

Transcript for Oral History Interview**Conducted for University of Maryland Course HIST 428M - Spring 2015****Instructor:** Dr. Anne S. Rush**Interviewer's name:** Crystal E. Alexander**Interviewee's name or pseudonym:** Natalie Neighbors (pseudonym)**Interviewee's Country of Origin:** Germany**Interviewee's Current Residence:** Fort Meade, Maryland**Date of Interview:** October 10, 2015**Place of Interview:** Fort Meade, Maryland, Anne Arundel County, USA

Crystal Alexander: My name is Crystal Alexander, I am interviewing Natalie Neighbors, this is October 10th 2015, and we are at Fort Mead. Hey Natalie how are you?

Natalie: Good, how are you?

C: Good. So um I'd like to start off asking you questions about where you are from, so can you tell us where you were born.

N: I was born in Russelsheim that's in Hessen, Germany

C: Okay, Is that the state Hessen in Germany?

N: Yes.

C: Um...where did you grow up?

N: Um...the first four years I lived in Russelsheim and then I moved to Nauheim, which is a town right next to it, and I lived there for six years. And then we moved to Gross-Gerau when I was ten years old. And I lived there until I was twenty-five, I wanna say, and my mom still lives there now.

C: Okay, did you have any other family there as well from the different areas?

N: Um, yes, it's all little towns next to each other. My sister stayed in Nauhiem, my brother moved to another town like five miles on the road. It's all right there.

C: Really close. Um what was life like living in Germany?

N: It was nice, it was peaceful and I really enjoyed the uh little towns with the downtown shopping and you can walk everywhere and you can as a kid ride your bicycle around anywhere. Like there was no bad side of town, like everything was yeah, peaceful.

C: Small town living?

N: Yeah it was small town living yes

C: In um was your school close, were you able to walk or ride your bike to school?

N: Uh yes elementary school I lived in Mulheim and I walked or rode my bike and then we moved to Gross-Gerau. Um, I also used my bike or walked. It was all in the uh, yeah, maybe a mile or two.

C: Um, I'm just gonna ask you. Did you, do you still celebrate the holidays and the fests that were in Germany. Are they still part of your culture now living in the U.S?

N: Yes, they definitely are, I'm looking forward to November because then it's Saint Martin where you walk around with a little lantern and we started it last year and um there is a church in Baltimore who celebrates it every year and um, yeah we're going there again this year. We're keeping up all the holidays.

C: That's good.

N: Yeah.

C: I was gonna to ask if you missed anything from Germany, being here, do you miss any of the fest, or holidays, or traditions or just normal culture?

N: I do, especially now with Facebook, your friends, they're still there, they remind you of this stuff you're missing and um. I try to keep everything up here but there's certain things that you can't just do. Like the carnival in the springtime. Um we have Halloween here but it's still not the same as carnival in spring in Germany. And um yeah, I definitely miss the food as well, but yeah I try to make the best of it (laughing).

C: Um I wanted to ask you, I don't know if the falling of the Berlin Wall had any kind of an effect on your family. Um did them putting up the wall, like split up your family, or do you remember when the wall fell?

N: Um I was six years old when it fell. And I have no memory of it and my family was all in the West, so there was no connection.

C: Okay, but do you remember it being a big celebration when it did fall?

N: No I remember, I remember nothing.

C: Okay.

N: The only thing about the story I know is that my mom was married before my dad and his family- they came from the east and they actually um escaped before the wall was put up. They um, they didn't tell their neighbors everything because you know they were all spying on you, so they just left for the day and never came back. Like they left everything behind.

C: That's fascinating.

N: Yes.

C: That is crazy.

N: So that's the only connection I have, but that was obviously, it's not my relative.

C: Not your immediate family.

N: Yeah.

C: That's interesting. So um you told me that you earned a degree at University in Germany. Can you tell me what your schooling was like there in Germany?

N: Um I went to the University of Mainz. Do you want to just know about the university or about the school before?

C: Um I guess if you want to go into the different schools.

N: The high school?

C: Yeah, they have the different structure there.

N: Right, um, I guess I'm gonna start with university. I guess the most important part is that it was free, so there was no fees. You pay like 200 euros per six months and that's just fees for they doing your paperwork and you get um a train ticket you can ride the trains and busses for free and um all the classes are free. And you can take as many as you want per semester. You can pick anything you're interested in and it doesn't even have to do anything with your degree you can pick whatever you want. Like um I have seven languages and I learned and yeah so its like you can just pick what your interested in and its all free. And its nice, you don't have to like I don't know have a side job to pay for you know anything. You're finished with school and you don't have to find a good paying job right away to pay for my debt, its good. Yeah, and then before, well there's elementary school, and then after electuary school the school system splits up into three

different schooling systems. There is Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium and if you finish Gymnasium you get the Abitur and with the Abitur you're allowed to go to university. If you finish Hauptschule or Realschule then you're not allowed to go to university, you can go after you finish Realschule or Hauptschule really good with like with really good grades, you can switch to gymnasium and then finish there, if you like or you can go to, like, even in class afterwards and get your Abitur, so there's different ways of getting your Abitur, I guess but you have to have Abitur to get to University.

C: Okay so it's a prerequisite for...

N: Yes, but a lot of people just finish Hauptschule Realschule and then they do, um, three years of learning a trade, its like trade school so yeah you can either do that or do University, its up to you really.

C: Okay, did you like that growing up?

N: I did I did, I remember when I was in elementary school the teachers kinda talked to the parents about what they think what um school the kid should go to and I remember the teacher telling my mom that I should go to Realschule and my mom was like, "No! She's going to Gymnasium," like all my siblings did as well you know. And she still tells me that now, like you know, I have my degree my masters and she's like, "remember your teacher in elementary school she wanted you to go to Realschule." Hah yeah.

C: And you proved them wrong.

N: And I proved them wrong. Yeah so my mom still remembers that till today

C: So um here in the U.S. we do, like you pick a specific study. Is it like that at the University in Germany, where you pick a specific study?

N: Uhu, uhu

C: Do you have to fulfill a certain amount of credits or hours or how does that work?

N: Um it has changed now because when I started we had um Magister Hauptschloss what translates to Masters but it was just called differently. But now, I want to say that two years ago, they switched and now it's officially called Masters like the English words Masters is used and, it um, it set up a little differently. When I started there was certain amount of classes you had to have to finish your first part, and then when then you had like, uh, a little test after, after four semesters you had a test and you had to pass this test in to go to the higher classes. And um there was none like you have to take following

five classes, they didn't say that. It was you had to have like um a certain class allowed um... what's the word for it... It was like certain levels of class but there was no, it has to be this subject, so if you imagine um they tell you, you have to take a math class. It doesn't tell you which one. You can take any one, like you pick yourself what topic is interesting for you and that's the class your taking. So um that's how it was for me at least and then any internships or whatever it was all voluntarily there was no you have to do any of this and I think now it has changed, it was the last 2, 3 years when they switched it. And now we have the credit system that you have as well, and that you have to have certain things and get credits for it and then you have to collect credits towards something, so it has changed since I finished.

C: Okay and how many semesters when you were in did you have to complete before you got your masters?

N: Um it was a minimum of eight, I believe, for the masters.

