

DP-17/EASTBERG

DP-17

WILLIAM EASTBERG

BIRTHDATE: FEBRUARY 15, 1921

INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 11, 1989

RUNNING TIME: 30:00

INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT

RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW LOCATION: EVERETT, WA

TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1989

TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: JOHN R. MURIELLO, 5/1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

SWEDEN, 1925

AGE 4

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

DALLETT: This is the beginning of interview number [DP-17] with William Eastberg. My name is Nancy Dallett. I'm here with Mr. Eastberg in his home in Everett in the state of Washington. Today is Tuesday, April the 11th, 1989 and we're beginning this interview at about 8:10 p.m.

Let's start back at the beginning of your story, and could you tell me where and when you were born?

EASTBERG: I was born on February the 15th 1921, in Gavle, Sweden. That's G-A-V-L-E.

DALLETT: Pronounced Gavle?

EASTBERG: Uh, I believe so, yes.

DALLETT: Gavle, Sweden. And can you tell me a bit about your family?

EASTBERG: Uh, my father died in Sweden in, uh, my mother brought me over here, and her sister and her husband adopted me, which would be my aunt and uncle. That was, uh, in, uh, I have that information. I gave you it.

DALLETT: Here it is.

EASTBERG: That was on April the 4th, 1925.

DALLETT: So that makes you three years of age when you came over with your mother.

EASTBERG: Three years. Right, yes.

DALLETT: And now...

EASTBERG: Since then my mother has passed away, and my aunt and uncle have passed away.

DALLETT: Do you have any knowledge of what your father did in Sweden before he died when you were a young boy?

EASTBERG: Uh, he was in the Swedish ARmy. And he, I think he contacted pneumonia and died in the service.

DALLETT: And it was at that point that your mother decided to immigrate to this country?

EASTBERG: Yes.

DALLETT: Did they have plans to come to this country, do you know, before, before the...

EASTBERG: I don't know. But I know, I mean, she was alone and she just figured she needed someone to help. And, uh, so she came over here and stayed in Kansas City for few years and then went on to Chicago. Ad, uh, remarried. So I have a half brother, and he and his family live in San Antonio. And he did not know a thing that I was related as a brother. He, his, no mention was made of me as a brother, as a cousin, rather, you know. And he was, his father, his when my real mother died, and then his father died, his father's sister told Donald that Bill in Kansas City is not your cousin, that is your brother. So I have a half brother, and I'm glad now. I mean, I really am, because I keep in close contact with them quite often,

you know. So, uh, and they have, my brother has two children, and their son is married, and, uh, has a family. And they live in San Antonio and, uh, they have, my brother has a, Chris, they call him, he has a daughter that's still single and she lives in San Marcus, Texas. So I manage to get down there just once a year, and that's a Thanksgiving time. I go down there and spend my Thanksgiving week with my half brother and his family. And, uh, I don't hear from them often, but I still keep in touch with them. And that's about the only, that is the only family. I have some cousins, but I, I've lost track of them. I mean, I, you know, I hear from them, you know, maybe on by birthday or something like that. But that's just about the extent of my contact with my family. So...

DALLETT: When your mother came to this country, she brought you in 1925. Now, was her sister already in this country?

EASTBERG: Yes.

DALLETT: And she was in...

EASTBERG: In Kansas City.

DALLETT: Do you know how much earlier your mother's sister, your aunt, who later raised you, had come to this country?

EASTBERG: Oh, they came in before World War One, they were here during World War One days.

DALLETT: As you grew up did you hear stories from them about what it was like for them to come over before the war?

EASTBERG: Well, now this is kind of peculiar to say. I mean, mother was disappointed that she came over because she was, ended up on a farm in Kansas, coal oil lamps. And, she says, in Sweden, she said, we had electricity. And here, she says we lived like in the sticks. And she didn't realize that this country was so backward at that very time in history, you know. Because people out in the country, they had outside privies, you know. And there they had pretty modern facilities. And, uh, but I guess she...

DALLETT: She found it a disappointment.

EASTBERG: A disappointment, coming over to this country at that time.

DALLETT: Sorry, was this your mother?

EASTBERG: This was my aunt and uncle.

DALLETT: Okay.

EASTBERG: My aunt.

