Interview with Gustav Speder

IM-A-L-2011-050

Interview # 1: October 7, 2011
Interviewer: Robert Sharpe

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

Sharpe: Hello and welcome. My name is Bob Sharpe. This is an interview of Gus Speder, Springfield, Illinois, for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Oral History Project. Good morning, Gus.

Speder: Good morning, Bob.

Sharpe: Gus, could you start by telling us when you were born and where you were born and a little bit about your family?

Speder: Okay. Well, my name is Gus Speder, Gustav Adolf Johann Speder. I was born on November 27, 1941, in Rummelsburg, Germany, and currently residing here in Springfield, Illinois, with my wife. We have three children. Of course, they're not at home anymore. They're all over the United States. We have one daughter living in St. Charles, Missouri, another

Wedding picture of Anna Fressdorf Speder and Johann Speder, Gustav's parents, circa 1935.

daughter living in Champaign, Illinois, and our son lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

Sharpe: Could you tell us about your family members, at the time you were born?

Speder: Well, I was born in 1941, and I was born in Rummelsburg, Germany, as I mentioned already. My dad, at the time I was born, was living in Sintauten. He was called in for the service in 1943, I believe it was. I was two years old at that point, but I don't remember anything of him at all. And then, he went off to war and never came back…was MIA, missing in action, and [we] never heard anything more about him at all.

Gus' father, about 1940

My mom, well, we lived far eastern in Germany and by Lithuania, in Sintauten, there. When the war came, we had to flee the Russian front. So, we moved towards the west, and then we were caught up with this whole mess of moving with the fronts. When the Russian front moved westward, we moved westward. When the Russian front moved eastward, we moved east and we were caught up in the turmoil of the time in 1942, '43. (clock striking) What else in regards to my family back then? I have a brother.

Gus as a baby, held by his mother, and his brother, Walter, on the left.

Sharpe: When did the fronts start moving at that point?

Speder: Well, see, the front started moving roughly in 1942, I believe it was. This was when, you know, Germany had decided to attack Russia. They were very successful at the beginning, so we didn't have to move at that point. But then, when the Russians became more forceful and started driving the Germans back, well, we were living in the German territory. We had to move with the Germans, because we tried to get away from the Russians, at least my parents did, not I. I mean, I was with them, but, yeah, we had to move with the fronts, and then, when the Germans became strong again, they moved the Russians eastward. So, we had to move with them again, with the Germans, and we couldn't get out of that circle, just viciously moving back and forth on the fronts.

Sharpe: Who were the members of your family at this time?

Speder: At that point, we had two aunts, my grandmother and my mom, all women, no men around. Men were in the service.

Gus at age two, with his mother and his brother.

Sharpe: Did you have a brother that was

with you?

Speder: I had a brother with me. He's older. He's three years older than I. His name is Walter, and he currently lives in Florida, Melbourne, Florida. He has two daughters and a wife, of course. Her name is Margaret and the daughters' names are Sharon and Maria.

Sharpe: What was your mother's name?

Speder: Anna, Anna Bertha, like the Big Bertha, Bertha.

Sharpe: When you would move—the first time, if you remember this—that the fronts moved, would you just abandon your house, and what would you take with you? What happened at that point?

Speder: Just basically, the clothes on your back. That's all you could take with you. And you had to find your own transportation. There were horse-drawn wagons, not coaches like we had here. I'm talking about wagons, like hay wagons, and just try to move with the front, moving along, get away.

Sharpe: How would you get notice of this?

Speder: Ah, that I don't know, how they knew about that. They just moved ahead [of] the fronts or with the fronts. I don't remember any of the shooting. All I remember is, back in 1940, must have been '43, '44, as we were moving back and forth, because at that point…Somehow I remember this one, because we were staying in a barn. And by barn, I mean there was a hay barn, but there was not hay in there. There was straw in there, straw bales. In order to hide from the Russians, when they came, passed us by, we hid in these barns, but in a very unique fashion, because what they had. They had the bales stored in the barn, but then hollowed out underneath them, the straw bales. That's where we slept. You know, you pulled one or two bales out of the front and then behind, there was a big opening or like a little room in there. That's

where we went and slept at night, so not to be caught up with the Russian fronts.

Not only the Russians, but also the Polish, because at that point the Polish really, really disliked the Germans. So, that's one, you know. We just stayed ahead of the front. This was my grandmother, my aunt and my mom and my brother, of course.

Sharpe: During the day, then, where would you stay? Would you still stay in the barn?

Speder: Oh, yeah, we stayed there by the barn. We stepped outside, of course, but at night, we slept inside of it.

Sharpe: Do you remember how long you did this, personally?

Speder: (sigh) The one I remember, probably about a couple of months, at least. At least a couple of months.

Sharpe: A couple of months long?

Speder: Yeah.

Sharpe: Were there soldiers nearby, or did they just move past?

Speder: They moved. They usually passed by, you know. There were armored trucks and heavy equipment moved past each time, each direction. Yeah.

Sharpe: Do you remember any of your other neighbors, where they would hide out, and did any of them get caught?

Speder: Oh, yeah. Others were there with us. We were not the only ones in the barn. There were always, you know, four or five, six families, like that. But usually were all females, apparently, or very old men, because all of the rest were at war. But, yeah, it was not just us by ourselves. We had a lot of company.

Sharpe: How would you get food and water and so on?

Speder: Living off the countryside. We find a cow; we milk the cow and stuff like that and begging. It's kind of hard to imagine how it was back then. There were villages there. This was outside of a village, because farms…if you know typical farms in Germany, you don't have isolated farm houses by themselves sitting nowhere. Usually farms were like little small villages, like six, seven farm houses, clustered in one area, and then they farm the area around there. So, in other words, when we went to the farmers and asked for food or begged for food, basically, milk and fresh water.

Sharpe: Why weren't they leaving, as well?

Speder: Ah, because they were the residents there. We were the DPs [displaced persons]. We were the ones who were kicked out from the area where we were, where the real battles were taking place. This was transient area between.

Sharpe: What would you do as a kid to amuse yourself (Speder laughs) during the day, or did you have—

Speder: The only thing I remember so well, that I was pretty sick. I had typhoid.

Sharpe: At what age was this?

Speder: This is at age of almost three. I was almost three years old then. Yeah, I had typhoid, and I had a great big…some kind of growth coming on top of my head. Yeah. I still got a spot right there. It's a different color hair, as a matter of fact. I mean, that's the way it was. Then, you know, people said to my mom, "You might as well abandon him. He's dead," you know, "He's gone," which she didn't…I'm still here today.

Sharpe: How about your brother's health?

Speder: Health? Well, he survived it. I mean, we all had typhoid. We all had that. I mean, once you're in that area, you know, it's from the water that you drink, and we all had typhoid.

Sharpe: Did you have any medical attention at all, during that time?

Speder: No. There was none available, none available at all. (clock chimes) It's just like in any war situation, except it's different now. Nowadays people usually have food or something for sustenance. But back then, it was, you're on your own. So, there's nothing, nothing available.

Sharpe: The first time you did this, you remember it lasting several months, and then what happened at that point?

Speder: Well, then we went back towards the east, because the Germans were becoming powerful again, or strong. The front moved towards the east, so we had to move with the front.

Sharpe: Were you then able to return to your home?

Speder: No. We never got back, never got that far, never got that far. That's why I said we were like displaced people. You know, when there was one area that was taken over by the Russians, held by the Russians, we had to get out of there,

because they just hated even German civilians, at that point. So, we moved from the east towards the west to try to go to Germany. But then, when the front moved the other direction, we were forced to go the other way again, towards the east.

Sharpe: What forced you to go that way? Is it just food or shelter or—

Speder: Food, shelter and get away from the shooting, just get away from the conflict that was going on at the time. That's what I remember and what our mom told us. You know, we just trying to get away from things.

Sharpe: And there was a large population, basically, doing this same thing?

Speder: Yes, a whole lot of people, a lot of people, yeah.

Sharpe: And everyone was trying to live off the country?

Speder: That's it, exactly that, yeah.

Sharpe: Were the crops being planted?

Speder: Yeah, but much of the crop was destroyed by the services. It's almost like a slash and burn type of situation, where they don't want to leave anything for the others.

Sharpe: Let's go back for a minute, if we could. What do you remember about your mother's family history and what her background was?

Speder: Oh, I've got some papers in regards to that. I don't know very much about it, to be honest with you. All I know is, she told me that her grandparents migrated from Westphalia, towards the east. My grandfather and my great-grandfather both were blacksmiths, and they moved from Westphalia. I mean, my great-great-great-great grandfather moved from Westphalia, east towards the Lithuanian border, way out east, which would be East Prussia.

Sharpe: But you don't know the reason for that migration?

Speder: You know, I always thought about that, why did they? [It] might have been because the Russians, at that point in history, wanted German farmers for the lands. I always thought about it, but I don't know if it's true or not.

But see, my ancestors were not farmers. Like I said, they were blacksmiths, both of them were. As a matter of fact, the one I just vaguely remember was, in 1948—that's when he died—he was a blacksmith. I remember him.

Sharpe: This was your mother's father?

Speder: My mother's father, right, yeah.

Sharpe: How did he die?

Speder: Starvation, in East Germany in 1948.

Sharpe: Was he with you at the time?

Speder: No. He was in a DP camp in East Germany, and we were staying at a farm house. My mom was working as a maid or as…what do you want to call it? You milk the cows and all that stuff.

Sharpe: Did you see your grandfather during this time?

Speder: Just the one time, one time when he was in a DP camp, and he came from the DP camp. I mean, they brought him, by a wagon, to where we were. Then, he went back and he died.

Sharpe: What was his health like when you saw him?

Speder: Oh, very frail. And he used to be quite a robust guy, a robust guy like the blacksmiths were, back then. But he was just a skeleton.

Sharpe: Do you know which displacement camp he was in?

Speder: No, I don't. It's right outside a little town called Nesow in East Germany. I don't know what the name of it was. I really don't know about that. I'll have to ask my brother about that. We never sat down and talked about that at all. I don't know. That's a time you want to forget.

Sharpe: What about your father's side? Your father's family?

Speder: Hmm.

Sharpe: Do you know your paternal grandfather or grandmother?

Speder: Nope, nope, nope, I don't know anything about them, to be honest with you. I certainly don't.

Sharpe: You don't know where they were from or—

Speder: You know, I never asked that question. I never even gave it a second thought. I'll have to ask my brother about all those things. He might know more about it than I do. But no, I don't know anything about my dad's side.

I know he had a…well, he had a brother. His brother migrated to the U.S., the United States, here, back in the teens. He lived in Philadelphia, and then he had my aunt. That was his sister, who was with us all, you know, for all those trials and tribulations we went through. She lived in West Germany all those times. She died. Back in early eighties, she passed away.

Sharpe: Were either of your aunts married, the ones that were with you?

Speder: Oh, yeah. A different name, a completely different name. Zehr was the name, Z-e-h-r, yeah, and her name was Anna, Anna Zehr, same as my mom's name, Anna.

Sharpe: Was her husband in the service, as well?

Speder: Yes, yeah.

Sharpe: Both of them?

Speder: Missing also, missing in action, yeah.

Sharpe: And they never heard of him again?

Speder: No, never of him again, no, because they were both pulled into the service late, back in '43. Apparently, some of the people that were put into service, into the armed services, I guess, were sent to the Russian front, and it's just, just chaos there, apparently.

Sharpe: And again, just to revisit this a little, you really have almost no memory of your father?

Speder: No.

Sharpe: Because he left when you were two.

Speder: None whatsoever. I mean, absolutely none.

Sharpe: And what about your brother? Does he have a memory that he ever shared with you?

Speder: Yeah, he did, but we never sat down and talked about that time. We really haven't. That's why I said, you ought to get together with him and talk things out about the times, what they were like back then.

Sharpe: After your father left for the war, was there any contact between you or with you?

Speder: No.

Sharpe: Or with your mother?

Speder: He might have with my mom, but we just never talked about it. I don't know why. All I remember is that he left, and he came back once, and then he left again, and then was gone for all that time. That's all I remember. Like I said, we just didn't converse too much about those times.

Sharpe: Do you remember his visit back, have any impression of it?

Speder: No. I like to think it was, but I just…I really can't say. It seems like a dream, that I do remember him, yet I don't. I just can't say one way or the other.

Sharpe: Do you remember how your mother reacted, during this time, about your father being gone or the visit or anything like that?

Speder: No, no. I just don't recall any of that at all.

Sharpe: And during this time, your mother, when she was able, was she working at all? Were there jobs available for her? Was there any source of income?

Speder: You mean when he was gone?

Sharpe: Yes.

Speder: No, she wasn't working at the time. She wasn't working at all. She was a housewife back then. I mean, she'd just maintain the house, and she was helping my grandfather with his business in a blacksmith shop.

Sharpe: And what city was that in?

Speder: That was in Sintauten, S-i-n-t-a-u-t-e-n, Sintauten. But I don't remember much of that at all.

Sharpe: Was your brother going to school at that time? Or were you?

Speder: No, during the war time? Heaven's sake, no. There was no school. Everybody was on vacation back then (chuckles), especially for the DP persons, who had no residency then. (static noise) Just go ahead. I'll just hold it right here. Fine.

Sharpe: Is there any more that you remember about your family life, during that time? What did kids do to play?

Speder: Well, the only times that I really remember or can think and relate to at the time was probably, I would say, in 1945, because, between '45 and 1948, we

lived in Germany, in East Germany. It became East Germany. It was, after the war. That was in a little town called Nesov, that's N-e-s-o-v, Nesov, which is, oh, I would say, oh, about a hundred miles south of the Baltic Sea. We lived at the farm, and my mom was working as a maid there.

And what did we do? That's also the times I remember, because I started going to first grade, to school. What did we do to play? Well, we used all those good things that were left over from the war, which I mentioned to you once before, because, when the German troops went back, were driven back by the Russians and, you know, there are bomb craters that were there. Well, the bomb craters always became good places for where the Germans dropped all their munitions, their guns and so forth, all the war articles, dropped them in there.

Sharpe: This is when the war ended?

Speder: Well, this was after the war, '45. That's what I say, between 1945 and '48; that's when I remember. You know, I went to school. When you asked the question in regards to playing, because that's brought all the memories back. That's what we did. We did play. We're kids and loved to do all the things that kids love to do. Of course, we played with all the dropped off goodies that's from the war, from the soldiers, that they left behind, because they didn't want to take anything back with them when the Germans retreated towards the west. They just dropped everything. They left trucks behind, tanks behind. You name it. And, of course, as a little kid, of five, six years old, you love to play in all those things.

Sharpe: So, in the area where you were, there were abandoned vehicles?

Speder: Oh, yeah. Abandoned trucks. Abandoned…oh, I remember, one tank was parked, as a matter of fact, right behind the farm house in which we lived. Like I said earlier to you, that the farms were not isolated farm houses all over the place. They had sections of five, six, seven, eight, sometimes up to ten farm houses, clustered to make up a village. This village in which we lived, like I said, was called Nesov. There they had plenty of abandoned material from the war. That's what we played with, all the toys left behind from that, ammunition.

We took the shells apart, took the powder out from under them. People my brother's age, as a matter of fact, they detonated a lot of them, you know, grenades that were left over. But they played safe with them. But safe is not safe enough, because a lot of friends were killed. My two friends were killed at that time, the same age as I was.

Sharpe: Do you know the circumstances of those?

Speder: Yeah. Playing with grenades, called a panzerfaust. You know, they had the panzerfaust are quite unique little things, because they had a little string on them, a little ceramic ring on them. We always want those ceramic rings. And the only way to get those silly things off, you have to pull them. So, you can get the ceramic, the whole rope comes out then, and you wanted those.

Well, it was not too lucky for a couple of kids. They were not fast enough, or they went off early or whatever it was, it just blew them up. Usually the older kids, like fourteen, thirteen, fourteen year-old kids, are the ones that are the more daredevils, so to speak. That was dangerous. But also, we found a lot of times, they had soldiers were buried there, also. All you'd see is the gun sticking in the ground, with a helmet up on top. It's almost like you see it in the movies. Because, when the fronts moved, they were moving fast, and a lot of things [were] left behind.