C: Okay

N: But you could take more. Like for me I got pregnant and then um you, like in Germany when you work you can take a three years of leave for the child and it's the same for the University. They allowed me up to three years leave of absence and then I could start just where I left off. I didn't take the three years. I took one year off, the first year of the baby born and, but it kinda counts towards the years and yea. I mean there's no um you have to finish it by eight semesters. Like there are some semesters that I only took only one or two classes because I was busy traveling and having fun, you know, so I think it was like, I think I finished it after eleven semesters, twelve, maybe I don't know.

C: Do you feel like there was more freedom?

N: Oh yeah, there was a lot of freedom. And I remember my dad telling me, "don't rush this, enjoy it" because he went to university and there is a certain lifestyle of university, there's no pressure you can just enjoy it and you pick the classes and you pick the pace, you're going through this. And yea I remember my dad telling me don't rush it, don't cram everything in one semester and then, you know, you don't get good grades and like he told me, "pick the ones you're interested in. Do them well. Enjoy life on the side. You know, go travel and stuff." I remember that and when my dad told me that, and

that's really what I did. I really enjoyed college life as you would say it. But it's not college life like as you think because you guys have the pressure of finishing and money.

C: So what was the typical semester? How many classes would you take in typical semester for you?

N: Um, I don't know, it depends. Uh, I did like four classes maybe. And then um there was also lectures that you can visit, but there was no mandatory, so I kinda picked the classes that I wanted and then I looked what lectures are there the professor holding, and I looked what kind of fit in to my plan. Like if I'm at university anyway, is their lecture before or after my class that I can attend? Um, I did that um maybe two, three lectures depending how they fit into my plan, and um I also spent a lot of time at the library just reading books, you know, getting knowledge, you know, so yeah. So yeah I wanna say maybe like four classes.

C: That interesting.

N: Maybe another one, if I picked up another language or so, and yeah.

C: And so you said you learned seven languages. What languages are those?

N: There's English and German, and Italian and French, Latin and Greek um Old Greek, Ancient Greek and um Hieroglyphics was called Middle Egyptian, so yeah there you go.

C: Why did you choose Hieroglyphics?

N: Um one of my minors is Egyptology, and it was part of their curriculum that you learn Hieroglyphics.

C: That's interesting. What is your major?

N: Archeology.

C: Archeology?

N: Classic Archeology, so Roman and Greek Archeology.

C: Did you get to travel to Rome and Greek and look at the different archeological sites?

N: Um we went to Italy a lot, but we didn't go to Greece, and also Egyptology they stopped traveling to Egypt because um the school didn't want to endanger their students, so I've never went there actually, I've been only been in books.

(Laughing)

C: They do have um-Egyptian obelisks in Paris and all over Europe basically that you can study. Um, so how many minors do you have?

N: Two. It's Egyptology is one of them, and Art History is the other.

C: Ok and um what were you wanting to do with that after university?

N: I wanted to work in museum. (Laughing) Yeah that was the big plan ...I don't know...

C: And then things changed?

N: Yeah things changed, when we lived in England I, uh, worked at a publishing company, a book printer, and I know all my friends who also finished from my degree there's only one that actually works in museum. The other ones they all went directions.

C: Has that, um has your degree translated well here in the U.S?

N: So far not really, I haven't really looked into it, um just because I had the baby and day care is really expensive in Maryland.

C: Uhum, it is.

N: So just thinking 400 dollars a week, and you know I have to go to a really good paying job to make it worth it. Um I have to get my degree evaluated, and there is different companies that offer that, and I looked into W.E.S (World Education Services) what is like, um, the most famous one I guess and it costs like \$400-550 to get your degree evaluated. They contact your school and the school sends them all your information sealed and then they look through it, see all the classes you took and then they translate it into American degree I guess. Yea so that's on my to do list definitely. Yeah.

C: Okay, um, do you know how long you guys are going to be living here?

N: It was supposed to be three but now it was just extended to four.

C: Okay, so you still have a few years. Um is that something you were thinking about doing is translating you degree for sure?

N: Yes. I will definitely do that um just because I don't really know how this works but if I apply for a job, is actually anyone gonna ask me like are they going to question my degree, if you know (laughing). But I think it would be a good to have someday. Yeah.

C: Because an American equivalent or just a, great...

N: Yeah. And I think W.E.S is the best one to do this because my friend who studied law in Germany, she moved to Hawaii and she used a different service, and they didn't give her the same degree when they translated it into something what really sucked for her.

C: Oh yeah? How bad? That'd be very upsetting. Um did you work in Germany before you moved to London, or England, I'm sorry?

N: Um no, I did not. I went to university full time, and then I had the year break as we moved to England, and I had the baby, and then I went back to University of Cambridge, part of the same university in like Mainz, they let me finish my degree in Cambridge. And when I finished there I started working, but it was just a coincidence they needed someone with a degree and they needed someone who was fluent in German because they had German customers, but it was a British book printing company, so I got lucky there.

C: Did you like it?

N: I liked it, yes, and then I had to quit because we moved.

C: Oh.

N: And that sucked.

C: And when did you meet your husband?

N: I met him 2007 in Ramstein.

C: In Ramstein? And um he is an American airman, is that correct?

N: Yes, yes.

C: And um, so you met him in 2007, and when did you guys marry?

N: We got married 2010.

C: Okay, and then he was, how long did he live in Germany?

N: He lived there for, six or seven years. I think it was seven actually.

C: And how long were you there with him as couple and married.

N: Um we moved to England at the end of 2009.

C: Okay.

N: So. He was already there for four five years before I met him.

C: Okay.

N: And then two years after I met him we moved, yeah the end of 2009, we moved to England. But because I'm European citizen I can move freely within the European Union, so that was really fine for me to move to England.

C: Even though you weren't married.

N: Even though we weren't married.

C: And how long did you guys live in England?

N: For four years.

C: For four years?

N: Yes.

C: And where exactly were y'all?

N: It was Royal Air Force Base (RAF) Alconbury, what is like twenty minutes from Cambridge.

C: Okay so that was convenient.

N: Yes, I know (laughing).

C: Um and then, did you like living in, um, the U.K?

N: Um. It was nice. The weather sucked a lot. It was raining all the time. The summer lasted like two week. Ugh- It was sad, and we have a German Sheppard so he was dirty all the time, I yeah. But we made really good friends. It was a very small base and very family oriented. And we made a lot of friends that were still in contact with know and we traveled as much as we could. We went to Scotland and all over England and looked at the castles. And it was nice because I was only a twelve hour car ride away from home or a one hour Ryan Air flight so that was nice. Yeah we enjoyed it. Obviously looking back you always look on things with a brighter light, I guess, cause like when you're in the situation you're like 'this sucks here; the weather like sucks really bad,' you know, but thinking back it was a really good time.

C: That's a good experience.

N: It was yeah.

C: Did you learn any new customs or different, I guess, things, cultural things from the U.K?

N: Um yes. Definitely the tea time and the little sandwiches they do and um we. After four years, you kind of feel like you're part of the culture, if that makes sense and when we found out that we were pregnant, we actually named our daughter after the queen. I know, its like, we will always be connected to the U.K. It was just four years but it was, for us, it was four very important years because, it's you know, our daughter learned to walk there. She learned how to talk, like, she actually had a British accent because she spent her four years of life, she spent it in the U.K. If you ask her now where are you from, she's gonna tell you, I'm from England. Even though she was born in Germany,

she doesn't have any memory of Germany but she, yeah, England was her home, and it was very, yeah, four very important years for us so uh, yeah.

C: Um does your daughter have dual citizenship?

