins, many aunts and uncles and his parents as well as his youngest brother, they watched what the news was, and they had, as my mother called it, just a wonderful world radio. She wrote a lot of really very vivid letters. I wish I had what that radio was, it was just so marvelous, but apparently it was shortwave and she was able to—they got a lot of

information that way. So they knew about Germany's march into Poland and they knew that probably the war would widen.

They were wary, but by that time I was on the way, so there wasn't much choice. And then, of course, by August of 1940 the British had published a blacklist and my father and my uncle and their businesses were on it. However, my mother immediately got pregnant again, and my sister was born on July 17, 1941. Her name was Ingrid—is Ingrid. She was born the day that Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued the proclaimed list—the United States Proclaimed List, which was basically another blacklist, but it was from the U.S. and he had a lot more clout in Costa Rica than did the British, so that really effectively ruined my father's business.

McWhorter: I'm sorry to hear that.

H Donald: Well, it's a long time ago, water under the bridge.

McWhorter: Um hmm. While living in Costa Rica, was there a predominant language spoken in the house, or was there a mix of both Spanish and German?

H Donald: I've thought about that a lot because I have a—there are words that I have used or that I know that I couldn't distinguish by which language, and I was much surprised that *lechuga*, which means lettuce in Spanish, was Spanish and not German. But I think my parents probably spoke German. My mother had a master's degree in Germanic languages, and so she had mastered that. That was

their only common language. My father spoke maybe a smattering of English. My mother learned Spanish and we had maids that were Spanish speaking, so Spanish was around, but I suspect German was the primary language. Of course, my mother got—she got upset at being the only person learning languages, so she kind of pushed my father into English weeks, where she could be the boss. She liked that a lot.

McWhorter: Oh, I see. Very nice. Well, it sounds like you're quite a young age when you left Costa Rica.

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: I have a feeling I understand why, but that's why we're here to do this interview, so instead of asking leading questions, I'm going to ask open-ended questions—

H Donald: Sure.

McWhorter: —about how you left Costa Rica. But before we get to that, what was the environment like in Costa Rica after December 7, 1941 and the United States entered World War II?

H Donald: As far as my—again, these are not my memories. My mother didn't speak about any changes. She said the Costa Ricans were kind thoughtful people and that she and my father had hoped to live all their lives there. And she did write an early letter that indicated that she was so glad that they were in Costa Rica, where they were at least free—they may have some financial problems because of the

blacklists but they were free to speak their mind. They were free to go about their business. Of course that began to change as the America's—United States government got into the act sending FBI agents down and censoring—listening—having listening posts and that sort of thing. But my parents weren't really aware of that, not in the early days.

McWhorter: Okay. I'm not exactly sure because of the geography and the structure of the government at the time, but was Costa Rica in 1940 an independent nation?

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: Or was it a territory, such as Puerto Rico?

H Donald: No. No. It was an independent nation. The program—I've done a lot of research into this—the program that was used was a totally illegal program. The FBI was used surreptitiously. They sent agents down there, and secretly the agents were supposed to gather information to make the same sort of list that was being made in the United States of people who [Interviewee is saying, "Quote, unquote."] "might prove dangerous if war broke out," so that they could have people that might prove dangerous already listed. However, most of these agents didn't speak Spanish and they didn't speak German, and of course, there was Japanese and Italians were also eventually picked up, so they didn't speak those languages either. So often they used paid informants, and I read a

Costa Rican book about the episode, and this particular writer—I have no verification of it—but he said that they had coupons in newspapers that you could just fill out anonymously to, you know, name your *beca* and send it in to these FBI agents or the embassies and things like that. It was a State Department program.

McWhorter: Well, it sounds like the paranoia that many Japanese Americans felt at the early part of World War II with the presidential order calling for the evacuation of the Western Coast was mirrored equally in the United States and Latin American countries for Germans and Italians.

H Donald: I don't think paranoia—I mean, we weren't paranoid. I think the government was paranoid, the United States government.

McWhorter: That's what I meant.

H Donald: (laughs) Okay. Basically though, again, I've read fairly extensively on this, particularly there's a book called *Nazis and Good Neighbors* by Max Paul Friedman that I thoroughly recommend to anybody interested in learning more about this. I think it's really well researched and he went to many Latin American countries. He went to Germany, he went to the United States, all the archives. But he said primarily the motive, especially for the German pickup in Costa Rica and all the other Latin American countries—nineteen countries sent their citizens up for rounding up—was security especially in the case of Germany. Germany was advancing very

rapidly in Europe and seemed to be really a superpower and there was a lot—not a lot, but there was some evidence, especially in countries like Argentina, Mexico—I think it was Brazil—of some truly organized perhaps Nazi activity. So there was an element of probably legitimacy to those concerns. But shortly after that they began to realize that if you—now, I go back to Costa Rica just more of my specifics—but you rounded up the people that own the big coffee plantations, you had a coffee plantation without an owner and what better than an American to come in to run the company? So very shortly—and also the government was corrupt as well, so they also realized, hey, get this person deported and my nephew so-and-so can take over the farm. So that became a secondary motive, the economy.

And then somewhere along the line not too far along—and I can't remember the date—but it's called the Marshall Memo. It's clearly stated that they had finally decided, they discovered why they could take the people—and we weren't called internees, we were going to be called detainees—we were going to be brought to the United States temporarily and then exchanged because no one would know where we had gone once we had left the country that we were taken from.

McWhorter: Understand. I think I've heard a little bit similar to what you just mentioned about removing someone from the merchant shop that

they made, the plantation that they built, the business that they'd established, whatever example to be used, and were placing them with, say, the nephew of someone or this outside foreign investor from here being the same thing that many Japanese in South America ran into especially in Peru.

H Donald: Yes. Well, most of the Japanese from Latin America came from Peru, but not all of them. There were some from Costa Rica. I have the blacklist that was published in the newspaper and there are some Japanese names on that one as well.

McWhorter: I'd like to see that someday if it's possible to make a scan of it.

H Donald: Yeah. We've got it already pre-scanned, but I think we've got it at home. I don't think—we've got a copy of the paper, but we've actually got a real high quality copy, so, yeah, sure, get you one.

McWhorter: Well, you've done an excellent job thus far in establishing the context of what is taking place in the early 1940s in Costa Rica associated to Germans there. Now, you'd mentioned citizenship. Were your parents citizens at that time of Costa Rica?

H Donald: No, they weren't citizens of Costa Rica. My mother was a United States citizen. She was born in San Jose, California. My father had never—he'd never gone on—he didn't get citizenship in Costa Rica, so he was basically—he and my uncle Karl Oscar were German citizens still. They were busy establishing themselves. I don't think they ever even thought about it.

McWhorter: Um hmm. Now, with you being born in Costa Rica, would that've made you a Costa Rican citizen at that time?

H Donald: I was a Costa Rican citizen. My sister and I both were, but my mother—but they immediately registered us with the United States Embassy, so we were also United States citizens, and through my father we were German citizens, so we had triple citizenship until we became eighteen.

McWhorter: I see. Well, leading up to your, I guess, detention—as detainee being a derivative of the word—and movement to the United States, we'll get to that shortly—did it lead up with a series of events?