Sharpe: Were the guns and helmets taken and played with?

Speder: Oh, yeah. But not only that, we just played with them. There were so many of them around. I mean, there were so many, you wouldn't believe it. I mean rifles, even machine guns. As a matter of fact, later on, it was beginning to be cleaned up somewhat, but not very much.

I knew when my mom was working the fields, you know, when the women were working in the fields, the kids were at the hedges, sitting, playing on the blanket in the grass. I mean, at the hedges, they had in the ditches, right next to the fields, that was a place where things were abandoned. Trucks were pulled in there, after the war and just began to deteriorate. That's where, also, the guns were thrown and ammunition, grenades, anything they could get rid of, so they could move fast, were left behind.

Sharpe: What sort of play did you do with all of these?

Speder: Well, we played war, for one thing. You know, we hoped the guns were empty. We'd point them at each other. Even as a little kid, those guns were heavy. They were pretty heavy. We took the guns and took the bullets out of the shells. They had the powder inside of them. That powder was highly flammable, and when we saw a paved road—which was asphalt paved back then, not concrete—what we did was, we spread the powder in a letter and then lit it up. It just burned it, right into the asphalt. I mean, it just stayed there forever, it seems like. It might be still there today, I don't know. I doubt it that it would last that long.

As a matter of fact, sometimes we tried to detonate the shells, set off the primers on them, by using hammers or anything that was hard, even rocks. You know, they'd pop pretty good. Because we didn't have fireworks, those were the real fireworks we had. And, yeah, there were a lot of accidents back

then. Our parents told us not to play with any of that stuff. Leave it behind; don't touch it. Well, it becomes more and more tempting. That's what it was for us.

Also, which I may have mentioned it to you before, but, when they moved in the fronts, the trains were running in those days. The railroad trains were bringing supplies back and forth, all the time. Well, we rode the trains, too, but not in the cars. We were riding on the bumpers of them. I was not, my mom was straddling and holding on to me, envision something like that. Are you familiar with trains in Germany?

Sharpe: No.

Speder: They're a little different than here. In Germany, the train cars, when they come together, they have two bumpers sticking out, and they're spring loaded. That's when you bump the cars, they'll spring load into each other, like this. Bump like this, but they retract themselves like that. Well, we rode on those, instead of riding on the train or in the wagon. That's how we did it. I mean, I did, and I was riding with my mom.

Sharpe: You just traveled from town to town or just—

Speder: From one area to another, you know, like thirty or forty miles, hitched a ride that way, on the bumpers. My brother really remembers that, because he's the one that told me about it, riding on the bumpers on the trains.

Sharpe: And this was done frequently?

Speder: Oh, yeah. To move back and forth, we did that. I mean, I didn't, so to speak, but, yeah.

Sharpe: Again, at the time when the war ended, do you remember the war ending? Do you have a memory of that specifically?

Speder: Yeah. That's what I said. We finally settled at a farm and lived in a room. Can you believe it? We had a room. We stayed in one room, my mom, my brother and I. We stayed in one room we had, up on the second floor of a farmhouse. That's where she worked as a maid, milking the cows and churning the butter, making the syrup from beets. I remember all those things. Those I remember, but otherwise…my mom, when she worked, even the farmers, they were kind of harsh, too. You know, we lacked food and didn't have much to drink. She stole milk from them, as she was milking the cows. She had a—back then, a thermos—you know, hot water bottles. You know what they are?

Sharpe: Could you describe them?

Speder: They were rubberized. They were hot water containers. Usually about, oh, this size, like that. It's the ones you used to put hot water in them and warm your feet up. That kind of stuff.

Sharpe: They were about six inches in size?

Speder: Well, they were bigger, pretty good size. When my mom stole milk from the farmer that was because, when she was milking the cow, she'd milk the cow, and then put it under her dress, so we had something to drink at night.

Sharpe: Were you living in the house that the farmer owned?

Speder: Yes. It was a regular…You see, farmhouses back then were nothing like here. The farmhouses were…they also had the animals living in the same farmhouse. In other words, you have the farmer's huge building always, and three-fourths of the building was for the cattle, the horses, the pigs. Then the other small portion of it was reserved for the people that lived there. The farmhouse would have a huge kitchen, and then the bedrooms and so forth, but it's all under one roof.

Sharpe: In addition to cows, what other animals were there?

Speder: Horses. We didn't have any goats, no sheep, either. Chickens, had plenty of those. But they were outside, living separate. But the cows and the horses and the pigs were in the same building as the farmhouse. Even today, if you go to the typical farmhouses, they're still constructed the same way. But now there're all big operations—not like it was back then—just like farmers here.

Years back here, they raised everything besides their fields. Nowadays, you know, just the fields. It's all specialized. [It's] the same thing over there. But the typical farmhouse, back then, they were all under one roof, (clock chimes) and things didn't smell.

Sharpe: So, the timeframe you were living in this farmhouse was immediately after the war, until about when?

Speder: Until '48.

Sharpe: Forty-eight. Then what happened, in '48?

Speder: Well, in '48, the border from us was maybe, oh, might be about forty miles from the border.

Sharpe: From which border?

Speder: West German border. There was a border between East and West Germany, and the border was established, so to speak, at the conclusion of the war. You know, there was a border and then a separation, but we stayed. We couldn't get, you know, it was controlled. The border was controlled by guards and so forth.

We stayed in contact with people by mail. Mail was going back and forth between East and West Germany back then. We got in contact with some friends on the west, not relatives, just friends. Then, some people, like my aunt, she fled to the west. So, she established a base, and then we corresponded back and forth. Then my mom went over to the west to see what's like, if it's worth going there or not, because we didn't…There was no news like they have nowadays, of course.

Sharpe: How did your aunt escape?

Speder: She fled across, fled across. A lot of people went from east to west. I mean, if you're not caught, fine. But my mom was caught, so she spent a week in jail. She was moved back to the west, I mean the east, East Germany. But then, she decided, well, it's time for us to leave, too. I remember that part, how we escaped, because that was the beginning of '49.

You see, in order to get to the West, you have to find a place to stay. Places you can stay in West Germany was DP camps, they set up for fleeing people from the East. So she made arrangements.

Sharpe: Those are displacement camps, right?

Speder: Yeah, these were displacement. They were just basically built for that reason. So, my mom went over to the West and talked to my aunt. And my aunt, who had gone over there, was living in a DP camp. So, she decided, well, we'll get out of that place, too, because [there was] no future at all in East Germany at the time.

Everything was rationed. Like my mom, at least, we had some milk to drink. Otherwise, you're all restricted, you know, sugar, butter, everything was rationed. You only had so much a month, and when you went to the grocery store [it] didn't have anything. If they did have it, you can't buy what you wanted. You can only buy what you're allowed to buy at the time. It's almost like rationing here during the Second World War. We had certain amounts of rationing, but it was worse over there, because they're not able to sustain living for a family of three.

So, my mom decided, well, we're going to hit the road, too. But then, that little town Nesov, which we lived [in], one of the guys who lived in a farmhouse across from there knew a guard, who was a guard at the border. He

was the one that helped us flee from East Germany, because he knew the schedule when the guards were riding their bicycles on the road by the border.

I remember, we hitched up one night. We took a wagon close to the border and hid in a barn. At a specific time, he came out and said, "Now is your time to go across the border," because of about fifteen, twenty minute time element, before the next guard comes through there and checks. They rode on bicycles, by the way, [the] guards did. So, we saw the guy coming by, with his bicycle light on at night, and passed it. Right after [we] went across, towards the border.

That's what I remember so well, because I was too slow, a scrawny little kid, because the border was about, I would say, about a hundred and fifty yards, about, roughly, two football fields from the road, but that hundred and fifty yards was plowed and plowed real deep. You have big ruts, and you had to run in a short time, to get across there. I fell down so often, you wouldn't believe. Fall down; pick yourself up. Then, fall down, and pick yourself up. That's the one I remember as a kid, so well.

Sharpe: They were plowed?

Speder: For that reason, so people could not cross easily or drive across them.

Sharpe: Was there a fence or anything else?

Speder: No fence, none whatsoever. At that point, there was nothing there before 1949. I mean, there was a border, a declared border. They had posts every so often, but there was no…nothing like it was later on, when the border was built. Yeah, that's how we came across from there.

Of course, later on, you hear about the border. Usually it's when the Berlin Wall was built. That was in '61, many years later. But there was a border already, prior to that, but not as fortified, as it became fortified later on. Later on, you know, they had fences, no man's land and all types of fences that they had mined, activated. Back then was nothing like that. That, like I said, posts were there, and there's this huge field. That's how I remember trying to get across. That's how we got across.

Sharpe: Who besides your mother was with you, when you fled?

Speder: When we fled that time, it was my aunt, my mom and my brother. Just the four of us, that time.

Sharpe: Once you got through the field, then what happened there?

Speder: You're on the West, okay? When we got to the West side—you're in West Germany now—then we had to get a ride. Well, the rides from farmers were available. They helped to get us to the next place, which was a DP camp, which was called Peppendorf, which is, oh, probably about twenty miles south of Lübeck. Are you familiar with the area at all?

Sharpe: Somewhat.

Speder: Lübeck is right, and the Baltic Sea is like this, like that, a big circle, south West Germany corner. Southwestern corner is a big town called Lübeck. Well, about twenty miles from there, they had established a DP camp, and the DP camp was being built there. They built them just for that purpose, for people who were fleeing from the East to come to the West, huge Quonset buildings.

Do you know what a Quonset building looks like? They had probably about…I imagine they must have had about twenty-five or thirty of them. Each one of them, when we were there, they had bunk beds in them, but not two bunk beds high, but three bunk beds high. I would venture and say (clock chimes) each one of those DP camp barracks—we called them barracks—I would venture they had two to three hundred people to a barrack.

Sharpe: So, there are two or three hundred people in the barrack that you were in.

Speder: Right.

Sharpe: And how many barracks?

Speder: About twenty of them. That's a pretty good sized DP camp. And it was away in the woods. As a matter of fact, when I took tourists to Germany, I took one tour just for that intention, to see if it was still there. That was back in the late '70s.

Sharpe: Was it there?

Speder: No.

Sharpe: It was gone.

Speder: Of course, it was gone, but for the pine trees growing there. They were probably about thirty feet high, thirty or forty feet high. But they had a memorial right there to indicate there was, at one point…this was a DP camp. You know how the Germans do things; a memorial sign made it official. But it was right there, then and there. As a matter of fact, I had a tour. I took a bus, the whole bus right there. They thought, "What in the hell is that guy trying to

do, going there." You know, there's nothing here. Well, it meant a lot to me, though. So, that was there.

Sharpe: In the camp, how was life organized?

Speder: Oh, Jesus! The worst conditions you can imagine. We have a so-called, the toilets. We always called it plums toilets collecting. You know, if you go to the bathroom, [unintelligible]. That's why they called it plums collecting, back then. And it smelled. You wouldn't believe it. You think these portable toilets are bad here, odor-wise, you should try one of them. (static noise at microphone is repositioned) Yeah, they had the so called plums back then. Can you imagine, with that many people? I would say there were, maybe, they had six by twelve toilets, but they're, you know, women on one side, for men on the other side, back to back. Then, you know, those—

Sharpe: Was there any privacy in these?

Speder: Well, they had doors on them. That was about it. They're wooden, you know, wooden, oh, you know, like boards, wood, and then a hole cut in them, and that's what you used. Showers, we didn't have any showers there. We were hauled by truck to Lübeck for showering.

Sharpe: How often did that happen?

Speder: Usually, once a month. But we were in that place only, I would say, probably about nine months we were there, because they're temporary camps. What they try to do is put all the people fleeing from the East to come to the West. It was like a holding camp. The DP camp was a holding camp, until they could find someplace else in Germany, not just in that area, but throughout Germany, trying to find housing. And housing was tough at the time.

Sharpe: What was the name of the camp, this one?

Speder: Peppendorf, P-e-p-p-e-n-d-o-r-f, Peppendorf. And, as a matter of fact, talk about, nowadays, bed bugs, (chuckles) plenty of those. They didn't go hungry there.

Sharpe: What was the bedding like?

Speder: Well, what we had there, you'll probably laugh, but we had…they were like canvass cloth, filled with straw. Canvass, you know, cloth like linen, real heavy, and then, they were filled with straw.

The other part, of course, when there are that many people there, lice was a big problem. I remember that. We had to ride on the back of a truck to Lübeck for delousing. For the little kids, the women, they didn't shave their

heads, but for the men and the little kids, they shaved our head and then powdered us for delousing, whatever it was.

The other part, which I never forget there, is that plenty to eat. That's the other part, nice part, of it. But they had fish, and we had, at that point, we had money, with paper money.

Sharpe: German currency?

Speder: Yeah, it was made out of paper, like a nickel, five cent, it was paper. Five pfennig and then fifty pfennig and then a mark. It was all in paper, you know. It was temporary money, made by the United States, as a matter of fact, produced for the Germans. The cheapest food we had was smoked herring. They call them bueckling. That was the best, but after a while you eat that on a daily basis, and that's cheap, for ten pfennig, a whole fish, you know, big fish like that for ten pfennig. I mean, that's what, you know, we had food. We had real food there. In East Germany, we didn't. This was the first time I ever had real food that I can really remember. That was in '49.

Sharpe: And how was your health, during this time?

Speder: Oh, I was in bad shape.

Sharpe: Typhoid still?

Speder: No, no. No, typhoid, that was in East Germany. No, no. I just [had] malnutrition, which I think I mentioned to you, that my grandfather died [of] in East Germany. When we were in Nesov, he was at a DP camp. Yeah, I did mention it to you. But, no, we thrived on regular food there, for the first time. I mean, it was, you know…big food was trucked in. They didn't have any kitchens then. The food was trucked in, and then we were fed three times a day. Then, like I say, people could buy the fish separately. And man, I'll tell you, ever since that time, I don't like fish anymore (laughs).

Sharpe: So, when you came across the border and got to this camp, you were suffering from malnutrition.

Speder: Oh, god, yes, yes, very much so.

Sharpe: And then, slowly, did you get better?

Speder: Slowly, but I guess it takes a long time. The reason for that is because…then the next one. We went from that DP camp, we were transferred to another DP camp, further south, in southern Germany, but to a town called Siegen, S-i-e-g-e-n. That DP camp consisted of, was the army barracks. They called them in Germany, Kasernen, because they were regularly, fully brick block buildings.

Of course, they were bombed out during the war. But the ones that were still standing were renovated, and we moved into a room there, again, as a DP.

Sharpe: What was the name of this camp? Do you remember?

Speder: It was Siegen.

Sharpe: It was the name of the town and the camp?

Speder: The name of the town. There was Siegen and Kasernen. You see, it's just like staying at the barracks. Here you would say, you know, Fort Leonard Wood. That would be the town and the barracks. Well, the barracks are the camp, and the same thing there, Siegen, because Kasernen was where the soldiers used to be. We were sent from Pappendorf to Siegen to the DP camp, waiting for assignment to find a place to live in Germany, because the government did all of the housing and so forth.

Now in this Siegen, I would say, probably half of the barracks, the Kasernen, the buildings, were destroyed or half destroyed and so forth. The rest of them, the DP people were assigned a room in there. We had a room there.

Sharpe: For your family?

Speder: Yeah, just the three of us.

Sharpe: On your own.

Sharpe: One room, yeah. We had a toilet there, a flushing toilet, as a matter of fact—that was unusual—and showers. But, again, like in an army here, when you're here, you have a shower, sure, but everybody uses them. There's no privacy, really. But we had that, at least.

And, as a matter of fact, that's where my mom…well, I even helped there; my brother helped. We were cleaning bricks, you know, from the destroyed barracks, because Kasernen there…like I said, half of them were standing. The other half were just ruins. Well, in order to get some money, we cleaned bricks. The bricks were there, and we hammered and cleaned all the mortar off and stacked them up. We got a penny per brick. I mean, one pfennig for a brick. So, you can imagine what it was like, yeah. Then we waited there, until we had an assignment for an apartment.

Sharpe: How was food there in Siegen?

