

*JESSIE MELIS*

*Lansing, Michigan Unit*

*Transcript of an Oral History Interview*

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*Jessie Melis*

*PREFACE*

*This transcript is the product of a tape-recorded  
interview conducted in C1986D, for the Women 's  
Overseas Service League.*

*Signed, dated agreements of release and biographical  
information accompany the original cassette.*

*Transcribed by Patricia Siggers  
Lansing, Michigan*

*15 July, 1988*

*JESSIE MELIS*

*E East Lansing, MI*

*Note: Elsie Hornbacher is interviewing Jessie Melis. Jessie*

*4 lives at 1400 Old Canton Lane, East Lansing, MI 48BE3.*

*Her telephone number is 33E-6930, and the area code is*

*B 517. Jessie is being interviewed For the Lansing Unit of  
the Womens' Overseas Service League.*

*B EH: Jessie, when did you go overseas?*

*JM: In August of 1950.*

*10 EH: 1950, and where did you go?*

*JM: My First assignment was Munich, Germany.*

*IE EH: Munich, Germany? How long were you overseas?*

*JM: Three years.*

*14 EH: Oh, three!*

*JM: And stayed the entire time in Munich.*

*IB EH: Then what prompted you to go overseas?*

*JM: During the war period, I tried to join the WAUE 's and*

*18 didn 't pass the eye test. So, I sort oF Forgot about  
it; and then when it was announced that they were*

EO teachers, I got interested, and then sort of forgot about  
it. Then, when it happened again, I decided to apply for  
EE several reasons. I was sort of interested in going to  
Europe, and I was also interested in seeing what had  
E4 happened during the war. I had relatives in Holland, so  
I was curious to see them and see how they fared because  
EB it had been very bad from our reports during the war.

EH: How close were these relatives in Holland? Were they  
E8 cousins, or— ?

JH: They were aunts and uncles and cousins. They were my  
30 Father's family. He was the only one who was in the  
United States. The others had gone into the Asiatic  
3E area, or had remained in Holland.

EH: Tell me a little bit about your experiences?

34 JM: Well, I guess the first thing that impressed me (or  
struck me), was very much as it had everybody else at  
3B that time; some of the results of the devastation that  
had happened during the war period.  
3B Some of the streets were still blocked off. Some of the  
buildings you could see that had been cleared but where  
40 other buildings had been attached to— the colors of— you  
could tell different rooms on the side of the building:

42           The railroad station in Munich was still— any   glass  
covered areas were still in sort of bad shape, but things  
44           had been cleaned up considerably. I think that was  
probably the first realization how bad— how much damage a  
46           bomb could do.

          Among other things, as you 'd meet some people, you got  
48           impressions. One of my first impressions was at the  
Octoberfest. We had gone (and the mobs of people) and  
50           finally, a group of German people in one of the beer  
tents signalled and joined us. We spent the evening with  
52           them and we spoke some English; our German was nil. We  
got along very well, and after the closing, we went to  
54           one of the night clubs. We found out then that they and  
some of the people in the restaurant; a violin player and  
56           some of the other members of the band, were refugees from  
Marienbad, Germany,— and from Czechoslovakia.

58       EH: Refugees from Czechoslovakia, in Germany?

          JM: They were Germans. They had been with a group of Germans  
60           that had settled in the area, and when the war came  
along— after the war, they were thrown out— of  
62           Czechoslovakia; because of all these boundary changes  
over the different years and one thing and another. So  
64           we met them, and we met them a few times afterwards. We  
went and had— didn 't really strike up a strong friendship  
56           or anything, but we saw them several times.

68       EH: Now, am I correct here; they were Germans that had gone  
to Czechoslovakia, lived in Czechoslovakia until roughly  
134-?

70       JM: Well, till the war period. Then after the war, they were  
sent back to Germany.

72       That was one of the things that was good fun, and of  
course, it was 1950; the Oberammergau play, and we had  
74 tickets for the last play of the season.

EH: Jessie, before you go on with this Oberammergau play, do  
76 you remember that great big bear in the Octoberfest?  
Wasn 't he there in 1950?

78       JM: I don 't; I don 't remember now.

EH: In 1951 or '5E, they had a bear- I would say, that was  
80 about 60-70 feet tall- and he hollered, "Leav-en-brau!":  
His mouth would open?!

BE       JM: Oh, over at the tent!

EH: Yes, and do you remember the horses?

84       JM: Yes!

EH: Tell us about that.

86       JM: I d o n 't remember that much about them.

EH: Weren 't there about eight-ten teams of horses?