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: Was there an escalation in perhaps the obvious discrimination being faced by Germans, Italians, and Japanese and Costa Ricans based on their nationality, or was there just all of a sudden one day you were being loaded onto a truck and moved off?

H Donald: No, it built. It built. But again, discrimination wasn't on the part, I don't think, of most of the Costa Ricans. They were pressured by the United States, much, much pressure to freeze the counts. The Germans had run big businesses. My father's business was not a big business, but they were running the coffee *finkas*, they were running the sugar plantations, the cane. They were intermarrying with the Costa Ricans. They were learning the language much

more than some of the other—well, much more than the Americans apparently, who would come in and keep their own enclaves and didn't ever learn the language, and the Germans were assimilating. In fact, some of the Germans married into some of the ruling families of the people who became president and things of that sort. So I don't think the government was really intentionally—certainly the people weren't.

Maybe the government began to see the possibility of removing people and getting their stuff, but it was more—things—the funds were frozen, and originally the funds—it was fairly easy to access. But then more restrictions were placed on the funds at the insistence of the United States apparently, so that you could get small amounts out, but you had to fill out these huge lengthy forms, and in Costa Rica at least you had to bribe the official in charge. And the Costa Rican government began to put tax—tax these frozen accounts as well. So by the war's end my parents had almost eight thousand dollars in their account that they never saw again. So that money became a problem, but as I said, my mother was—she still felt—she was still writing letters that said, "At least our problems are only financial."

When the business dried up, they decided—which is pretty funny really—they decided to try to become farmers. My father was a businessman pure and simple, had never—he'd lived in the big

city of Hamburg, he knew nothing about farming, and my mother the same. She was a scholar basically. She'd never done much except turn pages of books. But they bought a little farm, it was about an acre—and they called it a *finka*—just north of San Jose in a little town—it wasn't considered a very rural area—it isn't anymore—but San Juan de Tobas, and set about—there was a little bit of coffee on the farm, which they harvested and then they sold to a coffee roaster and grinder person. And then they planted vegetables. And they had a cow for a while, but my mother says that the cow and my father didn't understand each other, so the cow never gave milk and they eventually sold it. So for a while they were making it.

My father was going into town trying to get people to pay up for his business, you know, the past services, and that came to a stop because he was told in no uncertain terms he was blacklisted and it's naughty to go looking for your own money. So my mother decided to. They made her a partner in his firm and because she was a United States citizen, they thought it was okay. So she started writing letters to the companies, some of them in Europe that owed my father money. And that put her on the blacklist as a potential aider and abetter at least and possible, you know, Nazi person. So at that point they were totally dependent on what little

they could get out of their fund—the frozen fund—and then whatever they could do on this farm. But that didn't last very long.

My father was—well, the beginning of 19—let's see. I want to get this date right—beginning of 1942, they started arresting people and they were also building what my mother called a huge new concentration camp. She wrote something like, we've been—it's going to be a prison for the alien tribes—and I think she meant the Germans—but we've been told that if we behave ourselves, we'll be okay. So they did their best to behave themselves.

However, then sometime in July there was a bombing. Some Germans apparently came into port—and I'm not quite sure, I think it was Livermore on the east coast—and they scuttled a ship and there were some deaths, and that immediately threw the whole country into an uproar. There was a riot apparently in downtown Costa Rica—in San Jose, and then on the Fourth of July my father—my grandfather—no, wait a minute. Let me get this straight—my uncle was picked up in his farm and he was living off in Tilleran, which is in, I guess, it's called a province, canton—that's what they called it of Guanacasta. So he was picked up, and then on the fifteenth my father was picked up. So July 15, 1942, and the reason that I really am clear on this is because two days later my mother wrote a letter, a really desperate letter, to her brother and sister-in-law saying that he'd been picked up and that was two days

before and that that day that she was writing the letter was my sister's first birthday. And there I was spending the night screaming, "Poppy! Poppy!" and my sister had just turned one. Then she wrote, which was really uncharacteristic because she's very reserved, she wrote, "As you see, my heart is breaking."

McWhorter: Mmm. So this was 1942.

H Donald: Nineteen forty-two.

McWhorter: And you're still in Costa Rica.

H Donald: We're still in Costa Rica.

McWhorter: So the large, as she called it, concentration camp would've been in Costa Rica?

H Donald: Yeah. They picked up the men and they—I guess, the concentration camp—and she called it that but the officials and all of the documents both in the United States and in Costa Rica call it that as well. It was just common. I think it was prior to knowing what a truly horrible concentration camp could be. It was a place to concentrate people who might be enemies, and that was all. It's certainly developed a different term—tone now, hasn't it?

McWhorter: Well, I'm glad you brought that up.

H Donald: Yeah.

McWhorter: I'm not going to discuss it at this chance because I don't want to knock you off your narrative right now.

H Donald: Right.

McWhorter: But in a few minutes I'm going to show you some photos of Crystal City—

H Donald: Sure.

McWhorter: —and a specific monument there that you may be aware of.

H Donald: Very, very much. (laughs)

McWhorter: And I want to ask you a question.

H Donald: I've got feelings on that.

McWhorter: So please go forward. It's July 1942 and things are starting to get very bad for your family.

H Donald: Very bad, very bad. My mother was able to visit him briefly, like she said—oh, when first the men were picked up, they were just taken to the ordinary jail. This is not according to me or to my mother but this is according to this author, Max Paul Friedman of *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, it was one of the more horrible Latin American prisons. The vermin were so bad that the men were allowed to insecticide their cells. They had to throw out all the bedding and family had to bring in, you know, whatever—whatever they had had to be brought in by family. My mother described wrestling a mattress into their little opel, and my mother was five foot two max, and she got that mattress into that opel and she got that mattress out of the opel and even at eighty-three she sounded really proud of herself. (laughs) Of course, she said she never did see the mattress again, but I guess my father—otherwise they were

sleeping on the floor. She called it, “the cold bare floor.” She wasn’t going to have that.

Then shortly after that, they were moved to this concentration camp. And I don’t know, it’s not really clear whether that was also vermin-filled soon. It was clear from this Max Paul Friedman’s description that the officials were corrupt and that, I guess, there may have been some women kept there or maybe they approached the wives of the prisoners for sex in exchange for leniency for the prisoners. Food was minimal and had to be brought in mostly by the families. My father drew a picture of that prison about a year after when we were in Crystal City and he’s not a very good artist, but you get a sense of these huge walls and barbed wire on the top—maybe razor wire, I don’t know—and then off in the corner there’s a little tiny guard holding—and you can see that it’s a gun—and it’s almost completely devoid of anything that makes it human. There’s a little tiny sign on the wall that says, “*Cantina*,” and one little bench. But they were there for six months, and they both wrote letters to all the officials in the United States and in—because my mother was a United States citizen, my father wrote several really desperate letters to the United States because he was desperate—really worried about my mother that she wouldn’t be able to cope—with reason. I mean, she’d never had a

job, she had two small children. They didn't hear—never heard a word from either.