Speder: Again, it was served in, brought in. Plenty of food, usually.

Sharpe: And how big was the camp, population?

Speder: I don't remember how many were there. There were quite a few. It was big. There was, you know, like an army; it was for the German Army. It was built back before the war.

Sharpe: Was there medical attention given?

Speder: Very little, but yes, we had check-ups there. As a matter of fact, my mom had heart trouble. But, hey, who cares about heart trouble? You're trying to, you know, just exist. I was in very frail condition, very frail condition.

Sharpe: This was from malnutrition?

Speder: Malnutrition, yeah. Oh, yeah. I guess it takes a while to get over that. Then we finally got an assignment. In other words, what the government did [was], if people had houses, and they had more than, like, the place we were assigned to, the people had a house, the West Germans. And the West Germans didn't like the East Germans. You know, they were like bad news to them. So, we were bad news to them. But if they—

Sharpe: Not for any political reason, but because it was economic?

Speder: Housing, economic reason, yeah, economic reason. But they were still disliked. I mean, we were disliked by the West Germans. East Germans were disliked by the West Germans, because they intruded upon their space and everything else. You know, they had to learn how to share, and they didn't want to share. I mean, if someone tells you to do something, and you don't want to do it. But anyway, we finally got assigned to a two-room apartment. We had cold running water.

Gus at age 14, in Burgsteinfurt.

Sharpe: Where was this?

Speder: In West Germany. We were assigned to Burgsteinfurt. That's where I basically grew up, then. I mean, that's where all my memories are basically from.

Sharpe: How far was this from the displacement camp?

Speder: Siegen? Probably about a hundred miles, about a hundred miles. But, like I said, the government took care of all of this, all the DP people, to assign them to different

cities throughout West Germany.

Sharpe: One day they just came and said, you're moving?

Speder: You got [an] assignment; we got an apartment for you. But the apartment was, like I said, two rooms. We had a sink and a heating stove, heating and cooking stove combination type of thing, and then the bathroom.

We had to go downstairs, go outside, around the back of the house. That's where the people had a bathroom, back there. The bathroom was, you know, was like a plums toilet, because the people also raised the pig, and the pig had, you know…right next to the pig stall was the bathroom. But the bathroom, like I said, consisted only of a portable like, basically a wooden frame with a hole cut in it. Right underneath it was the retainer for the honey and also the honey from the pig. You know, the drainage from the pig goes in the same pit. That pit is pumped out in the spring or late winter and spread on the field as fertilizer.

So, if you had to go to the bathroom, you have to go all the way downstairs, around the back, and the back door from those people living downstairs, and go to the bathroom, because they use the same bathroom. There were no flush toilets back then. So, we were assigned to that place.

Sharpe: And the family was unfriendly?

Speder: They were. Well, they didn't have any choice. You can sense the animosity there, I mean, no ifs or buts about it. Not only them, it was true of all of them, because it's their house, and the government comes in and says, well, you have to take a renter, so to speak.

The government paid them for it. We didn't have any money. For what we had at the time, we were just like, like they say in German, like a church mouse, as poor as a church mouse, nothing there. But, yeah, so we stayed there.

Sharpe: How long did you live in this apartment?

Speder: In this place? We lived there…that was '50, yeah '51, we moved in there. We stayed in that house, in that apartment, for three years. We stayed there for three years, '51 [to] '54, yeah. Three years we stayed there.

Sharpe: So, you were ten and your brother was thirteen?

Speder: Uh huh.

Sharpe: And had you had schooling up to that point?

Speder: Oh, at the time in Pappendorf? No. In Siegen? No. But, then we moved to Burgsteinfurt. There I started school again. I went to grade school in East Germany, in Nesov, a little bitty town, first grade. I started second grade. When I came to West Germany, I started first grade all over again.

Sharpe: At what age?

Speder: This was, gee, I don't remember. No, I'm not quite correct on that, no. I started there…When I was in East Germany, I started school. When I came to West Germany, I started over again. I must have gone to school, then, in between there somewhere, because I remember I started in fourth grade. I started fourth grade in '50…'51, '52, yeah. Fifty-one, '52 I just have been in fourth grade. I started there in Burgsteinfurt, yeah.

Sharpe: And your brother was?

Speder: Three years ahead of me, yeah. And, well, yeah.

Sharpe: So, what was the school like?

Speder: Oh, I thought it was great. I mean, I enjoyed the people, the students, teachers. I'm in contact with them, even today. But, in between there, and when I got there, in order to make money, I was looking for bottles, you know, like wine bottles, except we used them for apple cider. I was collecting them. One day I just picked up about four bottles that day, looking for money. I made something like twenty pfennigs is how much you got for them, each time. That was a mark. It was quite a bit of money for a little kid. I couldn't make it home. I had such pains in my chest.

Sharpe: How old were you at this time?

Speder: This was…eight, eight or nine, about eight or nine.

Sharpe: And you were still in the displacement camp?

Speder: No, no, no, no, in Burgsteinfurt. I'm talking Burgsteinfurt. We were living in Burgsteinfurt now. But to get some money, I was looking for bottles. You know, well, we're scavengers, basically. We had that apartment. But I was looking for bottles. I picked up some bottles, and I could not make it back home.

Sharpe: Because of chest pains?

Speder: Pains, chest pains. So, the people called an ambulance that saw me, and they hauled me off to the hospital. Well, the hospital, they said, well, took x-rays, and I had really bad TB. I mean I had a bad—

Sharpe: Tuberculosis.

Speder: I had, well, from when I had typhoid, one of the problems that I had, still is, my left upper lung is grown onto my back bone, from high temperature, from the fever. It's still there. Nowadays, if you go to take a look at my x-rays, they're just scars, nothing but scars that you see on my lungs.

Sharpe: From the typhoid?

Speder: From the TB afterwards, from the TB, yeah. So, what they did, they sent me off to a sanitarium. As a matter of fact, I've got a picture of all the crew that were in the…I got a small picture, you know, the people who were at that sanitarium. It was called Senne Eins. It was Senne Eins and Senne Zwei. They're by Bielefeld. They sent me to a sanitarium, where I laid for six months.

Sharpe: Where was the sanitarium?

Speder: By Bielefeld. Are you familiar with that area at all?

Sharpe: No.

Speder: Have you heard of Hermann the Cherusci, the one that defeated the Roman legions?

Sharpe: Yeah.

Speder: Well, anyway, his monument is right there. I mean, that's where I took a picture, and that's how I remember it. But anyway, they took me there for six months, and, you know, there's nothing against TB. The only thing they can have is taking lebertran, which is cod liver oil. You know how that is, how nice it tastes? Then, they rolled me during the day in the sunshine. That's the only cure they had for it, TB, back then.

Sharpe: So you're basically reclined this whole time?

Speder: Flat on my back, flat on my back for six months.

Sharpe: Was it painful?

Speder: As long as I didn't move I was all right (laughs). But, you know, taking a deep breath, I couldn't do it. It's just like someone coming and pushing knives and needles in you, but then—

Sharpe: So, you were separated from your family?

Speder: Oh, yeah, completely, six months. And back then, you know, you don't want to associate with TB, because it's contagious. So, I was gone there for six months, and I came back, went back to school and was all right. As a matter of fact, those same kids, the same kids I went to school there with, all the way, I went with them to school until we came here.

Gustav Speder, front row, second from left, with group of fellow patients at TB sanitarium, Senne I, near city of Bielefield, Germany.

See, back then, the school year was not like here; in the fall you change grades, you know, like September, you start your freshman year, and then the next September, you're a sophomore and down the line. Back then, the change in grade school and high school and colleges was in the spring, Easter time. Easter time was the time of change. I stayed, while I was in Burgsteinfurt, until '56, and I just started my seventh grade there at Easter time.

Then we came here in August, three months later, to the United States. In other words, I never finished grade school. I start the seventh grade, and then we came here. And when I came here, I started high school.

Sharpe: Going back to when you recovered from the TB, did anyone else in your family get TB?

Speder: No, no.

Sharpe: What about other people in the town? Were you just an isolated case?

Speder: You know, I don't even know.

Sharpe: How big was the sanitarium?

Speder: It was quite large. Senne Eins and Senne Zwei, those were, you know, the specialty for TB. I don't even have any records from that at all. I don't have any records from them.

Sharpe: Did you feel you were treated well there?

Speder: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You needed something, they got it for you, the nurses. It was nice, except I couldn't enjoy it, at least the first part, through the three months. It was just…it was bad. Don't get TB anybody. I mean, forget that. I just remember those days like, sometime you took a breath…You know, you can't take a deep breath, because you're afraid you'll get that pain. So, I remember that quite well.

Sharpe: Were your family allowed to visit you at all?

Speder: No, no. It's contagious. No way. No way. Later, now I shouldn't say…about the fourth month, my mom was able to come visit me. Yeah, the fourth month, she was able…one day she came. [She] Couldn't before that. It was just total isolation from the rest of the world. I got a lot of reading done.

Sharpe: That's good.

Speder: Yeah, that's one positive part of it, but otherwise, no. It was hell.

Sharpe: Did you have any friendships formed with people?

Speder: There? No, no. That's the other part. No, didn't have any. I've got a picture of a whole bunch of us (clock chimes). We took an excursion, the fifth month or sixth. No, not the fifth, the sixth month. All the ones who were there in that sanitarium, we took an excursion to that monument of Hermann the Cherusci.

Would you believe it, we just looked through it a little while yesterday, Kathy and I. We sat down. [We said] Let's go through all the pictures we have and see what we can find, if you have any pictures from when I grew up. There's a picture of that and all the people in there. You can always notice me there, you know, the oddball looking one. But, yeah, that was it.

Sharpe: Then you returned and were healthy and were able to participate normally in activities and so on, once you returned?

Speder: The only thing that they said at Senne Eins, the doctor says, "You know, the thing of it is, you'll never be able to do any physical or manual labor," because you know, the lung growing fused on there. But how wrong was he? He was completely wrong. I've done everything here. You name it, I've done it, yeah. It's just amazing, the human body. It's just…but it was down in the dumps at one time.

Sharpe: So, back with your family, what was school like there?

Speder: In Germany?

Sharpe: Yeah.

Speder: Well, first of all, because of my situation with grade school and the transferring from here to there and all over the place, the moving we had…The system in Germany functions a little bit differently than here, the educational [system]. You see, in Germany you have basically a three-tier system for education. Everybody goes through, from grade one through four, in Germany, everybody. It's called grundschule. Then, at the fourth grade, upon the recommendations of the teachers and the money situation of the parents, you can have a choice.

You can continue in your general education, go through grade one, from five through eight, and then go into a trade, you know, becoming a plumber or whatever you want to become, a trade, bricklayer. Or you can go to a middle school, which is called a middle school there, which would train you towards, like, working in offices and so forth, like middle management. Then you have the other, one gymnasium, which is the third one, which is a prep school towards university.

Well, I was stuck with the general education for, you know, from one through eight, because I had no coherent, basic education at all. So, I stayed with them and with the kids and had a real good teacher, because in Germany the teachers go with you. You have a regular, like a home room teacher, and you go all the way, all the way through eighth grade with the same people, with the same teacher, and we had a good one.

Sharpe: Teaching all the subjects?

Speder: Yes. Well, no, not all the subjects. But it is like a home room teacher. Other teachers will come in, like, if you have a history teacher, he'll come into your classroom, not like here. Here we have the teachers stay in the room and all the kids come. There the teachers come to the classrooms, and we had our teacher. She just passed away about six years ago, Frau Brandt. As a matter of fact, she was in charge of the German swimming team in 1957, and they were practicing in St. Louis for the Olympics, parts of it. The German team was practicing in St. Louis. So, when she came to St. Louis, we drove down and visited her.

Sharpe: How nice.

Speder: Then, for our class reunions, she was always there. As a matter of fact, she wrote three or four books, I've got a copy of. She always sent me a copy of her books. She had three or four books she wrote. I've got that.

Sharpe: On what subject?

Speder: She did an awful lot of travelling, and they were like travel books. She published them, and then she sent me a copy of each one of them. We stayed

in contact with her and a lot of the classmates. I think I've got a list. I don't know if I've got it here or not, for class reunions. [It's] got all the people who were in the class and so forth. I went to two class reunions over there, and we had one here. I think I mentioned that to you. We had one class reunion…In '96, we had a class reunion here.

Sharpe: In Springfield?

Speder: Here in Springfield, yeah.

Sharpe: And how many?

Speder: Twelve.

Sharpe: Twelve people came?

Speder: Yeah.

Sharpe: Are they all living in Germany?

Speder: Yeah. I'm the only one that's in the United States or out of the country, so to speak. All the rest of them stayed in Germany. I'm the only oddball (chuckles), as usual. But, yeah, we had some good times together. I mean enjoyment, not good times, so to speak. I mean, getting together and seeing each other.

Sharpe: Going back to the education that you discussed. You mentioned your father was an engineer. Do you know, did he go through…he must have gone through university? Do you know where that was or anything like that?

Speder: I don't know.

Sharpe: You just know that he was an engineer.

Speder: Yeah, yeah, yeah, he was an engineer, yeah. He was not drafted until late in the war. He was drafted in '43, yeah. I think it was around '43. That's why I say, I can't remember him. Yeah, he was drafted real late. I mean, this was when they, you know, had hit the bottom of the barrel, so to speak.

Sharpe: What was he doing up to then? Do you know?

Speder: To be honest with you, I don't know. I really don't know. My mom said he was an engineer and that would be left at that. Like I said, I'm going to have to sit down with my brother sometime. Maybe he can enlighten me on some of the areas that he knows about, but, as far as I know, no.

Sharpe: Because often engineers, during the time of war, would have been put into a different position than, say, infantry or something.

Speder: At the end of war, everything went. I mean, ministers had to go. Preachers had to go. It was a strange situation at the end of the war, yeah. He was not pulled in until late. I'll have to ask, like I said. I have not reached a point yet. I've done a lot of translation for people who are doing research in family history and translation and so forth. I've done it for others, but I've never done it for myself. I'm too young yet. I don't want to do it yet. (laughs)

Sharpe: So, what was your mom doing, during this period, and your brother? Your brother was in school?

Speder: In Germany, you mean?

Sharpe: Yes.

Speder: My mom was working as a housecleaning person. That's what she did, *putzfrau*. That's what she did. She was not trained for anything. I don't think she even finished grade school. I don't think. You know, I don't even know. I never gave it a thought. No, I don't even know. But that's what she did, when we were living in West Germany, because [those were] tough times back then, even West Germany I'm talking about. The housing situation was bad. Work was bad, trying to find a job. My brother finished his trade. He became a tool and die maker and—

Sharpe: So, he didn't go to the university, he went to a?

Speder: Trade school.

Sharpe: Trade school.

Speder: I'm the same thing. I mean, we both were, you know. We didn't have any continuity in our education. We had so many interruptions, until we came to Burgsteinfurt. That was the longest place we were in one place, which was basically from '51 through '56. That was it. Otherwise, it was just hopscotch here, hopscotch there, moving from one place to another. It was just no continuity whatsoever. So, he became a tool and die maker, from that fact. Then in '50, yeah, '55, we finally rented a house; I mean our own house.

As a matter of fact, I took my wife to Germany one time and I showed her the place where we lived. I mean, it's immaculate, a beautiful looking place now. Still looks basically the same as it was back then, but completely redone, totally rehabbed.

Sharpe: In '55, you moved out of the apartment and went on your own, as a family?

Speder: Yeah, rented a house, yeah. We rented a house. I've got a couple pictures of that place, even, I didn't know I had. (laughs) It was unique. We had a place of our own, then. It was all right.

Sharpe: What about entertainment that you had then? Did you learn music? Was there music available? Were there sports?

Speder: Music was available. Sports, [I] played soccer. I mean, everybody did that. And we played a lot of basketball, but it's not the basketball as we have it here. We didn't have a backboard on it. Baseball, of course, was not existent. But, basically, bicycling, [we did] a lot of bicycling. Even with the classes, we had bicycling.

Sharpe: So, your activities were bicycling, soccer, basketball?

Speder: But not the basketball we have here; it's different basketball.

Sharpe: Did your bout with tuberculosis keep you from participating in any of these?

