

EI-1015

ROLAND SWANSON

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LEVINE: Okay, today is August 1st, 1998, and I'm here on Cape Cod with Mr. Roland Swanson, who came from Sweden in 1922, when he was twelve years of age, on the S.S. Stockholm. At the time of this interview, Mr. Swanson is eighty-eight years of age. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay, could we start at the beginning? If you would say your birth date, and also where in Sweden you were born?

SWANSON: Yeah, okay. I was born in Enköping, E-N-K-O-P-I-N-G, Sweden.

LEVINE: And what date?

SWANSON: On June 18th, 1910.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you live in Enköping up until you left for the United States?

SWANSON: No, I moved from Enköping to Vesteras, V-E-S-T-E-R-A-S, Vesteras.

LEVINE: And Vesteras, did that remain where you stayed, or did you remain there?

SWANSON: I remained there until I left Sweden.

LEVINE: Okay, Vesteras. So how old were you when you moved from Enkoping?

SWANSON: Oh, maybe [pause] two or three years old.

LEVINE: Oh, okay, so do you have any memories of Enkoping at all?

SWANSON: Not many. I was too young, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: But Vesteras, I have a lot of memories.

LEVINE: Great! Now, how about your mother's name, and her maiden name? What was your mother's name?

SWANSON: My mother's maiden name was Anna Wilhelmina [pause] Hellstrom. Hellstrom.

LEVINE: H-E-L-S-T-R-O-M?

SWANSON: H-E-L-L-S-T-R-O-M, Hellstrom.

LEVINE: Hellstrom.

SWANSON: And she married my Dad who was Victor, Carl Victor Swanson, and he worked for the big ASEA Company in Sweden. He was a lathe operator, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Okay, now how about grandparents? Did you have any grandparents in Sweden that you were familiar with?

SWANSON: No. My—the only one that I knew was my mother's father. He was a cabinetmaker; he had his own business in Enkoping. That's where my mother was born, and she had one, two, three—she had three sisters and a brother. Her three sisters came to America years ago. She's the one that didn't come. But my father was here in 1900, and he—he couldn't stand the climate. So the doctor told him, "You'd better go back to Sweden, or you'll die within six months."

LEVINE: Where was he living in the United States?

SWANSON: He was in Brooklyn. And the climate affected his lungs—pneumonia, and stuff like—he was allergic to whatever it was. So he came back home.

LEVINE: When did he go back to Sweden?

SWANSON: Oh, he was here—he came here, I would say, [pause] oh, about, maybe 1898 or '99. But he went back to Sweden. He only stayed here six months.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So, was your—did your mother and father—had their families been in Sweden--?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: --before them?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: So they were born there, and you--?

SWANSON: My—my mother's father was the cabinetmaker in Enköping. That's where she was born. And my father was born in Uppland somewhere. But they didn't come, come here. One of my sisters that came over here, came to visit us after World War One. They came to Vesteras. And her sister wanted—she had no children, and she wanted to adopt me, and bring me back [laughs]. But I wouldn't leave my mother! And I was only five or six years old [laughs]!

LEVINE: Wow! Well now, did—were you the only child?

SWANSON: No, I had five brothers and two sisters.

LEVINE: And how many were born in Sweden?

SWANSON: They were all born in Sweden.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: So where did you fit in the line of children? Were you the youngest?

SWANSON: I was the youngest. The youngest, yeah. Because the Swanson family, my brother Edgar, Arthur, Erik, Harold, and me. And my sisters were

Tura [PH] and Karin, and Anna. The only ones, as I told you, the three—yeah. They came to the United States. But my mother was the only one that stayed in Sweden, because she had a lot of kids, so to speak, you know. She had five—five, five boys and two sisters—two women.

LEVINE: Well now, did your father ever go back to the United States?

SWANSON: No, no, no.

LEVINE: No, he never did? Uh-huh. Now you mentioned that your mother died when you were eight?

SWANSON: She died of the Spanish flu.

LEVINE: Could you tell anything about that, how it—how she got it, or how it was treated?

