

**DP-11**

**BERGITH MORTONSEN HANSEN**

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**US: MINNEAPOLIS, MINN; SAN LEANDRO, CA.**

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett and I am about to talk with Mrs. Bergith Hansen for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. I'm at Mrs. Hansen's home at San Leandro, California. It's April 6, 1989, and this is interview number 385 [DP-11]. Mrs. Hansen came through Ellis Island in 1923 from Norway. If we can, let's start back at the beginning and can you tell me where and when you were born?

HANSEN: Oh, yes. I was born in Stavanger, Norway.

DALLETT: Can you spell that for me?

HANSEN: Yes. It's like Stavanger. S-T-A-V-A-N-G-E-R. Stavanger.

DP-11/HANSEN

DALLETT: Stavanger. In Norway. And when was that? In what year?

HANSEN: I was born in 1911. But I was born September 17th. (coughs)

DALLETT: Can you tell me a bit about your childhood and Stavanger?

DALLETT: Well, I had, ( she coughs ) my throat isn't very good. I had a very good childhood but, uh, my father was a seaman and traveled a lot. But after I was born he gave up the sea and stayed home. He was a machinist, so there was always a lot of good work to be gotten at the time. And we bought a very nice house. And we had a good life. We had – we were four sisters and my mother was a seamstress and s-- sewed all our clothes. And we were dressed very nicely.

And they were, both my parents were very fond of looking pretty, looking beautiful. And, uh, then, of course, went to school in Norway. And then when I was ten years old, uh, both my parents died within a year. My father got a brain hemorrhage and, uh, my mother died of the flu. There was no room in the hospitals. So they, you know, she was at home and just bur-- you may say burned up with fever, you know. There was just no room. There was a lot of flu at that time, in 19 – in 1920's and things, and '23. And, uh, so we sold . . .

DALLETT: Do you remember that, when your mother was --

HANSEN: Oh yeah.

DALLETT: -- home with the flu?

HANSEN: Oh, yes. I was in and out the door and towards the end they were dipping a feather in some wine to just moisten her lips because she was just burning up with fever. And, of course, being a young child, you know, I was just ten years old, you were busy playing outside. You didn't realize the seriousness of what was happening, you know. You were busy playing outside. But I had two older sisters and, uh, one younger one. And, uh, so we had a lady taking care of my mother, you know, for a while. And, uh, of course she died. And, uh, it was a very sad time.

You know, there were four children. The oldest one was only sixteen and to have to take over all these other sisters, you know. It was very hard. So we sold our house and moved in and got an apartment with one of our uncles and, uh, we lived there for two years. And then an aunt in Minneapolis thought it would be a good idea to come to United States and, uh, she meant well, but, uh, she had five children of her own, and really didn't have – didn't have the room for us. W-- the four of us slept in one bed and we weren't used to that, you know.

We came to Minneapolis. And -- and uh, she wasn't very nice to us, you know. So we had an uncle that lived in Montana, and he took my younger sister who was only ten at that time. She went to live with them until, for quite a few years. And, uh, my older sister got a j-- job in a grocery store. In those days they had all these places where all the Scandinavians went. They called it, Snus Boulevard. ( she laughs ) And Masie[ph] Drive near Minneapolis, you could find all the Swedes, the Danes, and the Norwegians there. She got a good job in a grocery store, you know.

Couldn't speak a word of English at the time. In those days you didn't learn as much English in the schools as you do today. Today everybody in the fourth and fifth grade either learning English, German are the two popular languages that they are learning today in Norway. And so, of course, we had to, we had to go to school, of course, when we came to Minneapolis and, uh, I remember well -- we had to go to a special class where they had people from all countries of the world. We stayed in there for about a year, learned English.

And then they tested you to see what classroom you should go into. They tested your arithmetic, mostly, to see where you fit in, you know. But as a young child, why, things didn't bother you so much as, uh, if you had been older, you know. So two of us sisters, we had to go to school in Minneapolis. At the time the law was that you went to school till you were sixteen. They didn't force you any further. And, uh, by that time my oldest sister had gone to New York and married her boyfriend. And she had coaxed me into coming to California after I had lived in Minneapolis for a few years.

But we, we belonged to all Norwegian organizations, the Daughters of Norway and the Norwegian Churches. In those days you stayed together with your own nationalities. (coughs) We went to our Norwegian church and went on Sundays to look at the soccer ball games with all the young boys. I belonged to the Norwegian Athletic Club at the time and,uh, the Daughters of Norway.

DP-11/HANSEN

DALLETT: Tell me a bit about the Daughters of Norway and the Norwegian Athletic Clubs.

HANSEN: Well, uh, like I said, at that time we all stuck together and the Athletic Club, they were mostly soccer ball players, and they would play on Sundays. And all the girls that, at that time, most of the women, at that time, they worked in homes taking care of children, you know. And, uh, working in the homes. That was most of the job that you got at that time. It was a thing that everybody did all over.

In New York, my sister worked in New York for a doctor and took care of his children. And, uh, it was just a thing you did in those days. Later on, of course, you went on to school and, uh, got better jobs. But, uh, that's what some of my sisters did. My – my youngest sister, she graduated from high school, but, you know, the rest of us, we left our aunt after a few years. And I stayed with a family, took care of their two little children and went to school, working for my board and room. Because I was . . .

