

Ann-Katrin Leppin for the Star City Treasures AmeriCorps Oral History Project  
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1015 Claremont Street  
Interviewer: Robyn Kingsley

Robyn: Let's just start at the beginning. What is the first thing you remember about your life?

Ann-Katrin: The first things I remember...I was born in Hamburg, Germany, and lived in Bendestorf, which is like a really nice neighborhood, like all these areas have apartment-like, and we lived in an apartment on the fourth floor. I think the first thing I remember is our hallway which had a staircase which was really nice and we had a balcony and I remember being on the balcony a lot and the playground. That is kind of what I remember. Then I think when I was two years old, my parents tried to adopt another kid, because my mom was very old, she was like 36, no, 34 when she got me and her life was in danger because of her pregnancy and the doctor told her that she couldn't have any other babies because she would probably die or the kid would die or both. They said they wanted to have another kid, they didn't want to have a single child, and so they wanted to adopt a kid. So, we had a little boy living with us for I think 9 or 10 months. His name was Mateas. He had a big nose like a boxer and I was very jealous and always stealing his toys, but I don't remember a lot of him, only a little bit. He was with us for about 10 months but his mom didn't sign the final adoption papers. She wanted him back actually so we had to give him back. I remember that my mom was very sad at that time. So when I was three, all of a sudden we had a call from the government agency for adoptions telling us that there was another kid who would like to come to our family, so my brother came to our family, whose name was Sven and he was 1½ years old, so I must have been 3½ or 4 when he was 2. His mom had already signed all the papers. He came to live with us, which was really great, yet still I was jealous and would steal all his toys. That was kind of first thing that happened in my life, like getting a brother. Then when I was 5½ my parents moved outside of Hamburg because they wanted to give us a more rural neighborhood so we could play outside and they built a house. That was in a forest, which was really great. We had a big forest behind our house and huge play space. It was a very small city, compared to Hamburg at 1,500,000, it was maybe 500 people. It was a big difference. I went to kindergarten before that in Hamburg and had my friends, so I moved there and I had to adjust. Before that I was kind of open and had all these friends, but after that I didn't feel very confident in that place. It was very rich village with movie stars and rich people from Hamburg who had moved outside and they had big houses and they were wealthy city. I remember my first day in kindergarten, we went there and everyone was wearing dresses and I was used to wearing pants and didn't like dressing up, and liked to be kind of like a boy and play wild. And so everybody was wearing blouses and skirts or even actual dresses, very nice and expensive, and I didn't have any of that and I would always go in my Mickey Mouse jogging dress. So they looked at me, "she is kind of an outsider or something," and I looked at them and like "I don't belong here, you are all different." I was very small before that. I was in kindergarten and I think there were four different groups and each group had like 20 kids and there one kindergarten with one group with like 15 kids, so all different you know and it was on our street which was good so it wasn't too far to walk and I went there but I wasn't really happy, I think, I never really wanted to move away from my friends and so that was kind of difficult for me but I found pretty soon like one good friend whom I still know until today. She is still my best friend, her name is Nova and we would always play and hangout together and

there was like a public pool that we would always go to. I learned swimming when I was 5, I think or 4, I always loved that. I went to school there, which was four, like primary school, four classes-one class for each year with like 20 kids so it was very small again until 4<sup>th</sup> grade like, 1<sup>st</sup> til 4<sup>th</sup> went there and then I went to another school because you had to change we had to go to an orientation for 2 years to see in which of the different schools you would go afterwards because there are different levels for like depending on how bright the kid is, they send them to different kinds of schools and so I went to this orientation school and then they told me that I was supposed to go, like they have like three different stages, they have like the broad school which is you go in there and you complete school after nine years and then you do an apprenticeship, which is usually like a craftsman thing and or you go to like a intermediate level then you complete after 10 years and then you do like some type of apprenticeship where you can continue school afterwards and like work in a bank or something , you know? Or you go to something like what we call gymnasium where you go you complete up to 13 years and you have to take a big test in the end and then depending on how good your test like at the end that's the university, or universities that you can choose from. You have to complete 13 years of school of a certain type of school in order to go to the university so when I was a child in 5<sup>th</sup> grade I was like "I want to go to the school and I want to study one day" and they were like "well we don't know about your kid, she is sometimes good but sometimes not and she probably goes to like the intermediate school" and I heard them and I was like "no" so for the first time in my life I was like okay I want to do something so I sat down and I was studying a lot and I could go into the higher level school and that is where I went from 7<sup>th</sup> till 10<sup>th</sup> grade I went to this school but I didn't like it a lot because it was a very like my primary school was kind of the same a small town. It was in another town not too far away maybe a half an hour bus ride or something.

Robyn: What was the town called?

Ann-Katrin: Buchholz- which would be "Beachwood" in English or "Bookwood", depending... That is where I went, that is where everybody went from our area. In my class, everybody knew each other and we would hang out in the morning at school and then we would meet up in the afternoon and it was the same people from like primary school and like people would like come along so we were like a big group of young kids but I didn't like the atmosphere because it was like a little too narrow. We would always have the same people around and there was all this group pressure and I didn't feel comfortable any more and also my parents split up when I was, I think, 13. I was in seventh grade and I didn't feel very good of course when that happened. And then...

Robyn: Did you know that they were going to split up or was it sudden?

Ann-Katrin: No. I didn't know that because they never had arguments in front of me ever. They always were very nice to each other in front of me and very nice to me but my dad wasn't there a lot, my dad was working in Hamburg and he traveled every day by train to go to work.

Robyn: What was his job?

Ann-Katrin: My dad worked in a bank and I think he is like for bigger customers like companies he would help them to get loans. He would process they're applications and then he'd

continue and then he would be a financial advisor from the bank when like the company started to run in debt he would advise them how to console themselves and he was, like I don't know how you call it, like some type of high position and he had some say but he would change his jobs a lot, he would change banks as soon as he would get a better offer, he would be like "Okay, I am out of here." He would always look for new challenges and so when I was like, I think it was, shortly before my parents split up my dad or they told us that they were actually splitting, my dad quit his job in order to go to a private company for the first time to be the financial executive there for one of the biggest coffee importing businesses that we have in Germany or probably in Europe and they hired him after half a year that was like the test time and they can hire and fire you any day or like fire you after they hire you, that is what happened. So with one-day notice they can fire you within that half-year, it is a testing time. At the end, like a week before they half year ended my dad came home and said "Wow, they don't want me anymore." He kind of knew that beforehand, so he had kind of looked around, but there was not really a lot, 'cause my dad was in his forties. He would apply in banks and they would be like "well we looked at your record and you've been working in banks for 20 years now and you have done really well and you are being paid really well, but as we see you always like to leave after two or three or maybe four years, and we need someone to stay here a lot longer than that. And my dad was like "no, I'm going to stay this time with you," but they were like, "we don't believe you." Every time that happened to him when he applied for a job, they would be like "sorry, you know, your qualifications are good but... Then he would start applying for jobs that he was over-qualified for and they wouldn't take him because of that. They were like, "You would be bored there, you aren't the right person for that. So he kind of had nothing in his hands and they had to give him a lot of money for firing him like that, so we had income for a while still, so at the same time my parents were kind of separating. My dad had a job offer in Dresden, which is on the Czech border in Eastern Germany and that was like a few months, or like a year, maybe after the Berlin Wall actually fell, or not the Berlin Wall fell, but we got reunited; Nineteen-ninety... maybe it was three years later. Ya, it must have been 1992, he got an offer in Dresden and he moved there a year later when I was 13.

Robyn: Did you go with him or did you stay with your mom?

Ann-Katrin: No, I stayed with my mom. My mom stayed there and he was like driving there and it was like an eight-hour drive and he drove there on Sundays and he'd come back on Friday night after work. He always came back on the weekends. My parents were already, they had already split up between them. They had different bedrooms. They were telling us that it was "because your dad was snoring." And we believed them because my dad snored so bad, it was understandable! I think there were other reasons for that too. I think by that time they must have been already like separated. My dad asked my mom to come live there but my mom didn't want to and we traveled there once with him when he applied for the job and he had his interview and we didn't like it at all because it was still like, now Dresden is the most beautiful town I've ever seen and it's so pretty and so rich and so beautiful and has so much to offer, but back then it was very grey and it was like shattered, you know and nothing was reconstructed and it was not a very nice town to live in, not for kids, really.

Robyn: Yeah, that's scary when you're like, 13...

Ann-Katrin: You're like "Oh, my god." They had like a very weird dialect, too that they were speaking and using different words and we were always making fun of this dialect. I'm like "I'm never gonna move here, I will never live here." My mom didn't want to move there either. She never wanted to even leave Hamburg. That my parents actually moved out of Hamburg, was kind of my dad's decision. We had like a very big house and my mom, I think she just wanted a duplex or something, with like a little bit of garden, but my dad went for the big-shot and we had a huge house. We rented out half of the house because it was way too big for us. (laughing) Then he asked my mom to come with him, but she said "no" and he asked us and we said of course "no we don't want to." So we stayed with our mom and he was driving in-between and then a little bit later after he already kind of lived there, they told us, they sat us down one weekend and they told us, "well listen, this is kind of it, we don't love each other anymore and we don't want to live together anymore" and that was really a shock. I don't remember even the conversation. My brother told me and my dad told me and my mom told me about it but I don't remember about it. It was like it really hurt me. Then my dad moved there, but he would always come back and then we'd always go and see him at the weekends and he would stay at my grandparents' house, which was really good. And then, unfortunately, half a year later my mom got diagnosed with cancer, so that was the next thing really tough, yes, that was really tough.