88       JM: Well, the teams, yes; very much like the Budweiser's team  
here?

80       EH: Right, but weren 't there about ten horses pulling those  
kegs of beer? Well, it was a real kind of a spirit.

38       JM: Yes, well, it was. It had rides, and you could do things  
and of course, the chicken; the specialized chicken- the

84       broiled chicken kind of thing on the spits: And lots and  
lots of beer. Every brewery in Munich- I think there are  
86       seven- had a big tent, and the place was mobbed.

EH: There were tables up. You sat at the tables.

38       JM: Yes, and then they had these huge kind of barn-like  
things, and they called them tents. I don 't know  
100       how many thousand people could get in them, but they  
108       were just absolutely packed and the band "oom-pahed"  
all along, and you "oom-  
pahed" with them.

104       EH: CGerman expression)?

JM: Yes! (Laughter)

106       EH: CGerman singing) Remember that?

JM: Oh, yes, indeed!

EH: The music was gay- and LOUD- and most people were  
108       extremely sociable, were they not?

JM: Yes. We had a fun group— seemed to there, but everybody was so packed. There were so few places to sit or stand.

Anyhow, we were invited with this group, which was fun because you felt not quite so much as an outsider.

EH: One thing about the Germans though; when they go out to have fun, they associate with all different kinds of people— quite different from in America. I was quite surprised to have Dr. Uogel tell me that when you went out to have a good time, that you were very rude if you didn 't dance with anyone who asked you to dance. In business, there was a great deal of class distinction. For example, I understand that at that period of time that you couldn 't have a car better than your boss 's, and you were definitely in a caste system; but socially, definitely not.

JM: The two big things I noticed when that was true was the Octoberfest; and then 'Fasching," when all the barriers were down. You would go with a husband or a date or whatever, and it was understood that you would not stay with those people necessarily. That you would go with anyone who came up and asked you to dance, which was very different from our social customs.

EH: What is Fasching?



132       JM: Well, it is the big celebration before Lent. In Munich,  
it starts in December when they take the Prince and the  
134       Princess to preside over the period. Then it 's  
party, party, party, until the end of

136       EH: Is it costume?

JM: Yes, there are all kinds of costume parties, and it was  
138       fun to see all the little kids because they were always  
in Western; cowboys, Indians, and this kind of thing.  
That was probably my favorite. We went to a number of  
140       parties and you could rent costumes or you could concoct  
you own.  
142       I remember going on a date with somebody to one of the  
hotels in Munich. Somebody came up and asked me, and he  
144       said goodbye and sort of left me, and he said, " I 'll  
see you in such and such a spot at three o 'clock," or  
146       whatever time the party was to break up. So I went with  
this young man whom I had never seen before. We went to  
148       about three of the areas where they danced and had  
different types of music Cwhichever one you wanted, you  
150       could do 3; drank Champagne, and at the time he brought me  
back, and my date dropped his date again and we went home.  
152       C(Laughter) But it is; everybody joins in and it  
didn 't matter. Your social position really and truly did  
154       not count. You Just met, and somebody was attracted to  
you, and you could not- you could not refuse because it  
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was considered a sort of an insult. That was true  
whether you were married or not, so I guess anything  
158 could happen. It 's said that very many babies resulted  
150 nine months after the Fasching season, and that sort of  
thing; but it was lots and lots of fun.

They have this terrific parade. I have scads of slides  
168 of the parade. One of the Germans invited me to go where  
there was a building and the parade. It was a narrow  
154 area, and it would come through a narrow street. It  
would be on a second floor. I had an unobstructed view  
166 of the parade and I Just took scads of pictures as I  
168 leaned out the window.

Of course, it is all kinds of things. Some of them are  
satirical; some of them poke fun at the political. One  
170 of them, I remember, poked fun at the Americans for  
chlorating the water when that was spoiling the beer.  
172 CLaughter) You know, things of that sort.

It was a long parade. It was about two and one-half  
174 hours, I guess, as I remember— and everybody in costume.  
Then of course, all of the various sections had their own  
176 wagon or their awn group, and then they had the different  
costumes. Women who participate in that cannot cut their  
178 hair because they need the braids for this particular  
thing. They keep their hair long. They don 't cut it  
180 during that period of time. So those were two

IBS                    interesting and, I think, rather insightful things in the group of people.

1B4           EH:   Jessie, when you went to Munich, where did you live? And  
                  tell us about the school you taught at?

1B6 JM: Well, the CMcGrawJ Kaserne was BLQ 's and they were like a series of row apartments, such as they have in Europe.

IBB                    We were on the second floor.