Then—and this is odd—but this is my mother's memory, and I've since been able to read the memories of another woman, who was in Costa Rica at the same time from a much more wealthy background who had teenage children and probably had servants. For her the whole experience seems to be—had been a much less painful experience, but she also mentions this, that all the women and children were rounded up in December and taken to the German Club, which was in downtown San Jose, and there we were held for about a week. My mother doesn't remember there being any furnishings or any real attempts made to get ready for us, but she did say that the sanitary conditions were indescribable. And that they washed the diapers out in the swimming pool because there were inadequate washing facilities. By the end of the week people were beginning to get sick. And this other woman corroborates that except that she said that there were beds. She did also talk about the sanitation or lack thereof.

We were sent—nobody—both my mother and this other woman agreed that no one told them anything. They just were sent home and there was a rumor that the ship that was going to take us away hadn't arrived. And I also don't know whether my mother knew that at the time that the ship was taking us away it would also

be taking my father with us, or whether the women were thinking they were going to go one way and their men would go another. I don't have any real evidence one way or another on that.

So then my mother says that my father came home for Christmas, that they released all of these dangerous alien enemies. By that time my father was one of the thirty-five most dangerous alien enemies in Costa Rica, according to the embassy military attaché who may have been an FBI agent, who after the war somebody reviewed all his records and said he was the most unreliable agent in the entire Latin America. Didn't help my parents though.

Now, the other woman that—to her—had written—she said they spent Christmas there, so maybe some people, they who came from a farther distance. Maybe the people that were far distance couldn't go home, people closer could, I don't know. So my parents had about a week to try to get everything put together. By that time they knew they were going to be deported and—

McWhorter: Was Christmas at the German Club, or was Christmas at your home?

H Donald: We, according to my mother, we had Christmas at home.

McWhorter: Okay.

H Donald: According to this other woman, they had Christmas at the German Club, so my thoughts are that they probably released some people

and didn't release others, and I don't know why. And my mother thought everyone was released because my father was released and I guess my uncle was released.

McWhorter: Can you describe what a German Club was or is?

H Donald: Well, it was a social club, pure and simple, for most of the time. My father was on the board, he was a treasurer I think back in 1934, '35. Basically, they had a bowling alley, which was apparently the only one in San Jose. They had a swimming pool. They had tennis courts. They had social activities. All the Germans got together for various events that came. They had Derivan Osmon, the Santa Claus, would come for Christmas for the kids. Then somewhere along the line while my father was treasurer in '34, '35, the Nazis tried to take it over, and according, again, to this Max Paul Friedman, it was a Nazi from Panama and I can't remember his name, but I do have it in the book that I wrote. My father said he and the directors thought that was a terrible idea, and so they said no, and this man hammered on the table and said that the Nazi Party would destroy them. So they were completely okay in 1934, '35, and then in 1941, I believe, and this is again not my memories. It was Max Paul's book, they actually had as a president somebody who was avidly anti-Nazi, a German who had lived in Costa Rica, I believe, since 1908 or something like that. But somewhere along the line, I remember there's something that my father—my mother

said that my father—no. No, actually it was in testimony that my father gave during a hearing. He said that at one point finally the Nazis were starting to take over the club and people were giving the "Heil Hitler" salute, and he stopped going, but he kept his membership because it was good for business, you know, what business he had left.

McWhorter: Around Christmas of '42 was when the time we were discussing that your father was released—

H Donald: Right.

McWhorter: —temporarily and Christmas was spent together with the family. It sounds like shortly thereafter you were taken from Costa Rica.

H Donald: Yeah.

McWhorter: But it also sounds from what you've said thus far that your family had spent quite a few years in Costa Rica—

H Donald: Um hmm.

McWhorter: —and I'm sure friendships were made.

H Donald: Oh yes.

McWhorter: Were there any local neighbors or any business associates that ever tried to champion your parents to the local governments and say no, these are good people?

H Donald: I don't know. My father had a partner that they ended up disbanding the partnership because of his—the partner's—vocal pro-Nazi talk. I don't know if he was a Nazi or not. I haven't been able to—I have

the manifest of the ship that brought us up, and I've looked for his name and haven't found it. So he may have not been picked up for some reason or—who was picked up and why is a mystery to me.

When we moved to San Juan de Tobas, there was a neighbor who was a sweetheart apparently. She helped my mother—she just took over the care of the kids while my mother would go in to see my father and would try to do what needed to be done on the *finka*. But I don't have any—not at that point. Later when we arrived in California, I have a nice piece of proof that at least eighteen neighbors signed a petition to the State Department—Justice Department to try to make sure my father didn't get sent to Germany. So there were good people, and my mother always said that, [Interviewee is saying, "Quote."] "The Costa Ricans would always—" I can't remember the exact words, but would all help her if they could. So she must've felt that they were doing their best.

McWhorter: Well, by early 1943, is your family still living in Costa Rica?

H Donald: My father went back to prison on January 2. I guess it was sort of the honor system. (laughs)

McWhorter: Um hmm.

H Donald: But by then we knew we were going to be deported, and shortly after that we were taken back to the German Club for another week, and by that time apparently nothing had been cleaned,

according to my mother. It was truly horrible, and according to the other woman—my mother didn't know this—but the other woman said that a child had come in with whooping cough, and that is part of the horror of this particular—our ship became a whooping cough incubation—

McWhorter: Incubator?

H Donald: —incubator. There you are. Thanks. Yeah. Yeah.

So we were picked up and then—I don't have the exact date—but sometime in mid-January we rejoined the men on a night train journey from San Jose to Puerto Reyes, which is the port on the west coast.

McWhorter: Can I ask you a quick question right here?

H Donald: Sure.

McWhorter: You said after your father had returned or during Christmas you learned that you were going to be deported. How did you learn that you were going to be deported?

H Donald: At this moment I cannot remember where I found this piece of information, but my mother apparently after that first episode, she was so furious as a United States citizen to be treated like that and without anybody being willing to explain, she went down to the police station, and she started harassing them, I guess. And finally a fellow, I believe his name was Jorge Fernandez or something like that—I've got, again, I've got that in my book—he told her.

He is also mentioned by this other woman that wrote her memoir about the experience, that he went with us on the train, and my mother doesn't—never mentioned that. At the end of the train trip—we'd been traveling all night—the children hadn't been fed. Not just all night but for hours before, and it was all in the dark so no one would see the train because no one was supposed to know that this is happening, right? This particular very good policeman scurried around trying to find some food for the children. All he could find was canned milk or evaporated milk—I'm not quite sure. At any rate, that was what many of the children had and then my mother said they promptly threw it up because it was so rich and icky.

There were military guards. I asked my mother if the military guards had guns and she said she didn't know and burst into tears. So—

McWhorter: Did she say if they were Costa Rican or if they were American?

H Donald: They were American. And we were taken by launch out to the ship. The children by this time, many of us were sick because of our twice staying at the German Club. The launch—I have all the papers. My parents were allowed each to have fifty dollars to take out in United States dollars and we knew we were going to the United States. Everything they could carry—I don't know that there was a limit on what they could take but they had to be able to carry

it. And of course, with two small children and we were both at least in diapers at night for sure, and my sister in the daytime as well, they had very limited capacity. My father brought a typewriter that he hoped to start a new business with someday, and all of that was put in the hold as was my father. Never heard what happened to him there, but it must've been really terrible because what happened to us was pretty terrible.