N: Yes she does; German and American.

C: And how does that work?

N: Um when she was born she was born in a German hospital, so she got her German pass, her German birth certificate right away. And then my husband had to take everything from her birth to the Ramstein, I want to say passport office, I don't know how its called, and then they issued a birth abroad birth certificate for her and she also got her American passport.

C: So what is that, what will that allow her to do later on in life?

N: Um well she can live either in the states or in Europe because her German passport gives her pretty much the option for being like every country in Europe. She can move wherever she wants and she doesn't have to give it up. She can have both for life.

C: Um does she know German?

N: She does.

C: So you started speaking with her?

N: I did, we did the one parent one language method and think she was two and a half and she was going to this child development center to the daycare, um, because I was finishing up my degree in Cambridge and my husband was deployed at that time and the daycare actually told me like she's falling a bit behind in her language skills, so I decide to switch to English to, you know, help a little bit. Um and then my husband got back and then I kinda missed the point of switching back to German with her, so she's not fluent. She understands everything, but she hesitates to speak it. So she mixes it, English German, with me. With my husband, it's just English like she knows when to use only English. But with me she mixes English and German because she knows I understand both. So I think there was a big mistake and with the second one I'm not gonna make this mistake again. Like, she's gonna hear German with me. I'm not going switch to English with her I don't...

C: (laughing) Oh okay.

N: ...know, it's the kinda thing you learn I guess.

C: Children are um really smart like that they can adapt. And how old is your second child?

N: She just turned one.

C: Just turned one. And she was born?

N: Here in Maryland, in Bethesda.

C: OK....and um so you guys lived in the UK and when did you move to um the States?

N: My husband moved the end of 2013 and I followed January 2014 because I had to wait for my green card, it was not finished. Because we got our orders really late, because of he's on a special assignment here we got it really late and then, then we had to start the green card process we didn't do it before because we didn't know if we gonna be stateside, are we gonna be in Europe, are we gonna be in Japan, Korea you know, you we didn't know where we would be so we never did the green card for me until we knew we would be going to the states.

C: How long does that process take?

N: umm... I guess it can take 6 to 8 month but I think for the military they do it a little quicker so....when did we start? I wanna say we started, end of September beginning of October maybe, and I had it like the day before Christmas, but then I couldn't fly out until January. So yeah they expedited a little bit for military.

C: And so he was already here by the time...?

N: Yeah he had to go to a class, he left like Thanksgiving already so I was I was the one packing up the house and doing all that fun stuff and uh yeah I was pregnant at the time already and I had the, the new four year old with me so he was in class in the States and I had to do all the fun stuff like packing up and dealing with housing and trying, I had to do the interview in London by myself because he was already gone like, yeah.

C: In, the interview for the green card process?

N: Yeah it's part of the pro..., it is like the very last step of the process.

C: And w..um..what was that process like? Was it easy or was it frustrating or...?

N: um...It was frustrating I want to say because, someone is, he has to fill out paperwork, because he's the one sponsoring me, and to show that, we're eligible to even do it and, that took a while. And it's a lot of waiting and you can't really call anyone, like there's no hotline for information, like you just kind of wait for mail to magically

show up. And then after that yeah um..after it's approved, then you go um to a me...to a medical appointment um from one certain doctor that's allowed to do it. So we had to set an appointment up with him, and then we had to go there with all my immunizations just to see if you know that it all needs to be up to date um, then he checked me physically, they did the x-rays and stuff and see if I'm healthy. I was, I felt like, like a cattle I guess, because he also had to check my private parts to see if I'm actually female and, yeah. I don't know it was quite an experience.

C: It sounds very intrusive.

N: Yeah it was, it was. It was like, you know, like head to toe you're being looked at to see if there's anything that would stop you from entering the U.S., like if you have any, I don't know, diseases. I was yeah, it was also quite expensive, but we got lucky and the Air Force paid for it since we were on orders.

C: uh hmm..

N: And then um, after the medical comes back good then um..you being um...invited to an interview at the Embassy in London and uh yeah...my husband was gone at the time. And there's actually like Facebook and other groups that talk about how this works and from there I learned that you need to be there early, and. So I got up at like four in the morning and I drove to the metro and then I took the metro, it was still pitch black out and I got like to the embassy at 6:30 and there were like 40 people in front of me and we were waiting outside in the cold and it wa. Yeah, I mean, once you're inside and you just kind of wait some more, wait some more. Like imagine being at the DMV, you have your little ticket and you wait and (laughing), you wait and, you wait and you wait and they did the interview part, had to, pay some more fees and. It was quite quick and I think it's because in our situation we were already married for a couple years we were...we had kids, you know so that was, for them it was pretty clear and we were on orders like for them it was...uhf it was a yes, you know. But I know other people who just got married couple weeks before like they had to like find pictures to prove, like, we've been together for a while, like this is not a wrong, like if that's a shame scam marriage like yeah. So they actually have to prove stuff if they have no kids or the marriage is kind of new but for us it was, we knew it would be a yes because yeah.

C: That's good.

N: Yeah.

C: That's good it went by fast. Um...um (coughing)...So what was your journey here li...journey to the US like?

N: Um...you mean like airplane? Airport?

C: Whatever...whatever you did (talking over each other)

N: Uh...yeah well, um I already ship...I already shipped the dog um couple weeks before because I had to clear out housing, before I could fly out and then they give you like three days in the hotel before you leave. And my car was already shipped, and so there was me, my four year old, my my pregnant self and my four year old. But luckily it was a really small base and we knew everyone and so everybody borrowed their stuff and they drove me around like when I had to close our mail box like, and like put a return address on it and like all the st....things going to the local town to pick up my Visa like, we had friends that took care of this. Had we would not know anyone, you know, all the cars already shipped it would have really sucked but we had friends and they took care of it and then (sniff) um yeah we flew over it was quite nice the...kid was...good and then we got to the states and then...I don't know something got flagged, I think it was because I was traveling with so much luggage, but as military on orders you can take extra luggage, but some on the system they saw my German passport, and like you know, six packages I had with me.

So I actually got, I landed in D.C. and they took me to the side and then I had to wait for all these (laughing) suspicious looking people you know and I'm like "why am I here?" and you kn...we were so tired and...I don't know in D.C. you go along this long line and then you already see the people at the end and I...already knew my husband was there, you know, and I saw him and I'm like ahh... and then....I was waiting longer, longer, longer for two hours we were standing there and nothing was moving, and then I finally got to the...to the....person in charge and they saw my Military ID and they're like, "why did they send you here?" I'm like, "I don't know, I told them, I showed them, but the lady that decided I need to go to the special...I guess she had a bad day or whatever but it took us two hours of waiting just to be sent...so they said "You're good to go."

C: And how pregnant were you?

N: Um....three months...so not that far, but it was, yeah.

C: Still not completely (talking over each other)...

N: Yea, it was not comfortable, because I had the big cart with you know, six luggages on there...my, my four-year-old fell asleep on top of it and it was night was, it was late and yeah.

C: What time was it?

N: Uh... I don't remember, it was like ten or so at night....I don't know...it was late...I don't know and this lady must have had a really bad day like af...like, I waived my Military ID (background noise) and she didn't care and then the guy at the (background noise) (cough) at the other check he saw my...he saw my Military ID and he was like "Yeah you're good to go." I think they were like, "What does she have in her luggage?" (background noise) and you know I don't know.