SWANSON: That was an epidemic after World War One. They called it the Spanish flu. There were millions of people that died in Europe from the Spanish flu. You had Spanish flu, you were dead.

LEVINE: Do you remember people dying of it?

SWANSON: My oldest sister, she was a nurse. She died. She got it in the hospital; she died.

LEVINE: Do you think that's how your mother got it, from your sister?

SWANSON: No, but—no, no, no. Because she didn't die until, oh, ten or fifteen years after she died. She died young. She was a young nurse in the hospital. And she was—there were millions of people dying from the Spanish flu.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother being sick with it?

SWANSON: I saw her. [Pause] [Sobs]

LEVINE: It brings back a very sad time, I'm sure.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: But were—because it was so prevalent, because so many people had it, did they have anything set up—

SWANSON: Nothing.

LEVINE: --that you recall, to take care of it?

SWANSON: They had nothing. You got the flu, you were dead.

LEVINE: Really! Wow!

SWANSON: See, today they have influenza vaccines and all that, but not—nothing. You got that flu, you were dead. And that—every day, millions of people in Europe died from it.

LEVINE: Wow.

SWANSON: The Spanish flu.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember anything about World War One?

SWANSON: No. All I know is, I remember as a kid, food was scarce. They were shipping it to Germany, because the German Queen—the Swedish Queen was of German descent.

LEVINE: Oh!

SWANSON: And they sent all they could to Germany to help them out, you know. So everything was short in Sweden. I, as a kid, I remember I got one cup of milk a week! That's all I got, milk: one cup of milk. And one reason [clears throat] that we survived pretty good was because my mother's brother, he was a caretaker for a big farm. And every week he used to come in to Vasteras, the town, with vegetables and milk that he sold to the stores. And he always used to stop at our house. He'd leave us milk, eggs, and butter. That's how we survived pretty well, you know. But I remember going to the Red Cross every Friday for a cup of milk.

LEVINE: So what did the Red Cross provide at that time, besides milk?

SWANSON: Well, milk, clothing, whatever they could help, they helped, you know, the Red Cross.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family? Did you go to church?

SWANSON: No, we weren't very religious. We went on the big holidays, Christmas, Easter, stuff like that. But during—during the summer, every weekend, we—my father built a sailboat, and every weekend we used to sail out to this Island in Lake Malerin [PH], which is a big lake. It goes from Vasteras all the way to Stockholm. And we used to camp at this island every Saturday night. And we would pick berries, and my father would fish, you know. So every weekend, we'd sail out to the island. So we

didn't have time for church [laughs]. We lived in God's country, you know?

LEVINE: Now what did your father do for work?

SWANSON: He as a machinist, a die-maker. A machinist. But he was clever with his hands. He built a sailboat; he built a motor boat. I remember before I came to this country he took me out in that before I left, on a spin on the lake, for about a couple of hours, you know.

LEVINE: When he was in Brooklyn, did he work as a machinist there?

SWANSON: He didn't work at all. He was looking for work. But I can't remember, but what I heard—I don't know if it's true or not—but he was a manager of the Swedish Strong Man.

LEVINE: What's that?

SWANSON: You know, like you have Atlas? He was the Swedish Atlas, and he came over here to join Barnum and Bailey's Circus. And my father was his manager, see?

LEVINE: Oh! But then your father, who came in, like, 1900, was too ill over here to stay?

SWANSON: The climate was—he couldn't stand the climate, so he had to go back to Sweden. He never got—as the doctor said, "If you stay here, you'll die within a year."

LEVINE: Oh.

SWANSON: So he went back.

LEVINE: Now how did your mother and father come to meet, do you know?

SWANSON: Well he—my mother, as I said, was born in Encheerpy [PH] and my father was in the—at the time they met he was in the Army. He was stationed, I think, in—in that Encheerpy, because they had an armory. That's how they met.

LEVINE: I see, uh-huh. So where was your father's family from?

SWANSON: From Uppland. Uppland. That's the state that Stockholm is in, Uppland, you see. Vesteras is in Vesmanland [PH]. They have states, just like we have here.

