

**Interview of Etta Goff on her time
as a teacher in Germany following WWII**

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...League, interviewing Etta Goff from Lansing. Etta may be located at 323 North Walnut, Apartment 412, Lansing, Michigan, 48933. This is March 26th, 1984. Go ahead, Etta.

[inaudible 0:26] talk right in. In 1946, when Grace and Connie went to Germany, I so wanted to go but my mother was ill and I couldn't leave her.

[0:38] Etta, who Grace?

Grace Van Wert.

Okay.

Then, in 1955, I read in the State Journal that they needed teachers in Germany, and I thought perhaps this might be my chance. I talked to Ms. [inaudible 0:54], our elementary director, and asked if she thought I was too old to go, and she said she never thought of me as being old and to go ahead.

[1:04] Etta, Etta, uh, how old were you? May I ask?

Fifty-two. I went to Ann Arbor to interview with a representative, and she assured me if I could pass the physicals, there would be a place for me. I passed with flying colors and then came my shots. The doctor put 4 shots in my arm and I told – and told me to go home and go to bed. I told him I couldn't as I had my church circle dinner meeting that night, and he said by that time he thought I would be a sick little cookie. [laughter] I went home and took his advice but I was up and down all afternoon, and about 5:30, I called a friend and asked her if I got sick at the dinner if she would drive my car home and she refused, so we took a cab. My arm felt like a bl – big block of wood, but I was okay and friends brought us home.

On August 16th, all decked out with 2 beautiful corsages, my family and friends came to the depot to see me off to Detroit where I was met by an uncle and 2 cousins with another corsage. I refused their dinner invitation as I thought I might meet the girl from Grand Rapids and the 2 from Detroit in the diner. In the diner, I was the only lady but as I left, I saw 3 girls sitting alone and I asked them if they were on their way to teach in Germany, and there were my 3. In the morning, they drew [cuts 2:47] to

1 see who would wear 2 of my corsages. [laughter] That day was my
2 birthday and when I thought I was alone, I opened a gift and some cards
3 and they caught me. That night, we went to Walgreens so a girl from
4 Chicago who'd, who had joined our group could make a call and while
5 there, they did some shopping. On the way back, one of the girls asked if
6 after I had had my bath, she could come down and I said yes. When I
7 opened the door, there were all 4 with ice cream, cupcakes with candles,
8 and all. They presented me with gifts of gum, Kleenex, and other goodies
9 they'd bought at Walgreens. [laughter]
10
11Elsie Hornbacher: [3:34] Those were welcome when you got overseas, too, weren't they?
12 [laughter]
13
14Etta Goff: They did come in handy once or twice. [laughter] We took several trips in
15 New York, and when our call for departure came, we saw the old
16 [Seabourn and Western 3:46] patched up with everything from Scotch
17 Tape to chewing gum. Before we got to [Gander 3:53], one of the patches
18 came off and the engine outside my window blazed way up, but in
19 [Gander 4:00], they got us fixed up and away we went landing at Rhine-
20 Main. From there, I went to, uh, the Bayerischer Hof hotel in Heidelberg
21 because our BOQs were not finished. On the second night, I met Maria,
22 with whom I traveled all year, and my principal. My teaching was very
23 much like Lansing, and I enjoyed it very much.
24
25Elsie Hornbacher: [4:27] Uh, Etta, what were some of your first impressions of the school?
26
27Etta Goff: Uh. The school was brand new, and we had, uh, uh, the books and
28 everything to, uh, unpack and put away and as far as the building was
29 concerned, that was very much like a, a, 1-room building, you know.
30
31Elsie Hornbacher: Oh, in the United States?
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33Etta Goff: In the United States.
34
35Elsie Hornbacher: [4:52] Even, e – the building was brand new?
36
37Etta Goff: Yes.
38
39Elsie Hornbacher: [4:55] They had erected it for a school. Now, had there been a school
40 there the year before?
41
42Etta Goff: No. No.
43
44Elsie Hornbacher: Oh. This...