C: And uh...your husband sit... sat there and watch the whole thing this whole two hours..?

N: Well he...he...I don't think he saw me because, I was....I one of like 100 people in line. I saw him but I don't think he saw us.

C: And was he worried that maybe you know....

N: No, he... he was probably playing with his phone (laughing)

C: Okay (laughing)

N: Like he... he was like yeah....yeah. And then it took.... a while to get from DC to um...Fort Meade but...it was....it was okay. We survived (laughing)

C: What um...and so moving from the UK to the US was your first official...military spouse....moving experience?

N: Uh...

C: Where you had to deal with the mil...the Air Force and everything...yourself?

N: Yes um... well, when my husband moved from...from Germany to the UK...when he had to take care of his cable and stuff I took care of all this because you know "You speak the language, you need to do this."

C: Right.

N: And um....I kind of... I knew what was gonna happen because I saw it from Germany to the UK...

C: Okay.

N: but then in the UK it was.... it was me who did most of it because he was already gone so yeah.

C: Was that a stressful experience for you, doing it on your own?

N: Um... it would have been... but I had...other spouses...that..they did it before and they...kind of talked me through it and then knew exactly what to do and they helped me out.

C: That's good...and there..there seems to be a big uh community. Where people very helpful in the military?

N: Definitely.

C: Have you found a community here in...

N: Um...

C: at Meade?

N: Not as much as it was overseas. I think overseas...the US military community is really, really tight because you're in a foreign country and you stick together and help yourself you.... and you hang out together all the time...and here in, in Maryland Fort Meade people don't necessarily live on base they live...you know 30 40 minutes..away...they have nothing to do with the military. Like their husband gets up in the morning, drives to work, and that's it for them like this is...the husband leaves to work this is their part of military. They don't ever...go to any of the events on base or spouses c...club so whatever so....I think it's definitely deferen...

C: Different.

N: Different stateside that it is overseas.

C: Um...have you...noticed um... is there a large...um.. German spouse community here?

N: There is....surprisingly.

C: Or have you found...

N: Yeah there is surprisingly I didn't know about that until I realized it but th...there is um...a lot of German spouses here. And....we meet.... once a month and we go to you know.....to dinner... to a Mexican place or Cheesecake Factory, that kind of thing...just...yeah. And it's nice to talk about...cause you notice kind of notice, the same things like...when you grew up in Germany and you kind of...this is how

you...want your kids' life to be but...here in the states it's different because...
 you feel like it's not safe like... when we grew up and you were free to roam the streets
 and here it's like...you can't leave your children alone because it's neglect kind of thing
 you know (laughing). So that's the kind of topics we have about how how our husbands
 have a different view...of..of bringing children or how to like something
 or...(background noise) or, look, I found some awesome food in the supermarket and it
 tastes just like home kind of like this is the kind of topics we have I gu...yeah.

C: That's good.

N: (laughing)

C: Um...have you made any...good friends out of that group of ladies? Or group of
 spouses?

N: Um yeah there's two German ladies that I'm really close to and....one of them was
 actually in England when we were in England but they left...like we met and then they
 left so...I know her from there, but we were not friends in England.

C: Um...have you made any friends with American spouses here?

N: Yes um...I'm also...part of the enlisted spouses club and....we hang out all the time.
 We do crafts together we...go to the movies we go to...um laser tag that kind of
 things...so yeah made friends in that enlisted spouses club and I also made friends with
 my neighbors who are also really nice and we have dinners together and that kind of
 thing.

C: Um...(lip smack) uh um I wanted to ask you this earlier but I missed it. Um... how
 would you describe your re...your relationship to America before you came to the US?

N: Um...(coughing) um...well, I guess until we moved here it was always a vacation
 spot for me. I went to Florida on vacation, I went to California on vacation like.... you
 know the typical touristy areas I want to say you know. I guess D.C. area is also touristy
 but it was not on my radar, like I need to go there, eh no....and then, yeah, it was a
 vacation spot for me I guess. (laughing)

C: Where um...where in Florida did you go?

N: Uh...the Tampa area, Orlando yeah.

C: What did you think about it?

N: It was nice. I really enjoyed it and I remember we were four girls it was three German girls and one American girl and we rented out like a house and...went to the Disney...parks and. I don't know just....going there for the very first time everything was so big like, you know, and...we rented the...the house and it was...it was actually four or five bedrooms and every bedroom had like a king size bed in it and we were there, like the four of us like, "Oh my God, we can all have one bed!" like we were thinking like hostels like little hotels in Europe and then you go there and everything's so big and we were like...it was so cheap for us, you know the exchange rate back then was amazing we were like, "Wow this is awesome!" (laughing) And I remember we are really scared driving around um....because (laughing) there's, there's certain rules in Germany like if you're faster you go to the left and then you only pass on the left and we were on the highway and we were going the speed limit and I think we were the only ones going the speed limit and it was big ginormous trucks passing us left and right like...and I mean not a truck I mean like um...like um...

C: Semis?

N: Semi! Like and they were passing us left and right and we're like in this rental car and we were like, "We're going to die here!" (laughing) It was really scary just coming from Europe where everything has like...you know how everything works and then you come here, it's different it's bigger and you're like this four or five lane highway and you're like, "Oh my God!" (laughing)

C: Chaos

N: Yeah, seems like it.

C: Um...and w..how old were you then? Were you in col...were you in university when...

N: Yeah...

C: ...you did that?

N: I was in university, and I was 21 or 22 because we decided it's not worth going to the US until you're 21 (laughing) because you can't (laughing) go into a bar, you can't go into a casino, like you can't do anything fun. And um...I think there was also some rules about um bein...having a rental car, I think...I don't know...either the fees dropped or

something. I don't know. We decided to wait until 21 before we go to the US and yeah.
(laughing)

C: So growing up in Germany uh...where the drinking age was lower..

N: Um hmm...

C: Um can you explain what that was like?

N: Um...the rules are when 16, you can have beer and wine and then with 18 you can have hard liquor, everything. With 18, you're a grown up. You have the same rules and same freedom like an adult...like with 18 you're...yep, everything happens when you're 18. And um...I don't know I remember my dad like always offering me a sip of his beer, it was perfectly fine or you know.

C: So it was not that big of a deal?

N: No, it was not a big deal...

C: They make it out to be a big deal here (talking over each other)

N: Yeah, no it's not like...I know, especially the boys they all like, you know, drinking a beer when you are 16 you know you go to a bar and you have a beer because it's legal and it's just a part of your dinner...kind of thing it's, it's not "Ooh, I'm going to get wasted." It's...part of a meal. (laughing)

C: Just part of the culture?

N: Yeah, it's part of the culture it's like...

C: Did you feel like it was ever um...abused or it was...it just wasn't a big deal growing up? (coughing) Like it is here like...here they're afraid kids are going to be out of control and they can't make decisions correctly so they shouldn't be allowed to drink that young...

N: hm...

C: Did they...do they feel like that there...are they?