DALLETT: At what age was that, that you began to do that?

HANSEN: Well, four -- fourteen. Yeah. And, uh, it was easier to do that than to stay with my aunt. She really couldn't afford to have us, you know. And, uh, the reason we had to stay on Ellis – Ellis Island was she hadn't got -- you were supposed to put up so much money, you know, to guarantee that we would come in there. Well, the money hadn't come. That's why they held us on Ellis Island, you know, for two or three days until the money came. She was slow in sending it. Because we had our fare and everything paid from Minneapolis and everything, after we got off, uh, off the boat, you

DP-11/HANSEN

know. So, and the few days we s-- spent in Ellis Island they treated us very nicely. We had good food and, uh, they had nice concerts for us in the evening.

DALLETT: What kind of concerts?

HANSEN: Uh, musical, musical concert for us. Of course, we had buffet dinner, so we went and stood in a big line and got our food. But we had, we were skeptical, we have -- with all these different nationalities, you know. We took our shoes -- we didn't want them to be stolen during the night. So, during the night, you know. So, uh, so really, I mean, nothing bad happened to us. We were in good health, and nobody had to be sent back, because we were young. But we were, we were very lonely, you know. We had nobody.

And, like I said, this was my mother's sister. But, uh, she had gotten away from all the Norwegians. In fact, she told us, "Don't have anything to do with them. They're no good," she said to us, you know. And the first one that was nice to me was the secretary in the principal's office in school. Her name -- she was Norwegian, of course. And, uh, she invited us to her home several times. They were very nice to us. My aunt didn't like it. She said they were no good, everybody was no good. And, uh, I don't know why. She had the nicest husband. He was nice to us. He was German descent, and very, very nice to us, very good to us.

So, anyway, after a few years we left my aunt and we were sort of on our own, you know, working. And, uh, it, like I said, because the Norwegians

DP-11/HANSEN

stuck together and, uh, we could get together and have these nice doings. And I was confirmed in the Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. I went back after fifty years, because I was one of the first ladies, uh, girls, to be confirmed in the church. We were having it built at the time, but it's still standing, Norwegian Memorial Church in Minneapolis. And, uh, so I, uh, we started getting older and going to these Norwegian doings.

I learned to dance. I was crazy about dancing. I learned to dance and, uh, my first dance, I can't call myself stupid, I was just too young. I didn't know how long you were supposed to stay with your partner when you were dancing. If you were supposed to leave him after the first time or wait till they kept playing and playing, you know. So you grew up, I grew up among a lot of nice, nice people. And, uh . . . ( break in tape ) ( sirens are heard in the background on the tape )

DALLETT: Take me back a little bit, if you would, to that period when you were a youngster in Norway. Uh, did you know the aunt who had left?

HANSEN: No, no. We didn't know her. She had left.

DALLETT: That was your mother's sister?

HANSEN: Yeah, my mother's sister. In fact, my mother was supposed to have gone to this country, but she became engaged, so she let my -- her sister have the ticket. That's how that came about.

DALLETT: Oh, so your mother was planning . . .

HANSEN: Was planning to come to this country, but then she met my dad, and-- and

they got married. He was Danish, and, uh, so I'm half Norwegian and half Danish. Of course, that doesn't matter. We're all Scandinavians. So, uh, where my dad worked, there was a man there that became our guardian and, uh, sort of watched, (coughs) watched over us, you know, come in and look us over. And there were times when different, uh, the Lions Club. They were very nice. Like for Christmas they would give us beautiful gifts, beautiful dresses and beautiful things like that, you know. They, uh, I mean, we weren't poor.

By that, we had made good money selling our house and we were able to, to pay for all our tickets coming to United States at that time. And so, we were brought up very nicely and, uh, had a very nice home with very proud parents. We all was kept, well, we were just very proud people. Like I say, we never went hungry. We weren't, we weren't poor. It was just sad that first my grandmother died, then my mother died, then my father died. This was a year-and-a-half. And we had nobody, you know, because my mother, she had lost her – her sister and, uh, we had no family left, which was sad. Luckily my sister, she was very smart and, uh, she had a very good job in an office downtown.

And like, when I grew up there weren't any buses or anything. We did all our walking, you know, all around to all the different stores. But like I said we were brought up so strict. There were so many things we weren't allowed to do. I mean, we were brought up strict. We weren't beat. By that I mean we weren't spanked, but we were brought up very strict. When Papa and Mama said anything you just did it. You didn't, and, of

DP-11/HANSEN

course, I maybe made the same mistake here bringing up my two sons. I was very strict. I had to do very little spanking. And to this day we're very good friends, you know. I mean, I don't think a little spanking hurts anybody, but that's beside the point.

But, I mean, what I meant was growing up was nice because Papa had a very nice voice and he sang a lot for us. He had worked in the opera in Denmark as a young boy. Evidently he had a good voice. I don't know just what the connection was, but at Christmas he always sang. We always walked around the tree and Papa would lead us in song. So, to – to this day, all the sisters have very nice voices, very good voices. And Mama loved to dance, you know. I keep bringing up this dancing, but, uh, it was a happy, it was a happy family, a very happy family.