*EH: Did you have an apartment?*

190 JM: Yes.

**EH:** How many people in the apartment?

IBB            JM:    Two, and then we usually ate over at the    officers' mess  
                 in the club that was at the    Kaserne.

194                   EH: Did you pay for your meals?

IBB JM: Yes; we had Just nominal cost, but we had pretty good meals, and we got almost all three because we didn 't cook. We didn 't have facilities in that particular apartment, so we didn 't have the facility to cook.

E00           *Besides, we didn 't have commissary privileges. So,*  
*that meant either buying on the German market- which we*  
*got the Cchloride compound!, you know,*

sterilized the vegetables- if we bought  
anything like fresh fruit; and

the little bit that the PX had. That was practically none, and then our Friends sometimes got things from the commissary for us.

B04

EH: You said you had an apartment but no kitchen?

B05

JM: Well, there was a kitchen there, but it was not equipped with stuff. They had been— as I understand it— they had been SS troops; for their officers and families, at one time. During the Reich period.

B06

B10

EH: There was a living room and bedroom in the apartment?

B11

JM: Yes, and then there was a kitchen and bathroom. It was a complete apartment, except that we didn't have a stove and that sort of thing to cook. Later on I moved, and we did have a stove then; so I did do some cooking, but most of the time we just ate right across the street— so it was simple.

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We were forced to move out of that apartment because the order had come to integrate various groups. The WAC (the colored WAC) detachment was outside the Kaserne. Our building was next to the WAC detachment, so we were forced to move because they were going to do some intermixing of the two groups, and we were to make way for those WAC's that were being transferred into the Kaserne.

226           When I first went there, we were outside the gate because  
the State Department was there. Because of the trying to  
228           work with the Germans, the military and the State  
Department were at odds. So, finally the State  
230           Department moved downtown so they wouldn't be impeded. I  
went to school one morning living outside the walls of  
232           the Kaserne, and when I came home at night, I lived  
within the walls of the Kaserne: Guarded gates and  
234           showing papers with which you could get in, your AGO  
card, and that sort of thing, so that was a change.  
236           The Germans came in and they did all the cleaning: I had  
not thought anything about the black marketing business,  
238           but I had picked up three cartons of cigarettes when it  
was cigarette rationing time. I was going out that  
240           evening so I didn't put them away. I left them on a  
bookcase and we went to Court. When I came home at  
242           night, they were gone. I thought, Well, that should  
teach you not to leave things out. But the next morning,  
244           the going rate of cigarettes was left in marks on that  
same spot where I had left the cigarettes. I could see  
246           the black market evidence really for the first time. I  
had heard it but it was the first time I had had a  
248           personal experience with it. And it was very easy when I  
first came because we were outside, and the Germans who

E50                    worked didn 't have to pass the scrutiny of the guards  
                      coming in; nor did they have to have their satchels  
E5E                    checked and that sort of thing.

EH: Perhaps you can remember what the Germans paid on the  
£54                    black market for a carton of cigarettes?

JM: It was eighteen marks. I don 't think I 'll ever forget.

ESS  
EH: Eighteen marks! and at that time, that was four marks to  
E50                    the dollar, wasn 't it- which would be four dollars fifty  
                      some cents per carton.

SBO                  JM: It was sort of a strange feeling because I had been sort  
                      of resentful at first. Then I could see the humor and  
ESE                    the understanding that it was left out on purpose; and I  
                      had not intended it to be done. Then I found out more  
£64                    about the various things in black marketing as time went  
                      on. I think probably the black marketing was helpful to  
EBB                    the Germans, particularly at the beginning prior to that  
                      time, because food was scarce. In trading back and forth  
EBB                    for things like Crisco and lard; they had been without  
                      fat.

E70  
EH: The Germans loved fat, too, didn 't they?

JM: Yes, a good many of their foods are rather on the- but I  
                      had found that out from relatives in Holland. That

272           during that period (they called it the starvation    period  
              in Holland!, when that last year the Germans didn 't pull  
274           out and they were   still suffering, there was a lack of  
              fat; some of the essentials that your body    needed and  
276           craved.

EH: They didn 't have coffee either, did they?

278           JM: No, and coffee was a high market priority. I think there  
              were other foods, too, that some of the Americans got  
280           from the commissary. As time went on, in 1950, when I  
              went over things were much, much better. Things were  
282           still a little short, but I don 't think there was any  
              real hunger at that point.

284           EH: No starvation, anyway?

              JM: No, no. Ule were not encouraged to eat in German  
286           restaurants. They said two reasons: In some instances,  
              it might be sanitary; to be sure that you didn 't eat some  
288           of the fresh things because of the 'hunting wagons."