N: Well...I know officially you have to be 18 before you get hard liquor but...kind of like you guys get alcohol before you're 21, you always find a way...it's the same in Europe. You get hard liquor before you're 18 if you want to, you know. And...I know there was parties and stuff where people drank too much and then they puke or whatever but...it's not like you can drive a car at this age anyway, so it's not like you going to have a wreck you know. It's like here you're 16, you can drive a car... and then you can

illegal drink and kill yourself. But there...you can drink, but you can't drive because you don't have a license yet. I remember we had um...I don't know what grade we were in maybe 10th grade in high school, we had an exchange with a U.S. high school. So a couple of us went over there for a couple of weeks and we had American students come to us. And I remember we had a party and it was in somebody's garden, and there was no parents...it was just us...and we were all used to drinking...at least some degree of alcohol, so for us it was perfectly fine, but most of the Americans never had any alcohol, and they got really wasted and it was really bad and then the next morning we had like a field trip...and all the Americans were in the bus like (gagging noise) almost like dead they they didn't, yeah, they had a bad hangover and all the German students were like fine. (laughing) It was like "wow, they never had alcohol before." (laughing) It was like surprise for us, I guess. (laughing)

C: Yeah, that's an interesting...(laughing) difference.

(coughing)

C: Um...so you said that...you weren't allowed to drive at the age of 16...w..what age wer...did they allow...

N: 18

C: 18?

N: Yes, I think it was lowered now to 17, but you have to have a parent with you in the car. So it's like 17 you can like test drive with your parents, but you have to have your license and in um...in Germany, you have to go to driving school. It's not like if your parent can teach you. And it's quite expensive. I remember it was like...2,000-2,500 what I paid.

C: Euro?

N: Yes, for my...it's car and motorcycle, but it was quite expensive....so yeah.

C: To get your license? So you go your license at 18?

N: Yes, you start going to school with like 17 and a half and you have to go....once a week to the driving school and learn the rules and then you do the test...to the...to that part and then once you pass it, then your teacher will put you in his...driving schools car and let you...drive around in circles in the neighborhood. (laughing)

C: Practice.

N: And then um...people who uh...and then you have to have the official test where there is a test in your car, and if you are already over 18 at that moment and you pass they hand you the license right away if you are still 17 and you know short a few days then you have to wait until you turn 18 and then on your 18th birthday you can go to the office and pick it up. Yep.

C: Are they really strict about rules...in Germany...like things like that?

N: Yeah, I guess...I don't know it's just...how it is (laughing)

C: You can't talk 'em...talk them into "Oh well my birthday is tomorrow" ?

N: No, no, no, no, no...(laughing) oh yeah, well they follow the book then yeah.

C: Um...what do you think about living here on Fort Meade?

N: Um...it's definitely crowded...the whole area. Fort Meade is nice...it, it's somewhat of a community and we have a nice neighborhood and we know our friends there and there is playgrou...playgrounds for the kids so it's...I guess somewhat sheltered I would say, I don't know.

C: I think so too. Um...it definitely adds some...a different kind of uh...dynamic where you have things you having to worry about like to scare on...Monday with the (laughing)

Sidenote: On October 8, 2015 a man robbed a car from Balitmore and led a police chase South on 175. South 175 dead ends into the Fort Meade Rockenbach Gate where armed security guards stand posted. Their job is to keep civilians without any military affiliation from entering post. The National Security Agency (NSA) is located on Fort Meade so there is heightened security measures in place. The man driving the stolen car rammmed the entry point at the Rockebach Gate and almost ran over a guard. He drove on post and collided into a fenced barrier at the other end of the post. He then fled the vehicle on foot attempting to hide from the police that were chasing him. The area that he hid in was a residential neighborhood on Fort Meade. Natalie and myself live in this neighborhood. Natalie lives only a few blocks away from where the man wrecked the stolen vehicle into the fence. He hid for over 12 hours while police searched for him on foot, by car, and by helicopter. We heard the helicopter all night and morning as it flew over our houses. They finally caught him around 10:30 am the next morning sleeping in a manhole.

N: Yeah

C: ...the person driving here on post and them looking for them um...were you close?

N: Yeah

C: Do you live close to that?

N: Yes, we had the helicopters over the house like all night it was pretty bad. (laughing)

C: Uh um...(coughing) They do have stuff like that occasionally that happens where people try to enter where the NSA is.

N: um hum

C: Like they had the, was it last year.

N: Yeah, it was on the other side like he actually went through Fort Meade to get to the NSA that way.

C: Have you guys tried to accidentally drive through the NSA gates?

N: Um my husband (laughing) did when he first got here...and he kind of instilled it in me, like, don't even try (laughing) and the GPS always wants you to go through it, so the first few weeks I am like "I'm never gonna understand which one I could go and which one I cannot go to." But eventually it clicked and you know and then you just kind of not go. But the scare on Thursday kinda, we are in the house...and we weren't... there was this bad guy out on Fort Meade somewhere in our neighborhood, like the police is going through our...road with flashlights. It was really scary. And it's something I never thought about in Germany, but I'm like, we need to get guns, like I had this thought like I would feel a lot safer now if I would have a gun this house. Because there was no information about if he's armed and dangerous or anything. We didn't know anything, so it was really scary, and you know my mom was freaking out too and the little kids and...so yeah that's something that's different. (talking over each other) I never had that thought in Europe that I needed a gun. (laughing)

C: So you said your mom's visiting right now.

N: Yes she is.

C: And she's been here for how long?

N: Uh...two weeks.

C: Two weeks. And so she got to experience the whole scare?

N: Um hmm

C: Ho...did she feel...would she feel safer with a gun in the house as well?

N: I don't know I didn't talk to her about it. (laughing) I don't think so, no...but I remember in the morning when we were still on lock down and we were not allowed to go outside and it was a beautiful day and she wanted to take the kids outside, and then she's like "Well it can't be that dangerous, I want to take the kids out." Like I don't think she understood the fear that we had... I think she was more annoyed of the helicopters keeping her up at night and, but for us we kind of knew that...how dangerous it could be, I guess. I don't think she even thought about...uh yeah (laughing)

C: So um...stuff like that doesn't typically happen in Germany? Where you have a helicopter...

N: No, no um...no (laughing) not at all...I can't even...remember any of my towns if there was ever like, maybe a robbery but that might be...the extent of crime. (laughing)

C: So it is generally safe there?

N: Yes.

C: And so that's something that has changed for you since you've...moved here in the US is or you have to think about um...safety and...it's kind of shifted your focus on...

N: Yes.

C: your surroundings?

N: In England, in our little base, number one, there was hundred percent ID check and all non-ID card holder had to be signed in...so it was little more closed than it is here at Fort Meade. But the neighborhood was so safe, and there was police cars driving by like once an hour because it was just going around the base, and the fence line was like 3 miles. We never locked our house. The four years we were there, our house was never locked. The car was never locked. It was just so...we had such a safe feeling there...and then coming here, like, I triple check all the time if everything is locked. And I know in our neighborhood there was someone breaking into cars stealing stuff and they think it was probably teenagers in the summertime when they're bored and stuff is, but it's just something I've never had to...be worried about before. And also when we go to the D.C. or Washington uh...Washington or Baltimore I always want my husband to be with me like...I don't dare by myself with the kids. And in Europe I went to all the big cities, by

myself, and I felt safe. But somehow here in the States, uh...I'm worried more and scared.

C: So I would say that's a negative...

N: Yes (laughing)

C: ...aspect of living here?

N: But maybe this is just the area, I don't know if it would be different if we could be... in a different state...where that would not be that many people?

C: Uh hmm

N: I don't know.

C: Would you want to um...stay in the US and move to a different, a different base...if you had the opportunity?