DALLETT: What kind of songs would he sing?

HANSEN: Well, they were typical Norwegian songs and Danish songs, you know, and, uh . . .

DALLETT: Were they sea, like, sea songs?

HANSEN: Well, also that and Hans Christian Anderson's songs about the different -- yeah. Why won't that song come to me now. ( she pauses ) ( break in tape ) ( a car alarm is heard in the background on the tape ) I don't know what that is.

DALLETT: I think it's maybe a car alarm. Were they songs you sang to your children?

DP-11/HANSEN

HANSEN: No, I didn't sing much to my children. I was, I got married young. Well, I was only, I was twenty. That's not that terribly young. I married a Norwegian. We had a very, we were married for fifty-two years, had a very good life. And, uh, so, I don't know what else there is to say, but . . .

DALLETT: Tell me more about your, anything you can remember about, was it a village? I'm sorry, I can't pronounce it again, Stavanger?

HANSEN: Stavanger.

DALLETT: Stavanger. Did I spell it right there?

HANSEN: Stavanger, yeah. And, uh, it at the time, when I left Norway, it was the third largest city in Norway, so it was a pretty good sized city. And, uh, they had very nice schools. Of course, we walked everywhere. That was the way it was. And, uh, when I lived in Norway, this man that was in charge of us for a couple of years, they wanted to send us to an orphanage, but we evidently could take care of ourselves. So there had to be somebody checking in on us every so often, you know, because, uh, you know, with four sisters, the oldest sister, it was hard on her to make all the others mind her, you know.

So she didn't have any trouble with the two youngest ones, but my other sister, why she didn't like to be told, you know, what to do, being the other sister. She was sixteen, the other one was fourteen, you know. So, uh, so then this man that sort of checked up on us, they – they had a home in Norway. It wasn't an orphanage. It was a home where they had thirty girls. And, uh, myself and my younger sister, we each went out there for –

for six months and stayed. And, uh, we were treated very nicely. We went to school there. It was a place out in the country. It was near a big hospital, a big tuberculosis hospital. And we were up on the top of the hill. A very nice, a very nice place. Like I say, I don't call it an orphanage. It was just a home for thirty girls.

And, uh, we were, we were taken care of by, uh, nurses. We called them sisters, at the time. They were religious nurses, it's called a sister. And, uh, we were, we had our own classes, we had our own sinks, we had our own beds and, uh, had very good food, you know. And every Sunday we walked in the long line, went to church every Sunday. And, uh, I remember that very fondly because I had a, I had one lady, she wasn't a sister, but she was one of the, the cooks. She used to sit on third floor and mend stockings. In those days you wore wool stockings, you know. And for some reason I took to her and, uh, I used to go up on third floor and sit and talk with her. And on the way up to her, this was the third floor, they had barrels of oatmeal and sugar and different things they used to cook with. Well, I used to, I used to fill my hand up with oatmeal and then the sugar and mix it up, and that was like a treat to me. I'd eat this oatmeal and sugar.

And, uh, but they were so good to us and we were kept so immaculate, you know. Bathed, and we had our special place for our toothbrush, and everything, you know. So it was a good experience, and it was good for my sister to get – get one of us out of the way, you know. Because she was working in the office, and then in her spare time, right next door to

DP-11/HANSEN

where we were living they had what they called a milk shop. And, uh, you came there with your little pail and, uh, she would scoop out one liter of milk, or whatever you wanted, you know. So that was her way of making extra money, you know, besides working in the, so, I don't know how she did it, where she got her money, but like I said she must have got a pretty good price for the house we had. It was a two-story house, upstairs -- downstairs, so we could rent a part of it. We did that for a while until we moved in -- my uncle. And, uh, we stayed there for a couple of years. And then, of course, we sold everything before we left.

DALLETT: You didn't, you didn't talk about coming to this country until you heard from your aunt, or had you planned on . . .

HANSEN: Yeah, yeah. No, I guess my sister had written to the -- this aunt and said that Mama had died, and then she got the bright idea. I don't know whether she thought we had money or what. I don't know. But, uh, I -- I stayed there the longest because I was the younger one, you know. But, uh, she played favoritism with us sisters. She took a liking to my sister number two. She was the pretty one. I was the redhead. You know, you always (coughs) figure the redhead, you're so homely, you know. You're so, you're the homely one. My other sister was the pretty blonde. And, uh, that's the one that still lives in Minneapolis. And she sent me upstairs to clean the rooms, and she would treat her to goodies downstairs and give me nothing. That hurt, you know. That really hurt.

And, uh, one time I was cleaning that time, they didn't even have, well, they had a bathtub, but you didn't take a bath very often. And, uh, they

had a little radiator you could open up, you know, to let the heat come from downstairs in the house. I opened it. I -- happened to be some dirt down there and it came down on the table where they, so she knew I was listening. I was peeking to see what's going on. She didn't like that very much. But I saw what she was doing to my sister, so I didn't like that. So anyway, my sister, she got a good job working for some wealthy people. And, uh, later on too, uh, while I was going to junior high, I worked for a Jewish family for a year-and-a-half, took care of their two little children. I went to school, but that, you know, I worked for my board and room. I got two dollars a week and, uh, I stayed with them and I had to, I had to cook, she did all the cooking. Everything was . . . Are you Jewish?