My mother said we were taken to an overcrowded cabin. There were two women and a child already there, which filled up the space more or less, but then they tried to bring in a double—a bunk bed, the soldiers did—sailors—and my mother—that had no rails or anything—my mother was terrified that we would fall out, so she asked them to take that away and just leave the mattresses, and as far as I know, the mattresses were just mattresses, stained.

And she said it was so hot—for a week we sat in port because for some reason—oh, I know what it was. I think—this is supposition. This is not factual. But from my reading there were a group of Peruvian Japanese being brought up. They had been brought up as far as Balboa Canal Zone, and they were being brought from there to join our ship in San Pedro. So while we waited for them—and the dates match exactly, so I suspect that that's what happened—we were stuck in port, and my mother said we weren't allowed on deck. Of course, portholes don't open.

Diapers had to be washed out by hand. I didn't think to ask her if there was enough water to really wash or if they used saltwater or what. She stopped diapering us partially to save on diapers at night, and so you can just sort of imagine those mattresses wet with urine or at least damp. We were really small children, so they're probably not soaked. Then she had to somehow—they had to figure out a way to pile them up, so they could move around the cabin because they were also not really allowed to wander around the ship.

That's where another kindness happened. She did—she had the other women take care of us. She realized she didn't have her purse. She'd forgotten it completely, and she didn't even have a comb. So she went around and because she spoke English, she just asked the sailor if there was a little store could she buy a comb. And he says, "No," and she said she started to tear up because she could just sort of see what was going to happen to all of us, and he pulled this comb out of his pocket. When my mother told me that story, it was more than fifty years after the event—he pulled a comb out and he gave it to her—and when she started that story, the tears also flowed. That was the one true kindness.

The first meal we were taken up, up to another level.

McWhorter: Did you learn the name of the ship eventually?

H Donald: Yeah. It's the United States Army Transport, the *Pueblo*. And I have all the—in fact, through the organization that I belong to now, I've met quite a few of the—at least electronically met—quite a few people that were on that same ship.

McWhorter: And is the organization the German American Internee Coalition?

H Donald: Yes, the Internee Coalition. We tried to get Latin American into it, but it got to be too long.

So the very first meal—that was another thing. This particular episode, this deportation episode, she was sick. We were sick. All the children were cranky, it was hot. If you've ever been on the coast in Central America, either coast is hot, humid, and to be kept below decks for a whole week was torture. That first meal when they came up, she told me there were sailors, United States sailors—sitting in other tables—clean, neat, pressed white uniforms. They were all bedraggled and hot, speckled with kids' vomit, but my father was there. He and a couple of—a handful of men, she thought they had volunteered to hash, to wait tables. I think now because I read *Triangle of Hate*, Gardner—I think Gardner is his last name. He wrote that the Peruvian Japanese were expected to wash and iron the U.S. sailors' uniforms. So I suspect my father was just assigned a detail. And the other woman that wrote about this experience also suggested that her husband had work.

So there we were. Our father was waiting on us, but we couldn't—we weren't supposed to talk to him and he wasn't supposed to talk to us. So I can just visualize this scene. My mother said they only had fifteen or twenty minutes to eat. My sister and I were getting sick. I don't want to eat. I'm a fussy eater. My sister would like to eat, but she's not feeding herself, so our mother—and it's crazy. But you know, her head is spinning around—my mother's trying to shovel food in. She didn't get anything to eat at all that first meal. And then we were taken back down below. So apparently the officials decided that the children could be left below with the teenage girls. The teenage boys, I guess, were in the hold with all the other [Interviewee is saying, "Quote, unquote."] "men." So the women could go up.

I'd also had—there I have a third verification of it because one of the women that was on shipboard, she and her husband became friends of my parents and met many times over the years later, and she told me that they got around this business of not being able to speak to their husbands. They would talk to each other. They were actually talking to their husbands, but they would talk in Spanish or in German, and the guards didn't know any Spanish or German, so a sort of lopsided communication could happen.

McWhorter: Very smart.

H Donald: Very smart. And then they were allowed to take food down for the children.

McWhorter: How long were you on that ship till you arrived in the United States? And where did you arrive in the United States?

H Donald: We sailed on January 26, and we arrived on February 6 in San Pedro Receiving Station Terminal Island, which is still being used in California. It's still being used as a holding place for immigrants.

McWhorter: So you left Costa Rica and probably went down through the Panama Canal?

H Donald: No, no. We were already on the western side.

McWhorter: Oh, I apologize.

H Donald: Zip. (laughs)

McWhorter: That's fine. That was Bruce Donald adding in, a little geography lesson for the military historian.

So you were arriving in California in early 1943?

H Donald: Yeah. February 6, and there is another kind of—we were all very sick and my mother said there was no medical attention. The other woman that had written her memoir said that there was a nurse that went around and that she had actually worked with the nurse as a translator, but I don't know what a nurse could've done because people were really, really sick.

My mother was interviewed—interviewed is the wrong—interrogated twice while we were there at San Pedro. The first time

she was—and the only papers that I have come from that Immigration and Naturalization Service interview, where they're trying to find out more about my father. They're asking about his business. One of his textiles that he used to import was wool, and they just can't believe that there would be a purpose of bringing wool in to any Latin American country because it's all hot, right? So my mother is trying to tell them, no, no, this is true, but up where Costa Rica—where San Jose is, there was a high plateau and it gets cooler in the evenings, et cetera, et cetera. But then they accuse her of—accuse him of being a Nazi, and sparks really fly in that little interview.

But that's not the interview she talked—that's the interview but that's not correct—interrogation because the one she talked about and that also reduced her to tears, this was one done by the FBI, and the FBI has not been able to find its records, but there's plenty of corroborating information, you know, that they talk about the interrogation done on Star Pate Gurcke at San Pedro, et cetera, et cetera. Basically, she said they kept her for hours, they were showing bright lights in her face, they accused her of being a traitor.

She had lost her passport along with the purse. Basically—may I back up just a moment?

McWhorter: Sure.

H Donald: Okay. When my father had come home in San Jose—or in San Juan de Tobas during Christmas, a thief came during that week. It happened just—my parents left the windows open—went in, stole my mother's purse. The purse that I talk about that she didn't have the comb on the ship, that purse was an old purse that she'd collected after the fact. But the purse that had her passport, her new passport and money was stolen, so that new passport that she'd been issued was not hers anymore. I mean, it was lost, but FBI thought that she'd given it away, had sold it, it was going to be used for some kind of nefarious purposes. So they harassed her. She said she finally just broke down, became almost hysterical and they had to give her sleeping pills to calm her down. So that was the interrogations.

Then we all had hearings, and I have the records for that. The hearings—no one was allowed counsel. You weren't allowed even any kind of immigration assistance or anything like that. We were only to be—it was only to be found out that we were in the country—whether we had a right to enter the United States. I have to backtrack again. I've lost a little bit. Okay. When we first went on the ship, they took away our passports and our visas. The United States military took away our passports and our visas, so—all of us. So when we arrived—I think my mother was allowed to keep her old passport, canceled passport—when we arrived, none of us had

visas or passports, naturally. So we were all found to have entered the country illegally becoming illegal aliens and that allowed us to be indefinitely detained for as long as the United States wanted. Then of course after the war, they used that same accusation to try to get rid of as many of us to send us back to war-torn Germany rather than allowing any of us to go home.