DALLETT: And did you know, uh, why she had come over?

EASTBERG: Well, I mean, I think because her, another sister had come over earlier.

DALLETT: So she had a sister here already?

EASTBERG: Yeah, yeah.

DALLETT: To Kansas City.

EASTBERG: No. They lived in Topeka. So, uh, they enjoyed this country and, uh, they, my mother's sister, the one in Topeka, her name is Johansen. They were married in Sweden. So when they came over they came over as a man and wife. So, uh, when my mother came over, she

was just, my aunt, she was only eighteen, so, and ended up on this farm in Kansas, you know. And going to Topeka later, met my Dad. And, uh, so, but my aunt, Mrs. Eastberg, was only about eighteen years old when she came over to this country. And she worked as a housekeeper. Most of those immigrants did. And, uh...

DALLETT: Did she tell you about that at all?

EASTBERG: Well, she worked for this rich family. I think it was Dudley family in Topeka. And she was impressed with, uh, or they were impressed with her, I mean. They, uh, more or less taught her English. And Mother never had any schooling in this country, but with no schooling, I mean, she could speak and write fairly well. And this well-to-do family that she worked for in Topeka, I mean, more or less schooled her and, uh, when Mother and Dad got married, she furnished the wedding dress and everything. It's fabulous. I mean, the sister that was married in Sweden came over and she was a little bit upset. She says, "What did you do to those people to get, they're spending all that money on you?" And she says, "Well, they liked me, you know." She says, "They think I'm pretty

nice." And there was a little jealousy, I think, between the two sisters. She says, "Well, they just like me. They just think I'm real pretty." And the other sister says, "Well, you're no prettier than I am." You know, they were, and they always did that. They'd bicker back and forth. They still loved each other, but they always were biting at each other, you know.

DALLETT: Right. Did she live in with the Dudley family?

EASTBERG: She lived in with the Dudley family.

DALLETT: And did she, she took care of the children?

EASTBERG:... Uh, I don't know about that. But, uh, the one thing, I mean, Mother said, that was her first time she saw a black man. And she was scared. But they had a chauffeur, a black a chauffeur, I remember. And he was, I guess, just as nice as can be, you know, and she was afraid of him, you know. But, I mean, nothing happened. Mother was a little shy, you know. But I can imagine, having never seen a black person. And that was the first black person she ever saw in her life. And I know she said that she was just downright

frightened of seeing this black person. Because he lived in, too. They all had, I think he had quarters above the garage, and he took care of the automobiles and, or whatever they had they were driving. I don't know, but...

DALLETT: Was there a large Swedish community in Topeka, where she was?

EASTBERG: There was quite a large Swedish Mission Church, which they belonged to.

DALLETT: Did she ever talk about whether, you say she was a little disappointed when she first came. Did she want to leave? Did she think about going back to Sweden, or...

EASTBERG: I don't think so.

DALLETT: No.

EASTBERG: Because her father, her real mother died, and she had a step-mother, and they never did get along. So that was one of the reasons, I think, that she came to this country, to get away from the step-mother.

DALLETT: Were there brothers, as well?

EASTBERG: Oh, there was, there was two brothers over there and, uh, of course, they've all passed on now.

DALLETT: They did not come to...

EASTBERG: No, no. Because Mother and her sister and my mother were the only ones that came to this country.

DALLETT: So the three girls came.

EASTBERG: Yeah.

DALLETT: Did the sons have a farm?

EASTBERG: Uh, they had a small farm, I think. But, uh, I don't know much about that phase of it, really, Wish I did. I mean, they're all handsome people. I mean, I got pictures. I wish I had prepared a little bit better to show you, but...

DALLETT: Oh, that's fine. All right. So your mother brought you over and, uh, her sister was living in Kansas

City. So did she come right to Kansas City.

EASTBERG: Came right to Kansas City, my mother did. And she stayed and worked as a housekeeper in Kansas City, my mother did. And then after I was adopted she, uh, went on to Chicago. And she passed away. And then she married in Chicago, and she and her husband went up to Lindstrom, Minnesota and bought a farm. And she died during the, at the oh, during the mid-way of World War Two. And then a year after that her husband burned to death. A wood stove exploded on the farm, and he burned to death. And then they left that one son who'd the half brother in San Antonio.