Robyn: What type of cancer?

Ann-Katrin: (starting to crying) Breast cancer. She was diagnosed with that and...

Robyn: Was her family nearby?

Ann-Katrin: They lived about one and a half hours away. My mom is from like the Danish border, close to the Danish border. My Granny came because she had an operation and then my dad took care of us while she was in the hospital and then she had to go to a re, how do you say that?

Robyn: Rehabilitation?

Ann-Katrin: Yeah, rehabilitation week somewhere in southern Germany and my dad took care of us. Then she came back and then she had chemotherapy and then my, my... her mom came from northern Germany to Hamburg which is only like an hour and a half away.

Robyn: Oh, that's good...

Ann-Katrin: Yeah, that's cool. And we picked her up and she lived with us for a few weeks and like took care of us and the household and my mom went through the chemotherapy. That wasn't fun at all. That was like the probably the worst memory I ever had. Then I think about a year later, she was like kind of recovering but she never was doing really well. She had, I think like 10 lymph nodes under of her arm removed, so she was really kind of disabled, so she couldn't even get a mosquito bite in her arm. It would swell up, she had no resistance, she was always short of breath. It was a very aggressive cancer and I think the tumor was as big as the fist of a man. So it weighed, oh, I don't know, like a kilo or something. Not a kilo- half a kilo. It was really big and really aggressive and then my dad was working but for some reason, we had to sell

the house at a certain point because my parents took on a big loan with very low repayments for a long term, like 40 years. But my dad needed the money or they were like kind of arguing over the house or something, plus my dad was driving back and forth and he had a separate place to live and he was earning way less than he had before, and he wasn't like in any executive position anymore. He was like somebody working for a bank, like doing some minor cases, and so he was earning a lot less. So I think that was the reason we had to sell our house. We had to sell it and move to Buchholz where I went to school. I think I was 16, yeah, I was 16.

Robyn: So, is healthcare socialized in Germany?

Ann-Katrin: Yes. Healthcare. If you work or your husband works or your parents, it is free for you. If you work and you're employed, you're not self-employed, but you're employed by a company, then you pay half of the health insurance and the company pays the other half. The same with unemployment insurance, health insurance, nursing insurance and retirement insurance. It is like all run by the government. Run by the government and they take care. You have to pay a little bit on top if you buy medication or you stay in hospital, you pay like 10 Euros a day, or for medication, if you buy a package of some pain reliever, then you pay like 3 Euros or something for it and health insurance pays the rest. So everybody's got health insurance. It is almost mandatory.

Robyn: That's awesome!

Ann-Katrin: Ya, it's really good, I love! It is a good system, so my mom was secure, but she didn't have any income, so that was really bad and a lot of the medications or supplements she had to take to get healthy or feel better weren't covered by the health insurance. So she needed a lot of money, but she couldn't work. My dad had to support her, which he didn't like, because he wanted to be independent. And they had big arguments. It went back and forth, sometimes they were all right with each other, but most of the time they were basically arguing over money.

Robyn: Did they divorce, is it the same as it is here?

Ann-Katrin: Ya, they divorced when I was 19, that was in 1999 after I was done with school. They kind of delayed it for a while because it was better for tax reasons and it was a better deal for both of them, but they were like living separately.

Robyn: Separated?

Ann-Katrin: Completely independent and my dad had to kind of pay for us, of course and also for my mom and I think that was bad for him as well, because he couldn't start a new life. He wanted to leave. They had really big arguments there. My mom got ill and we moved to Buchholz, like a smaller place. That was nice. I liked it there. Then she got better through the years. She lived 10 more years, which is a lot. Her prognosis was like, maybe a few years, so 10 years was really a big deal. We didn't think that back then.

Robyn: Yea, that's pretty incredible.

Ann-Katrin: Yea. So she was actually really lucky. I think it was because she wanted so bad to see us grow up and to take care of us, and so she was like kind of fighting and actually once my brother was done with his apprenticeship almost and I was gonna settle in the university, that's when her body just started to break down, and in 2001 they found all these different small-like tumors, like cancerous tumors in her bones like in 10 different places. They were like that's kind of bad and good at the same time because they can be very painful, but they grow really slowly, so you have a good chance of living quite a few more years, but she also had side effects from the chemotherapy, so her long term side effects – she had like this one it was a tumor, it was in her bowel, it wasn't cancerous, but it still harmed her because it would grow inside of her belly and it would just harden so much that you couldn't take it out because it was so hard and it was just like crushing the inside of her, I don't know what you call, the what your urine goes through... the tubes from the bladder, to like \_\_\_\_\_, like two tubes are onto you and one of them was kind of smashed and she had to have something out of metal in there to be in there to like hold it back kind of, or plastic maybe, I don't know, something that can't get smashed. So, that was kind of bad and she was suffering from that, and my mom had always been ill with her kidneys ever since she was kid, she had yellow fever and tuberculosis, all kinds of like bad, horrible diseases when she was a kid. She was born in 1946, so back then our medical system wasn't really good at all, and I think three times in her life until she was 25, they told her, “We don't think you are going to survive the next month, we don't think that this little girl is going to survive,” and she survived every time. So, she was really a survivor.

Robyn: Your mom is hardcore!

Ann-Katrin: She was hardcore, but at the end of it when they diagnosed the cancer again she was like, “I'm done with it. I don't want to go to the doctor again. Like I'll go to the doctor but I don't want to go through chemotherapy. I don't want to go through any, like, radical treatment anymore. That's it. I don't want to go into the hospital anymore. I'm done, you know?” So, that was really understandable for me. I can see why you are like...I just want to live my life as good and as long as possible, but I don't want to undergo all of these treatments because they are really painful and like horrible, yea. So she was like “no.” We did like a lot of alternative treatment though. When she told me this, also she had something like a diagnosis, I think, they told her like, well in two years you will probably have to start going to dialysis, like to wash your blood, because your kidney's are like kind of malfunctioning. And she was like, “Okay, that's that.” And that is when I was like “Oh my God, I realize my mom will probably have to die in like a certain amount of time” because you can only do it for so long, but you can't do that forever. At a certain point, your kidneys will fail no matter if you go to dialysis or not. So, that was really...I was like “Oh my God, only a few more years” and so I decided, okay I'm going to dedicate my time, I want to spend a lot of time with my mom. So, that's what I did for like this last year that she had. I think she told me that she was ill again sometime in 2001. It must have been like in September or something. We were like on our way to our family at the Danish border, like to see my cousins, and she was very close to them because her sister had died 10 years earlier at the same age that my mom later died, and her sister had like all these girls, like three girls and one boy, which were like my age in their early 20's, and my mom had raised them or helped raise them, and spent a lot of time, so they were even closer to my mom than their mom, so that drew them really close, like they were close anyway, but my aunt was like something that really affected everybody and so we went up there a lot and saw everybody. So

two of my cousins live in Berlin and the one still lives there, it's called **Volda**, it's close to \_\_? it's a little bit bigger city out there, and she has a dairy farm. So we always went there, and she's my godmother too. She's 18 years older than I am. And so I'm close to her a lot. And so we went up there and she told me that on the way. She is like, "Listen." We stopped like on the highway. She was like "I can't hold back anymore." And she drove to the side and she told me and we cried and talked, and then I already had moved out by that time. I think I moved out when I was 20, which was in 2000, and moved to Luneburg, where I was studying, and so I was like, okay, I'm going to arrange everything so I can kind of come back. I told her I didn't want to move in. I'm like I need to have my own place to like at least you know sometimes go back, but I'm going to come and I'm going to help with the household and everything. So that's what I did. We had like a really, really good year because we were doing a lot of stuff together and I was staying there a lot, and at some point, like I think it was probably two or three months later, after she told me that her body was like just kind of shutting down little by little and we didn't really know what was happening because she wasn't seeing the doctor so much, but at some point she went back into the hospital and they had to give her like an external exit for her colon, called a stoma...

Robyn: Ostomy in English...could be colostomy, like a pouch on the side?

Ann-Katrin: Yeah, yeah, because this tumor was not cancer but was still there and had crushed that too much and had smashed part of her colon, like put it together, and it wasn't functioning well, and she had to go back actually. She went for an operation and after that, that was the point when I already thought that I'm not going to see her again. But she can back out of the hospital a week later and she was doing already better, and that's when I kind of really moved in. I already stayed like three, four nights out of every week at home, but then I was like basically five nights and maybe two nights at my place, and I would help her do all of the household, and I did the shopping, I cooked for her, I make like everything myself like mashed potatoes and like all the small things and like cook them and she was like going to some healers because that would help her to just keep up her faith. I would take her there and she would undergo treatment and she would pray and she was very religious at that point...I wasn't but she was, and I thought that was good for her because that's something to hold on to. The best was I would always wake up between like 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. and she would mostly be awake and still lying on her bed. She was sleeping in the living room and I was sleeping in my old room. It was like a two bedroom place. My brother had his room, so she always slept in the living room.

Robyn: Was your brother still living there?