That in much more focused form also happened to the Japanese from Latin America. They were really intent on not letting them stay in the United States or letting them go back. It was a much smaller group than the Germans, almost double the amount of Germans, four thousand plus Germans versus two thousand Japanese, but they had even a harder time.

McWhorter: Um hmm.

H Donald: Then we were issued baggage labels and I still have my baggage labels—thanks to my father—and put on a train. My mother said you couldn't see out racing and sent to Crystal City.

McWhorter: So you traveled by train from Southern California to Crystal City?

H Donald: Yeah. Yeah. And my mother wasn't sure how long it took, but she said—and she had no memory of us ever being fed anything, but she said, "That can't be right because I don't remember being hungry either." By then of course, we were so sick, some of us were vomiting on the floor and (laughs) I mean, it was not exactly a pleasant experience. She doesn't remember if we were guarded or

not, but she did remember that there was no way to look out and no way to look in.

McWhorter: On the train?

H Donald: Yeah. So it was a secret train. We were—I guess, Uvalde was the nearest—Uvalde?

McWhorter: That's correct. That's where I was born.

H Donald: I'm trying to speak Texan and I'm not doing very well. (laughs) Uvalde had a train station and that was where we were deposited, and then, I guess, a bus picked us up. My mother mentioned specifically the statue of Popeye in Crystal City. Then we were taken in to the gates and that was that for the moment.

The next day then we finally got medical attention. Apparently—I've just read a study that was done about public health service and these internment camps—and apparently there was quite a brouhaha of fury at Crystal City because the physician at San Pedro hadn't taken more care with us because we had 131 Costa Ricans on that boat, and there were other people obviously. There were the Japanese from Peru and I don't know who else. My mother said there were rumors that there were war-wounded on the ship as well. We just—I don't know. But 131 of us and two children had to be hospitalized immediately. Almost all the adults had serious respiratory illness and 55 children, including my sister and

me, had whooping cough. My mother was treated for bronchitis and possible whooping cough.

McWhorter: And this was an assessment done in Crystal City by the medical—

H Donald: Yes, by the medical team. As the commander there, Joseph O'Rourke, I think. O'Rourke I'm sure of, Joseph. He wrote that it was—oh, he also said there was an epidemic of impetigo, which is the skuzzy bacterial infection, so we must've had that. I was a retired school nurse, so impetigo means yellow-crusted scabs and oozing—not pleasant at any rate. So we were all seriously ill and we were seriously ill in San Pedro, so there was quite a fuss in apparently the medical community in Crystal City that we hadn't been treated.

McWhorter: I'm glad someone advocated for you eventually.

H Donald: Yes. Yeah, well, and we were all isolated but there weren't very many people at Crystal City then, so it was easy to isolate us.

McWhorter: When did you arrive at Crystal City? Do you know the month at least?

H Donald: Yeah, February 12, 1943. (laughs) Yeah, I know exactly because it's actually listed in this O'Rourke's—he did a narrative of the camp. It was in 1945 and he specifically mentioned our shipload because of the amount of sickness, but there were a lot of other ships that came up, and they were women and children.

One ship, the *Acadia*, picked up people from the other side of the—I can't remember the—three different countries in South America—brought them up and there was room for 200 people and they put 675 passengers on that ship. I got that from that *Nazis and Good Neighbors* book. And there was another ship that had inadequate drinking water. They had one latrine for all the prisoners, the women and children and the dangerous enemies. Apparently, they weren't allowed to wash or bathe during the voyage, and that was from that *Triangle of Hate*, so these are other scholars not my personal accounts, but I think that the treatment that was pretty close to inhumane if not inhumane. Yeah, so it took a long time for us to get well.

They took a mug shot of us probably when we'd just gotten better. My father and mother are on also the cover of my book. (laughs) You'd think I was trying to sell my book, yes.

McWhorter: No, but I'm going to ask you the title of it when we get to the post-war.

H Donald: All right.

McWhorter: But I'm very curious about your book.

H Donald: Well, I put the mug shot on the front because I thought anybody that reads any of my mother's letters or—they were excited. They were in love. They were happy. Her eyes sparkled. His eyes sparkled. That shot my father is gaunt. He's got a cigarette in his

hand, which was a constant companion, and he died at an early age. He was sixty-one when he died—barely sixty-one—died of lung cancer. My mother and my father's eyes are just blank dazed, and I've seen enough of those mug shots of other families. They look just the same. My sister and I no longer look like happy little children. She's pushing—you know, she's looks wary—she's pushing the photographer away, and I'm just kind of imitating her like a timid person which I wasn't until then maybe.

McWhorter: So you found your mug shots?

H Donald: Yeah.

McWhorter: I would like to see those someday.

H Donald: Yeah. Well, it's on the cover of my book. (laughs) And my book happens to be in the car because I'm trying to sell it in other places. And I'm selling it not to make money, I'm selling it to tell the story.

McWhorter: Obviously.

H Donald: So, yeah. My father wasn't allowed a camera and the camera had been confiscated in Costa Rica, and he didn't get a camera until well after the war because he wasn't allowed to have one. These are all official shots that I have of Crystal City.

McWhorter: Upon arriving there, sixty-six years ago yesterday, what did the landscape look like to you? The landscape of Crystal City compared to living in Costa Rica. Granted, you're only two or three.

H Donald: Okay. The only thing that I can remember of that a couple of episodes. One is I could remember the lights from the fence because the lights apparently were ten feet tall, barbed wire, and there were klieg lights or any of the big, big huge. I remember them shining through the curtains in the bedroom that my mother made. I have a recollection that I didn't verify with my mother, so I can't be positive, that we lived just across the dirt road from the fence. And then I remember once looking out and this was sometime later—my father had put a swing for us out in the dirt, and my sister was out there swinging, and a little dust devil came around and swallowed her up, and she came in the house screaming, wet her pants. I was thrilled at the time. (laughs) Those are the memories.

McWhorter: While there at the camp, do you remember certain features of it, like the swimming/irrigation pool? [Interviewer is saying, "Swimming slash irrigation pool."]

H Donald: I don't remember it, but I know that my father worked on it. My father worked with a large group of men. They were happy to be in Crystal City just—not because of the barbed wire obviously or the guards with guns—but because they were together and because we were getting healthier and because my father could back to work. He'd been sitting idle, useless in prison for over six months, so he was very eager to work. He worked at the maintenance division making mattresses. No, that was where he was a

timekeeper, and he worked—he also did the mattress—made mattresses or something like that. Then on top of that, he volunteered to help with the pool.

McWhorter: I see.

H Donald: Yeah. My mother wouldn't have let us swim anyway. We weren't allowed to swim in pools because of polio. That was, again, considered a fear. And of course, we were very small.

McWhorter: Was the camp run by U.S. military? Was it run by the Justice Department? Was it run by some other office?

H Donald: Oh, boy. I think it's Department of Justice ran that camp. I think that was what all those camps were. This isn't the War Relocation Authority, where the majority of the Japanese Americans were hauled up from the coast, but, no, this is the Alien—by being brought into the country—by being told that we were in illegally, we became under the auspices of the Alien Enemy Control program. Before that we were in this other secret program, the legal program in Latin America that gradually got a name called the Special War Problems Division. So once we came into the country, we went into the Alien Enemy Control program and those camps, and that was Department of Justice, I think.