N: Uh hmm...I think so um...we, we haven't really talked about it because we're like just barely halfway into this assignment...but anywhere in the US because we've already traveled all over Europe kind of, it's kind of like we wanna travel in the US a little bit now...and we wouldn't, I wouldn't mind being somewhere else for a couple years and seeing some more stuff.

C: What are...um..so what are the other difference is that you notice between Europe or Germany specifically and the US that maybe you do like, will start with what you like, the differences?

N: What I like is that people...I think they're friendlier. I remember in Germany that you go shopping, and there's always like grumpy people that like if you walk around talk to them to like "why is this person talking to me?" And here in the US you can start talking to anyone about anything. Like you walk in somewhere and someone starts chatting to you about something you know, that's something I noticed...(background noise) and what I don't like...what I don't like is the whole food industry in the US. All the chemicals that are allowed here they're banned in the European Union, like it leaves a bad taste in my mouth, like I'm like "Do I want to eat this? Is this gonna kill me like eventually?" you know I don't like that. Yeah umm...let's see.

C: You mentioned driving.

N: Oh yeah, I guess I'm kinda used to it, at first I was very scared and I was kinda glad that my car wasn't here yet, because then my husband had to drive me everywhere. (laughing) But then eventually my car showed up at the harbor in Baltimore and my husband was like, "Well we need to go get it and you gonna be driving it back." And I'm like, "Oh no." Yeah...I mean by now I'm used to it and now whenever we have someone visiting they are like "Oh, how are...how are you doing it?" But you get used to it pretty quickly. (background noise)

C: Do you still um...do still wish w...you had the same rules as in Germany, do you still wish they or do you wish they did that here in the States?

N: Um...yes I think so especially on the, on the highway where people like pass you left and right that...they don't... still gets me when there's someone's passing me on the right and I'm thinking, "You're not allowed to do it" but yes he is. (laughing) (coughing)

C: What about the um...the right of way...um turning situation they have there in Germany? Do you like that? Or do you like it better here where we have more stop signs?

N: Um...I think at first I was very scared of the uh...the all way, the four-way stop sign because I'm like "well we are all going to get there at the same time, how are you gonna figure out who goes next?" But somehow it always works out and. What I don't like...is the speed limit, it's so slow here...on the highway like everything is empty, sometimes, and then you go so slow. (background noise) I don't know. I'm sure at some point I'm gonna get pulled over because I kind of...forgot...but I will see. Hopefully never happens. I do like the...you can take a right on the red light. I do like that...yeah.

C: Do you like um...how the light just turns from red to green, or do you miss the yellow then red then yellow then green lights?

N: Um...that doesn't really bother me.

C: Okay.

N: No, no...yeah.

C: And then the stoplights are on the other side of the road, as opposed to being on the same side as where you stop?

N: Is it?

C: Yeah. We noticed that, when we were there...but um...(laughing)

N: I need to...to pay...pay more attention. (laughing)

C: Um...so you have traveled in the DC area quite a bit. What do you think about the DC area?

N: DC itself...I love it. Like the whole National Mall and there's so much to see. I really like it. Um...and all the museums yeah....DC is awesome. I've been there so many times now because every visitor we have wants to go there...so I'm kinda tired of seeing the same things, but I really like DC. I like it better than Baltimore because Baltimore, you have the Inner Harbor and that's it, and you're done but DC there's so much to see...and especially in the summertime and it's really nice there...yeah I like DC.

C: Do you um...is there a difference in the weather here versus Germany. Have you noticed?

N: Um...there's more of a winter here. Because last two winters there was the snow. We went sledding and build a snowman, and I can't remember in Germany that we in the last 25 years ever had that much snow. Like maybe there's a little bit of snow and then it melts quickly, like it never stays. Like here was like you know a lot and then it stayed, it just stayed yeah. (laughing) That was like a big difference I noticed right away because I got here in January, and there was still snow leftovers in the corners and I thought, "Oh I guess it's already over," and then we got hit with like snow storm blizzard like in February. I'm like, "Oh wow!" Like I've never seen that much snow in my life. It was so much snow. And then snow days, like, where my child had no school. That was also new. And then my husband didn't have to go to work you know, it was just new. Then the summer time the humidity is crazy. I'm not used to that either. I know Germany had a really hot summer this summer, I've heard, from friends, but I think they called it like the summer of the century like it was really hot for them. And there is no A/C's there like....Ooh there's something I like. There's A/C's here, (laughter) see! There is something. I mean, obviously I survived. Everybody survives in Europe without an A/C but once you've lived it once, it's kinda hard to live without it I guess....yeah.

C: Do you feel like um... this area is equipped to handle the snow on the roads and stuff or no, versus Germany?

N: Um..

C: Like with the snow machines and salt trucks and...

N: I think they were pretty quick, at least in our area, to come by, even in our little dead-end street they came by, but I know that this is like a Fort Meade thing, if they take care of it but I think they took pretty good care of it, yes. And um...we didn't...we didn't really drive anywhere when there was snow and enough people were forced to go to work, and they have to drive it in the areas. So I don't really know about that. I know in Germany they have you know the plowers and the salt cars everywhere too.

C: Did they have very many snow days in Germany, do you remember?

N: Um...I don't remember. No, I don't think so. I don't think it was ever that much snow that stopped us from going to school. But again, school is never that far. It's always like walking distance or a couple minutes ride. It's not like here where some kids sit in a school bus for like 40 minutes to get to school. That's not how it is over there. It's always closer.

C: Um...so you said you still celebrate German holidays?

N: Yes.

C: What are uh um...like around this area, are there ones where different communities actually celebrate like you'd mentioned the um...up in Baltimore there is that one area but have you found, what festivals or holidays have you found in the area that you still get to celebrate?

N: Um...just recently there was a lot of Oktoberfest celebrations all over um...and then Saint Martin is coming up with the lanterns. And I think, yeah, that the church in Baltimore is doing it, and it is actually a German church. They um.. do sermons in German and English.

C: And what's the name of that church?

N: Um...Zion Church. And um... also one of the ladies from the German group is going to host at her house another lantern walk for the kids and then...

C: Is she here on base or...

N: No, she lives up by in Glen Burnie, but her husband lives um...works here.

C: Okay.

N: Um...(clears throat) And the next one would be in December would be Saint Nicholas Day....and it's kind of like everyone does it on their own so it's not like it's being celebrated. And then there's Christmas and as every year we are going to have the

decision, are we going to have the presents on Christmas Eve or are we going to have the presents on Christmas morning? And so that's the same holiday and the next one would be Carnival. It's not being celebrated here as much. I don't think anyone here is doing it, hosting it. And um...(searching for her cell phone, her friend from Germany was calling her) um.....and um the one after would be Easter. And there's Easter here, so I'm thinking about something that's different because you guys mostly have the same. I think like Saint Martin is the only one that you guys don't have. You don't have Carnival in the springtime. I'm thinking if we have anything else that you guys don't have. I think it's mostly the same holidays.

C: Um...what about the different fests like the Christmas fests or um...

N: You mean the Christmas markets?

C: Um hmm...

N: Oh yeah they have that in...in Baltimore they do.

C: Oh good.

N: And it's getting bigger every year um... I think it started it 3 or 4 years ago, I was told. At first it was just like a little booth or so and it's getting bigger and bigger and they have like, you know, the *Gluhwein* and all the little um...things, ornaments you can buy there, so there is the Christmas market in Baltimore a Germ...they call it German Christmas market so. I think the area is definitely helping me not feeling homesick, like there is a lot of stuff.

