

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 [1986], 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

2 East Lansing, MI

Note: Elsie Hornbacher is interviewing Jessie Melis. Jessie  
4 lives at 1400 Old Canton Lane, East Lansing, MI 48823.  
Her telephone number is 332-6930, and the area code is  
6 517. Jessie is being interviewed for the Lansing Unit of  
the Womens' Overseas Service League.

8 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.

12 EH: Munich, Germany? How long were you overseas?

JM: Three years.

14 EH: Oh, three!

JM: And stayed the entire time in Munich.

16 EH: Then what prompted you to go overseas?

JM: During the war period, I tried to join the WAVE'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 recruiting

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

EH: How close were these relatives in Holland? Were they  
28 cousins, or--?

JM: 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  
32 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  
36 that time; some of the results of the devastation that  
had happened during the war period.

38 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  
66 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  
194-?

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.

76           EH: Jessie, before you go on with this Oberammergau play, do  
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.

80           EH: In 1951 or '52, they had a bear--I would say, that was  
about 60-70 feet tall--and he hollered, "Leav-en-brau!":  
His mouth would open?!

82           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 don'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?

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

92 JM: Yes, well, it was. It had rides, and you could do things  
and of course, the chicken; the specialized chicken--the  
94 broiled chicken kind of thing on the spits: And lots and  
lots of beer. Every brewery in Munich--I think there are  
96 seven--had a big tent, and the place was mobbed.

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

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

EH: (German expression)?

104 JM: Yes! (Laughter)

EH: (German singing) Remember that?

106 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  
110 was so packed. There were so few places to sit or stand.  
Anyhow, we were invited with this group, which was fun  
112 because you felt not quite so much as an outsider.

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

JM: The two big things I noticed when that was true was the  
124 Octoberfest; and then "Fasching," when all the barriers  
were down. You would go with a husband or a date or  
126 whatever, and it was understood that you would not stay  
with those people necessarily. That you would go with  
128 anyone who came up and asked you to dance, which was very  
different from our social customs.  
130

EK: 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.  
140 That was probably my favorite. We went to a number of  
parties and you could rent costumes or you could concoct  
142 you own.

I remember going on a date with somebody to one of the  
144 hotels in Munich. Somebody came up and asked me, and he  
said goodbye and sort of left me, and he said, "I'll see  
146 you in such and such a spot at three o'clock," or  
whatever time the party was to break up. So I went with  
148 this young man whom I had never seen before. We went to  
about three of the areas where they danced and had  
150 different types of music (whichever one you wanted, you  
could do); drank Champagne, and at the time he brought me  
152 back, and my date dropped his date again and we went  
home. (Laughter) But it is; everybody joins in and it  
154 didn't matter. Your social position really and truly did  
not count. You just met, and somebody was attracted to  
156 you, and you could not--you could not refuse because it

was considered a sort of an insult. That was true  
158 whether you were married or not, so I guess anything  
could happen. It's said that very many babies resulted  
160 nine months after the Fasching season, and that sort of  
thing; but it was lots and lots of fun.

162 They have this terrific parade. I have scads of slides  
of the parade. One of the Germans invited me to go where  
164 there was a building and the parade. It was a narrow  
area, and it would come through a narrow street. It  
166 would be on a second floor. I had an unobstructed view  
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  
170 satirical; some of them poke fun at the political. One  
of them, I remember, poked fun at the Americans for  
172 chlorating the water when that was spoiling the beer.  
(Laughter) You know, things of that sort.

174 It was a long parade. It was about two and one-half  
hours, I guess, as I remember--and everybody in costume.

176 Then of course, all of the various sections had their own  
wagon or their own group, and then they had the different  
178 costumes. Women who participate in that cannot cut their  
hair because they need the braids for this particular  
180 thing. They keep their hair long. They don't cut it  
during that period of time. So those were two

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

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

186 JM: Well, the [McGraw] Kaserne was BLQ's and they were like a  
series of row apartments, such as they have in Europe.

188 We were on the second floor.

EH: Did you have an apartment?

190 JM: Yes.

EH: How many people in the apartment?

192 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?