McWhorter: While at the camp, do you remember going to school?

H Donald: Yeah, I went to nursery school, and I will not inflict it on you, but that's another memory I have very clearly of it, a little German circle

song about Sleeping Beauty, Sleeping Beauties. And I can remember doing that, so I guess we must've done it often. I thought it was kind of ironic once I grew up and realized that we were really surrounded by a very large hedge. We were trying to be a hedge. Yes, that kind of thing.

McWhorter: I was going to wait for a second, but since you've completely described it, what I'm showing Heidi and Bruce at this time is a digital image of what looks to be little blonde haired children, little Caucasian children and possibly little Japanese children formed around in a circle. And I've described this often as the children in the camp possibly playing Ring Around the Rosy. But you were about to describe what it—a circle game like this might've been.

H Donald: Okay. Well, now, in your picture it looks as though there are a number—it looks like there are two circles, and there probably were more than one sort of game. I don't remember the others. This is the one I remember very well, so well that I could actually sing it to you—part of it—because there was a Sleeping Beauty—and by that time I think probably because of our experiences, my sister and I were absolutely inseparable. Anything that she did, I did, and vice versa. We held onto each other for dear life, so if we ever got to be Sleeping Beauty, we were a team. (laughs) We were two little Sleeping Beauties. And then there was always a prince—and I realize how sexist it is now—but there was always the girls in the

center and the boy trying to rescue us. And then the rest of us were the hedge, and we started down, you know, crouched down and then gradually _____ (speaking German)—oh, now I'm going to have to sing. I won't sing it. I won't inflict it. But basically—

McWhorter: Please do, if you will.

H Donald: (laughs) Oh, no. I'm sorry. I don't think I can do that. I'm not that outgoing, I don't think. Am I? (laughs) _____ (speaking German) The hedge is growing taller and as it grows, you grow with it until you were standing on your tiptoes with your hands over your head. You're still trying to keep that prince from getting your princess in the center. And that I remember so well that I can still sing it. But, as I say, I won't. Which is, you know, when I think about it, that really is an interesting game to play when you're in the middle of a camp.

Oh, and camp is such a euphemism.

McWhorter: Um hmm.

H Donald: That was another thing that I found in my mother's records. As soon as she could, she started writing to a friend that she'd written to—well, she wrote to many friends—but one friend saved everything from that period, so I had a series of letters that my mother had written to her friend Liz, Liz Carpenter Kitchen, and there was a letter that she wrote in August of 1943 before they had

the—now, they had—after that they developed this blue paper. You could just fill one side of it out and it was for alien enemies to send letters, but she was able to send an actual paper letter in a paper envelope, and on the front of it she writes that they are at the War Internment—War Detention Station, I believe. And then, "Prisoner of war mail free," on it, so the euphemism of—happy little euphemism of family camp was just that, a euphemism.

McWhorter: The internment center at Crystal City housed Japanese, Italian, and German detainees.

H Donald: Yes. Yes.

McWhorter: Were you housed in, say, smaller sections separated within the camp?

H Donald: Yeah. Apparently. I know that our camp was supposedly, you know—I mean, our nursery school, I think, was a German language nursery school because that song that I remembered is in German. However, there are children in a picture that I have that look very Latin but no Japanese. We have one picture that's really early that was really shabby, and in 2001 we went back to the first reunion and someone from our group met a Japanese person who had a picture—the same picture that we had. And it looked to me in that picture that the children were Japanese as well as German.

McWhorter: Well, since you brought it up, (H Donald laughs) I was also going to ask you if you were at the 2002 reunion.

H Donald: Yes. Yes. My sister and I both—and our husbands went. Yeah.

McWhorter: What I'm showing right now for the transcriber is a small poster. It says, "First National Reunion of Crystal City's World War II Internment Camp Families," and it looks like that reunion was November 8-10, 2002. And there's a small photo of several children in the front look like some are—not Japanese on the periphery. It looks like little blonde headed possibly German children saluting and at least with the hand over their heart the American flag.

H Donald: Well, I think you should know I don't have—because of what happened to us, I have this real passion for accuracy. This is hearsay that that is not a picture from this camp. That these are not—that this is not—that it's a very idealized—that many of the people that I've spoken to from Crystal City, the older ones, do remember playing baseball with the Japanese kids. There was intermingling to some extent, but the Japanese had—my mother said they were in the back of the camp, I guess toward the swimming pool. The Germans—and that verifies really my memory that the Germans were over to the—yeah, see where the Ger—yeah, okay. You're showing me the Crystal City family Internment camp.

McWhorter: An aerial photo of it.

H Donald: An aerial photo of it.

McWhorter: And some of the portions are labeled, such as swimming pool.

H Donald: Yeah. And the German school on the lower—well, on this picture it would be the lower right. I believe that the housing for the Germans—if my memory serves me right—and it may very well not—that we were living somewhere close to the edge of that on the right side somewhere in one of these bungalows. It was supposedly a duplex. Supposedly we had another family that stayed, a family I believe from Bolivia with a small child. So—and bathroom facilities down the hall. (laughs) Down the path. Yeah. Yeah.

McWhorter: That was going to be one of my questions was, while you were in Crystal City, did you see the swimming pool? And we talked about that. But what type of structure—I'm showing you a photo of the foundation of what has been told to me to be the single family cottages. There are six of them that still exist out there in the background of this photo is the Crystal City High School, which now sits on the majority of the footprint of the camp. You probably saw it when you there in 2002.

H Donald: Yeah, we did.

McWhorter: But I'll show you another photo of this foundation in a few minutes from a different angle and you'll be able to get some perspective because there'll be people standing on it, but can you tell if you lived in one of those small buildings, or if you lived in more like

temporary wooden barracks similar to what you'd see on an army post?

H Donald: No, no. We lived—originally when we first came, my mother said that we lived in one large room, but we lived separately. It was when we were still being isolated because of the whooping cough. Then we were moved to a bungalow, but the bungalow was a duplex because she mentioned that later—that at first we were the only ones there. We were early.

We were early there. There were no paved roads. It was all dust in the summer and mud in the winter. And so the bungalows from what I understand from other internees—we spoke to another former internee last night. He said his father helped build some of those bungalows. But that this was a duplex and that later this family—I believe it was from Bolivia—with one small child came and they sometimes traded baby-sitting.

McWhorter: Going to pause that for a second. (Recording stopped)

The image we're looking at right now is an image that you described a little bit earlier, which is one of the images you remember. You could see on the left-hand side of this photo, the edges of several of the buildings. On the right-hand side of the photo is the perimeter fence and the guard tower, but high up in the air are the lights.

H Donald: Right.

McWhorter: And I wanted to show you this photo. It's funny that some of the photos I chose to show you are images that you've been describing.

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: It's great to have your description of seeing these lights—at least maybe not these specific ones—but the camp lights coming through the window at night.

H Donald: My mother said—I can remember she told me that looking out through the barbed wire she could see just miles and miles of sort of, I guess, they were black-eyed susans or something like that, a flowering—some kind of a yellow flower at some times. But in the winter—I mean, she said it was horribly dusty and other people have told me that there were scorpions and rattlesnakes and all of that. Then this O'Rourke wrote that in the winter that they were just building the hospital when we first arrived apparently. And that the nurses had to hike in—take their shoes and socks off and hike in because the mud was almost knee deep in the winter.