DALLETT: Yes.

HANSEN: Yeah, I can tell. Uh, they were Russian Jews, and they -- they cooked milk dishes and, *milkhe-- milkheg* and *fleysheke* they called it. And, uh, so I lived with them for a year-and-a-half and, uh, they had a little baby, and I took care of the baby and the little girl. And, uh, their name was Heinitz. Heinitz, they said. So I got a lot of good food there. I wasn't given very good food at my aunt's place, so I, I got to be a little healthier. And, uh, the lady I worked for, she was only twenty-eight years old, so she was a young person. And her husband was in business. And he had a beautiful voice. And he would, he played the piano and he would, he would make me sing with him.

One time he had a party. He even had the Volga Boat Men. He even had me singing that. *Ay dokh nem* [ph], you know. He was having me singing

DP-11/HANSEN

that for them while I – while I stayed with them. So after that summer, when I got to be sixteen, then I left and, ( clears throat ) she didn't really need me any more. And when I was sixteen, I wo-- worked for an older couple. They were seventy-five and eighty-nine. Took care of them, cooked and took care of them for a while. And, of course, by that time I was getting boy, boy-conscious, you know. So my older sister, she moved from New York to California, and I guess my other sister must have said, you better take care of her, you know, have her come to California and take care of her. So, so I had lived in Minneapolis for four years, and then I came out to California. And, uh, stayed here for a while. I did go back to Minneapolis, but I came back again.

DALLETT: So at what point, when you first came you were, sorry, how old?

HANSEN: I was twelve.

DALLETT: So you were in school for the first two years, is that right?

HANSEN: Four years.

DALLETT: Four years.

HANSEN: Yeah. I went to school till I was sixteen, and then I quit.

DALLETT: So what about the language?

HANSEN: Well, it didn't take long to pick it up. I went to school in Minneapolis for a while, and it was funny, one of the nicest girlfriends, or lady -- well, girlfriends that I had walking to school was a colored girl. Her name was Emma. She was very nice to me, you know. And in fact, when I was

DP-11/HANSEN

going to junior high they used to, there was another fellow, a boy there, he was a Russian Jew. And, uh, they called him an either, herring chokers, I don't know why. They knew we liked herring, you know. And, uh, it was funny. They picked on him and they picked on m—on me. I don't know why, but I never forgot that. "Oh, yeah, there's those two herring chokers," they used to say. They were mean, even then, you know.

DALLETT: How else would they pick on you?

HANSEN: Well, not too often, because I was bigger than most of them, you know, and I was – I was pretty rambunctious, so I, I wasn't afraid of anybody. So it didn't – it didn't take long. But it just, something that sticks in your mind, you know. And, uh, so coming to California, of course, I – I still worked for a couple, uh, a commander in the Navy. I took care of their little boy. And, uh, I -- I worked for them until I was about twenty and, uh, and met my husband in church and we got married. And so we were married, like I say, for over fifty-two years. And, but I have stayed with the Scandinavian people most of the time. The Norwegian Singers and the Sons of Norway. And, uh, and they have other organizations too that I belong to, that in – that was instigated all over the world. In fact, it's -- there's a little magazine right there. The Norsemen.

DALLETT: The Norsemen.

HANSEN: It's a, it's an organization all over the world. They – they started it. It's called another, it's another organization. (pages turning) But anyway, that's the magazine that they put out. And, uh, they started putting out these magazines many, many years ago when most of the people in

Norway used to go to sea. They'd have a Seaman's Mission all over. China, they have them, they just have them all over, San Pedro, they have a big one in San Francisco. So they do a lot of good for seamen coming in, coming in to the --- to the different countries. So, of course, now there are very few Norwegian ships coming in here, but the Norwegian government still keeps this big church in San Francisco. It's a very nice, a very nice place.

They bought this big home and they turned it into a church, built a church in the basement. And they have two ministers and, uh, so, like I say, it isn't that I don't have American friends. I have a lot of American friends. In fact, a lot of the Norwegian boys married American girls, you know, when they came to this country. And so I can consider myself lucky. I've never -- I've worked hard in my life, I've never had to ask anybody for any money. I was never poor that way, the way I hear the -- the black people are so poor now and can't take care of themselves. Which I don't understand because I think if they were a little more careful, you know, with things, they could do a better job.

DALLETT: I'm going to turn the tape over now. That's the end of side one of interview number 385 [DP-11] with Bergith Hansen.

END OF SIDE ONE      BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of interview number 385 [DP-11] with Mrs. Bergith Hansen. Let me ask you about the flu. Did it come through Stavanger?

HANSEN: Stavanger.

DALLETT: Stavanger.