JM: Yes; we had just nominal cost, but we had pretty good  
196 meals, and we got almost all three because we didn't  
cook. We didn't have facilities in that particular  
198 apartment, so we didn't have the facility to cook.  
Besides, we didn't have commissary privileges. So, that  
200 meant either buying on the German market--which we got  
the [chloride compound], you know, sterilized the  
202 vegetables--if we bought anything like fresh fruit; and

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

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

208 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  
210 time. During the Reich period.

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

212 JM: Yes, and then there was a kitchen and bathroom. It was a  
complete apartment, except that we didn't have a stove  
214 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  
216 of the time we just ate right across the street--so it  
was simple.

218 We were forced to move out of that apartment because the  
order had come to integrate various groups. The WAC (the  
220 colored WAC) detachment was outside the Kaserne. Our  
building was next to the WAC detachment, so we were  
222 forced to move because they were going to do some  
intermixing of the two groups, and we were to make way  
224 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 (out). 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

270 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. We 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.

294 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;  
296 so we really shouldn't eat too much in the restaurants.  
As time went on, that changed again and you went to the  
298 restaurants more and more.

300 EH: I would say that in 1953-54, when I was in Austria, there  
was no problem of eating on the Austrian or German  
market; as I remember, travelling in Germany.

302 JM: No, by the time I went home in 1953, 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  
308 never had any problems there; where I had with some  
others, when I was travelling.

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



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

EH: Did you ever buy a pair?

320 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  
322 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  
324 could buy shoes over there because I just couldn't get a  
fit. There were shoes available, and there were lovely  
326 leather purses. They were good shoes, and my roommate  
happened to have a foot that would fit the sizes so she  
328 could buy them, and she did.

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

JM: Right, yes. No, I can't say they were antagonistic, but  
332 I ran into some feelings at different places: Those who  
had been a Nazi die-hard group.  
334 I was teaching summer school in Augsburg, and I had gone  
up to visit a friend who was teaching summer school in  
336 Giessen, which was a staging area at that time. Her  
helper was a young German boy (young man). They were  
338 trying to hire a lot of the Germans; trying to sort of  
indoctrinate the democracy bit, and he was hired. I  
340 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  
curfew. All of the Americans had to leave; officers and  
346 enlisted men, or anyone in uniform. As civilians, we  
were not under those restrictions, so we didn't have any  
348 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 it'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  
356 "Oh?" 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 who 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 don't know that all of them went to the States, but at  
388 least, they were given some training somewhere. I'm hazy  
on the details now. This was thirty years ago, and I'm  
390 sort of hazy on some of these details.

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

394           JM: Is that recent?

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

406           JM: There is a difference, too. One of our German teachers  
(they came in and they worked, and they were to teach  
408           German, and they did some other things too) but the one  
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,  
412           would come and shake hands and curtsy on the street.  
Which, I couldn't imagine most of our children curtsying  
414           to a teacher, but they did and they were very prim and

proper, but evidently thought a great deal of her because  
416 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, or do  
you think just this one teacher?

420 JM: I don't know. That was my only experience with it, so I  
don'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 it's a nice thing. We did  
this too, but it was strange. I think a lot of the  
430 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?

JM: Well, the school where I first taught was a German  
438 school, and it was two stories. It was sort of an H,  
without an extra extension of the wings. Some of the  
440 upper grades, when I was there, were on one side. Then,  
the lower grades were in another section. The first room  
442 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  
separate from the school, and they always had loads of  
460 homework to take home.

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

462 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  
468 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  
472 desk was on a platform, probably about that high. So, it  
was quite different. That was interesting.

474 EH: Jessie, you said something about military trains. Tell  
us about it.

476 JM: They had the field trains going into Vienna and into  
Berlin, and they had the checkpoints that you had to go  
478 through. It was going through the Russian zone because  
of the country's partition, and you had to go through the  
480 Russians' in order to get into Berlin from any of the  
areas. You could go by flying, but that wasn't always  
482 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.

486 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  
490 with baby buggies and one thing or another. As we went  
up, they decided they couldn't maneuver well enough to  
492 get past the Russian area by flying the particular flyway  
they were supposed to, so they turned around and came  
494 back. We were grounded. This was as we were coming back  
on Sunday afternoon, and we were grounded. Then we tried  
496 to get out on the military train, but that was booked  
solid for a Sunday night; so we couldn't go out until  
498 Monday night.