DALLETT: So your mother, your adoptive mother, met who was to become your father.

EASTBERG: Right, in Topeka.

DALLETT: In Topeka, while she was working at...

EASTBERG: While she was working for the Dudley family.

DALLETT: And was your father Swedish as well?

EASTBERG: Father, yes. And his folks were born in Sweden so, uh, I mean, they're Swedes through and through. And, uh...

DALLETT: Did you know the story of why he had come to this country, and how that came about?

EASTBERG: No. And his occupation, my grandfather, my dad's father was a stone mason. So, uh, it is, I have things and then I misplace them. (Mr. Eastberg shuffles through some papers) But he was the stone mason and his wife was just a housewife. I mean, she, I don't have it.

DALLETT: And this was a stone mason in Sweden. Also from the same, do you know where he was from?

EASTBERG: When he came to this country he did stone mason work.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. The grandfather.

EASTBERG: The grandfather. And he worked on the steps of the State Capitol Building in Topeka. And he was real proud of that. He says, "The only steps that are standing are the ones that I put up, you know." He

said, "I know how to mix that cement." You know, real, real proud. And my adoptive father, he was a cabinetmaker by trade. So, uh, one of the best.

DALLETT: Have your grandfather or your father passed any of those skills along to you?

EASTBERG: None. None whatsoever. I mean, I'm strictly business administration. I mean, I can't even drive a nail in straight. Now, that was my grandfather's rocking chair. (he gestures to the chair in the room) I brought that from Kansas City, and the china closet inside the front door.

DALLETT: I wish I could describe the style on that, a swan handle.

EASTBERG: Oh, yeah. And it's heavy. It's just as heavy as heavy can be.

DALLETT: Beautiful dark wood.

EASTBERG: Uh-huh. I had it reupholstered in some appropriate, an old fashioned upholstering pattern, you know. But that's my granddad's old rocking chair. And there was

only one little flaw in it, a little piece of veneer had got chipped there at the bottom, you can see. But it's, people see it and say, "Gosh, you're lucky. Do you want to sell that?" I said, "No, I don't think so." Never.

DALLETT: Did you live with your grandfather and...

EASTBERG: No.

DALLETT: No.

EASTBERG: No, uh-uh.

DALLETT: He was in the same town, though.

EASTBERG: Right. That was in Topeka, I mean, my grandfather. But, uh, and then my dad, my adoptive dad had a brother, Uncle Claire, who was a dentist in Topeka. And he had another brother who was a dentist who died in dental training, when he was a senior, I think. But that was all in Topeka. Dad had the two brothers.

DALLETT: So was Swedish spoken in the family, or was it English as you grew up.

EASTBERG: When I grew up it was Swedish, but I didn't, I mean, they spoke Swedish between the two of them, but they all spoke English to me. I wish I'd been smart enough to learn the language, because it would be interesting to know another language. I do well to speak English, you know.

DALLETT: So you didn't really pick up the Swedish as a child.

EASTBERG: I did not.

DALLETT: It's not that you forgot. They didn't speak Swedish to you.

EASTBERG: No. Swedish, no. So it was, but, uh...

DALLETT: Did they carry more Swedish customs that you can remember or...

EASTBERG: The only thing in Swedish customs it would be at Christmas time, you know, the...

DALLETT: How was that celebrated?

EASTBERG: Uh, I mean, Mother with the baking. That was about it, you know.

DALLETT: What would she bake at Christmas time?

EASTBERG: Oh the, uh, different kinds of cookies, you know, and spritz and, uh...

DALLETT: What is spritz?

EASTBERG: It's a, you put the dough in one of those presses, you know, and turn it. As if it were a butter cookie, you know. it's rich, you know. And make it in little designs.

DALLETT: Did you deep-fry it?

EASTBERG: No, just bake it.

DALLETT: Just bake it.

EASTBERG: On a cookie sheet. So, uh, and then the fruit puddings, you know, and the sauces. And, uh, the potato sausage that I was telling you about earlier.

DALLETT: And how did, what did you call the potato sausage?

EASTBERG: Uh, well, that's the American word for it. It's potato karve, potato karve, something, I can't, which means potato sausage. I mean, it's, I don't, like I said, I don't know no Swedish to tell you correctly.