EH: Did they use hunting wagons?

290           JM: In Bavaria, they did.

EH: In Bavaria? Is Munich in Bavaria, or another--

292           JM: It is, yes. It 's the capital of Bavaria.

234 So they, of course, sort of told us that we should be  
careful with that, and that meats and some of these  
things were rather hard to come by and rather expensive;  
236 so we really shouldn't eat too much in the restaurants.  
As time went on, that changed again and you went to the  
23B restaurants more and more.

EH: I would say that in 1353-54, when I was in Austria, there  
300 was no problem of eating on the Austrian or German  
market; as I remember, travelling in Germany.

302 Jh: No, by the time I went home in 1353, you could see on the  
stands- and I used to stop after we were in the other  
304 apartment and I had a stove- sometimes I would stop at  
one of the little German shopping areas and pick up some  
306 vegetables and fruit. Then we used the [chloride  
compound] to soak lettuce or anything like that, and I  
30B never had any problems there; where I had with some  
others, when I was travelling.

EH: Were the Germans warm? Did they have warm clothing and  
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*shoes?*

312        *JM: Yes, they had. It was interesting because we sort of*  
             *laughed at their shoes in the sense that they had the*  
314        *fleece-lined shoes with the heels; sort of fancy, and*  
             *they were terribly, terribly expensive for them. That*  
316        *was really a mark of some substance, if you could have a*

pair of shoes like that. We sort of laughed and later on, we sort of adapted that type of thing ourselves.

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EH: Did you ever buy a pair?

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JM: No, because my feet are long and narrow. The German feet were not that way, so I never could buy any. The girl in the PX used to say, 'We've got some narrow shoes in," so I'd buy another pair of shoes. That was the only way I could buy shoes over there because I Just couldn't get a fit. There were shoes available, and there were lovely leather purses. They were good shoes, and my roommate happened to have a foot that would fit the sizes so she could buy them, and she did.

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EH: In your contact with the Germans, were they antagonistic toward you? Your name is a Dutch name, is it not?

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JM: Right, yes. No, I can't say they were antagonistic, but I ran into some feelings at different places: Those who had been a Nazi die-hard group.

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I was teaching summer school in Augsburg, and I had gone up to visit a friend who was teaching summer school in Giessen, which was a staging area at that time. Her helper was a young German boy (young man). They were trying to hire a lot of the Germans,- trying to sort of indoctrinate the democracy bit, and he was hired. I guess not only democracy; also to get the economy moving,

342 so he came with us to dinner that night at a German  
restaurant. There were a lot of Americans (military)  
344 there For the reason they had out- they had Just come and  
were going to be reassigned places, and there was a  
346 curfew. All of the Americans had to leave; officers and  
enlisted men, or anyone in uniform. As civilians, we  
were not under those restrictions, so we didn 't have any  
346 wish to go. We were Just staying there, listening to the  
music.

350 The minute the Americans left, the Germans came and  
filled in the tables. In Europe, a place at a table is a  
352 place whether i t 's your party or not. It 's a place, so  
you sit, or you join a place. So we talked, and I was  
354 talking to this one man. He asked me to dance, and we  
danced. Then he said, 'You know, I was a Nazi.'"I said "O  
356 h?" He said, "Yes, I was an important man in this  
village," and he said, 'You know, if Hitler were to come  
358 back again, I would follow him immediately." He wasn 't  
drunk, but he had been drinking so I think his tongue  
360 might have been a little loose.

EH: He was arrogant, was he not? German superiority?

362 JM: A little bit- and I noticed also- my roommate was an  
older woman in Munich, and her husband was working in  
364 Bonn. She was head of a school primarily to educate the  
illiterate, and she was in charge of that out at Dachau;

366           and her husband was at Bonn. One of his jobs had been to  
try through selection process to Find teachers and people  
368           of that sort uiho might have an influence when they came  
back and try to indoctrinate the democracy; or to send  
370           them to the States for awhile to go to school and do some  
of these things.

372           Ruth said, 'Well, you know, Russell said this one young  
man that he thought so highly of and wanted to go to the  
374           States, said, 'You know, I believe all of what you say,  
but I could never teach without my desk on a platform,'"  
376           which was typically true of most of the schools. The  
German schools I worked in, the teacher's desk was on a  
378           platform about six-ten inches higher so that the teacher  
could overlook. He said "I could not lower myself to be  
380           at the same level as my students." He had to have that.  
He would have been lost without it, which I think was  
382           quite typical of a lot of the Germans; the feeling that  
you had a position and you could not lower yourself.