HANSEN: Did it come through? No, it was all through Europe at that time. More people dying from the flu during the war there, you know. And, uh, so it was very common. Quite a few people died. And, like I said, the hospitals were so full there just was no more room in the hospitals. And, uh, I don't imagine the medication was as good in those days as, you know, today, like the epidemic we're having now, you know. I hadn't had the flu for forty years, and I had it a couple months ago, you know. So it was too bad and, uh, like I said, being my father -- he had been in the hospital for some time when my mother died. So she died first and then my father died afterwards. And having no family, you know, to take over wasn't, was kind of hard.

DALLETT: Did you know other people who had the flu, other parents of your friends, or . . .

HANSEN: No, I didn't. I guess, you're young, you don't pay any attention, you know. You don't, uh, but I remember in those days, of course, you know, when the person died you kept the body in the home, you know. And, uh, for the funeral, they always scattered green, a certain of -- certain greenery. I don't know the name of it, but they always gathered that through the steps and outside, you know. And in those days, of course, it was horse and drawn buggy, you know. They had beautiful hearse, whatever they called them in those days, I don't know. But. And then you walked behind it, you know, at the -- to the -- to the funeral, to their gravesite, you know, which

was, uh, hard.

And, uh, I don't remember too much about my father dying. I know we had some distant – distant relatives that lived in the country. They, one of them took me to stay with them in the country for a while, you know, and then I found out that my father had died, and then they brought me back into the city because we always spent every summer with my mother's mother and father out in the country. Always spent all summer out there. And at that time my father always painted up the house, the inside and out. At that time you had linoleum and they had to be varnished and everything had to be painted and he wasn't that fond of going to the country, you know. But he just came in towards the last week or something like that, because he wanted to get the house in order.

So like I said, our childhood was good. And my older sister is the one that remembers the strictness more because she was getting to be old enough to want to go out and had to be home at a certain time, and it was hard on her, (coughs) having to be home at just such a time. So . . .

DALLETT: Do you remember much about when you actually left home and made the trip to this country?

HANSEN: Oh, I had a wonderful time on the ship. I was running all over. I was the only one that wasn't seasick. All my other sisters were seasick. I remember one time that one of the waiters we had at our table, he had taken a nap and he didn't wake up in time. So I had gone in and set the table for him, so when he came out the table was all set, you know. So

DP-11/HANSEN

when we left the ship after our voyage why, uh, he . . .

DALLETT: Do you remember the name?

HANSEN: Yeah. Bergensfjord. ( she coughs ) This, you couldn't call him a steward, he was a waiter. He even packed lunch for us. You know, we were going to go on the train to Minneapolis. In those days, you know, it took three or four days. And we had no idea we were going to have to go to Ellis Island and stay there for a while, you know. But, uh, the trip, you know, like I say, a young child, you don't take – take things so seriously, you know. But I noticed when we came to Minneapolis, my aunt couldn't even, she had, hadn't spoken English for a few years, but that was no excuse not to speak Norwegian. But she couldn't even think of what to say to us.

Right there we all wished we could have turned around and gone back home, you know. Because, uh, it -- it was, we were lucky to be together, you know, to have that feeling. And we had left the home in Norway where we had electricity. When we came to my aunt in Minneapolis they had gas. Well, a lot of people had it at that time. They had gas jets, or whatever you call it, just turned them on, you know. And bedbugs. ( she laughs ) My aunt didn't have them, but I know when I visited somebody in New York many years later there was bedbugs in the – in the – the house. And they said that a lot of it came with old furniture, you know, stuff like that. But, uh, so, we were, like I said, we were, we had a good time on the ship, and, uh . . .

DALLETT: How long were you on Ellis Island?

HANSEN: Well, I would say about -- not over three days. It wasn't very long.

DALLETT: But you were detained there because . . .

HANSEN: Yeah. Because the money hadn't come in that what --they were -- they were supposed to put up to guarantee that we wouldn't be a burden to the, anybody, you know. They had done that. And, uh, so we -- we met a few nice Norwegian people in Minneapolis that invited us to come there for Christmas. I remember one time we were walking to this one couple for Christmas, I found ten dollars on the street. I was so happy. And, uh, we had, there was a store open there, I don't know how come, but there was a store open and we went in and -- and spent that money. I loved bananas (laughs) and we treated, I treated my sisters to bananas and saved some of the money, you know. And, uh, so all these little things you remember. And, uh . . .

DALLETT: Any other foods you can remember that were new? Were bananas new to you?

HANSEN: Oh, no, no. They had everything in Norway that they had here. I mean (coughs) shredded wheat -- I remember one of the first cereals I had was shredded wheat. And they used to be in -- in the windows of a lot of cafes at that time. I don't know why. They'd have a bowl of shredded wheat. I still eat shredded wheat after all these sixty-some years. And, uh, no, there was no -- no difference in the, I never noticed any difference in the food. My mother had been a good cook. And, where my mother was born was on the adjoining farm of Governor Warren -- came from, his grandparents came from the same farm outside there. We found this out

later because he changed his name to Warren, or maybe his grandfather did, but their name was Warrel, you know. But we found out later that that's -- my mother's farm and his farm was a little further up, but they came from the same district.

DALLETT: And what was your name when you came through?

HANSEN: Morten-- Mortonsen.