Speder: No, no, no. Once I got out of that place, man, I tell you, I just partook in everything there was. I mean, you name it, I did it, even in those days.

Sharpe: So, what were the soccer balls and the basketballs like? Were they genuine balls?

Speder: Oh, yeah, they were good balls. We had very good balls, yeah, leather balls. They were good. Basketball, they were kind of rubberized, not like here, the nice ones. Like I said, we had them on stands, with the basket up there, but no backboard. You have to be super good to hit it, no bouncing off the back. (chuckles)

Sharpe: How high was it? I assume higher than you could reach.

Speder: Oh, yeah, of course. It seemed high at the time.

Sharpe: So, you weren't dunking or anything.

Speder: Oh, god, no. No, no, nothing like that; nothing like that. Oh, we did, when I was a kid; what did we do? We did a lot of *marmor*, which means, what do you call those little balls, marbles?

Sharpe: Marbles.

Speder: Marbles. We played marbles. I mean, you wouldn't believe all the marbles. But, they were clay marbles we had, not glass marbles, clay. You know, we

played them with the other kids and see how many we can win off of them and so forth.

Sharpe: Did they have to be round?

Speder: Yeah, oh yeah, round, colored, too. Oh yeah, they had those. We did a lot of hiking. Even with the school, we did a lot of hiking, excursions we did, all over the place.

Sharpe: You did hiking, bicycling, soccer, some basketball.

Speder: But not the basketball as we know it here.

Sharpe: Right.

Speder: Yeah. That was about it.

Sharpe: Were the sports organized?

Speder: There were organized sports. As kids, we played anyone on our own, just like here, when you have a get-together. We played it on our own. They were organized, but nothing to do with the school. They were sponsored teams, but not sponsored by the schools.

Sharpe: So, there would be leagues and things like that?

Speder: Leagues, yes. Yep, that's what we had.

Sharpe: What about availability of books and musical instruments and things like that?

Speder: Oh, god, [I] couldn't find enough time for musical instruments, but I loved to read. I loved to read back then. Especially, I loved to read…We had, we called them *schmökers* over there. That means magazines, like we had here, Superman.

Sharpe: Comic books?

Speder: Comic books type of things. We had them. We had them about the West, here, American.

Sharpe: Cowboy and Indian?

Speder: Oh yeah, cowboys and Indians. As kids we played cowboys and Indians over there. Can't do it here anymore. Yeah, we read a lot of books on that. I remember the ones that we…not only that, but we traded those books. You

know, like comic books used to be traded here? We have people, like books like Pete, Bill Jenkins.

As a matter of fact, Bill Jenkins…when I find out I was going to move to Springfield here, because he was, he was an FBI agent, in the Wild West days, though. And he was here in Springfield, at the train station and stuff like that. The guy that wrote the books actually was Bill Jenkins. He lived in Cologne, in Germany, in the city of Cologne. So, there was a lot of, wow, you're going to go to a place where you just read about in all those books. So, it was interesting. But it was…you know, to come here was like, wow, nirvana.

Sharpe: How did the idea…I assume it somewhat came from your mom, about coming to the United States. What was the genesis of that, and how did that come about?

Speder: Well, the whole thing was, my brother was interested in it, in coming to the states. She was kind of lukewarm, but, you know, at that time, you have to put yourself in perspective of Germany in '56. Things were bad, unemployment, tough to get a job, tough to find housing. I mean, Germany was in a doldrums at that point in history. So, she said, "Well, we'll see what we can do."

Sharpe: Were there American troops around?

Speder: No, not in our area. Remember, Germany was divided into four zones, the Soviet, which was East Germany; then you had the British. We lived in the British sector. Then you had southern Germany, [which] was the U. S. sector, and the western sector was French occupied zone. We lived in the British occupied zone, in the northern part of Germany.

Sharpe: Was there a presence of British troops?

Speder: Oh yeah, oh yeah. They were around then. As a matter of fact, we mooched chewing gum from them all the time. (laughs)

Sharpe: So, was the interaction with them good?

Speder: Oh yeah, oh yeah, it was. But they lived in a different world. You know, troops, they were driving cars, and they were driving jeeps, you know. And here's a little kid, you know. You're just envious of all those things.

Sharpe: That was big stuff?

Speder: That was big stuff. You better believe it! As a matter of fact, in 1950, the early part of '56, you know, we applied for immigrating to the United States, and we found a sponsor here. So, we filled out all the papers. Back then, they had

[the] U. S., I don't know who, immigration department; whoever it is. They came to Germany, you know. They were stationed in Germany, I guess. They questioned the neighbors, and they came by and interviewed us [to see] if we are suitable to come to the United States. You had to be, I guess, not a Communist and be of good health and all that other stuff, at that point.

Sharpe: Do you remember the interview?

Speder: Well, I didn't pay much attention to that. Are you kidding? But the nice part of it was, they came in a car, and they had—

Sharpe: That's what you remember?

Speder: I remember that, because it was the first time I rode in a car, I mean, in a big car. I'd rode in a Volkswagen, over there before, but never in a big car, and to sit in the back seat, one of those big old clunkers we had here, 1950s, '52 model, a big clunker, and I was sitting in the back seat. The reason I was sitting in the back seat is because they wanted to interview the employer of my brother, where he was working.

Sharpe: He was doing tool and die?

Speder: Tool and die at the company there. They didn't know how to get there, so they wanted me to show them the direction. Man, I rode in that big car with them and showed them the direction, hope I see all my buddies, so I can wave at them, you know. (laughs) But I didn't see any, on the way there. But anyway, I showed them where it was. So, they went in and interviewed my brother's employer. Then they took me back home. Then, about three months later, they said**,** well, we've got your permission to go to the United States. So, that's when we came here.

Sharpe: You don't remember your mother making plans or discussing it with your brother?

Speder: She did, they did, my brother and my mom did, because he was really interested in coming here, and my mom said, alright.

Sharpe: How did he get interested; do you know? From these books you talked about?

Speder: I don't know. I really don't know. I don't know. See, we found a sponsor, and then we also found, you know…we didn't have the money to come over here at that point. All our paper…you wouldn't believe all the paperwork we went through. I looked through a bunch of it. I hadn't looked [before]. First time I've done this.

Of all the paperwork that my mom has, from when we lived in the east, you know, our home place, all the paper work that we had, she had to go through for redemption, for money for the places that we had. They were no longer ours, and they belonged to the eastern Germany. That was back then, not now. Now it is different. But, back then, we got [what] they called augsleich [a settlement], which means they paid us off for the land that we had over there. But it took so many years. I mean, we were living still here, in the '60s. Some of the papers, early '70s, even.

Sharpe: Who was paying you off?

Speder: The government had to pay us for the land and houses we had, because my dad owned, I think, three or four houses over there, something like that, whatever it was.

Sharpe: This would have been in the east?

Speder: In the east, yeah, yeah. Well, this was actually part of. I don't understand the whole darned thing even. It was actually…part of it was in Lithuania, and the Russians paid the Germans in gold for that land. Don't ask me how this happened.

Sharpe: This was after the war?

Speder: This was prior, during the war. The Russians paid the Germans in gold for that land there. I mean, it's quite an intriguing thing. I'll have to go into it sometime. I never paid any attention to it, to be honest with you. I just want to be where it was, I thought, all the time. But now, it's interesting. It's kindling interest in me again. Anyway, the Russians had paid the Germans in gold for that. Then, all the paperwork, you wouldn't believe. I must have a ream about this thick or more.

Sharpe: A couple of inches?

Speder: Oh, more, about five inches, at least, of paperwork, of correspondence that my mom had to go through, and then verification for it and the same thing for bank accounts, the same thing, I mean, everything. You wouldn't believe all the circus you have to go through for that, because we didn't have anything when we came to West Germany or when we came here. All this was, you know—

Sharpe: This is essentially a reimbursement for what you left behind?

Speder: A reimbursement for what we left behind, exactly.

Sharpe: And your father owned a house in Lithuania?

Speder: Yes. In Germany, yeah, in Sintauten, yeah. This was from my grandfather, same thing.

Sharpe: You mentioned to me once that the town in which you were born was in Germany.

Speder: Rummelsburg.

Sharpe: It is now a part of Poland?

Speder: Yes.

Sharpe: Can you talk about that a little?

Speder: Well, (chuckles) I have a friend of mine who is from Poland here. It has a new name, of course. He's familiar with the name. I don't even know what the name of it is. I said Rummelsburg, Rummelsburg. So, we looked it up on the Internet to find out what the Rummelsburg was. It comes up with a Polish name now. I don't even know what it is. But, yeah, he says, "I'm familiar with that. I know where it is." Yeah. But you see, I was born in the movement between, in the fronts.

Sharpe: Oh, you were born during that time.

Speder: Yeah. That's the thing of it. I was born in Rummelsburg, not over by Sintauten. I was born in Rummelsburg.

Sharpe: So, even in '41 this movement was going on.

Speder: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, trying to get away there.

Sharpe: Going back to when you came over, you then got permission after three months, after they did the interviews.

Speder: Uh huh.

Sharpe: Were other of your neighbors trying to come to the United States, too, or you were the only ones?

Speder: No, we were the only ones. Well, in Burgsteinfurt, there were not too many DP peoples, you know, displaced people from the Eastern Germany.

Sharpe: So, most of them were…their families had been there?

Speder: Not only that, but, if you take a look at the address of the kids that I went to school [with], I would say that about sixty, seventy percent are still there, in

the same town. I mean, they're local, local yokels, so to speak. We were the only ones, the oddballs. Like I said before, the government placed people in those days, in the '50s, where there were places available.

Sharpe: It sounds like you were welcome in the town and part of the town.

Speder: Oh yeah, yeah. The kids were nice to me, very nice, yeah.

Sharpe: Was your mother treated well, too; do you know?

Speder: Well, yeah, yes and no. I remember one time how the people there, who we were renting from…we had a chicken. You know, you didn't have chicken every day over there or every week or every month, even, either. We had a nice big chicken roast she made in the oven. Man, those people were so damned jealous of us, you wouldn't believe it.

Sharpe: Over a chicken?

Speder: Yeah, just a chicken. Yeah, well, you have to put yourself in their place, the times. You know, you don't have chicken every day, in the mid-'50s, in Germany, no. As a matter of fact, we had a lot of horse meat, because it was a cheaper meat, instead of buying hamburger or something like, from cattle. So, we had a lot of horse meat. Nowadays, horse meat is expensive here. It was the cheapest thing you could have was horse meat.

Sharpe: So, the three months came, and you got word. Then what happened? How soon after getting word did anything happen?

Speder: Pretty quick, pretty quick. We had applied. They said, well, we can advance you for the trip, the money for the flight and so forth.

Sharpe: Who told you that?

Speder: I don't know who did, but they did, and we found a sponsor over here.
Sharpe: How did you find the sponsor?

Speder: It was through an acquaintance from my dad. My mom was in communication with him over here. He was an immigrant over here, in the states, so he could not sponsor us. So, he had found a sponsor, a Lithuanian guy, by the name of Antonio Ramanauskas.

Sharpe: In Springfield?

Speder: In Springfield, here, yeah. He used to run a grocery store here in town, then he used to have a tavern here in town. So, he was financially able to sponsor, because, in those days, if you were a sponsor of an immigrant family to come

over here, you are liable for them. If they cannot find a job, you have to support them. In other words, the sponsor was a serious condition. If the ones you sponsor cannot make a living over here, you have to pay their bills, so to speak. So, it boiled down to—

Sharpe: How did he come to sponsor? Do you know?

Speder: How come?

Sharpe: How did it come about that he would sponsor you?

Speder: Because of this acquaintance of my dad's, who was living here, was a friend of his. He asked him if he would be willing to sponsor us to come over here, and he said, "Sure." So, he signed the paper for it, and we came here. He sponsored us. But then, the cost for the flight was…Catholic Charities sponsored us to come over here, and then we paid Catholic Charities back. My mom did; I didn't.

Sharpe: So, they paid for your transportation?

Speder: Flight, correct.

Sharpe: And train and everything?

Speder: Train and bus, yeah.

Sharpe: Were they doing that frequently?

Speder: Apparently. I don't even know.

Sharpe: Because this isn't…you weren't Catholic?

Speder: No, I'm not a Catholic; I'm a Lutheran. But they did sponsor, back then. I mean, there have to be records there, too. I imagine, it would be interesting just to go in and find out who, when, what and what transpired there, yeah. But, I remember my mom paying them back. I remember that.

Sharpe: But, as an act of charity, they fronted the money for you.

Speder: They fronted the money to come here, yes.

Sharpe: With the commitment from you that, over time, you would pay back.

Speder: Pay back, yeah, and no interest.

Sharpe: At no interest.

Speder: No interest.

Sharpe: That was charitable; wasn't it?

Speder: Yeah. I remember that, because, when she paid it back, it was years later. It wasn't like the next two or three years. It must have been fifteen years later, when she finally paid it back.

Sharpe: Interesting, isn't it?

Speder: Yeah, I didn't know it either, at the time.

Sharpe: So, you weren't aware of how?

Speder: No, heavens. As a kid, you worry about something like that? I mean, that's the last thing on your mind. You're more interested in playing. (chuckles) Yeah.

Sharpe: Okay, so you got word that you had a sponsor, and you found out where you were coming, which was Springfield.

Speder: Correct. That was great, because I knew the town already, from my books.
Sharpe: From your books. So, you were excited about it?

Speder: Oh, was I ever. I'm in hog heaven. When we came here, then, of course, the next thing was finding jobs.
Sharpe: So, before we get to that, can you talk about the trip itself?
Speder: Oh, the trip? Yeah. Let's see, we took a train from Burgsteinfurt to Hamburg. You know where Hamburg is?

Sharpe: Yes.

Speder: And, as a matter of fact, a good friend of mine from grade school, who owned a bakery in Germany—he didn't back then; his parents owned the bakery—he was visiting his aunt in Hamburg, so he came to the airport and saw me off. And we—

Sharpe: So, you flew from Hamburg?

Speder: We flew from Hamburg on a [Lockheed] Super Constellation. Are you familiar with Super Constellations?

Sharpe: Yes.

Speder: Big tri-wings in the back, the rudders in the back, tri-wing? We flew from there to Iceland. Iceland to…(clock chimes). Did you count them? (laughs) We flew from Iceland to Bangor, Maine; Bangor, Maine, to New York.

Sharpe: So, you had two flights? Hamburg to—

Speder: Two stops, two stops.

Sharpe: Okay.

Speder: Two stops, from Hamburg to Iceland and refueling. Bangor, Maine, refueling, and then New York. Land at the airport and had a bus to the train station. A little episode, I think I mentioned to you at one time.

Sharpe: Tell us, if you would.

Speder: We had about a three or four hour wait at the train depot.

Sharpe: From the plane?

Speder: By bus. By bus from the plane from New York.

Sharpe: Okay. Same day?

Speder: Oh, same day.

Sharpe: You didn't stay overnight in New York?

Speder: No, we didn't stay, well, no, no. See, we left Germany and got here early morning and into New York. Probably, I would say, we left…I don't know what time was it over there. You fly with the time. So, in other words, it's still all the same day. You're tired as heck, even as a kid. But, anyway, at the train station…as train stations go in the big towns, they have concession stands there, and they had an ice cream concession stand there. You watch around, walk around, and, as a little kid, I was watching those people buying all that ice cream, you know. Man, I got hungry for it too, just watched, walked around. I found a coin.

Sharpe: You're what, thirteen or fourteen at this time?

Speder: Fourteen, yeah. I found a coin.

Sharpe: Did you know English at this point?

Speder: No, my former teacher taught me the numbers and some of the basic things. She gave me special lessons. As a matter of fact, she was the one I got the books from. She spoke English. So, she worked for almost six months before we left. She taught me the numbers and some very simple English sayings, but

that was the extent of it. Of course, was I interested in it? Heck, no. I was looking forward to coming here, but heck with the language.

But, anyway, so, I was wandering, and I found a dime, a coin. I didn't know what it was, but it was a dime. So, what I did, I walked over to the ice cream to watch the people. You know, if they ordered ice cream, what they gave them, and watched it and watched. So, I went up there also and put down the dime, the coin, and pointed to it. No problem, that was my first ice cream cone I had here in the states.