384       EH: Right. Then German teachers were sent to America to pick  
up ways of democracy, and teach in schools upon their  
386           return to Germany?

          JM: I d o n 't know that all of them went to the States, but at  
388           least, they were given some training somewhere. I 'm  
hazy  
          . . . . .  
380           sort of hazy on some of these details.

EH: As I understand it from Friends I have who were raised in  
338 Germany, the students argue a great deal more with the  
teacher than they do here in America.

334 JM: Is that recent?

EH: No, this she told me maybe fifteen or twenty years ago.  
3SB She was raised in Germany, and is approximately in the  
same age group I am; sixty plus or minus five. I noticed  
338 in the Austrian school where I taught— we were on the  
second floor: Austrian children were below and above us  
400 in the high school. We knew immediately when the teacher  
left the room because the children were very active, very  
408 noisy. They were well-behaved when the teacher was  
there, but they did not have the control when the teacher  
404 left that we American teachers have.

JM: There is a difference, too. One of our German teachers  
408 (they came in and they worked, and they were to teach  
German, and they did some other things too) but the one  
408 teacher, when I walked home sometimes would be either  
walking or had been there in this little neighborhood  
410 area. Any of the children that knew her, or had had her  
in school at one time or had some connection with her,  
would come and shake hands and curtsy on the street.  
418 Which, I couldn't imagine most of our children curtsying  
to a teacher, but they did and they were very prim and  
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41G                   proper, but evidently thought a great deal of her because  
                      they were very eager to run up to her. She must have had  
                      something that was not too austere about her.

418           EH:    Would this have been true For any German teacher, Dr do  
                      you think Just this one teacher?

4E0           JM:    I d o n 't know. That was my only experience with it, so I d  
                      o n 't know whether that was general. I would say the  
422                   curtsy and the shaking hands, of course, - shaking hands  
                      was very common when you met people, and I was not  
424                   unaccustomed to that because I have that with my  
                      relatives in Holland. I mean, when you come in the house  
426                   you shake hands, and when you leave you shake hands.

              EH:    I like that habit.

428           JM:    It 's not a bad habit. I think i t 's a nice thing. We  
                      did this too, but it was strange. I  
430                   think a lot of the Germans-

              EH:    They respect education, I believe, more than we do.

432           JM:    It has a higher standard in their minds. Now, whether  
                      that 's true at the present, of course, we don 't know  
434                   either. I think the old traditional- it was still  
                      evident in a lot of things.

436           EH:    What was the school like where you taught, Jessie?

438 JM: Well, the school where I first taught was a Berman  
school, and it was two stories. It was sort of an H,  
440 without an extra extension of the wings. Some of the  
upper grades, when I was there, were on one side. Then,  
442 the lower grades were in another section. The First room  
I had was next door to one of the German rooms. Then  
later on, I was moved to the other side when they built a  
444 new building. Then, the high school and the first grade  
were over at this new building. First and second were  
446 over at the new building and the middle grades, so-called  
Junior high, were still in the old building.

448 EH: Was the high school some distance from you; a mile, or a  
few blocks?

450 JM: No, it was Just walking across the courtyard. I  
understand there is a brand new building over in another  
452 section now, not too far from there, but the other  
building was turned over. Central section was like gym,  
454 which was used as sort of an auditorium and a gym. There  
was a huge playground, and our kids were always unhappy  
456 because the German children were out earlier; but then  
they went out and did all of their- sports activities  
458 were not sponsored by the school. They were sort of  
460 separate From the school, and they always had loads of  
homework to take home.

EH: The German children did? What grades did you teach?

46E JM: I had fourth grade one year and fifth grade two years.  
A couple of times, I went into some of the German class  
464 rooms for one reason or another. If I entered as a  
stranger, or guest, the children immediately stood by  
466 their desks until the teacher signalled they could sit.  
One time I was in there talking to the teacher, and she  
460 had said they could sit. The Priest came in and  
immediately they were all standing again- and stood,  
470 perfectly quiet, next to their chairs until they were  
given permission to sit down. And again, the teacher's  
47S desk was on a platform, probably about that high. So,  
it was quite different. That was  
interesting.

*EH: Jessie, you said something about military trains.*

*Tell us about it.*

JM: They had the field trains going into Vienna and into Berlin, and they had the checkpoints that you had to go through. It was going through the Russian zone because of the country's partition, and you had to go through the Russians' in order to get into Berlin from any of the areas. You could go by flying, but that wasn't always possible. So if you wanted to go to Berlin, you usually went by train; but it was the long way because you had to



484 go through the checkpoint, then you had to go down into  
Frankfort and then back into Munich.