DALLETT: Spell it maybe?

EASTBERG: Potato karve. K-A-R-V-E, karve. Swedish is spelled like it's pronounced. Potato, P-O-T-A-T-O, potato, karve. So, uh, and it's good. I mean, we've had it here. There's a market up the street that sells Scandinavian foods, and you just put it in boiling water, you know and salt, you know. It's good, you know. And then lingon berries. And my mother was a great cook. I've got an old red cookbook, one of her cookbooks. It's falling apart, you know, but, uh, people would ask her, "Hilda, how did you make that?" She says, "It's all in my head," she says. "I don't have a recipe." And a lot of times she didn't. I mean, just a pinch of this and a dash of that, you know. So everything came out good, though. So I, uh, kind of miss all that now, you know. But, uh, that's true with a lot of us. But I mean...

DALLETT: Any of the other foods you can remember? The spritz and the lingon berries, and...

EASTBERG: The, uh, well, there's something called silta, S-I-L-T-A. Uh, pressed meat. I know you put it through a cheesecloth, and then put a big, heavy weight on it to press it down, and they leave it like that for several days, and then slice it, you know. It's kind of pressed meat. So, uh, I've never, other people around have never even heard of it, you know. And I think Mother has it in her recipe books, but...

DALLETT: Would she often get together with other women to create these dishes, or was it something she did on her own?

EASTBERG: Did it in her own, yeah. Mother was kind of a loner. She didn't, uh, fraternize with the neighbors too much, although if anybody needed help she would go, you know. And then when I was in grade school, she fell and broke her hip. We had to, the big police dog, you know. And she was laid up for quite a while, you know. And the neighbors did come in, and she got acquainted with her neighbors then, you know. But,

uh, Mother never was one to socialize, go to clubs, you know. And then later she did, figured it was just too much to try to persuade Dad to go to church, end up in a big fat argument, so why bother, you know. And the only time she got him to church wa maybe on Christmas morning they had a Swedish service at the Lutheran church, Emanuel Lutheran Church in Kansas City, and you had to get up at six o'clock in the morning, or five thirty, to get there. So that brought on a big argument, you know. But, uh, I can remember that. But that time of the year there was so much snow, I mean, Dad said, "I can't start the damn car," you know. So, "Yes you can. You're going to start it, don't give me that baloney. You're going to start that car. We're going to church." So he said, "Oh, I guess I can start it," you know.

DALLETT: So tell me more about the kind of work he did. He...

EASTBERG: I mean, he worked in, for a big store back in Kansas City called Emery Bird Thayer. E-M-E-R-Y, Bird, B-I-R-D, Thayer. He worked in the furniture department. And, uh, he, uh, repaired furniture that came in that needed repair and when someone wanted someone to come out to the house to repair something in the furniture

line, they'd send my dad out. And there at home, I mean, he built myself a beautiful desk. It was, since I moved I had to get rid of it. I mean, a big, too big for a small apartment which I had. After my folks died I sold the apartment, I sold the house, rather, and moved into an apartment, a small apartment. And then made my mother a big four poster bed. And I still have that. It's out in the storage place, and we're going to take that with us to Palm Springs. So, uh, that will be a keepsake. Dad used to make little footstools to give away for Christmas. And I still, I've got two of those little footstools. I wish I had one here, but I don't. I mean, they're out in the storage place.

DALLETT: So he did that all through your childhood?

EASTBERG: Yeah, right.

DALLETT: Was he affected by the Depression, or...

EASTBERG: After the Depression, I mean, they cut, this if after the Depression, the store cut out their furniture department. And he got laid off without any notice. I mean, one day he came home and says, "Well, it's all

over." And I think it affected him, because Dad, he started to get senile, and that's now what they call Alzheimer's, you know, they called it senility, you know. Because Dad was forgetting everything. He went out and forgot the way home, you know. And Mother would call me when I was working. I worked for the railroad, Santa Fe Railroad. And said, "Bill, you've got to come home. Dad has been gone for three hours. And, uh, you've got to come home and find him, you know. I'm afraid something's going to happen to him."