1
2Etta Goff: This was at Patrick Henry Village.
3
4Elsie Hornbacher: Patrick Henry Village.
5
6Etta Goff: And, uh, the BOQs were not ready.
7
8Elsie Hornbacher: I see.
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10Etta Goff: And, uh, the – a chapel wasn't built.
11
12Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm. [5:12] Some people don't know what a BOQ is. What is it?
13
14Etta Goff: Uh. Bachelor Officers' Quarters.
15
16Elsie Hornbacher: Oh. Bachelor Officers' Quarters. They weren't ready. Well, then, uh,
17 there were some, um, uh, parents over there already.
18
19Etta Goff: Yes. The, uh, parents were in their BOQs and homes. Some of the higher
20 officers had small homes there.
21
22Elsie Hornbacher: I see. [5:35] German homes?
23
24Etta Goff: Uh, yes.
25
26Elsie Hornbacher: Uh-huh. Apartments.
27
28Etta Goff: Apartments.
29
30Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm.
31
32Etta Goff: Every weekend, we went someplace. At Thanksgiving, we went to Paris.
33 At Christmas, we went to Italy. And at Easter, we went to the Holy Land.
34 When school was out in June, we toured Scandinavia, Scotland, England,
35 France, Spain, and Zermatt, Switzerland to see the Matterhorn. Maria and
36 I came home by boat going through the hurricane Betsy. Then, home
37 sweet home at [1207 Cleo 6:14].
38
39Elsie Hornbacher: [6:18] Uh, Etta, what was Ger – uh, was your relationship with the
40 German people?
41
42Etta Goff: They were always very courteous, very friendly. Never once did I ever
43 hear them say, "Yank, go home."
44

1Elsie Hornbacher: Uh, you didn't even have a German name.
2

3Etta Goff: I had an advantage over there. Uh. I would say – uh, they would say to
4 me, [sie haben ein Deutscher namen 6:41], and I would say, [ja, ja, ich bin
5 alles Deutscher 6:45]. And that immediately put me in their favor. Goff is
6 more or less a good German name, too.
7

8Elsie Hornbacher: Oh, is it?
9

10Etta Goff: No, but it's not as well-known as your name.
11

12Elsie Hornbacher: Oh. Well, that would help.
13

14Etta Goff: Go ahead.
15

16Elsie Hornbacher: [7:01] Uh, now, you mentioned something about the gum earlier.
17

18Etta Goff: Yes. Uh, when I – uh, when we were going to, uh, West Berlin, we found
19 that one of the girls that was going with our group had one number wrong
20 on her, uh, ...
21

22Elsie Hornbacher: Gray pass [inaudible 7:20].
23

24Etta Goff: ...her free pass.
25

26Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm.
27

28Etta Goff: And she had to go and have that taken care of, and we said we would wait
29 for her. Well, our train waited for 10 minutes for her to get back, but she
30 didn't get back in time and that train went away. There was a young
31 captain there who said to us, "If you girls would like to spend a little extra
32 money, I can get you on that train." So, he said, uh, "Take this train to
33 [Gothenburg 7:51] and, uh, there, you can get on the other train." So, uh,
34 we were put – I was put in a booth with, uh, a German family; a father and
35 mother and 2 little youngsters, they were twins and darling children. And,
36 uh, uh, I finally asked the father if the children had ever had gum, and he
37 said no. So, I gave them some gum that I had gotten at my birthday party.
38 And, uh, we visited and visited and the children chewed their gum and
39 finally Mother wanted them to, uh, have some lun – uh, supper. And, uh,
40 they didn't want to give up their gum, but I told the father to tell them that
41 they could have new gum if they would give that to Mother, which they
42 did.
43

1 And, uh, the father, uh, spoke such beautiful English and finally I said to
2 him, "Where did you learn your English?" And he said, "Uh, for 6
3 months, I was a, a prisoner of war in the United States." And he told me
4 that the first part of that time he was in Texas and then he was transferred
5 to New York, and we had such a good visit about things and then I said to
6 him, "What kind of treatment did you get as a prisoner of war?" And he
7 said, "Oh, they were always so nice to me." And when it was time for me
8 to get off from the train, he said, "Now, you take this little bag." And he
9 says, "I'll take your 2 bags and I'll take them over to the other train,"
10 which he did. So, it shows that if you are friendly with them, they will be
11 friendly back with you.
12