- LEVINE: So when you were a little boy, what was it like in Vesteras?
- SWANSON: Oh, very good. I went to school, and then I graduated from, well—well, it was something like grammar school, you know. But I went to a college. I started in Vesteras Ladderake [PH], which is like a college. My brother Edgar, he graduated from there.
- LEVINE: Well now you were—but you were how old then?
- SWANSON: Oh—
- LEVINE: Twelve?
- SWANSON: I started in the Vesteras Ladderake I think when I was ten. And I went there two years when I left. If I would have stayed there, I would have gone another five years, to become like a college graduate.
- LEVINE: Wow. Now, but were you ahead of your age group? That's sounds very advanced.
- SWANSON: Well, I think I was a little brighter than most of the kids, because I got—in Ladderake, in college, I always got straight A's and B's in my courses, you know.
- LEVINE: And what was school like? Was it strict?
- SWANSON: Strict, yes. It wasn't like here. You didn't talk back to the teacher, you know, like the kids do today. Well, I didn't talk back to them when I went to school here.
- LEVINE: And what did you do for enjoyment as a child growing up?
- SWANSON: Oh, home. In the winter we used to ski, and skate, play hockey. In the summer, as I said, we spent weekends up on this island, you know.
- LEVINE: Yeah, that must have been wonderful!
- SWANSON: Fishing, and picking berries, and we used to, in the fall, before the cold weather came, we used to pick wood, because we had a big, open—what they call a cockalung [PH]—an open fireplace, where we used to burn the wood, you know.
- LEVINE: What kind of a place did you live in? What was your house like?
- SWANSON: Apartment house.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SWANSON: It was four stories high. We had—we had two rooms: a big kitchen, and a big living room. It went the width of the apartment house, from one end to the other. And of course, the heat was the cockalung, you know. And we had a woodstove in the kitchen, fired with wood. That kept you warm in the winter.

LEVINE: And how about foods that you remember growing up? Things that your mother prepared or that you like to eat when you were--?

SWANSON: Well, she was a very good cook. Whatever she made was delicious, you know? And with all the berries we picked she used to make all kinds of jams: strawberry, blueberry, raspberry. And in the basement of the house, each family had a little cupboard, oh, about eight by eight, with shelves, where she put the preserves that she made. And if she made pickles in the barrel, you know? [Laughs]

LEVINE: So they each had a little section in the basement?

SWANSON: Every family. And in the basement they had a big—a big place where they did their washing. They had big furnaces that heated the water, you know, and they used to scrub on the board. Then they had a big place in the yard where they'd hang their clothes up, the women.

LEVINE: Do you remember—did you ever go with your mother while she did the wash?

SWANSON: Downstairs? Yeah! I used to get my baths there.

LEVINE: Oh! In the tub? In the sink, a big sink?

SWANSON: The big tub, yeah, because you had no indoor toilets like here. You had a big toilet, a row of toilets, on the outside, where you had the old-fashioned, you know?

LEVINE: Oh, right. Now, were they all connected?

SWANSON: Well, there were doors, you know?

LEVINE: Like in a public restroom, like separate little stalls?

SWANSON: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, they had about three stalls where you went to do your duty, you know. You didn't have any flush toilets and stuff like that. It was all picked up weekly by a sanitation truck, come around and emptied the—you know.

LEVINE: So, was it a social kind of event for women to go downstairs and do their laundry?

SWANSON: Oh, I'd presume! They talked, and you know! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah. And was it a close community, that lived in that particular apartment building?

SWANSON: Yeah. All the families that lived around you knew one another pretty well, you know? We were all friendly, so to speak. And the kids, we used to play together. Like, in the winter time, the big area where they hung their wash out, we used to go and get water from the brook—there was a big brook outside—and dump it in there, and made a skating rink. And we used to play hockey there, you know? And of course, skiing. All you had to do was put your skis on, and in five minutes you were out in the woods.

LEVINE: Did everybody have skis? I mean, was that pretty typical?

SWANSON: Everybody. Everybody had skis. Skis and skates. And we had sleighs, and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Oh. So when you look back on your childhood, how do you feel about it?

SWANSON: I had a very happy childhood. Very happy.