4B6 One Thanksgiving we Flew into Berlin, and the weather got  
bad. We were a little delayed because it was a Berlin  
488 airlift period of time and they had a number of refugees.  
They were trying to Fly them out, and we were overloaded  
480 with baby buggies and one thing or another. As we went  
up, they decided they couldn't maneuver well enough to  
43E get past the Russian area by flying the particular flyway  
they were supposed to, so they turned around and came  
434 back. We were grounded. This was as we were coming back  
on Sunday afternoon, and we were grounded. Then we tried  
436 to get out on the military train, but that was booked  
solid for a Sunday night; so we couldn't go out until  
438 Monday night.

The trains, of course, go into Berlin and into Uienna.

500 You got on, and there was military personnel- M P 's, and  
you had to keep your windows down once you got into the  
50E Russian zone (keep your curtains down) and not look out  
until you got through this particular zone. Uienna was  
504 the same way. You were limited in some of the areas  
where you could go. As a civilian, you had more Freedom  
506 than the military people did because they were much more  
strict with them.

508 One weekend we had gone down to Uienna, and a bunch had  
met at one of the Hungarian places for dinner. One of

510 the women in our group was studying For opera. She was  
an American teacher, but she had decided she wanted to  
51S study. One way she could do it was to take "housemother"  
For the high school. Then she had time oFF on her  
514 weekends and her daytimes to take her lessons.  
Anyhow, we were encouraging her to sing. We were in sort  
515 oF a little separate alcove, and we got started. She was  
singing some popular songs. Her voice carried, and  
510 pretty soon we had everybody in the place applauding.  
All the kitchen staFF came out and stood around and  
520 listened to us- or to her; because we sang once-in-a-  
while, but she was really the star. So we spread some  
500 good will that night.  
They were pleased, but going back on the train Sunday  
504 night, a bunch were sitting together and chatting and  
didn 't realize when we pulled out aF the station that we  
505 had gone into the Russian zone. The M P 's came by and  
demanded that we pull the curtains and keep them pulled  
500 until we got out oF the Russian zone.  
I can always remember the changing oF the guard in  
530 Berlin, when the various nations would take over For a  
month; be in control For a month. Not too Far From our  
530 hotel were the Russians, and they had warned us not to  
take any pictures oF the guards and so on. Some girls  
534 did, and it happened to be that weekend there were three  
oF us. We were walking into our hotel and the guard at

536 the door said, 'Are you the ones that they 're looking  
For?" Ule said, 'Uiha?" They had gone over and walked up  
538 close of the guards and taken pictures of them in the  
hotel doorway, and the guards had knocked the cameras and  
540 everything down and confiscated them; and of course,  
reported it as an incident. It got tricky sometimes,  
542 where you could go and where you couldn't.

EH: When I drove to Uienna, we could see the Russian zone.  
544 However, we had to check in at a point. Then, if I  
remember the distance, it was about one hundred miles.  
546 If we weren 't there in two-three hours, they came to look

For us. At no time did I stop. We were not to go to the  
548 ladies' room or make any stops of any sort enroute to  
Uienna.

550 JM: There were incidents, things that happened to friends.  
More annoying incidents than anything serious and they  
552 were sort accustomed to them; to shrug them off from time  
to time.

554 EH: Did they take the film out of your camera that day?

JM: They didn 't do mine. There were three other girls that  
556 were involved.

EH: But do you remember? Did they take the film out?

55B JM: I imagine they did- and confiscated the Film because that  
was customary; and there would be the little diplomatic  
SSO deal, you know, with somebody invaded. The privacy type  
of thing and annoyances, more than anything else.

568 EH: I think this was common, for us to take pictures. I  
c a n 't remember whether I did or not,  
564 but in Uienna, I took a tour of the Russian  
zone.

5BS JM: In Berlin we went out, but it wasn 't difficult. I still  
have pictures in Berlin of the bunker; Hitler's bunker  
56B that was blown up before they had destroyed it. You  
know, just as it had been left and with some of the  
570 grass. We went through that area and had no difficulty. I  
know that night, we had tickets for the opera. We got a  
57E cab and we asked for the opera and he said, "Do you want  
to go to East Berlin or West Berlin?" We said, 'Well,  
574 our tickets are For West Berlin.'" He said, 'They have  
better opera in East Berlin. You should go there."  
57B CLaughter) Under the circumstances, we weren 't about  
to, but it wasn 't the difficulty- getting back and forth.  
57B You could do it, but you had to check and have your  
papers verified. We did take a military bus across  
5B0 because they were offering tours. We had taken that  
tour, and we weren 't stopped or anything; and we did get  
off and take pictures.