DALLETT: Mortonsen.

HANSEN: Yeah. That's a typical Danish name, Mortonsen. And my mother, see, her name was Bergesen. And, uh, she had one brother that was living in Montana that sent for my younger sister. So she stayed there till she was sixteen. Then she was so lonesome, you know, it must have been ha-- tough on her. She was only ten years old. Luckily they had two children, so she wasn't -- the same age as her, so she wasn't so lonely. But when she became sixteen she came back to Minneapolis to be with my other sister and then, uh, she finished high school in Minneapolis. And she got quite a bit of credit at the time for being able to read and write Norwegian. They gave her a lot of credit for the language part of it there.

So she was lucky and got to live with one of the counselors in the high school. She lived with her for two years while she finished high school. And, uh, you know, did some housework, or whatever, you know, for her, at that time. So, so finally my sister in Minneapolis, she helped put her husband through school and he became a dentist. And my younger sister, here, she married an American fellow and she helped put him through

school. He became a kidney specialist.

And, uh, my husband was a seafaring captain on the ferryboats here in the Bay. So, like I said, when you se-- hear of these people going to the dogs, and I think how easy it would have been for us to have gotten in with the wrong crowd and things could have happened to us, you know. But, uh, I guess we had a good beginning and, uh, I think it helped a lot that we stayed with our own family, our ethnic backgrounds. And, uh, we were interested, we were all interested in the same things.

DALLETT: Tell me more about what you called Snus Boulevard.

HANSEN: Snus Boulevard. It's called Cedar Avenue in Minneapolis and, uh, all the, all the Scandinavians, for some reason, gathered in this -- this street. They had all the Scandinavian stores. They had even a Scandinavian music store where you could go in and buy records and things. And, uh, they had a lodge called, oh, what was the name of it. It's a Good Templar lodge. They don't drink. It's called International Order of Good Templars. They have them all through Europe, a lot of them in Sweden and in Norway, too. There's a few of them left here, but, uh, I -- I belonged to that in Minneapolis to begin with. That was one of the first lodges that I joined. And, uh, it was very nice, very interesting.

But, of course, going to the Sons and the Daughters there was, it was more of a jolly group. You know, they had music and dancing and programs and things like that. So, so I was young when I first started that. And, uh, so I, like I said, I married a Norwegian and -- and we went back to

DP-11/HANSEN

Norway about five - six different times. You know, at that time, being he -- worked on the ferryboats, but the ferryboats was, part of them was owned by the Southern Pacific. So we got, we could have free passage on the Southern Pacific trains. So we got a free pass to go on the trains to New York. And then, uh, going from New York in those days only cost, you know, two, three hundred dollars, at that time, to take the boats, you know. So, so that helped a lot. So we went by boat several times when my younger, when my son was two years old we went back, too, for, I spoke Norwegian to him for two years and then I just sort of stopped. I didn't speak it. But, uh . . .

DALLETT: How did you feel when you went back for the first time?

HANSEN: Oh, it, it was touching. Sailing into the Norwegian fjords. That's, oh, it's, yeah, you can't, you can't, there's nothing like it. Flying in is nothing. You can look down, but coming in through the fjords and, uh, you just stood there and cried, you know, coming in on the big boat -- people on the pier waving. Of course, I didn't have anybody special that was waving for me because my family had died out, but my husband's family, they -- they were there, you know. Of course, we got off, we got off in Bergen and then took another smaller boat to the place that he came from. He came from a little island and, uh, so it was good that I had his family. But, like I said, that is, I was twelve years when I left, and this was twelve years later that I came back to Norway. So . . .

DALLETT: Did you have any feelings about wanting to stay in Norway?

HANSEN: No, no. I've never, I've never had that. I don't think I could be happy

there. I'm really too Americanized, and I've had it good here. And there aren't that many people. You get so spoiled here. Although they're so extravagant in Norway. They don't look for bargains. They're not careful with things like, like I have been through my married life, you know. Think of tomorrow, you know, you're not going to be taken care of by hospitalization and all that, you have to look out for yourself, you know. But, uh, no, I could never, I could never live there. But, uh . . .

DALLETT: What does that mean to you when you say you're too Americanized now to want to live there?

HANSEN: Well, I feel I'm spoiled. I have -- of course, last time now, I went back to Norway, I went back to this little island. At this time, there's only two hundred people living there, but when my husband left there were six hundred people living there. But now all the young people are getting good education, they don't want to come back to the island. They want to go, they want to go -- they want to go -- go on further. And, uh, I came back there now and, you know, they had color TV, they had dishwashers, of course, everything is electric in Norway, you know. And, uh, they had everything. In fact, when I came back, one of the times I'd been back, I was embarrassed because I had a black and white TV and here they had a colored out one on this little island.

So, I mean, they have everything, but still they do things different. You know, they do, it's very expensive to go out and eat, it's just awful now. Norway is the second most expensive country you can go to now. You know, try and get a small hotel, a hundred dollars and up. It's just awful.