C: That's good.

N: There is actually a German butcher in Baltimore so if you ever need a good schnitzel, (laughing) you can go there and buy the meat for it.

C: Um...I was gonna ask you that, do you find it har...find it hard to find the different German recipe or you know ingredients that you need or that you like to cook or whatever do you...do you have a hard time finding them here or have you found them?

N: Um...I found most of what I want and what I don't find there's always substitutes for something. And um...there is a Facebook group it's called um...German cooking with American ingredients. It's a bunch of Germans through the US and this...they talk about cooking and ingredients and "oh I wanna make a German cheesecake but I can't find this and that, is there anything I can use instead?" And then they're like "oh I tested this out

this works best for me.” So it's definitely helpful like, I don't know, a couple years ago there... probably would be me and testing it out myself but now I ha...I have people who can help me with that. And the Commissary has a lot German stuff. I don't know if you saw, they have all the Christmas stuff already, and the little calendars with the chocolate and my kid can get out and have have already bought them all ready...ready to go and...yeah, yeah I think it's the area that's probably make it easier for me yeah....I don't know would be the same would be in Montana or something like, I don't know.

C: Maybe not, who knows though. Um...is there anything that you haven't been able to make because you just can't find anything, or anything you miss?

N: Um...no so far I...I was able to either buy it or make it myself and you know the German supermarket Aldi, they are here now and they just had German week the other day, and I went there and I bought a lot of stuff. And it's all in my pantry waiting for me. (laughing)

C: That's good. (laughing) Um...I wanted to ask you have you incorporated any American holidays into your family's celebrations?

N: Um...coming up is Halloween, and we already did it in the UK and...I know they are doing it in Germany as well, it's getting bigger and bigger. Like my sister, I know, she had to start buying candy a years ago because the neighbor kids started coming by.

Um...this is just a fun holiday and I think everybody's gonna love it and yeah...that's coming up. We're doing that and for Christmas...my husband had the idea of doing that Christmas celebration that some, like whoever...whatever country we're in, however they celebrate Christmas is how we are going to do it. So if we end up in Germany next assignment then Christmas is gonna be on Christmas Eve but right now we in the U.S., so we should do it Christmas morning. And when we were in the UK, think they also always do it Christmas morning if I remember right. So, I don't know... that was my husband's idea and I'm not...I don't know. I don't understand why you guys do it because the kids get up early in the morning (laughing) and you want to sleep but they are all like, “Ahhh Presents!!!” Like I like it on Christmas Eve because you can enjoy the day, you have a nice dinner, and then...then it's present time you know and then they play and then they can go happily to bed you know...I don't know.

C: (laughing) What about Thanksgiving?

N: Oh yeah, Thanksgiving, um...well my husband is originally from Maryland so his family is an hour and a half from here and um...they invited us over last year for Thanksgiving and it was like the traditional American Thanksgiving you can think of. It was beautiful and the food was delicious, and it was great and. (laughing) And um...that was the first year in the US that we celebrated it, or I celebrated it, but all these years before but when we were in England, we also celebrated it. There was always, from my husband's squadron, they did a Thanksgiving party where there was turkey. Then from the whole base they hosted a Thanksgiving and then on Thanksgiving day, one of the neighbors hosted it, so we ate like three Thanksgiving every year because it was three different celebrations of Thanksgiving. And I remember one year, It was probably when my husband was deployed that I went to home to Germany and I took my mom to the Commissary in Ramstein and we bought a ginormous turkey and all the fixings you need for Thanksgiving and then we drove an hour to my sister and... we, we had a traditional American Thanksgiving and for them was the first time. Like I've had it a couple times, never in the States but it was made by Americans and this time it was me, alone, hosting it...more like making it for my German family and a bought all of the cranberry and the stuffing and you know green bean casserole and all that and they were, just so shocked with the amount of food (laughing) and would like "would not one side dish be enough?" (laughing) "No, it has to be you know...and then there's pie waiting at the end." (laughing) They were...yeah they were really shocked about the amount, but they definitely enjoyed it and um...yeah I think that yeah they would like to have it again.

C: Oh really? (laughing) That's interesting.

N: Is there any other American holiday you can think of?

C: Um....maybe....Fourth of July that's...

N: Oh yeah, that is another one (laughing) but I mean, is there anyone who doesn't like fireworks?

C: Right (laughing) Oh, so difference in the New Year.

N: (coughing) Oh...yeah. I remember um...when we were stationed in Ramstein, you know, downtown everybody shoots their own fireworks and a lot of guys who came back from war have a really hard time...like, this is like warzone.

C: Um hmm...like PTSD.

N: Yes, I remember that. But for me it's like this is how New Year's is. This is...is there any other way to have New Year's you know...yeah.

C: And then you've celebrated New Year's here in the US and....

N: Hmm...yeah last year for the first time. The year before we were separate, my husband was already here and I was still in Germany. Yeah, and what did we do last year? I think we did nothing cause we had the new born....yeah.

C: It's not quite the same. (laughing)

N: No it's not. (laughing)

C: Um...how do you...how do you feel like you're perceived or understood here in the US versus Germany? Do you feel it's different or do you feel like you're viewed as the same as an American, or do you feel like you are treated differently?

N: What do you mean like seeing me...

C: Like other Americans do you think they're welcoming or do they treat you differently or...or are they...

N: So far everybody has been very welcoming and everyone I talk to always have some story about Germany they tell me right away. Like, "my cousin's brother he married a German lady" or something and, like, not even military people like even when we travel somewhere and someone hears an accent and someone says "Ooh, where you from?" And I'm like, Germany and they are like "Ooh you know...you know," they always have some story that's connected to Germany, and it's always positive they're always say, "Ah, I've always wanted to go," or they say, "I went and it was beautiful!" Or so always very positive so far.

C: That's good. Um...so is your mom the only one that's visited the US?

N: Yes, so far my my dad doesn't fly because his brother died in an airplane crash, so he doesn't fly at all and I don't think...

C: Can he take a cruise?

N: Yeah I don't think going on a boat, (laughing) no. I think he's hoping that we will...be at Europe our next assignment, but we will see. Because he hasn't even met my youngest yet.

C: Oh ok. (coughing) What about your siblings?

N: Um...my brother wanted to come, but he doesn't want come by himself. So he's like kinda wanna to piggy back with my mom. But then he was kind of shocked when he heard from my mom how everything is here in the US because he's like, "Oh well ok, well I'm going to come visit you and then you know I'm going to go explore and then, you know, I'll see you later," kind of deal and my mom's, like "this is not how it works" and he's like "what do you mean? You know I will just take her bicycle and like ride." And my mom's like "No." Like...like he is a biker like he rides his bicycle everywhere. He is...40 years old but he doesn't even use his car like he uses his bicycle for everything. So then he was like "what do you mean?" And my mom said "everything is so far apart there is no bicycle lanes, there is no sidewalks sometimes." (laughing) You know, and um...so he's like, "So when I come visit, we are going to be together the WHOLE TIME?" (laughing) And my mom's like, "Yeah, you know we get to go look at DC again, and then Baltimore for you." And he's like, "Well this is not what I want." Like he wants to explore by himself like and he's like, "No, I don't know." Like, (laughing)

C: It doesn't sound like fun now.