Ann-Katrin: Yea, he was living there the whole time. My brother, he couldn't live after...he was very scared and very immature, and he didn't want to face it, and he kind of ignored the whole situation the whole time, and he was more like a kid that I had to take care of, but that's how it was the whole time because when she got sick for the first time, I would step in and my brother would tell me everything and I would kind of educate him and discipline him for whatever he'd do, so that was the way anyways, you know? So, once I moved out and I was gone he didn't respect my mom that much anymore, so they had big trouble because of that, you know. But that's what happened...you couldn't change it. Then I would always wake up between 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. and then she would wake up and then we would both sit on my bed and we would

drink coffee and like have a breakfast and then just talk for like two hours until 11:00 a.m. and then she would tell me everything about her life and when she was like a kid and when she grew up and her first boyfriend and then how she met my dad and what she thought about things that were going on right now, and then I would tell her about my first boyfriend, and, and...everything. We were just talking and talking for like weeks, and that was really good. That made us feel really close. At some point, her...she had, like a...how do you call it...homeopathist...like a woman that she had worked for. She was the nanny for her daughter for about a year before she got diagnosed with like cancer again, and this woman had just finished her school and she was like in her late 30's I think. She was like "I like you so much and I am just going to treat you for free because you know you have done so much for me and my daughter and I know you can't afford it because it is very expensive and health insurance doesn't cover it, so I'm going to treat you." She would be like a good inspiration for my mom and like, good help to keep the hope up, and just to keep fighting and keep going. But at some point I was looking at my mom and was like "Oh my God". She had like the ostomy and she was so weak, and I just knew there was something wrong you know, and I would like drive her to places for somebody to put his hand on her and to make her feel better, and she would always be "Oh yea, I feel better", but it wasn't of course anything that would help in the long term, and she was getting weaker and weaker and she would feel really sick, and actually she started like her skin started to itch really bad and she would like scratch herself really, really bad all over herself and sometimes in her sleep so bad that she would start bleeding. So was it something wrong...this is too much...I can't take this responsibility anymore. I want you to see an actual doctor and just check on you. Her homeopathist, she came in like two days before, and she always gave her some type of medicine and medications, and she told my mom "Oh yeah, I see your symptoms are getting worse, but in a homeopathist healing process that is actually what you want. First the symptoms get worse and then your body builds up a resistance with the help of the medication and then fights against it and then actually gets healed." So she was like, well so you are getting worse...that's kind of a good sign. Because before that all of her medication hadn't done anything...nothing bad, it didn't get worse or better. So she was like, okay finally something is happening. I think we are on a good way. And my mom believed that and she went on holiday. And like I called my mom two or three days later and I'm like, "Mom, you can't do this anymore. You have to see a doctor." And she was like, "No, I don't want to." And I'm like, "Mom, I have to go home for the weekend because I have to work for like two days of the week." I remember I told her like "I have to go now and I have to leave. Call me if you need me, but I have to work tomorrow" because I was working and I was going to school at the same time as well.

Robyn: Oh, geez.

Ann-Katrin: Yea, it was really a lot, you know, it was a lot to organize. And I had my final exams coming up. I told her, "Mom, if it's not better in like two days when I am coming back I am calling the doctor. I don't care." And she was like, "Okay, I'll think about it." So I came back two days later and I went to my friend, she was getting ready to leave for Brazil and she had like a goodbye party and I arrived there at like afternoon after work, I went there, and I planned on going over to my house at like 7:00 or something and we were like having a goodbye drink and we were sitting down and all of a sudden my mobile rang, my cellular, and it was the hospital and it was like 5:00 or 6:00 and they were like "This is the hospital. We just want to



know if you understand the condition that your mother is in.” And I’m like “Yes, I do.” And they were like, “Well she is here now.” And I’m like, “Okay, I’m glad, but how did that happen?” And they were like, “A doctor came in this morning to her place and he just called us and she is here now and we just wanted to let you know because you haven’t shown up all day.” And I was so mad, because my brother...

Robyn: Why didn’t your brother call you?

Ann-Katrin: Yea, I don’t know. I asked him like so many times “Why did you never call me?” And he was like, “I don’t know.”

Robyn: That happened to my mom too when her father died. No one called her until the hospital said he was in critical condition, and by the time she got to the hospital he had died.

Ann-Katrin: It’s horrible.

Robyn: I don’t know why siblings do that.

Ann-Katrin: Yea. I think my brother was like...oh, she is coming back today anyway, or he just didn’t want to deal with it. Okay, she is in the hospital so you know what can we do about it. He completely ignored the whole situation, and I think that was his way to deal with it. He just ignored it until the very end, until it was like, she’s dead. Only then he could face it. But before that he was completely pretending that nothing happened and just not living up to it. He just, I don’t know, he’s weird when it comes down to that...like human relationships or like really deep emotional feelings. He doesn’t know how to handle them or how to express them, so I think that was just like his way of dealing with it was ignoring it.

Robyn: ...was by not dealing with it.

Ann-Katrin: Yea. By just making yourself believe nothing happened. You know. And that’s what he did. And so I went in to the hospital that night and she was awake and she looked really bad because she was all yellow and I found out that her liver was kind of shutting down and that was why she was itching, because her body, like her liver, couldn’t not process the toxins so they would come out through her skin. She turned yellow and her eyes were yellow and like she was itching. She looked horrible. Her whole face and she was kind of blown up too...yeah, she looked really miserable. I was like “Oh my God.” I was like crying and crying and I went up to a doctor and said, “Listen, you have to tell me. How much longer do we have here?” And they were like “We don’t know. Maybe a day, maybe a week, maybe a month, maybe a year, maybe 10 years. We can’t say anything because we don’t really know. We can’t tell the stage, plus you can never predict what cancer does. It is so spontaneous and so unpredictable. There’s nothing you can do.” And then I went home and the next day she came to another department and they were like nursing her and I went back and they were really nice up there. She was like on the fourth floor and she had a room by herself. There was nobody else. And they were like “Well, you know we are not really busy right now, so we are going to give her a free, like a room by herself. I was calling up hospices because I was realizing that she was probably dying and I wanted her to be like painless. That was my biggest fear, that she was going to suffer, and I

found a few, but the waiting list was like a week and I was like “I don’t think we have a week” or like maybe we do, I don’t know, so I put her on the waiting list I think, but actually we never needed it because that night I again slept at home, but the night after that they had offered my like “If you want to you can sleep here in the same room.” At first I was like I don’t think we need that, but that night when I was like at my place and I was in our living room at my mom’s place I couldn’t sleep and I was going crazy, and I was like that’s it...I want to sleep there. So, I moved into the hospital and she lived I think three more days. The total was five days in the hospital. She died on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, 2002. On the other hand, it was really relieving too because I knew that she didn’t have to suffer anymore and I would stay there all day, but I would always go for a shower in the morning for like an hour and leave, and then at night I would take like a two-hour walk or something just to get out of there before sleeping and then meet up with a friend or something or family and the night before she died I remember, she was like on morphine, so she was kind of unconscious most of the times, but at least she didn’t itch herself anymore. But we had a really nice ritual, because I would always like balm her up so she would feel better, so I could touch her and she would feel good, and it would ease the itch. She woke up one more time and she wanted to go to the toilet, which was completely unnecessary because she was tubed you know, and I was like “Mom, lie down.” And that when I realized that she was probably going to die tomorrow because that’s what normally happens like if someone is dying he usually rises one more time and tries to go to the toilet or walk or like wants to go to the bathroom for some reason. That’s what I read.

Robyn: Really?

Ann-Katrin: Yea. They always want to stand one more time or walk. And the night before I told her she didn’t have to, she could just die when she wanted to go and if she couldn’t like leave while I was there that she should do it when I was gone, because that’s what her mom did, and my mom thought always “Oh my God, I wasn’t there exactly those 45 minutes. I took a shower and she died.” And I always thought that’s probably what you have to do as a mom. You can’t leave this world, if your kids...you just can’t go. So I told her to go whenever you...you know, it’s so personal...you don’t have to worry. I will take care of myself and studying and my brother is done with his stuff, you know, with his apprenticeship. He can take care of himself. Don’t worry. There are so many people, there were always people coming in those three days, like she was standing there saying hello to her and goodbye, you know. The next morning I went for a shower and came back and she was dead. (crying) Sorry...

Robyn: We can take a break if you want to.

Robyn: We are back from our break.

Ann-Katrin: Yea, we’re back. My mom died July 10, 2002, and I was back then a student at the University of Luneburg, and I was studying economy and social science, and I was supposed to take like some of my kind of almost final exams toward a **fourdiploma**, like it’s a pre-diploma that you take after five semesters, then you have covered all of the basics and you have all of your requirements to then enter like the major studies, that’s like all of the something from everything, and then after those five semesters you are supposed to have all of these different kind of courses toward your degree and then you can like choose two major subjects. So, it’s