Not only that, it was probably a mercury dime, on top of that. You know, back in the '50s, they were still around. But, yeah, that was my first experience of purchasing something here. That was something. I was proud of myself, found a dime.

Sharpe: Did you share the ice cream or just eat it?

Speder: I just ate it. (laughs) I didn't share with anybody. I don't think I even told my mom about it. Yeah, that was quite something, yeah. Then, from there, we went by train to Chicago and transferred in Chicago, here to Springfield. Then Tony, the guy I mentioned to you, he picked us up, our sponsor. He had a big old 1952 Dodge. Are you familiar with a '52 Dodge?

Sharpe: So, he picked you up at the train station?

Speder: Yeah, that was my next big ride in a car, too. You know, those seats in those old cars were so plush, you know, the real plushy seats in it. It was a two-door Dodge, big car, yeah. Then, (chuckles) he took us over to his place. He had a three story building there on East Reynolds Street. It was a rooming house. Up on the third floor, we had a kitchen and two bedrooms, up on the third, way up high. That was quite an experience, going all up all those stairs.

That was not the strange part, but then, it had a fire escape ladder, from the kitchen door going straight down, three floors, straight down. That was quite an experience. Secondly, which I was so surprised, was, the building looks like it was brick, but it was this artificial brick, like siding brick. Are you familiar with those?

Sharpe: Yeah.

Speder: The other big part, which I was so surprised, in the bathroom there—you read all those stories that you read about in magazines and so forth, which I read—the bathroom had a nice mirror in front of it. Then, way back then, you have secret compartments behind the mirror and so forth. Well, I didn't know that these mirrors all had that here, when you open them up. Well, man, I pulled on that door, and it opened up. I never seen anything like that in my life, but I

read about them, that there's some mirrors you can open up by pulling on them. I'll never forget that. I was so shocked. We never had anything like that before.

Sharpe: Let's take a break here.

Speder: Sure.

(End of recording.)

Interview with Gustav Speder
IM-A-L-2011-050

Interview # 2: October 17, 2011
Interviewer: Robert Sharpe

Sharpe: Good morning. This is Robert Sharpe. I have the pleasure of doing a second interview today with Gus Speder. We're going to start by talking about some pictures Gus has provided and fill in the story of some of those pictures. These were ones that cover the time period that was discussed in the first interview.

Speder: Let's begin with this one.

Sharpe: Yeah. Let's start with this picture. Do you want to describe what that is?

Speder: Well, what this is a *übergangslager,* which means it's a transition camp, or DP (displaced persons) camp for Germans who used to live in the zones that were to be given to Russia.

This is the Germans who had been moved from those countries like Lithuania, the Baltic countries or Russia, even and even from Poland. This was where the people leaving those countries were sent to. Then, from there, they were assimilated into West Germany, Germany. This was done under the auspices of the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

Sharpe: And what would have been the approximate date of this?

Speder: This would be 1941.

Sharpe: 1941.

Speder: That's quite a neat picture.

Sharpe: Yeah it is.

Speder: It sure is. Nice job of blowing it up, by the way, nice for me to keep it.

Sharpe: Here's another picture. Could you?

Speder: This picture was roughly 1950. This is the group of people that I was, so to speak, living with in Senne Eins, which was a TB sanitarium near Bielefeld, Germany. You can see one nurse in there and the rest were all patients. I was among those patients because I had TB and spent almost six months lying in bed to recuperate.

Sharpe: What would have been the date of this and your age, Gus?

Speder: This would have been, let's see, '50, nine years-old, ten years-old…nine, ten, somewhere in there. Smallest one in the group.

Sharpe: While you were there, what was the health of the other people like and were there—

Speder: The health of the other…these are all young boys. I mean, anywhere…looks like it was from the age of probably nine, ten, through probably about fourteen, fifteen and in various stages of the TB disease, actually. So, it was a bad place to be.

Sharpe: Were there casualties while you were there?

Speder: Well, I don't remember that. I couldn't say. But there had to be, you know, from TB. There was a percentage died, but I don't

remember any of that. I couldn't tell you.

Sharpe: Okay.

Speder: Okay.

Sharpe: Here's the picture of you under the statute.

Speder: Yeah. This is the picture of the Hermann the Cheruscan. This was the final days, when I was there at the sanitarium. We took an excursion to this monument of Hermann the Cheruscan, who defeated the Roman Legions.

Sharpe: Was this close to the sanitarium?

Speder: Yeah, yeah, close. This is in the…it's in the area known as Teutoburg Wald, [forest] which is a mountainous region in north central Germany. This is where they way-laid the Romans, defeated them. One of the few defeats that the Romans had.

Sharpe: And there's another picture of you, with some of your young friends.

Speder: This is the buddies from my neighborhood. We called ourselves the *lehmloch bande*, the clay band. This is in front of one of the houses in the neighborhood. Looks like there are quite a few of us there, still. It looks like maybe fifteen of us, and I'm right smack in the middle of this one.

Sharpe: At the time, you all would have been in school?

Speder: Yeah, we would have been in school. We attended both. These are both Lutheran kids, who went to Lutheran school, and kids who went to the Catholic school, because, in those days, the schools were public schools.

But yet, they were separated by religion. Basically, they only had two religions back then. It was the Lutherans and the Catholics. This is not the same class. All of these kids did not go to my school. Some of these kids went to the Catholic school.

Sharpe: So, the schools are segregated, but your gang was not.

Speder: The gang was not. And it looks like…By looking at this thing here…I don't know, he wears a wreath around his neck. See it right there?

Sharpe: Yes.

Speder: I don't know if this was the…We used to play a lot. We had a *schützenfest* in those days. I don't know if this was one of the *schützenfest* that we had or not, but I think, even when we had *schützenfest*, we had more, you know. We dressed up more than this.

Sharpe: Could you explain. What is *schützenfest*?

Speder: *Schützenfest* is…well, the adults had *schützenfest*, you know. What it is is, the best shooter, the sharpshooter—and it was the one that won the contest of shooting—he had to give a big party. In other words, free beer, free food for everybody in that area, by invitation only, though. We tried to copy them, of course, all the time, too, like the adults did, you know, have a nice little party. I don't know if this was one of them or not, because he has a wreath around his neck, but usually had more decorations than that. I'll be darned.

Sharpe: The next picture is a group of young people with, including yourself, with shovels and stuff and could you explain the story behind that?

Speder: Yeah, this is, this group that you see in this picture. These are all Lutheran kids, of Lutheran faith. We had a church in town that used to be a Catholic church, until Luther's time.

Then, the count in that area became a Protestant and, in doing so, he

rode into the Protestant church. All the people in the community turned Protestants, because he did. He's the leader, and what he does, so do the folks do.

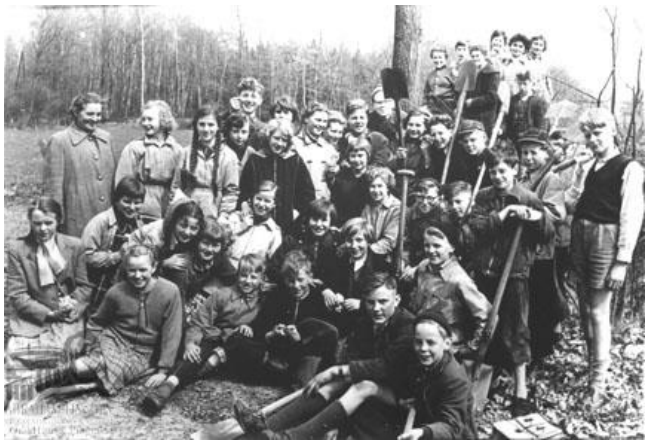
But what we were doing with this group, with all the shovels in our hands, we were looking for the foundations for the crypt for the church. The church was still standing. The church was still being used, but outside.

Sharpe: How old was the church?

Speder: Always been a church.

Sharpe: How old was it, though?

Speder: Oh, this church dates back to the 1200's, the church itself. The pastor utilized his confirmation class to look for the foundations for the entrance to the crypt, which is still under the church. But, we had to look for the entrance for it. So, the confirmation class was good, cheap labor. So, they provided us with shovels and spades, and then we started digging around the church in the backyard, so to speak. We did find the foundation, by the way. And we found, of course, a lot of artifacts, from human remains. You know, heads, arms, legs, the bones only, of course. But, yeah, that was quite an undertaking. .



Sharpe: This was outside the crypt, though?

Speder: Outside the church, in the back of the church, yeah, outside. See, they didn't know exactly where, how far, the church had extended. The foundation was what was added. They used us for looking for that stuff, for the foundations. And we did find it. That's the nice part of it.

Sharpe: What was done with bones that you encountered?

Speder: Well, of course, what you do? You re-inter them again. You know, another hole was dug and put them all in one. That was it. It was done the proper way. It was done the German way, so to speak. (chuckles) Yeah, that's a picture of that time.

Sharpe: Okay, Gus, the next picture is in one of the gardens that you've talked about. Maybe you could tell a little of the story behind that, in the garden?

Speder: Yeah. This picture is of my aunt, uncle, my wife (Kathryn) and grandmother. It was at the time, before my grandmother passed away. This picture was taken at *Schrebergärten*, which are…I know most people are probably not familiar with them, but there was a guy by the name of Dr. Schreber, living in Berlin.

Of course, Berlin is a big city, and the people did not have very many green [spaces] inside the city, you know, little gardens or anything like that. So, what they did, the city set aside a chunk of land on the outskirts of the city and divided them into little plots, maybe forty by forty feet or something like that, into little plots. Then the people could go out there and start little gardens, plant some veggies or have some bushes there that they would grow.

These gardens actually became really developed. They put fences or hedgerows along them, little hedges. Later on they became even fancier. [They] put a little shed in there, so they can keep their tools in there. Then the shed began to be expanded and expanded and expanded. The real fancy little garden houses were built then. Eventually, people even put beds in there and stayed the night, in the summertime.

That's how they developed, and they're still around today. But they're not utilized as much, because people just don't keep gardens anymore, like they used to. But this, all the way through to, I would say, all the way through the '80's they did, because, when we took a trip over there and took our kids, they had rabbits out there in the garden, in cages. The kids just loved that. So, that's something. But I think these *Schrebergartens* are on the way out. I don't hear much about them anymore. But they were quite prevalent in Germany.

Sharpe: Now the last picture we were going to talk about is right up to, about the point

where we ended our thing, but it's the home (clock chiming) where you first—

Speder: Yeah, it's over, just one bang. It's only 9:30.

When we came here, in 1956, this was the house we stayed in for about, oh, I would say, about a month.

Sharpe: Where was it located in Springfield?

Speder: This was located at 1729 East Reynolds. Of course, that house is an empty lot now. It's right next to the railroad track. As a matter of fact, the tavern there was known as the Railroad Tavern. Prior to that, during the depression, it was actually a grocery store and rooming house.

When we came here, our sponsor owned this house. Tony Ramanauskas owned this house, and when we came here, we stayed here, up on the third floor, a walk-up third floor. We had three rooms up there, two bedrooms and a kitchen, no living room.

Sharpe: Were others living there, besides your sponsor?

Speder: Oh, yeah. On the second floor, he had rooms in there he rented out to former miners. Oh, they're quite some cards, some of those miners.

As a matter of fact, one of the miners that lived there was by the name of Tony Radamski. He was the one—in 1930s, or something like that, somewhere in that neighborhood—he was the one who was shot, in the dispute between the United Mineworkers and the Progressive Mineworkers. He was one; he lived there.

I worked for the state one summer, and the guy who was the United Mineworker president at one time, was a mail carrier for the state. I was his assistant one summer. So, we started talking about it and put all those one and ones together and came up with two.

We stayed in this place about a month, and then we moved over to North Sixth Street, until '57en, spring of '57. That house was decapitated by a tornado. The whole roof was taken away.

Sharpe: Yeah. We have a picture of that, as well.

Speder: Do we have a picture of that? Yeah, the house, the roof was taken away. And then, we moved over to North 19th Street.

Sharpe: How long did this building stay there?

Speder: This one here?

Sharpe: How long did the tavern go?

Speder: I bought this one. Oh, the tavern, there was one for many, many years. It was still known as the Railroad Tavern. As a matter of fact, Lou Hinds ran the tavern afterwards. Tony rented it out to him, because he was getting too old. He rented it out until. Let's see, this building…I bought it in nineteen…Let's see, I sold it '70, '71.

I bought this place in 1968, and I sold it in '72 to a dentist. I think his name was Knox; I think it was Knox. He had an office over here, on Spring Street. Then it was still operated as a tavern, until it was torn down, about '78. As a matter of fact, something new just came up here. The reason I bought that place, actually, was because I was hoping that the railroad relocation would be moved to the 19th Street corridor, because that was the prevalent one, because they had the big tracks. They had three tracks running right next to it there.

Sharpe: This was in 1968?

Speder: Yes, yeah

.

Sharpe: Now we have a new discussion of railroad relocation going on.

Speder: And now we have a new railroad. Well, now we have…they call high speed train. We did some of the railroad relocation, but none in the city. They consolidated the entrances into the city, the relocation.

Remember, there used to be the old Wabash? You don't remember that? Along Wabash, that's where the Wabash train actually…out west. It ran straight into town. It was moved over to by [Route] 72, by the interstate now. That was part of that program. But now, they're starting all over again.

Gus' sponsor Tony Ramanauskas

Sharpe: Well, I think we've covered all the pictures. Let's just continue, sort of, chronologically, with where we were. Can you talk about your first impressions of your sponsor, when you got into Springfield and what you remember of him?

Speder: Well, the

sponsor, he was also an immigrant. He was an immigrant from Lithuania, and he was a U. S. citizen. Impression of him? When you see him…when I saw some of the pictures, he was…well, he lived through some tough times over here. He was quite a character, as a matter of fact. He had burns on his face, and he got those burns on his face when somebody tried to blow his truck up, when he started it.

Sharpe: In the United States?

Speder: Yeah, here in Springfield, here in Springfield. This was back during the bad years, in the '20s.

Sharpe: Was this related to the mine violence?

Speder: Well, no, it wasn't mine. It was during the Volstead [the Volstead Act, also known as the National Prohibition Act], during the prohibition era. He ran a tavern back then. But, this first picture, when you saw him, you know, his face…I think I showed you a picture of him.

Sharpe: You have one, yeah.

Speder: Yeah, his facial…it's burn marks on there. So, the first impression of him was…He was quite a character; what can you say? But it was very favorable, otherwise. He loved to drink beer. I mean, that was his hobby.

Sharpe: What was your first impression of Springfield?

Speder: Very unusual, I thought, because, when I came to Springfield, all the streets were straight here. I was so used to…In Germany, the towns that I lived in, the streets just winding, little narrow streets. Here, you come into town, and big, wide streets, with trees. I mean, this was, I mean, wide.

Secondly, all the cars here, are the big cars. The cars we had in Germany…a big car was a good Volkswagen or one of those trucks that they had, three-wheeled trucks they had in Germany, front wheel drive, three wheeled, with a big motorcycle engine in them. But no, the impression of Springfield was the size of it.

Also, the other impression was the reason that I love Springfield, because of the history. From my reading, because we read books…not books, but pamphlets, you know. We used to call them *schmökee*, probably about thirty pages long, only adventures of FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agents, by the name of Bill Jenkins and Tom Rocs and all the episodes that they had over here, catching the bad guys.

And Springfield was one of the towns. Even Springfield was mentioned. The old railroad station was mentioned in that…the one over on Madison Street, that old train station. What's it called? The…What was the name of that railroad? This one was Gulf, Mobile and Ohio. The other one was Central, Illinois Central, I think, something like that.

Sharpe: Who was your first American friend, and how did you meet them?

Speder: First American friend. The first American friends we had here, a friend, Tony. My sponsor, he had three boys. There was Tony, Mike and Vito. Those were the three boys. Those were the first friends I had here. Then, of course, when I went to school, it didn't take long to make friends there. As a matter of fact, I—

Sharpe: How soon did you start school, after you got here?