N: Yeah, he was just in Africa for three months exploring and then before he was in, where did he go, the Philippines for two months, like he likes to like kind of be like the backpack explorer kind of thing and then hearing about it here how he would be you know stuck with us and have to do what we want to do was kind of like a turn off for him. (laughing) And then my sister, she wants to come, but my nephew, he's 14 now. He's going through some scared of flying issues. So she's like "I don't want to leave him behind." And I told her like, "You have three years," and now I told her "you have an extra year." And I hope they gonna make it at some point. It's so far was just my friends and my mom who came to visit.

C: So you've ha...had a couple of friends come to visit?

N: Yes

C: What do they think about the area?

N: They liked it and um...um...they liked DC, they like Baltimore, they liked going shopping. I'm like, "Do you, you want to go to the mall again?" Like (laughing) yeah and for them and it's, it's like a shopping trip. I mean, I was not any different than when,

when I first went to Florida or California. You go to the malls, you want different clothes that you can't get in Europe, and, you know, go to the outlets and stuff. It's...yeah, it's like a mixture between a shopping trip and culture trip, I guess...I don't know.

C: Um hmm...do you feel like the culture here in the US is really different from Germany?

N: Um...I don't know, I mean, I remember when we went to Philadelphia and they were saying...the first settlers and this is so old and so old and I was thinking like, my Dad lives in a house that was built 1500 something like...this is not old but you could say it's one of the oldest settlings in the US and I'm thinking like, you know my dad's house is older than this (laughing) you know. I don't know.

C: Is that something he's had in his family from generation to generation?

N: Yes.

C: That's really fascinating to me.

N: Um hmm...

C: So did you grow up living in that house part of the time?

N: No, it was um...my great grandma lived in there and um...my dad, like we didn't live there, she lived there on her own and um...When my, my parents got a divorce...so when...then my grandma got, got really old, like she couldn't be by yourself anymore and then my dad with his new wife. They moved in with her to care for her. So I when I visited lived there but I've never like lived there long. Yeah.

C: Um...I wanted to ask you this earlier, um...how would you describe your relationship to America before you came here?

N: Hm...

C: I think you mentioned it was just a vacation...

N: Yeah, yeah for me it was a...a vacation spot and it was...you know when you hear it in the news or you see it like, you see all the movies like it was yeah, it was kind of like in the movies, you know. Like I remember when I met my husband and then he had the red solo cup and I've seen it on TV, (laughing) like I've seen it in movies like you see it in movies but you...you unless you live it, you know, it's different, I don't know. So yeah, it was a vacation spot and as seen on TV kind of. (laughing)

C: Did you think of everything, like the way you perceived it, was everything positive or did you have some negative views about it that maybe..

N: Uh...it was, I was...uh...I think it was...it was both. You know the negative about Americans being so obese and lazy and loud...and they kinda want to run the world and American the police that you know, American police taking care of the whole world and I don't know and then. I don't know, I think it was...I don't know how old I was. It was in the 90s so I guess it was, 10 maybe, I remember when there was the first war with Iraq and Kuwait there. I think it was the *Rhein Mein* Base, I think it was closed afterwards. I remember waking up at night hearing the big planes flying over our house so that was like the first memory I have because my mom said this is American planes. Like, "They keep me up at night." (laughing)

C: So it's negative...yeah.

N: Yeah, but then also you see all the movies and...you know you see all of you know Florida and California is beautiful and Grand Canyon and New York, like ah everybody wants always to go to New York, you know. It so positive as well like...I know a lot of people like when my friends heard 'ooh you're moving to the States.' I know there was a lot of jealousy there too like, "Oh you are so lucky you get to move to the States." So I think it's, it's both, it's negative and positive.

C: But for you has it been more positive...

N: Yeah, I think so, yeah. I think it's been more positive.

C: That's good. Um...(coughing) let me see...ok. Um...is there anything else that you would like to tell me before we finish?

N: Hmm....let me think a minute. (coughing)

C: Maybe something that was important um...for you coming here or growing up or something that I didn't ask.

N: What really shocked me here was the amount of restaurants. Like, if you drive down a road and then there's a, like a, strip mall with like five restaurants, and then you drive five miles and there's another strip mall with another five restaurants like there's, I don't know how they can exist next to each other because like in Germany, at least in the smaller towns, you can have one Italian or two Italian sometimes you know, and then there's maybe one, two Chinese places and then one Greek place and they can all survive

next to each other. That's fine. But here there's, within miles, there's so much and I think the eating out is part of the culture and it's not like that in, in Germany you know like, I'm always surprised how they can survive and even though the, I don't know maybe it's just the area, I don't know much else so...even like...stores like Old Navy, like there's one here and there's one in Columbia and there is one in Annapolis and then there's one in Waugh Chapel like, there's like 5 of them within like 20 mile radius, like how can they all survive? But I think the culture of the U.S. is a lot of shopping, a lot of eating out. Yeah, I don't know, this is something I notice, you drive down you keep seeing the same thing...and at first it was very confusing for me, I'm like did we not just drive down like, are we doing a circles like, no it's just the same things again. That was something that really shocked me. Let's see what else, I can think of? Hm..

C: I wanted...I did want to ask you about um...your children growing up here and their education. Do you think they'll have the same quality education here that you did, you had back in Germany?

N: I don't know...remember I was discussing it with my husband if we, you know ...er...um...started a college funds and then my husband's like, "oh well you know when they're done with school we are going to ship them to Germany and then they can do, the free education." (laughing) But I was like well, by the time they're 18, maybe it's not free anymore, because you know, you don't know how things change and um...so we did start a college fund just in case and um. She's in kindergarten now my oldest and I did notice, when you guys called kindergarten is pretty much what we call first grade because our kindergarten is like your preschool. It's just games. It's just playing so...I don't know. I mean, she just turned six now. She started when she was five. And I remember I started first grade when I was...six maybe about to turn seven. So I think you think you guys start this early, but I don't know if it's necessary. I don't know. Time will tell, I guess (laughing) and yeah, we'll see, I don't know. Like this whole Common Core, I hear a lot of controversy about it, I really need to look into it more, yeah. Then to see my friends are in Germany, and they have kids and they go to first grade and second grade and kindergarten is just what I hear from them is so different than here. I, I really can't tell if it's gonna be negative or positive. It's...

C: It's still early.

N: Yeah, I mean my husband's not stupid, you know, and he went here, (laughing) you know, and he just finished his Masters. And I think it's actually um...what his family says is some that he had no um...intention of really finishing up his degrees until he met me and his family is like, "Thank you Natalie for inspiring him." And I was like, hey, I don't if it was really me. You know, maybe, I don't know, maybe, I had a Masters, he felt like he had to get a Masters. I don't know like, but it is also the military it is encouraged to keep on working on yourself. I know that some of my friend's husbands don't even have their

Associates done. You know like, I don't know, maybe he was inspired by me maybe he was not...

C: Maybe.

N: I don't know. (laughing)

C: Do you think that um...maybe there in Europe or specifically Germany they are more inspired to better themselves and to get degrees and to learn versus here? Do you see a difference with that?

N: Um...mm..maybe, I don't know. I think, I mean I had friends that had the Abitur, and they did not go to university with it like, it always depends on the person like what you are interested in. There is like no "oh you have to do it to get a good job." You can get a good job without going to university. I think it really depends on the person you know. I don't know.

C: Ok. (cough) Um...we're finished.

N: Okay.

C: I want to thank you very much for sitting down with me and talking to me about your life.

N: No problem.