LEVINE: And how was it being the youngest of such a big family?

SWANSON: Well, you know! [Laughs] Nothing but the best for the youngest.

LEVINE: You were kind of spoiled, do you think?

SWANSON: Yeah, I would say so.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh?

SWANSON: Yeah. I know my oldest brother, Edgar—he had a bicycle, and every time he went for a pretty long ride he took me on the handlebar.

LEVINE: Wow. So, you were good in school, and you were spoiled by your family?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you had a nice childhood, huh?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: Happy childhood.

LEVINE: Good. Now, when your mother died, you were still in Sweden for four more years?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was that period like, after your mother died?

SWANSON: Well, it was a big change. My sister Karin and I lived together; we had a small, three-room apartment. And that's where we stayed after my mother died. As a matter of fact, the apartment that we had, my brother Edgar used to have it, but when he left for this country, we moved in there, in his apartment.

LEVINE: Now was Edgar the first to go?

SWANSON: Edgar was the first? No, he was the second one to come over here.

LEVINE: Who was first?

SWANSON: The first one was Arthur. That was when my aunt and uncle from Buffalo was over to visit us. He gave him—he gave him the money for the ticket. He was a pretty rich man; he had a bedspring factory in Buffalo.

LEVINE: Now, he was your—was he related to your mother?

SWANSON: He was married to my mother's sister.

LEVINE: I see, and did they come over as a result of your mother's death?

SWANSON: No, my mother was living. They just come over—

LEVINE: As a visit?

SWANSON: As a visit, as soon as they could after World War One they came over. And as I said, they wanted to adopt me [laughs], you know? But Arthur, he came over here, and he went to Buffalo to live with them. And he worked in my uncle's factory, bedspring factory. But he was trained to be a clock and watch maker, in Sweden. He took a three-year apprentice course, because he worked for a jeweler. And he didn't like

the work, making bedsprings, so he told me uncle, "I don't like this work. It's too hard." So he said, "Okay, if you want to go do watch and clock making, try some place in Buffalo." And he did, and one guy said, he said, "What you ought to do is go to Brooklyn, and get a job with Ansonia Clock Company." That was a big clock company in Brooklyn, Ansonia Clocks. So he did; he went there, and he got a job right away. He was—he got a boss's job. He had about fifteen, twenty people under him, because he knew everything. So, so he stayed there until about, oh, I guess he worked for Ansonia for about ten or fifteen years, and he went into his own business. He went to repair clocks and watches. He had an office on Nassau Street in New York. Then from there, he moved up to 40 Broadway, opposite Macy's, in what they called the Clock and Jewelry Building. He went up there, and he stayed there. Then he did very good—he also imported Swedish clocks, which he sold through the department stores all over the country.

LEVINE: So how about Edgar?

SWANSON: Edgar? When he came over, he got a job with F.L.I.S., Foreign Language Information Service, because he could speak French, German, and Spanish, and Swedish, and Norwegian, fluently! And he took care of the immigrants that came over from Sweden.

LEVINE: Where did he take care of them?

SWANSON: Right from his office. He—they sent them to F.L.I.S. because he could speak English, and tell them what to do. And he helped them exchange their money, and put them on the trains to go out to Minnesota, and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Now, would this be during the years of Ellis Island, that he was doing this? Would the people have come through?

SWANSON: I presume they sent the people from Ellis Island to him, because they didn't have any people that could speak Swedish or something, you know?

LEVINE: Do you know where his office was for the F.L.I.S.?

SWANSON: Yeah, right down—right down Bowling Green.

LEVINE: Oh!

SWANSON: Because I worked in the Cunard Building, which was right near there, see? I worked Anaconda, up on 25 Broadway, in the Cunard Building. We had three floors, and my office was right in the corner building, and I

could look out on the bay. I saluted the Statue of Liberty every morning. I could see every ship that came in and went out. And I have pictures of all the—and Broadway was on the other side. I have pictures of all the parades: Lindbergh, Eisenhower, the astronauts—all the parades.

LEVINE: Wow! Okay, so Edgar came—

SWANSON: So, then Edgar, then he became the Editor of the Swedish newspaper that was printed in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: What was the name of that paper?