really cool as to like having you know, having this pre-diploma, and then that was my third or probably my fourth semester and I was like only one semester away, and I was supposed to take my exams at like exactly the week that my mom died. So obviously, I couldn't do that and I got a sick line from the doctor because like a little bit before that I already had like a nervous breakdown because everything was caving in, you know, and everything was getting too much and I was supposed to take the exams but I couldn't. I was just like not in a condition to concentrate on like economy or anything, you know, so I like skipped these and then we arranged the funeral and everything and then I took my first trip to Brazil when my friend went and I visited her for like five or six weeks and just like stayed then and recovered and relaxed and like regained some energy and just like lived for like a little bit without worries for once, you know. And I stayed there for these weeks and then I came back I think the first of October and then my brother was still living in my mom's flat, but he had to move out because he couldn't pay for it any more and we had like given a notice, you had to give a three-month notice, so that was due by the end of October, so he had to move out and we had to go through all my mom's stuff and like threw away what we don't want and keep what we want and like find a place to store it, and like, yeah, give up this place. And that's what we did. Basically, I did it because my brother, until the very last day, at least he found himself his own place and he finished his apprenticeship, he took the final test or his exam, like an apprenticeship in Germany for craftsmanship, he was learning to become a baker, that takes 3½ years. You have to work and go to school for 3½ years. That's what he did and he took his final test, and you know, he was successful in all that so he became his diploma as a baker and was like certified and then he had to move out until the last day, actually the moving trunk was outside. My brother hadn't even started to pack his stuff up and I was doing everything else. I was doing really everything else. He wasn't doing anything. So we had a lot of trouble. I got really mad at him. He was like, he was kind of paralyzed I think for like a year, and so he moved out into his new place and we like kept most of my mom's things and stored them at my cousins, who has this dairy farm, so she has a lot of space and we could leave a lot there, which was really good, because I still have it and I can go through it and it is like still kind of home upstairs in the attic, it's really cool you know. So, we did that and I went back to school and I took my tests the next February and I continued, but I was kind of not doing good, I was really depressed and it was really hard for me to concentrate on like anything, and I was really low and then I was like, "Okay, now I only have two more exams to have my pre-diploma" and after that I decided I wanted to leave. My mom had left me a little bit of money so I had some money at hand and I like, I just wanted to leave for like half a year. I just wanted to take one semester of vacation and like kind of decide, redecide, because I felt like I was going somewhere that I didn't want to go. I didn't feel confident in what I was studying and I also decided that I wanted to move away from Luneburg, because it's very small town maybe half an hour away from Hamburg or 45 minutes, and it's like 25,000 people, no maybe more, probably 50,000 people living there. It's a University town, but I never really liked living there a lot. It was okay because it was functional, it was close, and it was right outside of the school, you know, like it was only a minute to school, so that's good, but other than that, I never really liked the city and I didn't get along with my flat mates that well, so I moved to Hamburg and I traveled everyday from Hamburg to Luneburg, and then once I had taken my final test and it was like, Okay, now I can go...and I applied for a vacation semester and they agreed on that, and so I was like Okay, what do I want to do? I want to do some voluntary work, that will make me feel good and I can give something to somebody else, because at that point I was very depressed and I wanted to give something to somebody and not be

centered on myself so much because at that point I was like, you know, always circling around myself in my head, you know?

Robyn: Yea. How do you make it stop?

Ann-Katrin: Yea. And I was like, I need a break. And I was like, okay, maybe I always like to learn languages and I have always been interested in other cultures and traveling, so I decided okay I want to go to South America and I want to learn Spanish and I want to go to a Spanish school because I don't speak a word and I might need that. And then I was looking into different Spanish schools and volunteer programs, but I didn't really find anything, and I was like okay I will just do it there...once I get there I'm sure I will find something. I found a Spanish school in Cuenca, Ecuador that looked really good and the city sounded really good. I was like, "Oh, this will be perfect." It was like an old colonial city that has like 250,000 people living there so it's not super big but it's not a small town, so I like sign up for going there for two months starting in November of 2003. So, yea, I was super calm. I organized everything. I was super excited and I left and I was really happy and I go out there and stayed with a family that was really nice and they welcomed me. For the first time in like a year I felt so good and I had other things to think about than, you know, like being sad, and it was really exciting. A week later after I got there, I had decided that I didn't want to hang out with anybody that spoke German or English a lot or if I did, that I wanted to try to speak Spanish as much as possible. Also, I liked my home stay mother a lot and she had a daughter my age, and she was speaking in quite a bit of English, but she was like "I only speak the same for a day with you and then tomorrow I will still speak Spanish, and I was like "okay". So they really forced me and I was always with them and we were always like going to like visiting other family relatives and like playing cards or she took me to a concert and she would take me out with her friends and really made me feel very welcome. I felt very good and so after a week, that was the first time that I took on an opportunity to go somewhere with my school. First, we went hiking I think and then a few days later they said like "Oh, we have salsa classes and you can come and afterward everybody goes salsa dancing in a salsa bar in the city." And so that's what I did and I went to the salsa class and didn't go that well, but I still had fun. It was really funny. And like most people looked like they were falling like over their feet, so we were all making fun of ourselves and having a good time and then we all went to a salsa bar called La Mesa and I was dancing all night, and one of my home stay sister's friends who was a salsa teacher was there and he was teaching me how to dance a little bit better and not to fall over my feet so much and then I was walking through the bar and all of a sudden there was a guy standing in front of me and he said "hello" and I said "hello" and he started talking to me. We were talking in Spanish and it turns out that he is an American and we still spoke Spanish as good as we could and he told me that he was a vegetarian and I told him that I don't really like meat, but my family always makes me eat meat because that's what they have and like I always eat what people give me. That was like my policy. I go there and I try everything that people present me unless it's too gross, you know. I told him that I love vegetarian food and I don't really eat any meat, you know, really once a year and now I eat it every day and I want to go to a vegetarian restaurant. And he was like "Yea, I can take you to one." It turned out that he had gone to the same school as I had gone or that I was going at that point, and that he had like just finished all of his classes and that he was still staying there in Cuenca and he said "Yea, I know where your school is. I'll just pick you up." I don't know if that was tomorrow or like two days later, or something like four days later maybe,

I don't know...like in a few days I will pick you up from school. I was like "Okay". And his name was Zane. I said, "Okay, good." I really liked him and liked talking to him, the way he talked, and we just like had some energy going. He left and I was really happy that night and I went home and I was thinking that was great and I wondered if he really shows up or not. I think that was a Wednesday night, and I think he wanted to pick me up on Friday after school. So, after school on Friday I was like, "I wonder if he is there." And I didn't even dare to go out and like peek around the corner to see if he is on the stairs. There was like a huge stairs that was going down toward the river, and that was like a downhill, and that's where the school was built on. I was coming out of the school and he was sitting on the stairs actually really waiting for me, and I was like "Oh my God, he's there." I would get all excited because I liked him so much, and then we went to the vegetarian restaurant and we started talking and we were always talking in Spanish and then that day he would walk me home and from then onward for like a week he would pick me up everyday and he would take me to a vegetarian restaurant afterward.

Robyn: Oh, cool.

Ann-Katrin: Then we would walk around in town and just talk and just like we would also like, sometime we would meet up later that evening, just have a beer somewhere, and just talk, or we would go to a café or do something, and then at some point my home study mom was like "Oh, you are always busy with this big (he was super tall, you know, he was really tall and has blue eyes and brown hair) and she was like this beautiful American boy is always walking you home. Why don't you invite him for lunch?"

Robyn: Ohhhhh!!!

Ann-Katrin: Yea, and so I was like "Well, so my home stay family wants to invite you for lunch, but they are meat eaters, so I don't know if you want to sit at the table with them." He's like, "No, that's cool. I'm just not going to eat it." And then like okay, so I told them that he was a vegetarian and they ordered a salad for him.

Robyn: Ohhhhh!!!

Ann-Katrin: So, he had his salad and we all had rice and then something and then we sat there and they loved him. And then afterward, he helped. I would always help my home study mom in the kitchen afterward to clean the dishes and like to make everything look good again, and he helped and I think that what she had been talking about afterward for like the whole 10 hours. She was telling everybody "Oh my God, he was tall, big American and then he helped me do the dishes." She was so excited about it, like because her husband never did anything, you know, he just sat there. She always had like three-course lunch (they would buy it though), they would buy it at like a certain kitchen and they would buy it for their whole family. She didn't really have to cook ever or do their laundry because they had a maid coming in...

Robyn: Oh, that's cool.

Ann-Katrin: Yea. So they always had people cleaning and everything, you know. So, she would serve, she would like prepare all the plates and she would serve her husband first and then

everybody would sit down, she would serve everybody, and then she would sit down to start to eat. By that time, her husband was done, so she would jump up, serve him the next course, then everybody else was done, so she would serve them the next course, and then sit down and try to finish her first course. By that time, the dessert (postre) was ready to be eaten.

Robyn: Whoa!

Ann-Katrin: So she would jump up again and so she was always the last one to finish her plate. She was really tiny too. So, it made such a big impression on her that Zane actually came and did the dishes and helped her. So, he was always a very...she always loved to see him as a guest in our house. That was really good. Then we would hang out more and more. Then his birthday was on November 26, and then he asked me out on a date for his birthday, just me, and I was very proud...I was like, "Oh my God, you're asking just me. What about your friends?" He was like "Yeah, I can celebrate with them, you know, the night before. My mom gave me \$50.00 for my birthday, so we can spend it." I'm like, "But what about your friends?" He was like, "No, no, no...I want to go out with you." And I was like "okay...I want to go out with you too." We went out and I think we had kissed once before, but at that point we were really holding hands and we're like "Oh, I love you." "I love you too." And, then we became a couple and then I think about three weeks later he had to leave again.

Robyn: To go back to the United States?