13Elsie Hornbacher: Uh, Etta, when I was in, um, uh, Japan in 1949, we were advised not to be
14 friendly with the Japanese – uh, not to, uh, socialize with the Japanese
15 people. Uh, by 1952, it was perfectly permissible, and at no time were we
16 uh, uh, were punished or uh, ostracized for, uh, our Japanese contacts, but
17 it was, was not advisable. [10:12] Now, what year is this again?
18

19Etta Goff: '55 and '56.
20

21Elsie Hornbacher: [10:16] In '55 and '56, the Germans were actually taking Americans into
22 their home in order to make them, uh, comfortable in Germany by that
23 time.
24

25Etta Goff: Much more so, yes.
26

27Elsie Hornbacher: I, uh, in fact, uh, fraternization was welcome to them.
28

29Etta Goff: Right.
30

31Elsie Hornbacher: But in the early days, I'm quite sure it was not. [10:37] Um, you
32 commented that Heidelberg had not been, um, bombed.
33

34Etta Goff: No. There was no sign of any bombing in Heidelberg, but we had to go
35 about 20 miles to Mannheim to see any bombing.
36

37Elsie Hornbacher: At all.
38

39Etta Goff: At all.
40

41Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm. [10:55] You said you got into, uh, West Berlin?
42

43Etta Goff: Right.
44

1Elsie Hornbacher: [10:59] And, uh, what was it like there?
2
3Etta Goff: And we got into East Berlin...
4
5Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm.
6
7Etta Goff: ...on a bus.
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9Elsie Hornbacher: On a bus.
10
11Etta Goff: And we were, uh, amazed to see so many of the stores in East Berlin with
12 beautiful things in the windows but we were told by our guide that outside
13 – uh, inside of the windows, there was nothing in those stores.
14
15Elsie Hornbacher: Oh, they just were a showcase?
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17Etta Goff: They were just for show.
18
19Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm. Um. [11:36] Etta, what did you do, uh, prior to going overseas?
20
21Etta Goff: I had taught in Lansing, uh, for – oh dear, how many years?
22
23Elsie Hornbacher: It's not so important. [laughter]
24
25Etta Goff: For several years. [laughter] For, uh, a long time.
26
27Elsie Hornbacher: Alright. [11:53] And how many – what did you teach in Lansing?
28
29Etta Goff: I taught 1st grade.
30
31Elsie Hornbacher: [11:56] And what did you teach in Germany?
32
33Etta Goff: I taught the same books in Germany that I taught in Lansing with the – uh,
34 and when I went over, there was one little book that I wanted and they
35 didn't have it there, so I asked my principal and she said, "Etta, if you
36 want it, you can have it." So, she ordered it and when she looked over –
37 uh, looked it through, she said, "Oh, I'm so glad you asked for that book."
38 She says, "I think that's the funniest little, uh, book that I have had in, uh,
39 teaching."
40
41Elsie Hornbacher: [12:28] Who was your principal, Etta?
42
43Etta Goff: My principal was, uh, Ruby Anderson, and she was a dear. She was
44 always so fair, so lovely. She had a car. If there was any time that we

1 needed to go to, uh, the hospital or anyplace, her car was right there to
2 take us. She didn't like to drive, so she took – uh, had another teacher
3 there who did like to drive and was from Hutchinson, Kansas, also. Uh,
4 and Iris always did the driving for Ruby.
5
6Elsie Hornbacher: [13:08] What kind of a car did she have? An American car or a
7 European?
8
9Etta Goff: Uh, she had a European car.
10
11Elsie Hornbacher: I see. Mm-hm. [13:16] Uh, Etta, what was your pay when you went
12 overseas? Do you happen to remember? Did you take a loss or a gain?
13
14Etta Goff: I, I don't remember what the pay was, but I – uh, if I remember right, it, it
15 was around \$900 less in Germany than it was here. But I was – be – uh,
16 glad to give that up for the experience of going to Germany.
17
18Elsie Hornbacher: [13:39] That was teaching in the dependents' schools.
19
20Etta Goff: That's right.
21
22Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm. [13:43] Um. What was the nature of your housing?
23
24Etta Goff: Uh. We were, we were in BOQs and, uh, by BOQ, I think I said, it was,
25 uh, Bachelor Army Quarters. And I was just about a block from the
26 schoolhouse and, uh, uh, I had to share my bathroom with another, uh,
27 person. She was not a teacher, she was, uh, a secretary.
28
29Elsie Hornbacher: [14:14] Did you have, uh, a room alone?
30
31Etta Goff: I had a room alone, and when I first went into the BOQ when it was – uh,
32 my room was finished, uh, so that I could get in. Uh, I went over one
33 noon to look and see what it looked like and, uh, I found the – an ugly
34 green chair in my room; it was very worn and it wasn't pretty at all, and as
35 I went by where some men were working, there was another chair that I
36 really took quite a liking to so I said to them, "Would you trade those
37 chairs? Bring that chair into my room and take the green one and put it in
38 that room?" They said, "Sure." So, I took the chair and, uh, uh, had it in
39 my, uh, my room. Then later on, our, uh, [inaudible 15:13], uh, which is –
40 was our American, uh, housekeeper, uh, saw a chair that she – [just match
41 15:26] ...
42
43Elsie Hornbacher: [inaudible 15:26] Excuse me, she was a German housekeeper for the
44 Americans?