McWhorter: Wow. Without the paved roads there's a lot of moisture. Trust me on it, they're not getting that moisture right now. (laughs)

H Donald: And that winter that we were there, the winter of '43, '44 was apparently the coldest winter on record, which made me—I think it's funny that we were put there. I guess with the Geneva Convention

saying you're supposed to be in prison somewhere that is similar in climate to where you are from.

McWhorter: That's right.

H Donald: And I guess they decided that everybody from Latin America had to like hot, and then along comes the ice and we'd never even seen an icicle before, so that was—I remember the icicle.

McWhorter: That's often something I tell people about the numbers of German war prisoners—

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: —brought to Texas during World War II—

H Donald: Because of the weather.

McWhorter: —captured in North Africa, and the Geneva Convention saying that you have to be housed in a climate similar to the one where you were detained, taken prisoner.

H Donald: Right.

McWhorter: This next image that we're looking at right now is a color image of the irrigation/swimming pool. [Interviewer is saying, "Irrigation slash swimming pool."]

H Donald: Right.

McWhorter: I'm glad that you talked about the polio perspective and why you and you sister weren't allowed to swim there as younger children because that's not something that generations today would think about—

H Donald: Would even thing about, right.

McWhorter: —but it's a very real danger then.

H Donald: When we did go to that reunion in—it was 2002 as you pointed out—my sister and I, we went a day early and were looking—just looking to see if we remembered anything. They'd cleaned out that pool to some extent. My sister and I didn't—but my sister particularly didn't remember it, and we ended up sitting on that edge of that pool crying. We just—it just killed us that our parents had been there and had been unable to leave, you know. We could walk away. We could do anything we wanted now, but all they went through and I—just that pool just brought it all home.

McWhorter: Well, I told you I'd bring it up toward the end because I wanted your perspective.

H Donald: Um hmm.

McWhorter: I consider myself an academic historian first before public historian. And I look at terminology because it can have different meanings in military terms.

H Donald: Yeah.

McWhorter: And the one thing that I wanted to bring up especially with someone who lived there as a detainee, I wanted to get your perspective on this specific question. I believe this monument, this cube monument, was placed in 2002. And the monument does talk about

the detaining of Latin Americans, of Japanese, of German, of Italian descent.

H Donald: Um um. Um um. Not that cube, it doesn't. It's only Japanese.

McWhorter: Oh, it's only Japanese.

H Donald: It makes it sound like only Japanese were interned there, and it drives those of us who were interned right along with the Japanese absolutely wild.

McWhorter: Well, I'm glad you brought that up because that wasn't where I was headed but I'm glad that you're able to express that.

H Donald: Oh, right. We've got some strong feelings about it. Okay, but go ahead with your—you had a question.

McWhorter: No, no. This is about you. If you want to talk more about it.

H Donald: No, no. It's just it is—there's—well, this gets into what we've been working on lately, the fact that the German American and Latin American internment is not in the history books. National Parks Service puts in a sentence, but all their funds come from Japanese bills about the Japanese internment, and therefore, the Japanese are getting the majority. They were the majority even in this particular Alien Enemy Control program, but we were there too, and we're not in the history books anymore. And in fact, some of the Japanese don't even know that we were interned because of signs like that. So we're trying to get recognition—congressional commission to look into what happened to us and to at least

acknowledge publicly that it happened because we can't get any—it's hard to get funds, it's hard to get any kind of traction when there are signs like that up.

McWhorter: And I'm sure it's rather difficult right now as well.

H Donald: Um hmm.

McWhorter: Well, the question—and I appreciate what you said because that's very important—the other question that I had regarding that monument is the term, concentration. And as a military historian, terminology can mean different things. You can talk about caliber and you can talk about tonnage and what these different terms mean. Concentration technically is correct. Whenever you concentrate a number of people together, you have a concentration camp. But as you described earlier during this interview, concentration camps have taken on a new meaning since, and my question to you, having been there behind the gates, detained against your will, against your parents' will, did you feel that labeling at a concentration camp is apt, is correct? Would the combination of what concentration camp means today when someone thinks about World War II?

H Donald: I have—there are two words that bother me a lot about this. Concentration camp is one. It's been used repeatedly, again, by strong advocates for the Japanese American group. It pushes a button, and yet it is not—it was—it has to have a caveat. Yes, it

was called a concentration camp but. But, and that but is never in there. And then the other one that is used repeatedly is kidnapped. And my mother hated that too because kidnapped has such a pejorative—not that it wasn't pejorative—and I mean, it truly was a kidnapping basically, but there was so much more to it. There's no—it doesn't—the United States had some reasons. Some of it was about security. They were heavy-handed. They swept up all of us really with none of us being serious threats of any sort. I think eventually with the German community anyway, there were like eight people who were accused of espionage but not with enough facts to ever bring them to trial. So that's an awful lot of people to ruin lives. My family came out intact more or less, but I've spoken to people whose mothers went into mental hospitals, whose fathers drank themselves to death, whose families were ripped apart with half of them in Germany or taken off to camps in—camps, they say—prisons in Russia while others managed to find their way back here. It wasn't a benign program. So concentration and kidnapping are words I wouldn't use because it's not totally accurate. I can understand why people use them.

McWhorter: Um hmm. Well, thank you. I appreciate that very candid answer.

H Donald: Oh. And very-hot-under-the-collar answer. (laughs)

McWhorter: Well, the photo you're seeing here is of our marker dedication.

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: I'm not sure if you've—

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: —seen Texas Historical Markers before, but they have this distinctive shape with the curved top.

H Donald: Yes. Yes.

McWhorter: And we placed this marker there on Veterans Day of 2007, and I worked closely with the county historical commission so we could place it close to this because I wanted the interpretation of both to be there.

H Donald: Yes.

McWhorter: And I don't know if you've seen it before—

H Donald: Actually, I have read it carefully, and I had some—a few caveats on it as well.

McWhorter: Well, I'm all ears.

H Donald: I would need the actual wording right now because I—thank you.

McWhorter: I've already—what I'm going to show her is a copy of the marker inscription I brought for Heidi—this is yours of course—and it's on regular eight-and-half-by-eleven paper.

H Donald: Well, I can speak for at least the people that I'm in contact with, the former internees and their families, that this is a vast improvement, that we were delighted that it went up at all. Let's see, I have to find my little caveat on this. (Recording stopped) No, there's my caveat, sorry.

McWhorter: Starting the tape back up.

H Donald: Okay. That, "The government built the camps to hold Japanese, German, and Italian nationals arrested in the U.S. and Hawaii and," then "in Peru and other Latin American countries," I object to having Peru singled out because there were nineteen countries and Peru in honesty, they sent—well, one thousand and something or other Japanese while other countries overall sent many more. So I guess that's my little caveat.

McWhorter: No problem at all. I'm very happy that you're _____. Would you like the copy?

H Donald: Oh, sure.

McWhorter: This is for you.

H Donald: Thank you.

McWhorter: Well, we've discussed, you know, how this occurred to your family. We discussed how your family got to Crystal City. How did your family leave the camp? And when did they leave the camp?