DP-11/HANSEN

So they, they say that you just don't go out for dinners. You just, you have parties at home. And, uh, liquor is very expensive. I know my son, when he went last time, he broke a bottle of liquor in his suitcase. And to go to the, they have what they call a Vin Mon Opol, and it's a place where you can buy liquor, you know. And, uh, very expensive. But they make a lot of their own. They make their own vodka and their own liquors and, you know, they can get the pure alcohol. And I don't know if it's legal or not, but every place we went, why --.

And then going to a place, going to a restaurant or anything, if you think you're going to drink or something, why, it's best just to take a taxi home. Everybody takes taxis home, you know. And, in fact, some of the big restaurants even have policemen standing outside -- watching to see if you're feeling good when you come out and you're going to get in your own cars. Very -- it's a tough sentence you get there. You know, they take your license away from you. So what they do, if they're going to go in a group, they'll have one person promise he's not going to drink, then he can drive you home. And that, that works out good, you know. So I just have, all I have left now is second cousins, but they've been very nice to me. I — I stay with them when I go to Stavanger and, uh, and the rest of the family is my husband's side, you know. So it, uh, no, I . . .

DALLETT: I'm not sure I understand that, what you mean when you say Americanized and spoiled, now, because . . .

HANSEN: It, uh, well, I think, I think in English, you know, it's funny. You can, I can say this because when I go back to Norway I'm thinking in English, and

then to translate, you can't always translate things. And I know the first time I went home, of course being only twelve when I came and then had spoken just English all the time, you know that I actually got tired in my mouth from talking Norwegian, you know. It was an effort. In fact, I did a better job than my husband and he was seventeen when he came, and everybody says, "How come you speak so much better Norwegian than your husband does?" I says, "I don't know." But, uh, they, I'm not bragging about myself, but they do say that, that I do very good for being only twelve. And I still have the dialect of the city I came from, so the minute I speak Norwegian, in fact, I spoke to a young Norwegian student who's over here and, uh, studying. He's in the Norwegian Army, he's an officer, and he come over here to study for two months. And, uh, when he heard I was Norwegian, then he wanted to talk Norwegian to me. Just a young fellow, twenty-six years old. And he said to me, "I can't get over how good you do, and especially still carrying that dialect from Stavanger." You know, we have such terrific different dialects in Norway. It's just, it's terrific. My husband had one, and I had one, and whether you come from Oslo or you come from Bergen or Trondheim, some of those people that come from Trondheim, oh, my goodness. They swallow their words. So, of course, I had a Danish dad, but we, you know, when you grow up with parents that have an accent, you don't hear it, you know. Like, uh, my husband had a little more of an accent than I have. I have, I'm sure you can tell, I still have somewhat, you, you know, your mouth and your tongue are used to certain things. You know that now, every once in a while when I'm going to say "TV," it comes out "tee wee." I just, I laugh at myself sitting here saying these things but, you know, it's two language

that you, uh, you have to remember. And, uh, now my youngest son, he went to the University of California, he took Norwegian, but I can't get him to say a word of Norwegian. He won't say anything. He'll say (Norwegian), thank you for the food, or something like that. I think he understand a lot more than he'll say. He's kind of a shy fellow. But my older son, he'll try. He doesn't care if you laugh at him. You know, he'll try all kinds of things. And, uh, they have a very exclusive club in San Francisco. It's a men's club. The club is ninety years old. And he just finished two years of being President of it. And, uh, you can't belong, yes, you can belong, you can't hold office unless you're of Norwegian descent. So many of the men that do belong, their wives are Norwegian, you know. They can belong, but they can't hold office. And it seems to be doing all right. They have a Ladies Auxiliary, so I belong to the Ladies Auxiliary. So they, they do a lot of good, you know. They help out the Seaman's church a lot and, uh, so it's a wonderful club. That's on the outside of the Sons of Norway. That's a different group altogether. In fact, at one time, it was considered quite elite to be able to belong there. It was business people, people that had a little more money than working class. Now they have carpenters and painters belonging, because they're making good money, they're making more money than people working in an office. I was talking to a carpenter the other day. He says, "I'm sending my wife to Norway." He says he makes \$1,200 a week. Imagine! You know, he said, "I can't afford to take off from work, but I'm sending my wife to Norway." So . . .

DALLETT: So your sons, I , your older son you spoke Norwegian to as a child.

DP-11/HANSEN

HANSEN: Yes. For just two years, about till he was two years old. He only knew Norwegian at that time.

DALLETT: But not your second son.

HANSEN: No, I didn't.

DALLETT: Why was that?