Ann-Katrin: To go back to the United States then finish his college. He's from Lincoln. He had to go back to Lincoln and continue University and finish his degree in English. Then, we would still write each other all the time and I could never forget him and he didn't forget me, obviously, because then when I was getting ready to go back to Germany in April he wrote me that he would like to come to Europe, and maybe to Germany, and I said, "Well, you can stay in Germany as long as you want. You can be here." And then he wrote back, "I'm glad. That's all I wanted to hear. I'm coming on (I think it was the 29<sup>th</sup> of April or 30<sup>th</sup> of April or something like that)...I'm flying into Amsterdam and if you want to meet out there and then we can see where we go from there" and I'm like "yea, sure." And then I came back on April 15 and then I was really excited to see him actually, and then yea, he came and we saw each other and it was like...we were both like just smiling and then I think we didn't say a word for like an hour. We were just looking at each other and like touching, and just looking and touching and hugging all the time, and we didn't leave...we were meeting up in the breakfast room in the hotel, that's where he waited for me. He told me the wrong date. He told me he would come the day before. That's what he wrote me. And I was there and I had this hotel booked where we were supposed to like meet up because we both didn't really know when we would arrive because I was coming by car and he was coming by plane, so we had a hotel booked in our names, and we wanted to stay a night there. Well, he never showed up that night and I was really frantic.

Robyn: Yeah, like wait a minute maybe this isn't real!

Ann-Katrin: But, I was like, the next morning I was making everybody go crazy in the hotel because I was like "Oh my God, he must have been taken to...he must have been arrested or he must have had an accident, or something must have happened to him" and all these guys that

were working in the hotel were like, “Oh you know how guys are when they come to Amsterdam, you know, he just found somebody else, or like, he just never came.” And I’m like I know he did for sure, I was so sure that he wouldn’t do that after like all this effort and like waiting, I was like no way, you know, I trust him. I know that he would come if he could, you know. Obviously he can’t. So I was really frantic. I went to the police. Then I went to check my e-mails and it was about 10:00 and it was dated that night and he was like, “Only an hour and I will have to leave here to board the airplane.” I was like, “What??? That means you told me the wrong date.” He wrote me the arrival date, he didn’t write me the arrival date, he sent me the date that he was leaving. So, first I was a little mad, but then you know, I was more excited to see him. Then, yeah, we spent 2 ½ weeks in Germany. We traveled and he met all my family. My dad got married while I was in Ecuador. That was in November, right after I left, like a few weeks later, to my stepmother, who is really nice.

Robyn: So you had met her before.

Ann-Katrin: Yea, I had met her before. They had been going out for I think three years or something, and they already lived together and everything and they decided to get married. Yea, she’s really nice. She is only nine years older than I am. So, 19 years younger than my dad. So, it’s a big gap. But she’s really nice. I love her. She’s like an older sister or something. We get along really well. They both get along really, really well. And they are really happy. So, I am really glad that he found her. But they had like a church ceremony when I came back on May 11 or 12 or something, and I took Zane. That was the first time he met my dad, when we went to the wedding, which was a great time. We had a really good time. We were like dancing and living it up. They were really nice. They liked Zane and he liked them. That was good. Then he had to go back and we were like, “Okay, what do we do?” It’s really tough to be separated and we knew that he would probably have to stay in the US for another 8, 9, may 10 months or maybe a year, and I knew I couldn’t leave because I was still studying and I had like two years left in my career as an economy and social scientist. I was like, “Well, I have two more years” and he was like “Well, I have 10 months to a year. I don’t know. What do we do?” I don’t know, we both realized that it didn’t matter, that we just had to try to be together no matter what, because otherwise it wouldn’t make any sense anyways, you know?

Robyn: Like nothing would matter without each other?...

Ann-Katrin: So, we were like, we will just try and see how it goes and we were just going to write e-mails because he didn’t have a phone and I didn’t have a phone at that point, I think. Yeah, I didn’t have a phone either. We both didn’t have a phone, but we could write e-mails and write letters. So, we were like, okay, so it was really sad when we parted. He took the train back to Amsterdam and I said goodbye to him that morning. I was really sad. And then I went back to school, but I couldn’t readjust. I had been so far and I was really unhappy. I was trying to choose my major subjects, but I didn’t like any of them at all, and also I didn’t like the job opportunities that came with them, like the fields that you could use them to work later on. There were like only so few things that I could imagine myself doing, and even that was only half-heartedly. So, I was really struggling, but at the same time everybody kept telling me, “Oh, you are so close. It’s only two more years. You’ve already done three years, you know, and you over half of it. So, it’s only two more years and it is getting easier to. You can like choose your

subjects after your interests and there is nothing you have to do, only things you can do if you want to.” But, I took like all the classes that I took apart from one class that semester were so bad that it was so hard for me to even go, and I had like really...because I was still kind of traumatized and everything was caving in and I couldn’t even go there. I would start like weeping outside of the classroom, because I was having like anxiety attacks a lot. So, I was like, “Oh my God. How do I deal with this?” I have to go there. I was like really...my jaws kind of clawed in there, I have to study you know, I have to finish this because this is what I have to do. I was looking back but I have to, you know, focus, focus. But I couldn’t do it and I had really bad results on my exams for the first time in my life. I was doing bad and I was like, I don’t know why, you know, I have studied for weeks and I just did not do anything but study. But at the same time, when I was studying I would sit there and try to force myself to read it and concentrate and understand, but I just couldn’t. It was like I physically couldn’t. But then I had really good advice from a friend who told me like “listen, stop running against a wall. Maybe there is a door,” which was the exit of the university. At that point, I was like, I’m not able to study anymore. I’m too stupid.

Robyn: Oh!

Ann-Katrin: Or I have a problem with university or education or I can’t function in the system. I didn’t know what was wrong with me, but I was like, “Okay, I can’t do it anymore.”

Robyn: ...well, “not functioning in the system.” That makes more sense than you being stupid.

Ann-Katrin: Yea, but really I was doubting myself so bad because I was like studying and I was like I can’t learn, I couldn’t memorize anymore, I can’t remember stuff. It was like as if my brain kind of refused to. Of course, it was just me, but it was like I didn’t want to, but I didn’t realize that at that point. It took me like this whole semester of like really a lot of failures and like things that didn’t work out and disappointments. I always disappointed myself basically. Everyone was like, “Oh, it doesn’t matter. It’s only two more years.” So, I did half a year of those two more years and I still had the same amount ahead of me, because I didn’t get done anything, you know, no matter how hard I tried. I was like, “Okay, I think I have to leave university and do something completely different.” So I left in November and I just worked randomly and I think I worked as a, oh yeah, I worked in a newspaper and I was like dealing with the customers’ accounts and their bills and then their complaints, their phone calls, or like their e-mail inquiries or written inquiries or orders, their newspaper subscriptions, or their classifieds, or whatever. So, that was what I was doing. I was working from 6:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. every day.

Robyn: Oh...

Ann-Katrin: For like a long time. And Zane was wasn’t there. I didn’t know when I was going to see him again. And I was kind of sad. But, I really needed a lot of time and space to like consolidate and rethink of what I wanted to do with my life, and I realized it wasn’t studying economy at all. I was like, the day that I quit university was actually a very relieving day, because it was like so many stones fell, I had like rocks on my shoulders and then all of a sudden I felt just light and I was just like, now I’m getting somewhere. So, I was working and thinking



and talking to like job advisers and they were like, “Well, I don’t think you are too stupid to study. You know, it’s probably just like this isn’t the right thing for you. Just do something else.” I felt really guilty for quitting after 2 ½ years or 3 years of like studying and not finishing it, and I actually told my mom “I promise I’m going to finish my career in the university,” and I couldn’t do it so I felt kind of bad. And then I thought maybe I should become an occupational therapist or something, because I really like to work with people and I like to work with kids and adults and I like to help, you know, and I like to interact with people, so I was like looking for something in that field and I applied, but the schools were all private and I couldn’t afford it, because I had to come up with it myself because I was too old and I had already started like on career and the government was like, “We can’t help you anymore. We’re sorry. You know, you are on your own. If you don’t want to finish this, then go on and take care of yourself.”

Robyn: Does the government pay for public university?

Ann-Katrin: We they give out scholarships, or not scholarships, they like pay you if your parents can’t pay for it they pay for your living and the schools are for free. Or like right now, they have just introduced student fees, which are 500 euros per semester, which is 1,000 euros a year.

Robyn: That sounds cool.

Ann-Katrin: Compared to the United States, it’s really cheap. But Germany is like right now a big controversy because they are like, education should be free and I believe that, you know. You shouldn’t have to pay for a good education, because that it like liberation of the mind.

Robyn: Well, and it’s important to have an educated citizenry.

Ann-Katrin: Oh yes, totally. It is for every society. That’s...education is the most important thing. Health and education and they like both go hand in hand, you know, and also mental health. And being an emancipated human being and like being able to make your own decisions and like you know and tell right from wrong, make up your own mind, is like the key to everything, wealth, health, everything is education, I think. So, yea, I was really upset when I heard that they want to charge us fees now.

Robyn: Ah...no...

Ann-Katrin: Yeah, that’s not good. But, what can you do if the government does not have enough money and they’re in debt...they don’t want to fund education anymore. I think it’s a mistake, but...unfortunately, I am not the chancellor in Germany. Not yet...Ha, ha, ha...One day...And so, I was looking at everything and I was considering and thinking about what I wanted to do and what I should do, and I was like, okay, probably the best way actually at that point I would like with me going back to school and study something that I would really LIKE to study, not something that I don’t like to study but might want to work afterward in, but something that I really enjoy because I have to go there everyday for such a long time that if I do something that I don’t like at all, you know, it just takes forever and it doesn’t...you know, you don’t have any enjoyment at all in doing it and it’s going to make you sick, you know? And so, I was like looking and I think it was just one day I was like just looking through the University of

Hamburg, because I had never done that before, and looking at their program and they had like Latin American studies and Spanish as a major and I was like “Wow, that sounds so good”, and journalism, and some type of like all like these creative classes and I was like “Wow, that sounds really good”, so I was looking at it and then out of nowhere I applied...I applied for occupational therapist school and I also applied for the university and then I got accepted and I was like, “Okay, that’s what I am going to do.” I prepared and I was a little worried about my Spanish, because your Spanish has to be as good as if you had taken it five years in school.