H Donald: Okay. My uncle, my cousin Ermida, and my Tiapani left in February of 1944. My uncle had chosen repatriation, but he actually had a choice because I've seen the letter he wrote requesting it. Some people say that their families did not have that choice, but I don't know that for a fact. So they left. Of course, repatriation was kind of a funny word for my aunt and my cousin, who were Costa Rican

natives. They left—they on the Grippes home, the 1944 rage of the Grippes home.

My father toward the end of May in 1944, he was finally given a hearing. It was over a year and a half after he'd first been imprisoned—it was the first time he got to hear what was alleged against him, and I could go into detail but I know that there are some time restraints. Basically, they felt that he posed no risk and he was released to go to California where my mother had a beach house—her family beach house—in Santa Cruz. Originally it was called relaxed internment, but they decided that was too fancy, I guess, relaxed a name for it, so it became internee at large was what he became. And we were allowed to leave Crystal City shortly thereafter.

McWhorter: And since then, it sounds like you've done quite a lot of research into what happened to your family.

H Donald: Right.

McWhorter: You've discussed your book and I said I wanted to know the title. What is the title of your book?

H Donald: It's called *We Were not the Enemy*, (laughs) and then it goes on. It's so long I can't even quite remember, but *Remembering the United States Civilian Detention Program in Latin America in World War II*. I mean, I put in every catch I could to try to trigger interest, and we will give you a copy so that you've got it for your—

McWhorter: That's very generous of you. Thank you.

H Donald: Yes. Yes.

McWhorter: And it sounds like you've also done a lot of primary research. I can really respect—

H Donald: I have.

McWhorter: —someone that's dug into the primary documents to understand something. But that—

H Donald: My parents—

McWhorter: Go ahead.

H Donald: I was just going to say that my parents especially—I didn't—my father died when I was twenty-nine and I never got around to really spending grown-up time with him, if you know what I mean. And we had children and all that. But my mother I spent many, many years with and she valued the truth beyond almost anything. She became a translator of documents in the pre-statehood documents—California documents in Spanish and all of her work is housed now at the University of California in Santa Cruz in Special Collections. My brother became a historian—archeologist historian for the National Parks Service. And I just—it was lack of truth, it was allegations that got us where we ended up and most of the other people too. So truth is terribly important.

McWhorter: Um hmm. It is.

H Donald: Yeah.

McWhorter: Your father and mother and the family were able to move to California. Did they ever move back to Costa Rica?

H Donald: No, but my father was homesick, desperately homesick for eight years he couldn't go back because he was still considered either an alien enemy or under threat of deportation because after he no longer was an alien enemy, he had an arrest warrant for entering the country illegally. That is when eighteen neighbors got together and petitioned the Department of Justice to have him stay, but then after that there was no money. I mean, for years after this was over we ate at a picnic table and my parents slept on cots. There just wasn't any money. But in 1955 he was finally able to go back, and he went back and he finally realized that his heart had shifted, that California was where he wanted to be, and in the center of it, I think he wrote, "is my own sweet small family." So he ended up happy and then a few years later he was dead, but so goes it.

McWhorter: I'm sorry.

H Donald: That's all right. It's—you know, these things happen.

McWhorter: Well, starting with this marker, we've been doing these oral history training _____, where I've been bringing to the attention of as many people as possible.

H Donald: Yeah.

McWhorter: These photos that you've seen, they're print screen images other than this one, but such as the one of the children in the circle off of

a ten-minute Department of Justice film that is available on YouTube.

H Donald: Yeah.

McWhorter: And I tell you the younger generations who use YouTube all the time—

H Donald: Oh, I know who put it on YouTube.

McWhorter: Oh, you do. Who did?

H Donald: Art Jacobs.

McWhorter: Art Jacobs.

H Donald: Art Jacobs is another Crystal City camp kid who has been fighting single-handedly for his whole adult life to get Congress to acknowledge what happened to us and to get some sort of historical record. He's become quite embittered unfortunately—

McWhorter: I'm sorry.

H Donald: —but he's in his seventies or late seventies, and he's the one that got it on YouTube.

McWhorter: Well, I'm glad that he did because I thought it was a goldmine when I first saw it because—

H Donald: Oh yeah.

McWhorter: —actually able to see moving pictures of it.

H Donald: Yeah, you can get it through Nora too at the National Archives.

McWhorter: Yes. That's my plan. I'm headed there later this year for some records because we're doing a statewide survey of all the military

and the home front sites. And as I told you before, we're looking to tell the full story. It's a real place telling a real story about these camps. Part of the Texas mystique, why they were here, we know of four, and from the newspaper—not newspaper—the e-mail announcement I heard about the German Heritage Society's exhibit on Sunday, I think there's eight. Now, I know of Crystal City being the largest—at least largest family site, Kenedy, Seagoville, the routing center at Fort Sam Houston, but are you aware of any other of these type of detaining sites in the state of Texas?

H Donald: Is it like a Camp Bliss or Fort Bliss?

McWhorter: Yes, there is a Fort Bliss in El Paso.

H Donald: A lot of people were held in military facilities and sort of temporarily. There were a lot of temporary holding facilities as well. I think Seagoville, Crystal City and Kenedy were mostly for the Latins or many Latins, but there were supposedly eight and that—I may not be pronouncing this correctly, but Michael Luke Rams is the director of Traces and if that's the historical group, it's a museum that's actually sponsoring this Vanished exhibit. So he would have some more of that information, and also I earlier gave you a business card of the German American Internee Coalition. There's a web site there. We have a lot of information. Art Jacobs as well, he has some—it's called Freedom of Information—it's FOI Times.com. He has a lot of information, but it's more disjointed.

Our little group started with three middle aged to elderly ladies who wanted to get everything in perspective and get it in order, so it's pretty orderly a little web site, but it has a lot of historical—

McWhorter: I had a chance to go to it, and I'm impressed. I like your photos too.

H Donald: Okay. Good.

McWhorter: Well, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to speak about today?

H Donald: No, I think that covers it. My concern is that if we don't look as a nation at this program—we've looked at the War Relocation Authority and it's been determined that that truly was wrong and shouldn't happen again. But if we don't look at what we do with people who are not citizens in a time of war, people who may be citizens of an enemy country and decide what their rights are and can people be held indefinitely like in Guantanamo now and in special prisons around the world? Do they not deserve to be able to hear the allegations? Do they not deserve to have counsel? I know there may be some true terrorists being held now, but those are only labels, and my father was labeled a Nazi and one of the most dangerous enemy aliens in the country. My mother had an arrest warrant in 1943. It was just a paper that was handed out to all of us after it was decided we'd entered the country illegally. Basically, it's an arrest warrant that says that she was dangerous to the safety of

the United Nations. And I think as a people we can do better than that. We can set better parameters and not destroy so many people in our almost hysterical fear of the enemy. And that, I think, is my conclusion. There should probably be a trumpet. (All laugh) There you go.

McWhorter: Well, I want to thank you. And I want to thank you too, Bruce, for your time today. You ran into Texas from California. You're doing many things this week, and I appreciate you giving me a couple of hours of your day today. It was my pleasure to meet you both.

H Donald: Thank you so much.

B Donald: Thank you very much. (end of interview)