Speder: Well, we came to New York on the twenty-sixth of August. We came here to Springfield on the twenty-eighth of August, and I started school…I think it was the first or second of September or something like that. It was right after Labor Day.

Sharpe: September?

Speder: In September, yeah. The strange part, when I came here, of course, guess what I was wearing?

Sharpe: I don't know.

Speder: Short pants, shorts. I didn't have any long pants, as a matter of fact. So, (chuckles) when I came here, our sponsor, Tony, he kind of laughed about it and said, "Well, come on, we'll have to go get you some clothes." So, he took me over to the Hub Clothiers store. You probably don't remember where that was. Do you remember where that was?

Sharpe: I do.

Speder: Over on Washington Street, there, he took me there. He bought me a suit. "Now, you've got something to wear to school." Well, I went to school with a suit on. Can you imagine that? (chuckles) Talk about being ridiculous. It was worse than wearing shorts. You know, they didn't wear shorts, and certainly they didn't wear suits to school. So, I felt like an odd ball, going in that. It didn't take me very long to change my clothes. I went to school like that three days, and that was it. The first day, with the whole suit on; the second day, just the pants and shirt on, no jacket.

The school…I went to Lanphier [High School] by the way. But I went to Germany with those kids you saw in all those pictures there. I went for seven years, with them, to school. How many? Yeah, for seven. Well, not the same group, because this was our second. So, I was together with those kids for five years, you know. I knew them that well in Germany.

Then, when I came here…By the way, in Germany the going from grade to grade was not done in the fall. It was done at Easter time. In other words, you changed from grade three to grade four at Easter time. Right after Easter break, you go to the next level, then. You've finished a fourth year; you go into fifth. If you're in the fifth; you go to the sixth, whatever it is. But the change was done at Easter time.

So, in other words, when I came here, I [had] just switched into my eighth grade over there, at Easter time. I came here right after. So, after the switch—because we had the Easter break, and we switched to seventh grade—then we had four weeks' vacation, in the summertime. Then, we started in school already, at the beginning of August.

So, I start, actually, my eighth grade for…I was in eighth grade for what, maybe a month? When I came here, they stuck me right away, not the grade school, but they put me in high school.

Sharpe: At Lanphier High School?

Speder: At Lanphier High School, yeah.

Sharpe: So, you would have been in ninth grade, then?

Speder: I started ninth grade, yeah. I didn't finish grade school. I just went from the seventh to the ninth grade here.

Sharpe: Were you the same age, though, as the students?

Speder: Yeah, yeah, same age. But the strange part of it was that I didn't speak any English, of course. I mean, just like, throw somebody in the water to learn how to swim. That's what it was then. But the people were very nice. The kids were very nice. The faculty was very nice.

I was not familiar with how they do the whole system here, you know. You move from one classroom to another. The kids do it. In Germany, they don't do it. In Germany, the teachers come to the classrooms, and you stay with the same group of kids all the time. Here, over here, you have to go from one class to the other. I was totally lost.

Then, the band director, Mr. Sage, he kind of took me under his arm and helped me out. He said, "Come to the office. When the bell rings, come to the office." He made it clear to me, you know. Then, every time I went there and then, the next day, did the same thing. Then, finally, [he] said, "Now do it on your own." Well, I did it.

Not only that, he spent some time with me. He wanted to learn German. I didn't speak any English, of course, so he taught me how to play a clarinet. I was in band with him, but, instead of playing with a band, he taught me how to play a clarinet. And I spoke to him in German, and back and forth. He learned some German; I learned some English. And then the rest of it, it fell into place.

Sharpe: How did you do, the first semester?

Speder: Of course, I flunked everything except PE (physical education). I mean, I couldn't pass. No, I passed something else, choir. I passed choir.

Sharpe: Choir and PE?

Speder: Choir and PE were the only ones I passed the first semester. The other part, I'll never forget this. I don't know if I mentioned that to you or not. I had Ted Boyle [who] was my algebra teacher. Of course, I didn't know what in the hell he was talking about. I mean, you know, nothing I understood.

And kids are kids. A guy named George Smith was sitting in front of me in my algebra class. He was quite a card, and the teacher, Ted Boyle, was talking up, in front of the class, drawing on the blackboard, doing this whole problem system. Then, this George was sitting right in front of me, and he said…turned around, he said (whispering) "Go like this; go like that." So, I did.

Sharpe: He was trying to get you to make an inappropriate gesture to the teacher?

Speder: Yeah, and so, I did. I went like this, and the class just broke up. I mean, it just broke up. But old Ted, he knew. I didn't know anything about it. He laughed. (chuckles) Not only that, but everybody in the whole school knew about that episode. I mean, that spread like wildfire. (laughs)

Sharpe: But you really didn't get in trouble for it?

Speder: Oh, no, none, none whatsoever. None whatsoever.

Sharpe: Did George Smith?

Speder: No, he didn't either. But, you know, that's what I'm saying. The kids were nice, but kids are kids. The faculty was very understanding, really.

Not only that, school started, I think it was on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. In Germany, I went to school on Saturday. Well, I walked all the way to school on Saturday. I came there, nobody there, doors closed. I didn't know what was going on. I really didn't know. I was sitting on the front steps of the school, and I couldn't figure out.

So, I came back home. My mom was home. She was working. I couldn't figure out what I did wrong. You know, it's Saturday school, no school here. That was, some of the episodes there.

Sharpe: So, what came of the fact that you flunked all your courses the first semester because you didn't know English? Did you have you have to retake them or what?

Speder: Yeah. I retook them second semester. Then, the next three years, what I did, we only had five solids here; I took six solids each time, then, to make up for it.

Sharpe: So, how were you trying to learn English, during this time?

Speder: Well, basically, there were two ways. I went to night school at the old Springfield High School, over here on Adams. There used to be an old Springfield High School, had wooden floors in them still. That's where the old Internal Revenue building was sitting. Remember the Internal Revenue building used to be there? It moved twice since. It moved on Adams Street; it moved over to Washington, and then out there, out west now. But, where the old original Springfield High was sitting, the wooden one, with the wooden floors in it, was over on Adams Street. We went to night school there. All three of us did. My brother did; my mom did, and I did. We all went to night school to learn English.

Then, the other part, which I thought was very helpful, was television. We didn't have a television, but the family I mentioned to you, those three boys that I was befriended with, they had a television. I just lived in front of that thing, when I wasn't playing around. I just lived in front of the TV. That's how I learned English, the best way. The other part was sink or swim.

Sharpe: At school.

Speder: At school, oh yeah. That's the best way of doing it. I mean, if you want to do it, you do it.

Sharpe: So, how long did it take you until you could understand what was going on in class?

Speder: I would say, probably, oh probably, second semester already, probably second semester, because I remember many of the teachers. I mean, I had old lady Norton. She was my English teacher. She was one of those prissy ones, you know. I can never forget her, old lady Norton. Then, I had Charlie Miller was the drafting teacher. I loved that drafting part of it. Then, we had Mr. Sage. Of course, I mentioned him. And Chiti, we had for history, real nice. He was an Italian guy who taught history.

One episode, we had in my drafting class. Charlie Miller, the teacher, he was a nice guy. He really was a nice guy. I enjoyed him, one of the best ones I've had. He sent me over to the wood shop teacher, Mr. Williams, [who] was across the hall from him. He sent me over there. This was second semester. He sent me over there to pick up a board stretcher. So, I went over there and I asked for a board stretcher. Of course, there's no such thing. (both chuckle) They got a bang out of that, of course. But, you know, things like that happened.

Sharpe: They were having some fun with you.

Speder: Oh, yeah, they did; they did, but not mischief. I mean, they were nice about the whole thing. But, you know, if you don't know what's going on, you can just do it. I mean, just like watching, sometimes, "Seinfeld" [situational comedy show on television] or something like that. You do the dumbest things.

Sharpe: Were you in any activities in schools, beside the classes?

Speder: Yeah, uh huh. I, well, I played intramural basketball, and I was on the wrestling team at Lanphier High School. Played in the band, extracurricular activities. Then, also, Walther League at the church, Immanuel Lutheran Church, which used to be over on 14th Street, way on 14th, where Concordia Seminary was.

Sharpe: Yeah.

Speder: That's an office now.

Sharpe: Near Carpenter?

Speder: Yeah, near Carpenter, two blocks north of Carpenter, on 14th Street. We had the Walther League there. You know what the Walther League was? It was a youth group from the church. As a matter of fact, that's where I met my wife, in 1958. What else did we do as extracurricular activity?

Sharpe: Did you particularly enjoy any of those?

Speder: Oh, yeah, I enjoyed participating in all of those, yeah. Then, we played baseball, from the Walther League. Then, we played touch football. Well, not really touch football, real football, actually, without any of the equipment, (clock chimes) over on the field, right there by the Concordia Seminary, with the neighborhood kids.

Sharpe: What was your mom doing, during this timeframe? Was she working?

Speder: My mom was working. When we got here, she worked. She washed dishes at Stevie's Latin Village. [restaurant] Then, she started to do some housecleaning for others. And then she started working at the shoe factory. Do you know where that is?

Sharpe: No, where was that located?

Speder: The shoe factory, you know where Goodwill is now, on 11th Street?

Sharpe: Yes.

Speder: That complex. They just repainted it, as a matter of fact, was in the paper. Yeah, that was the shoe factory, Brown Shoe Company.

Sharpe: So she worked there?

Speder: She worked there, and she worked until they closed. She worked until they closed. They closed, I think, was probably in the '80s, beginning of the '90s, I think, something like that.

Sharpe: How long did it take her to learn English?

Speder: Well, she didn't write English very well. She spoke it fairly well, with a heavy accent, of course. She got along, got her driver's license and drove. She never drove before, in Germany. (chuckles) Drove a bicycle, but never drove a car.

Sharpe: During high school, what was your life like, compared to what your life would have been in Germany, going to school? What was the difference between the school systems here and there?

Speder: Well, I thought the school system here was pretty damn good. I only had the experience of going through seven grades over there, so I can't really…you know, this was, again, another stage in my life, which is older. So, it's kind of difficult to compare the educational systems of the two. But, I think the education system that we have here is pretty doggone good.

The only sad part here [is], we're trying to make everybody chiefs, where, in Germany the system is, you're being cubby-holed already, because,

in Germany, you have the division of the school. Everybody goes through fourth grade, and then, after the fourth grade, upon the recommendation of the teacher and your ability, you have a choice. You can keep on going in the…they call it *Gesamtschule*, which is grades one through eight. You can keep on going there, and then go into a trade school. That's if you want to become a bricklayer, or if you want to become a carpenter, or if you want to become a machinist, anything like that. You keep on going through regular *Gesamtschule.*

Or at fourth grade—where I mentioned to you was the splitting level, if you want to go study at the university—you would go to a *Gymnasium* then. It's called a *Gymnasium*. It's a prelude. You go all the way through the twelfth grade, and then go on to the universities.

Or you can go into the *Mittelschule,* they call it, where they put you into kind of a middleclass, working for the government or bureaucracy, or go into management of stores or something like that.

In other words, you had three different branches that you could go into, beginning with the fourth grade. Of course, with the opportunity to go later on, into crossing over. If you get smart suddenly, you can go to college, too, or university.

Whereas, here, everybody goes kind of mainstream, all the way through, and then, whatever you want to become, you can become here. That's the neat part of it.

Sharpe: Did you have a job while you were in high school?

Speder: Yeah, I did all kinds of jobs. I painted rooms, painted houses. When I started here, I started doing that already. When I was about fourteen, I started working for Ramanauskas. I did a lot of painting for him. Then I'd…'58, I started delivering pizzas. I worked at Twins Corner. Do you know where that is? Yeah, you do, Saputo's.

Sharpe: Oh, Saputo's?

Speder: Yeah, Frank and Joe Saputo. I worked for them, delivering pizzas. I knew this town backwards, sideways, upside down. I knew all the streets back then.

Sharpe: From delivering?

Speder: From delivering pizzas, oh, yeah. Yeah, I worked there four nights a week, during school, even. Usually we were finished by 11:00 at night. But, yeah, we delivered pizzas, delivered them all over town. Yeah, Twins Corner, Saputo's now.

Sharpe: When you finished high school, how did you decide about college, and where did you decide to go?

Speder: Well, my mom said, "Well, you've got to go to school. You know your dad wanted you to go to school, so you better go to school." So, the first summer, when I graduated from high school…Oh, by the way, in high school, I had perfect attendance. I never missed a day in school. I even put an extra Saturday in. (laughs)

Sharpe: Right.

Speder: I'll never forget that one. Yeah, when I finished high school that summer, I would start working for Gilbert Capranica, who was a bricklayer. He had a bricklaying company. He had three bricklayers working, and I worked for them as a laborer, two bucks an hour. It was damned good money, back in 1960. And, boy, that was the hardest summer I ever had. I woke up in the middle of the night. My hands were just like this, from carrying those heavy blocks, big concrete blocks.

The first job we had, there used to be a bowling alley in Rochester. Are you familiar with Rochester? There's a grocery store there now, on the left-hand side, a long building. It used to be a bowling alley. That's the first one. I carried practically every one of those blocks in that place. Then, when the summer came over, I had enough money saved up to go to junior college here, JC.

Sharpe: And what school?

Speder: JC, Springfield Junior College, right over here on 5th Street, you know. It's called…What is it called now? As a matter of fact, they just sent me a flyer from there, wanting money. You know, ex-graduates from there, they're wanting to collect some money. Benedictine, Benedictine College. That used to be Springfield Junior College. I went there for two years.

Sharpe: You had enough money to pay for that?

Speder: Oh, yeah, I worked in the summertime, oh yeah. I worked on construction, during the summer months. Back then, it wasn't too bad, especially once you get to know people. Then, people with the contacts get jobs. That's what I did.

So, I went there for two years, and then I decided to go to the University of Illinois. So, I started there in the spring of '60, '63, yeah, '63, spring of '63.

Sharpe: This is in Champaign?

Speder: Champaign, yeah. I went there.

Prior to that summer, I started working at Allis-Chalmers, here. I got a job at Allis Chalmers. Then, when spring semester, I had enough money, so I went to the University of Illinois in the spring, and then ran out of money going to school there. So, I skipped the fall semester, going there, and worked at Allis-Chalmers.

That's when Uncle Sam said—this was draft time period—Uncle Sam said, you can't do that. You go full-time [to] school or you get the lottery number.

Well, that scared the shit out of me. So, what I did is, I looked around, looked around, went to the National Guard. Well, they were full. You couldn't get into the National Guard back then. But the Army Reserve still had openings. So, I signed up with the Army Reserves, and I didn't have to go to the draft.

But then, I still [would] go to work and alternate between the two, but I only did it one time. In other words, I went to school, worked one semester and then came back to work. But then, I had to go for my basic training. So, when I came back from the basic training, that was in the spring of '65, yeah, spring of'65.

I came back from my basic training, and AIT [Advanced Infantry Training] from Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Sharpe: Where did you do your basic training?

Speder: In Fort Knox.

Sharpe: Fort Knox?

Speder: Fort Knox, Kentucky, yeah. That was in '64, the fall of '64 I went there. Came home for Christmas, yeah, was it Christmas? Yeah, I came home for Christmas. We had a leave, four day leave, from the Army at that time and came home. As a matter of fact, that time, I had a tough time getting back. I was late, almost AWOLed [absent without leave] me there on that one. But I finished there and then, in the spring of '65, I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for the AIT [advanced individual training].

Sharpe: What is that?

Speder: Advanced training, you know. AIT is the advanced, the MOS [military occupational specialty] that you get, like, if you're going to be a clerk. I was a gunnery on an artillery, 105 howitzer. I finished that there, came home (clock chimes), got married…It doesn't want to quit. I came home that spring. I came home in May, got married in July, worked at Allis-Chalmers, and I said, I'm not going to work out there. This is crazy what's going on out there at Allis-Chalmers. I mean, I had some good jobs out there. Don't get me wrong; it was a well-paying job.

Sharpe: What was crazy going on?