So I told my boss. "Well, Bill, you go home and find your Dad." They were very patient. Usually a company, you know, if you've got family problems, continue to have family problems, you'll be looking for another job, you know. "But you go home, find your Dad," you know, which I did. And Dad would be down in the park, you know, sitting on a rock, watching, looking at the birds or something, you know.

It was, "Dad, come on home." "Oh, I'm not ready to come home yet." You know, he wasn't doing anything. He was just sitting there, you know. And I don't think he knew the way home really.

DALLETT: You thought he was very distressed when he had lost his work.

EASTBERG: Oh, yeah. The family doctor said the only place for Dad is in the state hospital. I mean, because he will get care there. He didn't think much of the nursing homes back in those days. So Dad was put in the State Hospital in St. Joseph, Missouri. And they treated him very good there. Although, I mean, Mother, the neighbors, some of them, are unkind, you know. "Oh, Bill's mother, Bill's father, is in the asylum," you know. And talk like that, you know. And then Mother would start a cry, you know. And, uh, we'd go up to see Dad. I didn't have a car then, and get on the Greyhound bus and go up to St. Joseph, Missouri and see my dad. And, uh, about once a month. And Mother would cry all the way back home, you know. And that didn't do her any good, really. And then she finally had a stroke. She had about five strokes before she passed away. And that was in, my dad died in February of 1958, and my mother died in September of 1959. So, but, I'm thankful that they did adopt me. But I, the letters that I get from my cousins over there, Sweden, I guess, is a pretty prosperous state.

DALLETT: Did you ever visit where...

EASTBERG: I never have. Someday. They say it's so expensive. I have friends that are in the travel bureau business, and it's just, it's awfully expensive travelling to the Scandinavian countries. So, but someday I will if I can save a little, you know. But that's...

DALLETT: How about Ellis Island? Did you ever visit through there?

EASTBERG: Other than that boat ride, you know. The sightseeing boat around the island there.

DALLETT: How did you feel when you went?

EASTBERG: Oh, I mean, it felt, you know, I mean, so that's where I first saw this country, you know. I mean, you couldn't help but feel a little touched, you know, that uh, but that day, I mean, it would have had to be the worst day of the year, and it was in the fall of the year, and it was overcast, and you could hardly see the statue, you know. But I hope that you or someone in your organization will let me know when it is opened.

DALLETT: Well, I think you should be a special guest there.

EASTBERG: So, uh, but it, I'd be forever grateful, because I'm looking forward to it, you know.

DALLETT: I hope you'll be there. Well, I think we've got what we need, unless there's anything else you want to say about your immigration experience.

EASTBERG: Well, when I was in the service, I attained the rank of warrant officer.

DALLETT: That was during World War Two?

EASTBERG: World War Two. I was sent, inducted at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, and sent to, uh, Camp Cal in San Diego, California. So, uh, and uh, my dad had a cousin living in San Diego, she and her husband. I mean, took me around, you know. I said, "Wouldn't this be a great place to live?" Little did I believe I'd ever be living there one of these days, but gosh, I mean, it took a long time to do it. (he laughs)

DALLETT: I was going to ask you about your citizenship papers. There was a question about that.

EASTBERG: Uh, oh, uh, well, when I was adopted my adopted parents, my foster parents, maybe that's the correct term, though that I was a citizen, you know. So if I was, they wouldn't have had to tell me. They weren't going to tell me. I asked them, I remember, "Where was I born?" They said, "Well, that's hospital's been torn down." I can remember them saying that. And I says, "Why would anybody say that?" Nowadays, when a child is old enough to know anything, they tell them that you're adopted, you know. Unless they thought it would change my feelings toward them, which it didn't at all. I made me wonder, though, but it didn't change my feelings toward them at all. I was thankful, you know. So, but, uh, I was hoping, you know, after my dad died, that I would be able to take, my mother always wanted to go to California because she had a cousin out there. And I says, "We'll go to California." And I says, and I worked for the railroad, I could, she could ride on my railroad pass. But Mom had a stroke, and that was it. She never got there. And Mother always loved to fly, I mean, loved airplanes, go down to the airport to watch the airplanes. And I always said, "Someday I'm going to get up in one of those airplanes," and Dad says, "The heck you will. Not over my dead body you'll ever be

in one of those airplanes," you know. But, but she was, I mean, she...

(tape ends abruptly)