Robyn: Uh huh.

Ann-Katrin: And I never took it. I took it like...I was half a year in Ecuador and I took it for two months, so I had no idea if it was ever good enough. I took the test and it was good enough! Even when I got in I didn’t have to take any like zero credit classes that don’t get you anywhere but like towards a certain language level. But I already had that, so it was like, “Oh my God, I can do something. I’m not stupid.” I got success! And then I started doing the program and it’s so good, I enjoyed it so much and I went there everyday. By that time, Zane had already arrived. He came while I was still working from 6:00 -2:00 at this telephone job. I think he came in January of 2004. He came and then I started studying in April or May of that year. He came and it was really great. He was like living in my place. We were living together in this one room that we shared and my flat mate was living in the same flat. We had like one kitchen that we were sharing, the three of us, with a super small bathroom. Then after I think three months or something he kind of moved out and found his own place and he was working on the telephone as well as like interviewer for just a little bit, you know? That was really good. We were just living. I was going to school and then I had to go to school three days a week and then afterward I would work.

Robyn: Where were you working? Was it the same job?

Ann-Katrin: No! I quit that job. I couldn’t hear the ringing of telephones anymore. It would make me go crazy. So...and I hated to talk at a certain point, and I didn’t like people any more, and that was the point where I was like, “Okay, I think I should quit my job, because...no, that’s not good.” I started working at a coffee shop, a deli and coffee shop all together and also I got a job as a teacher for kids, like tutor and teacher like in the afternoon school where they get help with their homework or if they have a subject that they are bad in where I just give them extra help and redo like the units that they already did in school and work over the stuff that they had done with them, and like, yeah, lead them toward an independent way of studying so they can be better and like, you know, have a better position in school...perform better. That was really nice, it was like all ages from like 6 to 18, you know, all grades. I did math, German, Spanish, English, history, geography, biology, whatever would come up...yeah, everything. It was fun. It was really good. I had a good time there. And, it was tough though because the government wasn’t funding me, so I had to like work kind of full time, or like I had these two jobs, and then also was going to school, so I was like either working or in school or I was on the train doing homework or I was at home doing homework. I was always studying. All the time. So that was tough, because the classes were really difficult. But, I had all A’s, you know, at the end.

Robyn: Awesome!!

Ann-Katrin: Yea, that was something, you know. So I was really glad. Then I had semester holidays and Zane decided that he wanted to go back because he was missing his friends in Lincoln.

Robyn: And his dog?

Ann-Katrin: His dog! Yea, he was missing his dog a lot, which is so understandable. He just has the best dog in the world. (laughing) Sorry...you just had to say that...And then, also, I think the main part was that he wanted to continue his career in the university and in Germany as an English major there wasn't so much opportunity because our system is different in that we didn't have a Master's Degree back then, not in English, or he wanted to do poetry or fiction writing and creative writing doesn't get taught really at all, you know, especially not in English. So, it didn't make any sense for him to stay longer. So, he went back and he wanted to move to Portland, because that was the school that he wanted to go to. So, I think in September...he left in August, and then in September I came to Lincoln for the first time and visited here and met his family and his friends and everybody and looked around, and then we moved his stuff to Portland then, his friend. And then, I stayed in Portland for I think two weeks longer, like 10 days here and then the journey, and we stayed in Missoula in Montana for a week with Josh, our friend, and then we went to Portland. I think I had like 10 days there-in Portland. The city was okay, but I didn't like it as much as Lincoln, because I liked Lincoln a lot for the weather. September was a little cooler than now (laughing). It was really nice. I liked his friends and family. I liked the fact that it was kind of smaller and had like more the feeling of home or something. It was like just cozier, and Portland was like just so big and everything was so stretched, and they're living in Portland, but kind of in the suburbs of Portland. It still was part of the city, but even if you rode your bike for like 40 minutes you were still nowhere.

Robyn: That's too much!

Ann-Katrin: Yea, it was just so far and the city was just too stretched...too big. It was an okay time, but I wasn't really happy, plus we didn't have any privacy at all once we left Lincoln, which probably counted toward my dislike of Portland (laughing) and my love to Lincoln, you know? So, then I left and he said he was applying there at that school and he didn't know when he would come back or if he would ever come back or what we would do. I went back and I was really unhappy. I was missing him a lot. I realized at some point that it was just not making any sense to me to live without him, and also I was thinking about him, and I realized this one night, "Okay, either I have to leave him, because this is just like pain, I was like, I missed him so much that I didn't know what to do with myself any more." It was kind of hopeless. I was like, "What do I do, you know? He won't come here and he already came here for so long, so it is kind of my turn to do it." I don't know because I never really intended or I never thought about going to the States ever, nor living here, you know? I always thought that I would like to move to another country, but I always wanted to move to South America or Scotland or even Australia, you know, more likely than the U.S., because I was like I don't want to support those... many things that happen in this country and I don't want to support the economy and I don't know if I can, you know, fit into the society, like a lot of prejudices against it, because I thought this was a very harsh society and a very, how do you say that, well ...the survival of the fittest kind of.

Robyn: Yea.

Ann-Katrin: You are like, on your own and I was like, I don't know. Plus, I was like, it's pretty superficial. Everybody is like smiley and your best friend, but that's what you hear when you are in Germany. People go to the U.S. and say, "These friendly Americans. They are all fake."

Robyn: That's really funny because after you visited that first time, I think everyone that met you, and I talked to probably like 10 people, and every one of them had probably been smiling at you and just smiling Americans, and they all loved you. Every person that met you was like, "Wow. Ann-Katrin is really awesome. I can't believe she's with Zane. She's so good and nice."

Ann-Katrin: What is she doing with Zane? That's funny!! Yea. The funny thing is when I came here for the first time for those two weeks, everybody asked me the same questions. The questions were always things like, "So, do you have McDonald's? Did you ever eat at Burger King in your life? Have you ever had a pizza? Wait, it's from Italy, maybe you did." Yeah, like all these like really funny things and like, "So, did you ever ride on the Autobahn? That's something that everybody asked. And then McDonald's and Burger King, or fast food in general. What kind of TV shows we had on our TV. I was like, "I can't believe that that is something that people would really ask, you know?" I was like, "Well, you really need to get a passport yourself and just leave this country for a week. Don't go to Mexico though. Go somewhere else."

Robyn: Go somewhere else...leave the hemisphere.

Ann-Katrin: Yeah, exactly. It was like, that was really weird. Zane and me were having a lot of fun with these questions. He said that actually in Germany a lot of people had asked him the same, not the same questions...

Robyn: The type...

Ann-Katrin: Not even the same type, but they have their own questions, but everybody would ask them, and he said, no...I think though that they asked him "Does everybody really eat at McDonald's and Burger King in the U.S., you know? Does really everybody watch Big Brother? You know, something like that...kind of maybe the same type of questions...repeating it. Everybody. I asked him...I was like, "Zane, did everybody in Germany behave like that, asking these questions, and did everybody ask the same type of questions?" And he was like, "Yes, yes, I went through all that...oh yes, I did." I think we already talked about moving here when I was here, and we were talking about getting married, but we were both like, first Zane said, "Oh yeah, let's do it." And then he kind of withdrew...he got like cold feet. And that was a big issue and a big argument while I was here in Lincoln...Portland actually. Then I went back and was thinking about it, but for me it was like, I want to be with him and I want to get married, but I don't...or...I want to be with him, if he was German I maybe wouldn't get married to him. But if I come to another country I need to have some certain status, which is like I need to be his wife. Or if he wants to live in Germany he has to be my husband so he is allowed to like just be

in the country so we can actually be together and that was really important and that I could like go to school, because we were looking into getting a student visa for me, but that was just like so expensive. You have to have like \$25,000.00 in a bank account just to prove that you could like come up for one year of school and you are living yourself or you have to have a sponsor that has that much who says, "Well, I would give this to you." So, we are like, okay, that's just not possible. And then he called me a few months later one night. I never mentioned it again because I didn't want to pressure him. It's like, if he doesn't want to, I don't want to get married if he doesn't want to get married. That's okay. I don't want to force him to do it. If we get married, I want him to agree to it out of his heart and not because I am like, "Yeah, you have to do this." I wouldn't want to marry a guy who doesn't want to marry me. So, I was like I didn't know what was going on and we really never talked about it and then I think one night I brought it up. I was like, "Okay, listen, I need to talk to you about this." I just brought it up. What is the deal with our future? What are we going to do? He was like, "Actually, I wanted to come to Germany in December or January and I wanted to ask you to marry me like really officially and do everything. But now that you are like phoning me it's like I have to say something right now. Well, yeah, I want to marry you. Do you want to marry me?" And I said, "Yes." And it was kind of sweet and funny and nice and we then decided that we really want this and then he came to Germany on Christmas and then we had all the papers ready like a week later and turned them in. I think three weeks later they gave us the okay. The German government was like, "Okay, you can get married." We had to like get a proposal in front of the court, to like, they had to state that they accept him as my husband, kind of that he is in the condition to marry me...

Robyn: Whoa...