The trains, of course, go into Berlin and into Vienna.  
500 You got on, and there was military personnel--MP's, and  
you had to keep your windows down once you got into the  
502 Russian zone (keep your curtains down) and not look out  
until you got through this particular zone. Vienna 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 Vienna, 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  
512 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  
516 of a little separate alcove, and we got started. She was  
singing some popular songs. Her voice carried, and  
518 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  
522 good will that night.  
They were pleased, but going back on the train Sunday  
524 night, a bunch were sitting together and chatting and  
didn't realize when we pulled out of the station that we  
526 had gone into the Russian zone. The MP's came by and  
demanded that we pull the curtains and keep them pulled  
528 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  
532 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?" We said, "What?" 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 Vienna, 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  
Vienna.

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?

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

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

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

582 EH: Was there a great deal of devastation in Berlin?

JM: Yes. Especially in the Eastern Sector.

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

586 JM: Yes, very much so. I think there was a tenseness; of course, that was that period of the Korean War, when I  
588 was there. The flyway, where you could have the three paths coming in and out, and they had the airlift into  
590 Berlin in that period--and it was a little tricky. The refugees could not go out by train because if they went  
592 out by German train, they would be picked up. For some reason, I guess, (I don't know) they couldn't ride the  
594 military train, so they flew them out so they would not have to go through the Russian Sector.

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

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

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

608 EH: I never did get into the Russian zone by streetcar in  
Vienna. We were just across the Danube from the Russian  
610 zone, but it would be very easy to go across there on the  
streetcar.

612 JM: We did. We went over, and we took the Ferris Wheel ride.  
"The Third Man" was the movie that was popular, and we  
614 saw the place where that had been filmed and went to some  
of the places.

616 We also decided we would go over into Prater, which is  
kind of an amusement park area. We rode the Ferris  
618 Wheel, which is prominent in the film. But we were glad  
to get out. I think it was very comfortable to get out.  
620 As civilians, I think there wasn't much point for the  
Russians to fuss at civilians. You know, it would be  
622 more meaningful to fuss at someone who is in the  
military.

624 EH: Yet, it could have been an incident where the American  
Consulate would have had to get you if the Russians held  
626 you; and they could hold you.

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

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

EK: They were rich.

632 JM: Oh, they were marvelous. Seemingly, everybody--and I  
noticed that in Germany, 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  
638 dollars almost, because I can remember some of the  
pastries in Germany being marked about four marks  
640 seventy-five, and their coffee was always expensive.  
With the tip, that would be rather an expensive  
642 refreshment. The Germans weren't making that much,  
actually.

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

646 JM: I can'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--

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

650 JM: I don'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 you?  
656 At about two dollars a night?

JM: 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  
662 railroad ticket. You got that at the military depot  
part, but it was inexpensive. It was a way of getting  
664 beautiful recreation. Ski lessons for twenty-five cents,  
I remember.

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

JM: Yes, that would be about a mark.  
668 Anyhow, things that I remember: My first Christmas that  
I was there, I did go to Egypt; and the trip included  
670 Jerusalem, which was really what I wanted to do--the old  
part of Jerusalem, which was in Jordan at that time.  
672 When we flew from Egypt into Jordan, we had to go way

south and back because we could not cross the Israeli  
674 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  
678 the new city from the old city. Since most of us in the  
group were more interested in the old city, the historic  
680 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  
684 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,  
688 they were quite bitter. They had hopes of going back and  
were resentful. They had been quite well-off and now  
690 were not too well-off, although they were in this home.  
We went out in the countryside, and when we went in, I  
692 couldn't see. It was so dark. They were being polite,  
and we were in this room which would be a living room,  
694 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  
706 difficulty ever even thinking that there's going to be a  
lasting peace there.

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

JM: Well, I had come to the point. At three years, you are  
710 going 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.

728 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 (the helping the Swiss get back  
on their feet as far as hotel business was concerned), so  
746 it was a very inexpensive way to do this at a very lovely  
hotel.

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

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.

762 EH: And you'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.

766 EH: Did you teach in East Lansing before you left?

JM: Yes.

768 EH: And you came back to East Lansing.

JM: I came back to East Lansing.

770 EH: You were originally from Grand Rapids, weren't you?

JM: Right. I was born in Grand Rapids.

772 EH: Well, thank you.

774 Transcribed by Patricia Siggers  
Lansing, Michigan