Speder: Well, I was working. I worked on three different jobs, four different jobs, out there. The first one was cleaning the case, transmission casings. That means, when they weld the transmission cases together, slag jumps from the welding part of it. I had to chisel it off with an air chisel. I did that. It was a hard job. Then sandblasting, and that was a hard job, too. You'd put on a mask and get in a booth and then sandblast the casings.

Then I had a good job. I was straightening main frames out there, the main frames that the tractors were riding on. That was the craziest thing. You have to do three per day, three per shift. What you do is, you take the main frame that was welded together, put it on a steel plate platform, and check that all four points are flat on the steel plate, because, from the heat of the welding, many times they twist, and then you have to bend them, with hydraulic presses. You bolt them down here, and then put a block underneath, and push down on it to make them level on all four points.

Well, sometimes you pick one of those things up and put it down, and it's perfect. Sometimes you work on one of them for two or three hours and then, other times, it just takes an hour to get it done. But if you do three in an eight hour shift…well, sometimes you're so damned lucky, you pick up three of them; they're all perfect. You can get them done in a couple of hours. What are you going to do in the next six hours? You can't do any more. The union says you can't do any more. You can only do three of them, so you had to go and hide someplace. You had to find someplace in the corner of the factory and sleep. I remember I actually did that.

That's why I say, that's the craziest part. I said, "Well, I don't want to do this." So, I went over to Illinois College, and it was pretty cheap yet back then. It was $600 a semester at Illinois College.

Sharpe: In Jacksonville?

Speder: In Jacksonville, yeah. I could stay at home and drive back and forth. Not only that, but then I shared rides with others, other people here from Springfield. So, I went to school there for the next two years.

Sharpe: So you only stayed in Champaign, at the University of Illinois for—

Speder: Two semesters.

Sharpe: Two semesters.

Speder: Two semesters, uh huh. Two semesters there, and then I came back here and went to Illinois College. You see, the way a transfer was, all couldn't transfer, so it took me two years to go there to Illinois College in order to finish there.

Sharpe: What were you studying?

Speder: Education. I started there in…when was it? Sixty-five, yeah, '65. [I] graduated '67 from there and did my student teaching over there at Jonathan Turner Junior High School. That was quite an experience, too. I had a teacher there, when I started teaching, my student teaching in history there.

[I] was there two days, and her husband passed away. So, she was gone. She was gone for almost three weeks. I didn't know anything at the beginning, but the principal came he says, "Hey, we have to have you in this classroom to teach English class, the history class, two classes, two subject areas all day long." I said, "Well, I'll sure as hell try." (chuckles) So, I taught for three whole weeks.

Sharpe: After two days?

Speder: After two days as a student teacher. The principal came in once in a while and looked in the door and walked away, and that was it. That was, you know, a sink or swim situation, again, for me. It worked out well for me. I learned an awful lot.

But, at the same time, when I was going to school there, I also worked at the old Jacksonville hospital there, the state hospital. I worked there for almost a year-and-a-half at the hospital, dismantling the laundry facilities.

There was a company in Chicago that bought all the laundry equipment, the big commercial, you know, the mangle irons, the washers, the spinners and everything else. I cut them all apart, took them all loose. The bolts are anchored to the floors. There was a lot of equipment in there. So, all they had to do was come with the forklifts and pick them up and put them on semis and haul them away.

But I had a year-and-a-half work out there. I mean, that was like a godsend. I had a job there, and I could go between classes, with class in the morning and class later in the afternoon. In between, I could go there and

work at my own pace. That was just like…it was unreal. It was perfect for me. That's how I finished school, that way.

Sharpe: You mentioned that, when you came back from the military, you got married. You met your wife in the class at church?

Speder: Yeah, in Walther League. That was back in '58, 1958. I was here two years. I met her in '58, got married in '65, seven years later.

Sharpe: Did you date?

Speder: Oh, yeah, we dated all the way through high school, yeah. Yeah, sure did, sure did.

Sharpe: What was she doing while you were in college?

Speder: She was working for the state. She worked for the public health. It used to be on a similar area, field, that you're in. Aren't you [working] for EPA?

Sharpe: Yes.

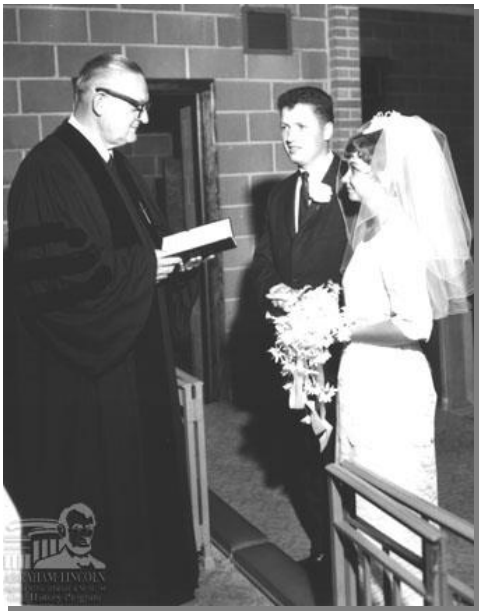
Speder: Well, that's part of it now, the public health. Isn't it?

Sharpe: They're separate now.

Speder: Oh, they're separate?

Sharpe: Yeah.

Speder: Well, public health, she used to work on the fifth floor on the north side of the State Capitol building. That converted over for the legislature now, but back then, the lab was in there.



Sharpe: So, what was your wedding like?

Speder: My wedding?

Sharpe: I saw the pictures.

Speder: Did you see some?

Sharpe: We have one of them.

Speder: Oh, we have one of them here, yeah, yeah. Well, it wasn't fancy. We had it at the…what was the name of that place? It was on the corner, right across the street from that redone railroad station, down on Madison, on the corner of Madison, Fifth and Madison. There used to be a tavern and hall right there. That's where we had our wedding.

For music, we used my brother's tape recorder, big reel-to-reel, you know, a big nice fancy Wollensak tape recorder. Yeah, that's what it was, the music for the wedding. What else was there? We had quite a few people there.

Sharpe: Her family is from Springfield?

Speder: Yeah, yeah, her family was from Springfield. We had a nice little wedding. We probably had, I don't know, maybe about a hundred people there.

Sharpe: We haven't talked about your brother. What was he doing during this period, when you were in college?

Speder: Okay. (clears throat) My brother, my brother, alright. When he came here, he worked. He was a tool and die maker in Germany. That was his trade. He finished his trade over there, as a tool and die maker.

Sharpe: Before you came here?

Speder: Before we came here, yeah. He was eighteen. When we came here, he washed dishes. He also worked at Stevie's Latin Village as a dishwasher. He worked there for about three months. Then he started working for Napier, Napier Machine Shop. They used to be right next door to the place where we got married. It was right on Fifth Street, the Jackson Club. You don't remember the city back then?

Sharpe: No.

Speder: Yeah, it was practically two doors over from that place. But, anyway, he started working at the Napier Machine Shop. He worked there until…he worked there for a good ten years. No, no, wait a minute; wait a minute. No, no, no, no he worked there for about…wait a minute. No, I've got that all screwed up, I think.

Sharpe: What other places did he work, besides that?

Speder: Well, he worked at Napier's. Yeah, he worked as a dishwasher, and then at Napier's. Then he joined the Army. He joined the Army, had one stint and re-upped for another stint. He went to Germany. He was in Korea first, the first stint. The second stint, he was over in Germany, and he married his old girlfriend over there.

Sharpe: Oh, from Germany?

Speder: From Germany, yeah.

Sharpe: When would that have been?

Speder: Ah, let's see. He was married, probably '61, 1961.

Sharpe: This is five years after you guys had left.

Speder: Yeah, yeah. But he married in Germany.

Sharpe: Right. Had they kept in touch, during this time period?

Speder: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. He went over. He was stationed over there. He married her over there and brought her back over here. When he came back, he started working for Napier's again, the machine shop. [He] worked there for about five or six years.

Then he went to work for the City Water, Light and Power, at the power plant. That's where he retired from. He retired, back in…I don't know, back in '96, '95, '96, something like that. Now he lives down in Melbourne, Florida, enjoying the good weather.

Sharpe: You guys still close?

Speder: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We converse, yeah. Still married to the same gal, just like me. We've been married now, what, forty-some years. Sixty-five, I think it will be fifty years in '15. So, it's forty-six years, a long time. You've got a lot of catching up to do. (laughs)

Sharpe: Approaching thirty-five.

Speder: Yeah, I know.

Sharpe: What was life like for your mother during this time period?

Speder: It was tough for her. I mean, she had to make rent payments and so forth, when we came here. It was tough on her.

Sharpe: She never remarried.

Speder: She never remarried, no, no. See, she had to declare my dad as dead, you know, MIA [missing in action]. He was, but in order to get a pension from his part, she had to declare him dead. She did that when we were here already. I have the papers. I haven't looked at any of that yet, but I've got another box

downstairs, I've got to look through. I've got to find out. There's all kinds of paper in there that give the whole sequential thing, what transpired there, in regards to the pension payments that he made, the bank accounts that they had. All of that had to be—it's all verified—had to be verified by the German government

.

Sharpe: So, you and your brother's lives progressed. Where did she live, and what did she do?

Speder: She lived right over here, on Pasfield. What did she do? She did some housecleaning. She always did that. As a job, she didn't hold a job very long at all.

Sharpe: Did she make friends?

Speder: Oh, yeah. Well, she belonged to the German-American Club, here, and she befriended a farmer, Weidhuner, Fritz Weidhuner, here in Middletown. She never got married again.

Sharpe: Was she happy with her decision?

Speder: Oh, yeah, oh god, yeah, she was happy. I mean, my brother and I, we did well, you know, made a good living. That made her happy, that everything turned out well.

Sharpe: So, during these years, what did you do for amusement and entertainment?
Speder: What did I do all these years, since I've been here?

Sharpe: No. When you were in high school and college, and then, after you got married, what sort of—

Speder: Wow, that's a hell of a question. I still did, besides teaching, I also…What's that, just walked around the back? Hold on a second. (Pause in interview.)
Sharpe: Should we go?

Speder: Go ahead. Okay. Entertainment, gee whiz, all the way through high school until—

Sharpe: Yeah, in the period.

Speder: Oh, wow. I think high school, I just basically did just like everybody else in those days, I think.

Sharpe: Listen to music. Did you play a musical instrument?

Speder: No, I didn't play anymore, after high school. High school, I went to all the basketball games, because our band had to play at every one of the games; every home game, we had to play. We played at the Armory [Illinois State Armory]. Like I said, the Walther League took up some time. You had that, once a week, and that was important in my life, at that point. And then, of course, we did a lot of cruising, back then, in cars, and smoked in cars, of course.

But I never smoked, though. I never did, but other kids…I mean, all the other kids smoked. The friends that I ran around with, they all smoked. But that was one of the big no-no's, when I went to TB sanitarium. They told me to never smoke and never do any hard work. Basically, the doctor was wrong on both counts. I smoked the cigars. [I] still do, once in a while, have a cigar, and did a lot of labor, physical labor, all my life. So, they were wrong on that part of it, which is good, so far. But, otherwise, we went to dances.

We even went to places like…as a matter of fact, I just ran across Bob Burk the other day, and he said, "Do you remember those days, we went up to the Coliseum down in Benld? Did you see what happened to it? It burned down." Well, they used to have big [names]. We went to see Chubby Checkers [rock and roll singer who popularized The Twist dance style] there, as a matter of fact.

So, you know, for entertainment, that's what we did back then. In the wintertime, oh, we stole a number of Coca-Cola signs, you know, the big round ones. [We] went sledding with them, over in Lincoln Park. We did that. We did all kinds of entertainment like that, just some mischievous stuff we did.

One other part, which was so unique all the time, I always had good friends that way (chuckles), because I always got my booze free. Not free, but I could buy it. My sponsor, Tony Ramanauskas, he orders beer at the 709 Liquor Store all the time. The 709, you know where it is now, 709 Liquor Store? It's along Clearlake, way out on East Clearlake. Jerry Gardner runs that now, but the 709 Liquor [Store]…The name of it comes from 709 East Washington. I always went with Tony to pick up beer, and later on, he sent me to go get his beer. Well, many times, when I was in high school, guess what? I got beer. (chuckles) They didn't question me at all. I just buy a case of beer, and that was it. We had a good way of buying beer as kids. We did our share of trouble like that. (chuckles)

Sharpe: So when you got out of college, then, did you go right into education at that point?

Speder: Yeah, I went straight into it. When I finished, as a matter of fact. I graduated in '67, but I was already hired in '66. I applied one place only. That was right

here at Springfield High School. They hired me, and right after Christmas, between the holidays, I went there. Just prior to Christmas, they sent me to the high school to see old Frank Frankoviak, the principal. Then, right [during] that interim, between Christmas and New Year, they sent me a contract to start teaching school there, history and German.

So, I had a job from before I graduated from Illinois College and worked there for thirty-five years, so to speak, straight through. So, it was a one and only official job I had in my lifetime, so to speak.

Sharpe: So, you were doing history and German all of that time?

Speder: Uh huh, uh huh. Yeah, and then, well, towards the end, the last five years, I became also the district coordinator for foreign languages. So, I did that, then, from '95, '94 or '95, until 2000, when I retired. So, I stayed basically in one job.

Sharpe: So, you enjoyed it, I take it?

Speder: Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, when I retired, I taught two more classes, the upper third and fourth year. I taught for another year. I went back for two hours a day. Oh, yeah, I enjoyed it. To be honest with you, I hated leaving. I enjoyed it that much. I really had a good time. I enjoyed teaching. I don't know why, but I did. I mean, it was a drag sometimes, but I did it, and I loved it and hated to quit.

But, financially, it would be crazy to stay. I mean, I would have been working full-time for about what, $12,000 a year? The way the system works, with the retirement and working, that would have been crazy. So, I decided to hang it up. I had my years in, more than enough in there. As a matter of fact, I did pay into my…I thought ahead, way back when you're in the Armed Service, you can get credit for teaching. In other words, if you were in the service, whatever length of time you had there, active duty, you can also apply to your teaching.

Sharpe: For pension purposes.

Speder: Yeah, but you had to pay in the amount. Well, I did that for a year, you know, paid my one year, because I had active duty of one year. (clears throat) I did that, but then, I didn't need it at the end of it, because it was an extra year. I didn't need that extra doggone year. But, way back when I did it, you never know. So, I paid into it and didn't have to use it.

But teaching, I enjoyed teaching at Springfield High School, and I would do it again. I think that was the right move in my lifetime. It really was. I enjoyed the people there, the personnel I worked with. I enjoyed the kids and

even, as a matter of fact, I went to a Octoberfest…what was it, two Saturdays ago? Yeah, two Saturdays ago, one former gal that I had in class, she had Octoberfest at her house, over in Rochester. She graduated in '74. We went to her house. She invited us to an Octoberfest.

Sharpe: Did you do any other activities at the school? Was there a German club?

Speder: Yeah. We had a German club, quite an active one. We had a very active German club. For fundraisers, we sell gummy bears [fruit gum candy originated in Germany in 1922]. You know what gummy bears are? You know now, but, back then, you couldn't get them. They were imported from Germany, back in the '60s, '70s and '80s. We sold them in school, little packs for thirty-five cents. We made good money for the German club.

Sharpe: So, this was about the time you started doing tours, as well?

Speder: I started tours. My first tour, I started in '69.

Sharpe: We've got a picture of that, your first class.

Speder: The first class, yeah. But we had tours, I would say, probably, all the way through '90. Now, wait a minute…not through '90, yeah, no, more than '90. Ninety, all the way through '96, I would say, we had at least one per year. A couple years, we even had them in Easter time. But these were tours. They were different than the tours that you go [on] nowadays. You know, they have the ACIS, or those companies that have those, tours, pre-tours. I did them all, on my own. All the arrangements, I made overseas and everything else, hotels, the bus.

One year I drove the bus myself. (chuckles) In '70, '71, yeah…So, 1971, I took a tour. I had seven kids that year, only. We spent three weeks overseas. I drove the bus myself, Volkswagen bus.

Then, the following year, I had a Fulbright Scholarship[1] to go over there for the summer. I spent [it] in Konstanz and Trier, two places that they sent me over there.