Ann-Katrin: And they did that. We didn't actually have to go there. We just had to file the papers and pay money. Of course...pay money. And then they were like, yea, okay, because you know there was nothing standing in the way, obviously. Then we got married on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, this year, and then his parents came and his brother came a week before that and we traveled and we stayed at my dad's. He lives outside of Berlin now. We stayed at my dad's, which was a really good time. Then we went to Hamburg. Then from Hamburg...we got married in Hamburg...and then that night we were just going out with the family, really small but really nice, and Zane and I stayed in a really posh hotel...yeah...and then two days later we had a big reception. With like everybody, I think, 70 people were there. We had a brunch. Everybody brought some food and we stayed there all day long in a very old, ancient, like medieval mill that we rented. That was really sweet, a really nice place, and had a good time. Then the day after that, that was Monday, we rented a car and then Zane's parents and his brother and him and I, we traveled to Denmark to Copenhagen. First we visited my family on the way, and then we went to Copenhagen and stayed there for two nights, and then we went back to Berlin and stayed for a few more days in like Berlin and visited Berlin and took like some...my Dad loves to talk about history, historical events and sites, and he would always take Zane's parents around and drive them and we would have our own car and we would drive and have our fun like not talking about history. My dad has like really good taste in wine and food and drinks, and so he had stocked up and it was like just a big feast...eating and drinking for a week, staying up and talking until like 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning, and the whole family was "blah, blah, blah, blah..." every night. Except for Mike, Zane's dad, he always went to bed at 11:00 p.m. and he would always say, "Now, don't let Sarah stay up till..."

Robyn: Anni, I have to stop this...hold on...okay...(Pause)

Ann-Katrin: (Starting up again) I don't remember when the dog's interrupted us. I think that you had...

Robyn: You'd been in a posh hotel with Zane.

Ann-Katrin: Oh yeah, we were like on the wedding and then I was like, I said we were going to Copenhagen, and then we went over to my dads and stayed there. Oh yeah, I was just telling the Mike said every night that we shouldn't let Sarah, my mother-in-law, talk until midnight. It was really good. It was really cool because Sarah and Mike didn't speak any, and Zach of course, didn't speak any German, and my dad speaks pretty good English, but he is very timid. So he was always like, "My English is so bad." He always goes like, "My English is shit", actually, and we always tell him, "No, your English is great, you know, don't worry about it." My brother doesn't speak a lot of English, but some, because he was in the military for two years and then he went to Kosovo, and there of course he had to learn some English to get along with like...there were so many like American soldiers and English soldiers, you know, from all over the world, so they had to...everybody had to speak English, and he actually speaks fairly well. My dad's wife, Carola, she was raised in communist Germany, in eastern Germany. They only learned Russian. Never any English. So she doesn't speak any English at all. She understands a little bit because she then later took it, I think in school like when she went to university, and she is a very smart woman. She is a psychologist for cancer patients an "oncopsychologist". She works with people, like she has a hospice that she is in charge of, which is part of the hospital where they treat cancer patients, and she is like the main, the head psychologist for all these people.

Robyn: A cool job.

Ann-Katrin: Yea, it's a very tough job though too. She is very exhausted a lot and it is pretty stressful I think. But, it can be a really good job too. It depends, you know. But, a lot of sad stories there. So anyhow, she didn't speak any English and they are still all getting along and we would always sit down at the dinner table and everybody was talking, "Blah, blah, blah, blah..." and translating back and forth, and my dad would always say, "Ann, can you translate this or that for me?" Then I would start translating and he would interrupt me and correct me and say it actually better the way he wanted. Then I stopped translating for him. I was like, "Dad, you can do it yourself. You don't need me, obviously, because every time I say one sentence you interrupt and then you start. You know?" That was really good. The Zane's parents left after...I think they stayed for two weeks total. Then Zane left, I think it was seven days later. We had like a few days and then like finally, privately for ourselves, and being just like a just married couple and we were like living it up and having a good time, but he had to say goodbye to a lot of people too, because it was clear that he wasn't coming back for quite a bit. So we went on kind of a goodbye tour and then I took him to the airport. He flew back to Lincoln. At that point, we still thought that we were going to move to Portland because of his application to the university for the major in poetry writing was still pending, but like two weeks later it turned out that they had like turned him down, unfortunately. So, I was like, "Do you really want to move to Portland? Are you sure? Have you ever thought about staying in Lincoln?" Because there's

like your friends and family and I like them and I felt comfy in that town, you know. He said, "Well...that's an interesting idea. I will think about it. I don't know. Maybe. Yea." I don't think he every liked Portland that much once he lived there. He liked it for visits, he said, but actually living there was kind of depressing. So, we had started our application process for me to go there the day that we got married. We had a flight booked for the end of May because that was a really cheap offer. Like, something that we could afford. Kind of the cheapest offer that you could get, but we couldn't afford more because we both didn't have a lot of money. Then, I planned on like continuing school here and organizing everything. I didn't go to school since April...no before that...like a little bit, since February. I took my exams in February. All A's again.

Robyn: Yay!

Ann-Katrin: Yay! It was a really tough semester because I had to work and study at the same time and then afterward, we were organizing the wedding. Then, like me moving away, and so it was really exciting for me. I was kind of sad too about leaving, because I had just established a place where I really felt at home and after the loss of my mom, that was like for the first time I had a place where I really felt like this was mine, you know? So, I knew I had to like, you know, kind of tear it down with like a little hammer...

Robyn: Ohhh...

Ann-Katrin: And just like deconstruct everything that I had just like built up and that was really tough, but then it turned out that the application that we sent in to the consulate for the first time for them to acknowledge our marriage, which is the first step in the spouse's visa process, we didn't fill it out correctly and that we didn't enclose the money. We didn't know that we had to. So it came back.

Robyn: Oh no.

Ann-Katrin: It came back to my address, but in Zane's name. And Zane's name wasn't on the mailbox, so it didn't get delivered. So, we inquired and this is how we found out, like a little too late actually, and they almost didn't want to send it back because they were like, "So what's going on? You don't have the same name and you are like living together but you don't have your name on the mailbox. So, what is going on? Is this like a fake marriage?" We were like, "No, no, no...this is like a big mistake. We are so sorry. Please send it back." So, now his name is still out there and my name is still out there on the mailbox. And then they sent it back and then I sent it back to them after it was like all filled out correctly and then I talked to a lady there and she said, "Well, this is like a six month process." And I said, "Well, we have the beginning of May, or the end of April, that was like around April 20<sup>th</sup>, and I have already a ticket booked for the end of May for going to the U.S. and I don't have a job. I quit my job today and I also quit my flat, so I won't have a place to stay nor a place to work. How is this going to work out? You have to help me." She was really nice. She said, "Well, there is nothing pending right now, so just send it in on my name and I will try to process it as fast as possible. Just make sure that you enclose the money this time and everything's filled out well." "Then while you do this", she told me, "you will have to go to the doctor and you will also have to come down here

for an interview to Frankfurt. So, while I am processing this, why don't you call the consulate at the department for the visa and ask them what you need, so you can already prepare, because you will have to bring a lot of paper work, which usually takes a while to get issued by the German government." So, that's what I did. Then I started like trying to find out what papers I would need, which doctor I would have to go to, what I would have to do there, when to get an interview, and everything was really like a last second deal. I was really lucky because everything kind of just worked out somehow. I called them up for the first time and I said, "Well, he can't get scheduled for an interview in May anymore, the next time we can like schedule you would be in June." And I was like, "NO." I started crying at that point.

Robyn: Ohhh...Ohhh

Ann-Katrin: Actually, also, we had like...we had contacted so many different agencies and we had been told so many different things, what to do and how this process would go along and what would be the next steps to take, and they were all wrong. Some people in the U.S., some authorities actually, told us that I could just come in on like a normal visa waiver and just stay here and like change my status. Or I could come under like a B1 visa, which is like a tourist type of visa, and then change my status. Then a German lady that worked for the U.S. consulate actually told me, "No, listen, don't do this because if you try this and your marriage is already registered in our computer and our system and they put in your name, it could be possible...or you tell them, yeah I am married to an American who lives in Lincoln and I am going there right now and they probably wouldn't even let you in and like turn you down on the border and be like, well, you have the wrong type of visa and then you can't waive it and then also, you would be accused of fraud probably.

Robyn: Oh my God!

Ann-Katrin: Yeah. I was like, "Oh my God, this is crazy. I can't do it like this. We have to come up with a different plan and like, we realized we had to have this certain K3 visa, like a spouse's visa, and then somehow it worked out. I don't know how, but it was just really a lot of good luck, last minute and I had to go down to Frankfurt. I took a night train. I got, like a week before, I got a notice that you can come the next week, and I kind of got put in between at like 7:30 in the morning I had to be there and then I took the night train and then I came back and I was standing in a huge line with like 50 more people that wanted to get into the consulate down there in Frankfurt, and you couldn't have a mobile phone anywhere near, like one kilometer, and you couldn't bring a backpack inside. You couldn't bring any electronics inside, not even the car keys, like automatic, because it could be like a bomb or something, you know, it could be used like some threatening.

Robyn: Oh my Gosh!