502       EH:   UJas there a great deal of devastation in   Berlin?

      JM:   Yes.   Especially in the Eastern   Sector.

5B4       EH:   In the Eastern Sector:   Did Berlin seem more   austere to  
          you than Munich?

506       JM:   Yes, very much so.   I think there uias a tenseness; of  
          course, that was that period of the   Korean War, when I  
500       was there.   The flyway, where you could have the three  
          paths coming in and out, and they had the   airlift into  
500       Berlin in that period— and it was a   little tricky.

          The refugees could not go out by train because if  
502       they went out by German train,                               they  
          would be picked up.   For some reason,                   I guess,  
504       Cl don 't know) they couldn't ride the  
          military train, so they flew them out so they   would  
          not have to go through the Russian   Sector.  
506

      EH:   Now, my German friends are from— Dr. Uogel is from  
500       Berlin— and they got out of there; he and his  
          mother. He said there were ways for them to   escape.

600       JM:   Yes, there probably were, but at that time the Germans  
          could go back and forth between East and West Berlin. There  
602       was no problem.               Not like it is now.   I suppose  
          they had to have papers to show, but a lot of the G I 's  
604       would fall asleep on the train— streetcar type of thing,

yo                    u know.        Sometimes they would wake up and they would  
be

in there. Then there would be this little incident. I  
BOB guess this happened regularly and nobody seemed to be too  
excited about it.

BOB EH: I never did get into the Russian zone by streetcar in  
Uienna. We were just across the Danube From the Russian  
BIO zone, but it would be very easy to go across there on the  
streetcar.

B1E JM: We did. We went over, and we took the Ferris Wheel ride.  
614 'The Third Man' was the movie that was popular, and we  
saw the place where that had been Filmed and went to some  
oF the places.

BIB We also decided we would go over into Prater, which is  
kind oF an amusement park area. We rode the Ferris  
B18 Wheel, which is prominent in the Film. But we were glad  
to get out. I think it was very comFortable to get out.

BEO As civilians, I think there wasn 't much point For the  
Russians to Fuss at civilians. You know, it would be  
BEE more meaningFul to Fuss at someone who is in the  
military .

6E4 EH: Yet, it could have been an incident where the American  
Consolate would have had to get you iF the Russians held  
BEB you; and they could hold you.

JM: You didn 't think quite that much about it as a civilian.  
BE8 We had more leeway.

630 I 'll always remember, even in Uienna back then- the  
pastries.

EH: They were rich.

63E JM: Oh, they were marvelous. Seemingly, everybody- and I  
noticed that in Bermany, too,- everything in the  
634 afternoon. It didn 't matter how much it cost. People  
would stop and have coffee and something with schlag in  
636 between, in the afternoon, and get a pastry. They were  
terribly expensive. It would be the equivalent of five  
63B dollars almost, because I can remember some of the  
pastries in Bermany being marked about four marks  
640 seventy-five, and their coffee was always expensive.  
With the tip, that would be rather an expensive  
64E refreshment. The Germans weren 't making that much,  
actually .

644 EH: Do you remember what your salary was then? And what a  
German would be making?

646 JM: I c a n 't remember. I tried to look it up- what I was  
getting, and I couldn't find it. I have no idea. I  
648 would say that was the standard-

EH: Around four or five thousand, wasn 't it a year?



650 J M I d o n 't think it was that much when I went over in '50.  
I think probably, it was closer to less than three  
652 thousand when I went over.

EH: But you did have your room Free.

654 JM: Yes. Our meals were our own, but we did have—

EH: You had the advantage of going to the hotels, didn 't  
656 At about two dollars a night?

Jf1: Yes, or a dollar; going down to Garmisch for skiing or  
658 something. Weekends, you could get by at any of the  
better places for— with meals and everything— about ten  
660 dollars for the weekend. Because you could give about  
seventy-five cents For the RTO 's, which was the military

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ra           at at the   military depot part, but it was inexpensive.

il                 It was a way of getting beautiful recreation.

ro                 Ski lessons for twenty-five cents, I remember.

ad  
ti   EH:   That would be one mark back in that   time.

ck   JM:   Yes, that would be about a   mark.

et           Anyhow, things that I remember: My first Christmas  
.           that I was there,   I did go to Egypt;   and the trip  
Yo           included Jerusalem, which was really what           I  
u           wanted to do- the old part of Jerusalem, which was in  
go           Jordan at that   time.

t           When we flew from Egypt   into Jordan, we had to go way  
th

674 south and back because we could not cross the Israeli  
territories. The war had stopped at that point, but it  
was still very evident, and the older part of Jordan had  
676 tank traps still. When you went around some places, you  
had to watch that, and they had the barbed wire dividing  
67B the new city from the old city. Since most of us in the  
group were more interested in the old city, the historic  
600 part-- and we couldn't go back and forth between the two  
countries-- when that choice was made, we took the trip  
682 that would include the old part.