SWANSON: *Nord Farnun* [PH], *North Star*. It was the biggest Swedish-American newspaper in the country. And he was editor of that, and he went to all the big Swedish affairs, and most of the time he spoke at the events, you know. So he was very well-known in Swedish circles.

LEVINE: And then after Edgar, did anybody else come over from your family?

SWANSON: Well, as I said, Arthur was number one, Edgar two, Erik, Harold, Karin, and I. Karin and I were the last two to come over.

LEVINE: Oh, so Erik and Harold?

SWANSON: Yeah. My other brothers, they lived with my aunt in Brooklyn. But when we came over, the last ones, we got an apartment in a three-story brownstone on Fifty-Second Street in Brooklyn, Fifty-Second and Fort Hamilton Parkway in Brooklyn. And we stayed there for about—for about, oh, three or four years. Then—

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay, this is Side B, and you were saying that Edgar got married, and then the others.

SWANSON: Then we bought a house in Garretson Beach [PH], Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Where's that, Garretson Beach?

SWANSON: That's out near—it's out Flatbush, near, well, it was opposite Floyd Bennett Airfield.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SWANSON: Yeah. And we stayed there. They all got married, and finally I moved with a friend of mine in the Bronx. We had a bachelor's apartment. And a couple years we stayed there, and then I got married and, with Eleanor.

LEVINE: Okay, well, let's see. Can you remember leaving your home in Sweden, you and Karin?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: What do you remember about getting ready to go, actually leaving? What happened?

SWANSON: Yeah, we had to go to Stockholm to get passport papers and stuff like that. And the day we left, by rail from Vasteras to Yettaboy [PH] where we got to Stockholm. Then we came over here. And one thing I remember well, there were two or three other kids on the ship. There was one Swedish family from California that had visited Sweden, and they were coming back, and they had a girl and a boy about my age. And we used to fool around together on the voyage over here.

LEVINE: Can you think of what—what did you do? Did anybody like get together and play musical instruments, or anything like that?

SWANSON: Well, they had orchestras aboard the ship, you know. And of course, we were too young to dance, and stuff like that. We ran around the ship all day. We were down in the engine room. Every time we went down to the kitchen, we got grapes or bananas, you know, [laughs] and stuff. So we had a damn good time! But one thing I will remember is when we hit outside Newfoundland, we saw an iceberg in the horizon, and we kept going, going, and finally we passed it, about a mile away, a big iceberg. There were—there were seals on it, you know? But I'll never forget that. When we passed it, it got cold!

LEVINE: Really?

SWANSON: You know, the wind was coming from the iceberg. You could feel it. This was in September, you know.

LEVINE: Wow! Now, were you aware of the Titanic, that it had sunk?

SWANSON: No.

LEVINE: I mean, was that something you knew about at that time?

SWANSON: That was, that happened the year I was born, 1910.

LEVINE: Yeah, no, but I mean, did you know that? That that was an event?

SWANSON: Well, I probably—through the newspapers, you know, they probably told me about it. But it was no big deal, you know, like today [laughs].

LEVINE: Yeah, right, right. So you had a good time. Remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

SWANSON: Yup.

LEVINE: What was that like?

SWANSON: I remember saluting the Statue of Liberty. And then, of course, from the ship I went to Ellis Island, because my sister had only sight in one eye. And why we were kept overnight is I think there was not an eye doctor at Ellis Island at the time. So they kept us overnight.

LEVINE: And what was that like? Tell me your impressions of Ellis Island, or describe it, as you remember it.

SWANSON: Well, I was only a kid. They put me in a cell. It looked like a cell—bars. I don't know what it was, but I was in with a couple of old men, and I remember sleeping on an Army blanket. I couldn't sleep because the wool—I was allergic, to itch, the wool, you know! So I had a hell of a time! But my brother Edgar came down the next morning, and he brought a bag of bananas! [Laughs] You know, in Sweden, when we had bananas? Only on Christmas. So he brought me a bag. And we were released. My brother Edgar took us on the elevated. We went out to Woodhaven, where my uncle and aunt lived.