Ann-Katrin: Yea. It was really, like no food...and then you had to bring all your papers and show them and present them, so I spent like, I think, six hours in there and I was spending these six hours mostly like, five of them I was spending with just waiting and like we were sitting in the big atrium, you know, it was like huge, maybe 200 people would fit in there and there were like maybe 150 people sitting on chairs, and then there were like windows all around it and like a



glass roof on top. The windows had numbers and then there would be like a computer voice saying like, “A – 1 – 6 – 8 go to counter 25.” And then you would have like a number, you’d get a number, and then you would always have to look up for your number and watch out, you know. It didn’t go in chronological order. That was kind of, you know, really weird too. At some point I thought they had already forgotten me and I couldn’t inquire and they got really mad and they said like, “Sit down again.” You know. So, I was sitting there and then I had my interview, which was really formal, which was just like he was like reading through my application for the visa and as he went he would just like double check like, ask me something that he could already read, and then...I would say it... the consul officer was actually really nice...really nice. Then he was like, “Yea. You’re approved, you know.” I said, “Well, I kind of need the visa because I am leaving in like five days and if you take your time to send it to me it might now arrive before I leave. He said, “Well. It’s noon right now. We have to recheck something in Washington. They always have to always name check, and they have to sign us out, and he was like, “It usually takes a day, but we are sending this out maybe right now. I don’t know if I can get you in for this. But, I will tell you what...come back at 3:00 into the front and there all of the visas that we have for that day they will give out, and maybe yours is among them. So, I came back at 3:00 and mine was there. I held it in my hand and the envelope...it was huge. Its like, “Oh my visas in there.” you know, and so I took that and I went home and I was really happy. But then I had to rearrange everything because I hadn’t done anything. I had to paint my room. I had to clear out everything. I had to like distribute everything. I had already planned it out but I never had the time to actually do it, because I was working on my visa. So, I had five days to do everything. That’s what I did. I kind of cleared out my room and made it livable for my flat mate that was just keeping that room as a sleeping room, not as a bedroom. Then I boarded the plane, really excitedly, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May to come to Lincoln. Then, my plane was delayed two hours and I had booked it so it was really tight so I wouldn’t have any kind of stays anywhere, only like an hour or an hour and a half at the most, but since my flight was delayed like two hours, I had missed the connecting flight in Amsterdam...

Robyn: Ohhh!

Ann-Katrin: Since I had like a bulk ticket they couldn’t upgrade me and put me on another flight, or like, you know or like business class or anything, so I had to stay overnight in Amsterdam. Yea. That was really bad. I stayed there and then the next day I had to go to Chicago instead of to Detroit. I had to stay there for seven hours. And then finally, after all of this long journey, like I don’t know, 28 hours later than I was expected, I arrived in hot, warm Lincoln and Zane waited for me at the airport, and Spencer was there too, it was really great. I was really happy to like, finally...I’m legal, you know, I have all my papers. I can leave the country, come back in, I can work, I can go to school, I can do anything that I want. So, I feel really good now. I have Zane, of course, that’s number one.

Robyn: Yay!

Ann-Katrin: Yeah, that’s how I got here...yeah!

Robyn: Well, what do you think about Lincoln now that you are here? You've been here since May 25.

Ann-Katrin: Well, the street system is kind of confusing sometimes to me. My impression since I came here for the first time hasn't changed so much. I think it is a nice, relaxed town. It is really diverse...the people that are living here...you can find just like anything is really like the typical American melting pot. There are all these like, a vegetable pizza is what I heard too, you know, it's like a pizza with all of these different toppings like on one thing, and that's really interesting. I like my neighborhood, I live at like 12<sup>th</sup> and D, and so there are a lot of people from South America, there are people from Africa living there, Asian people living there, and there is always something happening, a lot of bad stuff too happening...There is always something to see. Well, I enjoy it so far. Really I do. The people are really friendly. Of course, you find these people that are just fake friendly, but you find the other people too, you know, and I think you find these people everywhere. It doesn't matter where you go, you always find good people and bad people and you just have to watch out for both, you know? So, yea, I really like it. It's bike friendly. It's animal and kid friendly. It has a lot of parks. Uh huh. Yea, I enjoy it. I think most of my stereotypes that I had like, like I had in mind, have actually come true, but I don't think it was always horrible. I couldn't stand living like that, but actually, like totally tolerable. It's just a different way of how society works. Like, the U.S. is such a huge, like space-wise, such a large country. It is like this huge continent. It almost covers up the whole continent and there are so many people living there and it is such a young nation and so many different groups and so much...so many layers and like connections, you know, in between people, and like stories, history, that it is kind of...and it's so big, it has so many people too living here, and then all this space, that you kind of have to have...I look at this system right now and it seems to me almost like, pretty close to a totalitarian system the way it's run. I don't know if I'm going too far with this, but the way it is run is like it is being central power controls everything. Then it is a little bit decentralized with like a few different agencies within this power, but even those are like pretty tight. Also, like the power is divided between like a certain small ally of politicians. So, it's been really...yea...the people are very controlled with like their social security number. You don't have that in Germany. Nobody has ever...my employer of course asks me for the social security number and he takes a copy of it, but that is about it. You never use it anywhere else. You never write it down. Your driver's license can never be an I.D. or anything. You have to have a different type of I.D. and the driver's license is different. What is really funny too is like, everybody uses like checks. Nobody in Germany writes checks...nobody...I've never seen anybody. The craziest thing to me is actually that banks, like the Union Bank, has like a drive in. Everybody drives. Everybody has a car. That is something that is very weird to me as well. So, there are like so many things that it's not like completely bad. I see like the bad side it does to like the economy of your country and also to the ecological influence is really bad. Everybody has like such a huge car, you know, like huge trucks, you know. Completely unnecessary, polluting the planet, you know, so like everybody is driving in instead of like walking somewhere or taking a bike. You have no public transportation, which drives me crazy. But at least in Lincoln I can take it. In Portland I couldn't, because it was just too big, and you are just lost without public transportation or a car, and I don't want to have my own car that I have to take everywhere. I have a small car now, you know, and it is convenient because I can go somewhere, but I can take my bike if I want to go downtown or I can walk. I am walking everyday for like two hours and I am always walking downtown and walking back,

and I like that, you know? I actually can live with these things. I don't mind them. I find them kind of odd at the same time. It's like something you can laugh about or all the fast food that people eat. Supermarkets are just five times bigger than the average German supermarket...

Robyn: Really?

Ann-Katrin: ...and everything is in bulk. Everything is like in huge packages. You don't have just...for example, cereal. You know, we have like a part of one section is like, we have maybe eight different varieties of cereals, maybe two different breads.

Robyn: And here we have an entire aisle.

Ann-Katrin: Yea, you have an entire aisle, or juice, or something...that's okay. The only thing that I really miss like produce-wise is like, really good wine that was like, you could get from every country wine in Germany. You could get, like, Chilean wine, French, Italian, German, South African, Australian, American, you know, U.S. wines and for a really cheap price for like a Euro 40, which is like almost \$2.00 or something you could get like a really good bottle of wine.

Robyn: Wow!

Ann-Katrin: Or you could get really good cheese from everywhere for like nothing, you know. Cheese is so cheap. And here, the quality of cheese is just so poor.

Robyn: Yea, if you want any good quality wine or cheese it is going to be very expensive.

Ann-Katrin: Yea, it's very expensive. So that is kind of different. But then again, there is a lot of products that are a lot cheaper, like a lot better, like your fruits are a lot better because you don't have them from a greenhouse in Spain like we do in the winter. Strawberries in December out of the greenhouse in Spain, and we wonder why they have no taste. So, yea.

Robyn: Are you going to go to the University here? Are you going to finish school?

Ann-Katrin: I want to...I will start in January probably, because right now they are still waiting for a translation of my high school transcripts, which of course I only have in German, and I'm still working on that. So, all of the other transcripts I have. And I have to take an English proficiency test as well.

Robyn: I think you'll pass.

Ann-Katrin: I hope. I really don't know. The TOEFL test actually is difficult. People wanting to leave.

Robyn: It did sound like it's pretty horrible.

Ann-Katrin: It's really harsh. You really have to study because you just have to know the right answers. Like, I will probably pass my test without studying, but on a low level. So, I really have to prepare. I will probably go and take a class or something...a preparation class for like a few weeks or something. Then I want to start in January and continue and do Latin American studies and Spanish, of course. So, I'm really excited about that. It's not going to start until January, and before that, I would like to go to Mexico for two months in November and December and learn more Spanish and like, deepen my proficiency, my skills in writing, because that is something I really have to work on. Yea, and then I don't know what is going to happen afterward.

Robyn: How much school do you think you have left?

Ann-Katrin: I think it's probably going to be a year and a half if I'm slow. If I'm fast it's probably just a year or like, almost a year. I'll see. I don't know how much I have to work on the side. That all depends on how much time I have to spend on working. And also, my dad said he might come next year in May to go to Yellowstone, because I will start to have like semester holidays I think in May, but also, summer school starts in May, and that's like, if I don't take summer school then it's one and a half years, but if I take summer school, then it's probably just like three-quarters of a year or a year total.

Robyn: Yea, you can take like five classes in the summer.

Ann-Katrin: That would be really good. So I want to hurry up and I want to finish my university as I promised my mom, and then I want to work and do something productive, something nice.

Robyn: I'm sure it will make more sense once you finish school and you know what your options are. That helps...

Ann-Katrin: Yea, definitely. Yea.

Robyn: Excellent. Is there anything else that you feel like people should know?

Ann-Katrin: No...only that they should always educate themselves. Never stop.

Robyn: Very excellent.

Ann-Katrin: That's it...Use the public libraries!

Robyn: Thank you Ann-Katrin

Ann-Katrin: Thank you, Robyn.

Robyn: There are four dogs in the house with us right now, so that might explain some of the crazy noises that you might hear on this recording.

Ann-Katrin: Yes, probably (laughing).