I think I got Just a bit of a feeling that is evidenced  
6B4 recently in some of the problems and why there has been  
some real serious problems since that time. The feelings  
686 from the Palastinians; and I was invited to a Palastinian  
home of some people who were refugees, and of course,  
608 they were quite bitter. They had hopes of going back and  
were resentful. They had been quite well-off and now  
630 were not too well-off, although they were in this home.  
We went out in the countryside, and when we went in, I  
682 couldn't see. It was so dark. They were being polite,  
and we were in this room which would be a living room,  
684 and there was no heat. I was freezing. I was so cold  
and finally they said, after we had gone through some  
696 formalities, 'Would you like to come into where it's  
warmer into the kitchen?' I was so grateful. We had a  
698 lovely evening. I enjoyed it very much, but I think it

700 gave me some understanding of some of the bitterness that  
some of the groups have and why it 's so difficult to even  
702 talk of peace and try peace. Because of all the little  
bit that I got that evening and the little bit of the few  
704 days that I was there, that I saw and heard; you could  
understand why there is going to be a great deal of  
difficulty ever even thinking that there 's going to be a  
706 lasting peace there.

70B EH: Thank you, Jessie. Jessie, you didn 't tell us why  
you came home. You were there three years.

JM: Well, I had come to the point. At three years, you are going  
710 to have to make a decision. You are either going to have  
to stay with the idea of making that work a  
712 career, or coming home and picking up things; because it  
would be too long to be gone much— I mean, you would lose  
714 your ties at home for career possibilities, and I was  
needed at home. My father had become ill. Weighing  
716 things out, I decided my wisest choice would be to come  
home and reestablish myself here and do what I could at  
718 my home.

EH: Did you come home each summer?

720 JM: No, I taught summer school the first year. The third  
year I travelled until I did come home.

722       EH:   I see.   You stayed two summers in Europe.   You had been  
away a total of three years before you came back? That  
724       was a long time.

JM:   I had three teaching years.

726       EH:   Were you lonesome for the United States?

JM:   No, I don't think so.

72B       EH:   I was terribly lonesome for it.

JM:   I missed certain things, of course, but I have been very  
730       fortunate (maybe) that when I 'm with some place or  
something; something that 's finished or done with, or  
732       I 've made a decision; then that 's it, and it doesn 't  
bother me. I don 't get nostalgic about whether I should  
734       have or I shouldn't have, and I missed my parents. That  
was my first Christmas away from home. I had always  
736       managed to get home, if only for twenty-four hours. I  
couldn 't do it very well, and I think the last Christmas  
738       I was there we went skiing in Switzerland. We went for a  
week

740       EH:   St. Moritz, perchance?

JM:   Oh, I was there too. No, it was at Klosters, but there  
742       was a hotel that name. It was on the Swiss plan, which

744 was one of those military Cthe helping the Swiss get back  
on their feet as Far as hotel business was concerned?, so  
it was a very inexpensive way to do this at a very lovely  
748 hotel.

74S We had the week there. Christmas Eve we had dinner. The  
dining room was off sort of a mezzanine, and as you came  
748 out, they had placed about a two story tree in the center  
of the lobby, which came up over the mezzanine part; and  
750 you still had to look up. It was lit with candles, and I  
was homesick. That was the first time I could really and  
758 truly say in the years that I was gone that I was  
homesick. I had always been able to be busy at that  
754 time, but that was the last straw. I don 't think I have  
ever seen a more beautiful tree, except some that my  
756 grandmother had with candles. Here it was dark and then  
all this huge tree. It was Just loaded with candles.  
758

EH: People came in and lit them by hand?

760 JM: Well, they hand fixed them, you know, so they reached--  
but it was lovely. I think that 's it.

768 EH: And y o u 're back in Lansing? You went back to your  
old school?

764 JM: I went back my same town but into a brand-new school that  
had been Just built while I had been gone.

7SB            EH:    Did you teach in East Lansing before you       left?

**JM: Y e s .**

768 EH: And you came back to East Lansing.

*JM: I came back to East Lansing.*

770           EH:   You were originally From Grand Rapids, w e r e   you?  
                  n 't

*JM: Right. I was born in Grand Rapids.*

772           EH:   Well, thank you.

*Lansing, Michigan*