LEVINE: That's Brooklyn?

SWANSON: Yeah. Flushing, yeah. And we were sitting in the car, elevated car, and this big black man came in, and sat opposite me—the first time I saw a Negro, you know. And I kept looking at him, eating bananas and looking at him! [Laughs] And my brother said, "Don't look at him." The first time I saw a black man, you know? A kid, you know? So, well we finally arrived at Woodhaven, and as I said, we stayed there with my aunt and uncle for about a month, I guess. Then we all got together and moved to Fifty-Second Street in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Were there any other first impressions, those first days or weeks that you were in the United States, that you recall?

SWANSON: We stayed mostly with my uncle and aunt. I used to play with my—with their son Ralph. He was only two or three years old; I used to play with him.

LEVINE: Now, you were twelve, so did you start school right away?

SWANSON: I started school when we moved to Fifty-Second Street in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: After you finished staying with your aunt and uncle?

SWANSON: Yeah, after we—

LEVINE: And you stayed how long with them before you moved?

SWANSON: Oh, about a month, I guess. We had to look around for a place to live, buy furniture, and stuff like that, you know. But when we finally got settled, my brother Edgar took me down to the school, which is only two blocks away, and entered me in school. And because I couldn't speak English, they put me in, say, the fifth grade, or something like that, where in Sweden, I was going to high school! [Laughs] But because I couldn't speak English. I stayed there, and then when we moved to Garretson Beach, I went to school there, and that's where I graduated from grammar school. I graduated from P.S. 153, 1925, Avenue U and East Twelfth Streets. Then I went to James Madison High School, a brand-new school, in 1920—9/1/25.

LEVINE: And did you stay at James Madison?

SWANSON: I went to James Madison to 1927. I had, I think—I was in an advanced class. But I didn't graduate, because I had to get out and get a job. So I left, but I went to night school. I got a job with the Equitable Life Insurance Company from 1927 to '29.

LEVINE: And then did you finish high school in night school?

SWANSON: I didn't get a diploma. But I went to night school, I think, until I was eighteen. Eighteen. Then I got a job, Equitable. From there, I went to Selchow and Righter from '29 to 35.

LEVINE: What was that?

SWANSON: Selchow and Righter, they were game people. They made Parcheesi, and this latest game they made, that's on television, you know.

LEVINE: I don't watch much.

SWANSON: Well, they sold that game to Parker Brothers. But that was a big—that game earned millions.

LEVINE: What is that game?

SWANSON: Huh?

LEVINE: What was the name of it?

SWANSON: The game?

LEVINE: Mm.

SWANSON: I can't—but they also put on a show on—it's still on, game. Ask questions—that guy from Canada.

LEVINE: Oh, is it Jeopardy?

SWANSON: Jeopardy, that's the one. That was the game.

LEVINE: I see.

SWANSON: That made them millions. And they franchised—they got franchised to the television.

LEVINE: Now was that a good job? Did you consider that a good job?

SWANSON: I was—I was chief bookkeeper. I kept the full set of books. That's where I learned a lot of accounting, you know.

LEVINE: Right.

SWANSON: So from Sellchow and Righter, they had to leave me go in the Depression, you know?

LEVINE: And how did the Depression—what, tell about the Depression and how you personally were affected by it.

SWANSON: Well, I lost my job, but I was lucky. I had a friend who was a job consultant, and he got me a job with Anaconda.

LEVINE: What's that?

SWANSON: Anaconda Copper Company, the biggest copper company in the world. I got a job there in 1935.

LEVINE: And again, as a bookkeeper?

SWANSON: As an accountant, because right in New York, the office where they had the office, in the Cunard Building, they had three floors. They had six hundred employees in the main office.

LEVINE: Wow!

SWANSON: But their mines and everything were out in Montana. They owned practically the whole state of Montana, Anaconda. That's where they discovered copper, you know, copper and silver and gold.

LEVINE: What was it like? Could you say as much as you can remember, or anything, about the Cunard Building?