HANSEN: It, uh, it's hard to carry on a conversation all the time in Norwegian. I, some words I don't know and, like I said, the Norwegian that I speak is like a child of ten, twelve years old. You can take an American child, you get better through the years, you learn bigger words and different things, you know. So it's, uh, but, uh, like I said, I don't mind speaking Norwegian when it's necessary, but most of the time it isn't necessary. All the young people coming over now, they're so fluent in the English language that they would rather speak English, you know. So, so it's, uh, for quite a while it was compulsory to go to school through the seventh grade, but now they've upped it to the ninth grade. so they, they have a very good educational system in Norway, very good. They are, in fact, when I take, when I compare a child here with a child in Norway, as far as languages are concerned, they're way advanced. And now one of my sons, I think in junior high he took Spanish. Of course, I didn't know any Spanish so I never heard how well he did or anything. Anyway, like I said, when he wanted to go, when he went on to school I just said, I'm just proud of every year you do. I'm just very proud of you, you know, that you will go to school and we'll help you out as much as we can. But they worked in the summertime and paid for their own tuitions. Of course, my older son had

DP-11/HANSEN

been in the service, so he was on the G.I. Bill, you know, so that was different. But my other son, you know, he got a job every summer and all these Norwegian friends we had, he was either a carpenter or he worked in gas stations and saved enough. I think at that time my son only paid seven hundred dollars tuition to go to Cal at that time. It's way up now, I'm sure.

DALLETT: And at what point did you become a citizen?

HANSEN: Well, I waited a long time. I don't know why. I waited twelve years, so I was about twenty-four. In fact, the first time I went to Norway I wasn't a citizen and, uh, it was kind of hard because my son had to be with my husband on one place and then I had to be by myself in another place because, you know, the citizens were allowed to go ashore first. And being only two years old he wanted to be with mama, you know. He didn't want to go with his father. But it worked out all right. So after the children got a little bigger why, uh, then I, I got it during the war. And it took a long time, it took me almost two years there were so many people applying. And, uh, at first I was going to get it here in San Francisco, but in, I mean, in Oakland. But I found that it, you see, there they had you go up there and they tried you out, and had a lot of people watching you. But in San Francisco they took you into a private room and you weren't quite so nervous, you know, answering all the questions. So I got my papers in San Francisco. So it was about a year-and-a-half that I had to wait.

DALLETT: Do you remember some of the questions they asked you?

HANSEN: No. Political things, you know. Things that you studied and knew it and

DP-11/HANSEN

then you'd just forget it, you know. They asked all about how they run the government, the parliament and the congress and all that, you know, and how the president was elected, and all those things, you know. And of course I went to school and studied it, you know, so, in those days they had so many schools you could go to. Now I don't think they even have any of these. Foreigners coming over now, you know, I don't think they even have schools to study for your citizen appears. Because I have a niece living here, she hasn't gotten her citizen paper, and they've been married for twenty-five years now. She says she has no interest in it. In fact, it helped her when she took her children home to Norway. They had a dual citizenship. They could even work in Norway, you know, and that helped them out a lot. But, of course, when my children were growing up they didn't have such a thing, but I, I was, I wanted to become an American. I mean, after all, I was living here and this was going to be my land, you know, so. My husband, he . . .

DALLETT: Did it have anything to do with the war coming on that you applied for your citizenship?

HANSEN: Oh, no, no. I had applied way ahead of time, but it just got so delayed during that time, you know. So, no, but I had always wanted to become But, you know, I had two small children. It wasn't that easy to get away. My husband always worked shift work, I had nobody to take care of the children. So it, uh, that's what held me up for many years, you know, having two children. And, uh, so . . .

DALLETT: When you first started working you did domestic work. Was that the one thing that was really available to you as a teenager? Was there anything

else you could do?

HANSEN: Well, it was pretty hard. You had to work for your board and room, you know. And you had no other way of doing it. So, getting two dollars a week, you know, for your board and room, that was all right. I mean, that was my carfare, and I walked to school. In fact, I even saved money out of the two dollars a week that I got because when I lived with this Jewish family why, I got good food and, uh, in fact I had to learn how to be sure to put the right dishes on the table and the right silverware and everything because of them, and, uh . . .

DALLETT: Did you have time off?

HANSEN: Oh, yes. I had Sundays off, you know. And of course they went out a lot. They were young people, they went out a lot. So it was easy. It was either through a friend or through an associate that I got my jobs, you know. One place I worked, also going to school, my sister had already worked there. And I worked there and, uh, I got very little money. I got very little money there. In fact, they were supposed to buy me a dress once in a while and that, that was hard work there. I worked hard for those people. They were some Irish people I worked for. And, uh, I worked there while going to school. I can remember scrubbing hardwood floors. They were going varnish them and I had to take up all the, all the varnish. I sat there with a little blade scraping the hardwood floors and then washing them. And oh, what a job. I had blisters on my knees. I worked hard then for whatever. Then I had a word from, is it all over? Then I had a letter from a distant cousin that had found us, on my mother's side, and she wrote and found us four sisters. She wanted to adopt me.

DP-11/HANSEN

She wanted me to come to Iowa. She wanted to put me through school. But I didn't want to be adopted. Whenever she mentioned school, why I wasn't going to go on to school. She meant well. She was an only daughter and had no family and she had discovered us through the Norwegian papers and, uh, she came to see us. And so while I was going to school, once in a while she would send me dresses, you know, so I had more than one dress. I had two dresses. One I washed every week, and the other one I had ready to go to school for the next week, you know. So I had two dresses to, you know. But I, I was clean, I was proud and my sisters helped me, you know, buying me a coat, those that made more money. One sister made good money working for a wealthy family, and they had a daughter her age. She got all her clothes, from fur coats to everything else, from the daughter. ( tape ends )

INTERVIEW ENDS HERE