1
2Etta Goff: She was a German housekeeper.
3
4Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm.
5
6Etta Goff: And, uh, uh, she, uh, uh, saw another chair that matched the little chair
7 that I had in my room and unbeknownst to me, I came home at night and
8 found that other chair in my room, so I said to her, uh, “How do I get this
9 chair?” And she said, “Well, you do quite a bit of entertaining in here and
10 I thought you needed an extra chair, so I gave it to her.” I shouldn’t tell
11 this, but, uh, uh, coffee was so rare in Germany, we weren’t supposed to
12 give them coffee, but I did give her a little bottle of instant Maxwell
13 House and she was very appreciative of it.
14
15Elsie Hornbacher: [16:21] Uh, did the, uh, housekeeper tell you anything about herself?
16
17Etta Goff: No. No. She, uh, told us very little. I – uh, she did say that they had a
18 hard time, uh, uh, buying things and doing things, and I had a cape made
19 from a fur coat before I left, uh, the United States and I took that with me
20 and, uh, she always admired that, uh, cape, so when I left, I gave her the
21 cape and she just broke down and cried about it; she was just that happy.
22
23Elsie Hornbacher: [17:00] Mm-hm. Was she married?
24
25Etta Goff: Uh, I think so, but I don’t know.
26
27Elsie Hornbacher: I see. She was quite, uh, reserved...
28
29Etta Goff: Yes.
30
31Elsie Hornbacher: ...of her own personal life.
32
33Etta Goff: Yes.
34
35Elsie Hornbacher: Sometimes they...
36
37Etta Goff: At, at night, she went – always went home when her work was over, but
38 now, what home was, I don’t know.
39
40Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm. [17:16] Was your room in a hotel or was it in, um, another kind
41 of a building?
42
43Etta Goff: It was, uh, ju – uh, just a building full of just rooms and bath.
44

1Elsie Hornbacher: I see.
2
3Etta Goff: It was a big building.
4
5Elsie Hornbacher: [17:33] Did you have hot water?
6
7Etta Goff: Yes.
8
9Elsie Hornbacher: [17:35] This was not common for the Germans at that time.
10
11Etta Goff: No, I presume not.
12
13Elsie Hornbacher: Mm-hm. Um. [17:42] What did you do after your service was
14 concluded?
15
16Etta Goff: Uh, I came back to Lansing.
17
18Elsie Hornbacher: [17:49] And you...?
19
20Etta Goff: Uh, uh, to teach. And when I first came back, at the first party in the fall,
21 uh, I had received, uh, a welcoming letter from the superintendant of
22 schools in Lansing and from, uh, the, uh, mayor's office, and, uh, uh, one
23 or two others welcoming me ba – uh, to Lansing as a new teacher.
24 [laughter] So, at the first party, they were giving the new teachers a rose or
25 a carnation, I don't remember which it was. So, I put one in my – on my
26 coat and people said to me, "Etta Goff, what are you doing with that?
27 [laughter] You're in Lansing after all these years!" And I said, "Well, I
28 was welcomed as a new teacher, so I thought I might just as well be a new
29 teacher." [laughter]
30
31Elsie Hornbacher: And you're back home from where you started.
32
33Etta Goff: That's right.
34
35Elsie Hornbacher: This has been a delight interviewing you, Etta.
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37
38/ad