[1] The **Fulbright Program**, including the **Fulbright-Hays Program**, is a program of highly competitive, merit-based grants for international educational exchange for students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists and artists, founded by United States Senator J. William Fulbright in 1946. *Wikipedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulbright_Program (accessed: May 15, 2015).

Sharpe: And that was to study—

Speder: German. Yeah, German literature and German culture. That was at Konstanz, which is on Lake Constance, city of Konstanz, and at Trier. Are you familiar with Trier?

Sharpe: No.

Speder: Trier is probably one of the oldest. Trier was, as a matter of fact, the fourth capital of the Roman Empire.[2] As a matter of fact, I think I've got one up here someplace. I've got an old Roman coin. When they were digging on the sewer in Trier, they ran across artifacts, of course, because Trier had the Roman baths there. They had the Rome basilica there, and it was…You've heard of the Porta Nigra[3], haven't you? Yeah, that's in Trier.

The workers, you know, when they would find artifacts, were supposed to turn them over to the government. Well, we were there on the Fulbright Scholarship tour, and one of the guys gave me a Roman coin. I think I've got it here. I'll show it to you afterwards. I think I've got it in one of the boxes up here, one of my wife's music boxes. Those are all souvenirs we bought over there, over the years.

Sharpe: So, you did tours for twenty years?

Speder: Oh, more than that, probably twenty-five years, I did tours, many, many tours. The first tour was a conducted tour. I didn't care for it, I mean, the way they handled it. That's why I did it on my own, afterwards.

Yeah, the first tour only cost, I think it was like $425 for, like, fourteen days. It was one of those whirlwind tours. We landed in Ireland, Shannon, and then by bus all the way over to Cork and, from Cork to England and down through England, visited Coventry and then down to London, then across from London over to Calais to Paris, and then Paris over to, where was it, over to Koblenz, and Koblenz down the Rhine, and then down the Rhine, all the way to Switzerland, Switzerland to Italy, and then to Rome and back home. One of those quick tours, you know, one day.

Sharpe: You later started conducting them yourself.

---

[2] **Trier,** formerly known in English as **Treves** (French: *Trèves*, IPA: [tʁɛv]), is a city in Germany on the banks of the Moselle. Founded by the Romans in the late 1st century BC as **Augusta Treverorum** (Latin for "The City of Augustus among the Treveri"), Trier may be the oldest city in Germany. *Wikipedia,* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trier (accessed May 22, 2015)

[3] The **Porta Nigra** (Latin for *black gate*) is a large Roman city gate in Trier, Germany. It is today the largest Roman city gate north of the Alps. It is designated as part of the Roman Monuments, Cathedral of St. Peter and Church of Our Lady in Trier UNESCO World Heritage Site. *Wikipedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porta_Nigra (accessed May 22, 2015)

Speder: Yeah, oh, yeah.

Sharpe: Did you always do that with just students?

Speder: Had adults with them, also. I mingled them up. I had adults and students going at the same time. It works out pretty good that way, believe it or not, because the kids behave a little better, and the adults behave a little better, too, because they don't want to be looked upon as, like, being kind of snobbish or something like that. So, the mix somehow worked out real well for the kids and the adults.

Sharpe: So, do you keep in touch with your friends in Germany?

Speder: Oh, yeah, that I do. As a matter of fact, when was it? That one tour I took in '71, that was the first time I came back to the hometown, the first trip back. They gave us a hell of a reception there. They had the mayor, gave us a reception in the banquet hall, free food. I mean, they had free food and booze. They just treated us royally, that first time back. (chuckles) That was quite an experience.

Sharpe: Did you keep in touch with your friends in Germany, now?

Speder: Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, we just spoke to them earlier. Oh yeah, today at 1:00, I'm supposed to wait for [a call]. As a matter of fact, I was supposed to have one last week. He wrote me on regular email. He says, how about it? What's it, twenty-two hundred hours, which would be 3:00 here. That was on Monday. Well, at 3:00, I'm usually at the Y [YMCA] Monday, Wednesday, Fridays, so I missed that one. So, we came home, and there was a message on the telephone, "Well, where were you?" So, I wrote him back on the email, "How about today?" It's going to be 1:00, would be 8:00 over there. So, I'll talk to him today. They're all retired, of course.

Sharpe: Do you do this with phone or with Skype?

Speder: Skype, Skype, yeah. But setting up the time on the regular email, and then do it on Skype afterwards, yeah. It works out real nice. Not only that, it keeps me up on German, on speaking the language, because you forget, if you don't use it; you really do. I've got a friend of mine, here, who's a bricklayer. He doesn't do that much, and you'd be amazed how much you forget, how much he has forgotten.

Sharpe: And do any of your friends in Germany come over to the United States?

Speder: Well, the last ones we had was last year. We had a couple came over here last year. As a matter of fact, we took a trip out to Niagara Falls and Cleveland, took a look at the Rock and Roll Museum. (clock chiming) You know, people

over there are interested in stuff like that, the Rock and Roll Museum. Then we spent three days in Chicago and then back home. Yeah, we stay in touch that way. You have to.

Sharpe: So, when did you start a family?

Speder: We started a family in…as a matter of fact, our boy, the oldest, was born in '66, in July, the year after we got married. We got married on the sixteenth of July, yeah, sixteenth. I remembered, sixteenth of July, and he was born the twenty-second of July, in the next year, the following year. Then, we had Andrea, three years later, and then Greta, three years later.

We did a lot of travelling across the United States, mainly out west. We visited practically all the state parks, national parks, but we tent camped. At the beginning we did, and the first, oh, I would say, the first four or five years, let's say, '69, probably, the first seven years would be.

The first seven years, when we had the kids, we travelled to Lake Norfork. Do you know where that is, in Arkansas? It's right by the border, Missouri and Arkansas, right on there, Lake Norfork. We went down there and rented a cabin for a week, all the time, one week at a time.

Those were nice days. I mean, when our kids were little, we just went there. We rented the cabin. It was strange; we had a Volkswagen. We had a '61 Volkswagen, and we had that baby loaded, had one of those luggage carriers up on top.

Sharpe: Was it a van?

Speder: No, the bug.

Sharpe: The bug?

Speder: With a sliding roof on it. I think you saw a picture one time. Didn't you show one? But, anyway, we had a luggage rack on top of it, had the baby playpen on top of it, outboard motor on top of it, (chuckles) packed on the inside, just enough room for the kids, for two of them. For the two of them, because the third one wasn't here yet. The two of them, there was just enough room for them on the inside of it. We packed that one. We looked like a bunch of gypsies going down there.

Then, after that, we took a lot of trips out west. We took the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Glacier and all the way down, and we tent camped. Not only then did we do it, but two. Well, one time we went out to…it was Colorado, yeah. We went to Colorado. We camped with four families.

Sharpe: From Springfield?

Speder: All from Springfield, yeah. We're still in touch with them, nowadays. It's nice that the kids are still friends with each other. But, yeah, we went to the Black Canyon, off the Gunnison. Well, we camped all over the place. Just camping, that's the way to go. I mean, it's cheap.

Sharpe: Did the kids enjoy it?

Speder: Oh, yeah. Well, they'll never forget it. They never forgot those years we did that. Gosh, yeah.

Sharpe: And did they go to the schools here in Springfield and to Springfield High?

Speder: Yeah, yep. As a matter of fact, they all took German. I had them all in German class, for four years each. (laughs)

Sharpe: How did that go?

Speder: Alright. I mean, I just treat them like anybody else. But, yeah, yeah, we had them all, all three of them did it for four years.

Sharpe: So, do they all speak German now?

Speder: If you don't use it, you lose it. They lost it. I mean, they catch it, but I think, well, one of the kids we sent over the one summer—the boy, the oldest one—he spent one summer over there. But, if you don't use it, you lose the language. That's all there is to it.

Sharpe: So, did you teach German to them when they were young, or did you just wait until high school?

Speder: Well, my mom babysat the two oldest ones, and she, of course, spoke in German with them, all the time. But, I didn't. I should have, probably, but I didn't. It's just for me, it was to become Americanized. I don't know, that was

my attitude. It still is that today. I still think it's wonderful to learn about the language, learn the language, and to use it is marvelous, but to force it upon them, I just…it was not my bag.

Not only that, Kathy didn't speak any, but she learned a lot of German, with all the people hanging around here. But, no, we did not converse in German at home at all.

Sharpe: So, did you talk to your children about your childhood in Germany?

Speder: No, I never did.

Sharpe: They never asked?

Speder: You know, the older they get, they begin to ask more and more questions about it. But, I still have been kind of, I don't know, it's just, it was tough. You don't want to talk about tough times. You like to talk about the good times that you've had. When I talk about my early childhood, back then, it was hell. I mean, starvation and being sick. You don't want to share things like that. You like to share the good things.

Sharpe: Do they know that much, though, about what happened?

Speder: Here and there, they pick it up. You know what I mean? In conversations and listening to the adults, when they were here talking about it, then, yeah. No, to me it's important. I'm happy with where I am. My attitude towards that whole time period…It's wonderful that we had the opportunity to come here, the family, my brother and my mom. And I'm a citizen, loyal citizen.

Sharpe: When do you think you first started thinking of yourself as an American?

Speder: Well, I'll tell you what. I had the feeling of wanting to be one, and that was ingrained in me. I just wanted it, and I did it. I mean, after five years, I took my citizenship [test]. As a matter of fact, I was at the U of I [University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana] and had to come back to Springfield to participate in the ceremony. I forgot even the date. I was going to look it up for you. I've got it someplace. I got a copy made of it, of my citizenship papers.

Sharpe: That was important to you?

Speder: Oh, yeah. It was, very important, I think, yeah. Yeah, I did it right away, as soon as I could.

Sharpe: And today, you think of yourself as an American?

Speder: Yeah. I don't care for this hyphenated type of thing. I just don't. I mean, I'm an American now, of German heritage. I'm not a German-American. That's how I look at it. It's just to me. It's wonderful to have a heritage, but I don't think it should be in the name of it. That's my personal opinion. I explained that, even to the kids in school. I mean, I'm just like you.

I'm an American, not like the one in the past election. I'm not a witch type of thing, right? (chuckles) My wife drives me nuts sometimes. You know, "You always watch those doggone news programs." I do watch them, but I'm not hooked on any one of them. I just scan through. What I want to hear, I hear. If I don't want to hear, I don't want to listen to it.

Sharpe: These are German news programs?

Speder: On the television? I like to watch "The History Channel." They have a lot of good information on there.

Sharpe: Yes, they do.

Speder: What transpired, when I grew up, as a kid, of course, I didn't understand any of it. But it's interesting to listen to what transpired back then. Yeah, so I do. I'm kind of…not in the evenings, I don't care for the other programs. My wife, that's why she's got this TV in here, and she watches many times. She likes "Dancing with the Stars" and all that crap. I'm not interested in that. (chuckles)

Sharpe: And your children, you think, always thought of themselves as Americans?

Speder: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I don't think they ever thought anything else. No, I think that was it.

Sharpe: We talked about, when you became a citizen. Do you feel you view the United States any differently, because you were an immigrant?

Speder: I think so, because I appreciate it more. You know, I didn't have it, and now I have it. I'm talking about the opportunities. Here, most people just take them for granted. They just bitch about something, like this and that and this and that, instead of getting down and doing something about it.

Because, when we came here…Like I said, I still have the crates and suitcase that we came here to the states [with]. I've still got the one out in the barn, out in the country. I mean, I kind of treasure it really, now. I mean, it was sitting in my mom's garage for…I didn't know; we had it. I mean, it's been sitting in her garage for what, thirty-some years or forty years? Now I've got it, for the last ten years, sitting out in the barn. And that, if you view it, you know, you begin to think about it, you know, gee whiz. No, I appreciate it here.

Sharpe: So, do you think your history, experience and the impact of war, has affected your views as an adult?

Speder: Yes, I think so, because I feel I'm…Well, maybe it's from the family, too, being very frugal, kind of, not the spendthrift. Like, in our house here, if we can't afford it, we don't buy it. If I want something, I save for it, and then we buy it. Luckily, my wife agrees with me on that. The kids are a little different, I'll tell you that. They use their credit cards alright. (chuckles) I use them, too, don't get me wrong, but I wouldn't buy it unless I could afford it.

Sharpe: So, what are your views today of the United States, as a country and as a citizen of the United States?

Speder: Well, I don't know. I'd probably have to agree with what you hear on the news media. We're just on the wrong path somehow. I don't know what the right path is, but we're not on the right path. You know, when you hear all the news and the media and so forth, what the situation is here in the United States, with the unemployment and the future for the young kids and the futures of the pension systems that we have, like Social Security, or look at the State of Illinois. What are they, $80 billion in the hole, basically on the various pension systems? I'm part of the system, too, because I've got the Teachers' Retirement System there.

But my guess, on something like that, is that you have to tighten the belt, and cut where cutting has to be done, even cutting our pensions, probably. I don't know. I don't have an answer for that, but we're doing something wrong, not right.

And now you hear, just the other day, that we're giving aid to China. We're actually sending money to China, for aiding the situation over there, for grants, and we're borrowing the money from them. We're paying interest on, and then we give it back to them for nothing. It doesn't make much sense. There's something wrong in the whole system anymore.

Well, just like, I was just talking to Horst in Germany. They're irate over there, because of the Euro and now even with Italy. They've had the Greek problem all along, still have, but now Italy is coming into play, and that's scary for them. They said, what's going to happen over there, have a terrific inflation, or what's going to happen? They don't know. It's almost like a scary thought.

It's almost like maybe the old Weimar Republic might be coming back, where they just have printing presses running. Just like when I was a kid, we used to play with German money. I mean, real money. We had it by the bushel basket, as kids from the Weimar Republic, from the early '20s, where they just printed money, and you had to take a wheelbarrow of money

to buy a loaf of bread. Or, if you couldn't buy toilet paper, you used the money to wipe your butt. But that's what they're talking. Just a little while ago, when Kathy was talking to Helga, that's what they were talking about over there. I mean, it doesn't look good.

Sharpe: I have a couple wrap-up questions. But, before we do that, are there any other specific pieces of history we haven't talked about that you thought you might want to share, or have we covered everything you think you'd like to discuss?

Speder: To be honest with you, I don't know what we have covered or we haven't covered. To get your point, I don't know what it is.

Sharpe: Well, we've covered a lot.

Speder: Yeah.

Sharpe: I just have a couple of wrap-up questions. What is your view of the U. S. immigration policy today?

Speder: Well, the policies that we have are there, but they're not being enforced.

Sharpe: So, you like the policies, but not the practice?

Speder: Right. I mean, that's the thing. Why have a policy when it's not enforced? Because, as far as I know—and I might be wrong on this—but, when we came here, which I mentioned to you a couple weeks ago, you had to have a sponsor here, first of all, and that sponsor was liable when you came. That sponsor was liable for whatever went wrong, in regards to your finances or staying. If you're a criminal, of course, they would send you back. But for financial reasons, your sponsor was liable for you. That's the way it was, and it probably is still. I don't think the books have changed on that. The only way you can come over here was you had to have a sponsor or critical job that could not be filled by anybody else here. I think all those things are still on the books. I'm not sure.

But nowadays, none of that's being enforced. Then we complain about this or that, or that group is over here, and even if they are here, nothing's being done about it. But, back then, when we came here, you had to have your green card, and you had to carry it with you at all times. You have to register. Every January we had to register, go down to the post office, fill out a form, and that's it. Nowadays, all that it gone. I mean, there's no enforcement. I don't know if those guidelines are still there. I really don't know. My guess, they probably would be, but they're just not being enforced.

Back then, you know, when we came here, you want to keep clean, because you're afraid, if you don't do the right thing, you'll be sent back. That's the way it was, when I came here. Today, I don't know, I really don't

know if the same policies are in effect or not. I guess they are. I don't think they…I think Congress has to change that. If they have changed it, I really don't know. It would be another thing to look up, all those things.

Sharpe: Is there anything else you want to add, before we stop?

Speder: No, not right now. If I think of something, we'll get back to it then.

Sharpe: All right. Well, I want to thank you for sharing your history with us, and we'll stop here.

Speder: Okay.

(End of recording).