SWANSON: Oh, that was a beautiful building! As I said, it was about thirty stories. We were up on—we had three floors: seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen. That's where the big boys had their offices: the Board Chairman and the President of the Company. But Anaconda as a whole employed about two hundred thousand people, you know. They also had mines down in Chile. And they discovered the metal that [pause] made the atom bomb, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SWANSON: They had—all the land was full of that stuff they needed for the atom bomb.

LEVINE: Wow! Now, were you keeping books? Were you being an accountant? I mean, did you have to deal with--?

SWANSON: With the sale of copper.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SWANSON: Yeah. We sold—we sold Europe, South America, Japan, and all those offices. We had an office in London, in Germany, in Italy, in South America we had two. We had one in Japan. And all those salespeople in the countries, I kept them with their commissions, and I took care of their expenses, and I ordered their books.

LEVINE: Wow! Quite a job.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, the Cunard Building?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like, working in it?

SWANSON: Well, it was a beautiful, beautiful building, you know. As I told you, we could see the Statue of Liberty on one side; that's where I had my office. And in the front you could look down on Broadway and see all the parades.

LEVINE: Could you describe some of the parades that really struck you, and you remember?

SWANSON: The biggest parade that I can remember is when I worked for Equitable Insurance Company. That was in Lindbergh's era. I got the day off to go up and see the Lindbergh parade.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

SWANSON: Marvelous! On Broadway, yeah.

LEVINE: How were people behaving?

SWANSON: Everybody was crazy! [Laughs] But I would imagine if I would have been in the service, that when the soldiers and sailors came back would have been a big one.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

SWANSON: Yeah, as I told you, Eisenhower's parade, all the astronauts' parade, and—

LEVINE: So you've seen a lot! You've seen the Lindbergh parade and the astronauts' parade! That's quite a span.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then did you stay there until retirement?

SWANSON: I started with Anaconda in '35, and I worked thirty-five years. I retired in '70, with full pension. And after I had been on pension for a month, they called me up, and wanted me to come back. They would give me a good salary increase. But the—I taught two Harvard graduates my job for a

month before I left! [Laughs] Inside a week after I left, they called me, and wanted me back, at a good salary rate. I said, "You didn't appreciate me when I was there, so you can suffer." [Laughs] "You didn't treat me the way I should have been treated." I should have been making more money.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now when did you meet your wife?

SWANSON: I met Eleanor in [pause] let's see. [Pause] 1931 we were married. I met her—I met her, I think we went to the [pause] we went together for about five years before we were married.

LEVINE: And where did you meet?

SWANSON: I met her in my friend's office, in New York City. She worked for a patent attorney, and the patent attorney my friend worked for. He was a stenographer; he worked for this patent attorney. And this patent attorney was Colonel Allen. He was a Colonel in World War One, and he was also Sanitation Director of the City of New York.

LEVINE: Wow! So she worked in the office, and what, you went to the office?

SWANSON: Yeah, to pick up my friend, and we'd go out to dinner, stuff like that. That's where I met her. So I dated her.

LEVINE: And what was her maiden name?

SWANSON: Henderson. Eleanor Henderson.

LEVINE: Was she Swedish?

SWANSON: No.

LEVINE: No.

SWANSON: No, she lived in New Jersey. And I used to—by the time we were married, I think I owned the Holland Tunnel!

LEVINE: [Laughs] You went through it so often!

SWANSON: [Laughs] Every week I went out to see her, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did you have children?

SWANSON: No, no children, no.

- LEVINE: And did you—so where did you live when you were working in the Cunard Building?
- SWANSON: Well, I worked—we lived up in the Bronx, in Mishula Parkway, in the Bronx. And then when I went into the service, of course, my, Eleanor went with her sister, and I went into, you know, the Navy. And as I told you, when I got settled, she came up to Boston, lived up there with me while I was going to school. And when I graduated and went down to Norfolk Naval Air Station, she came with me, and she got a job with the Navy.
- LEVINE: I think we talked about this before we had the tape on. Just say what school you went to in Boston, and then—
- SWANSON: Bryant and Stratton Business College. The enlisted men went to Bryant and Stratton. The officers went to Harvard.
- LEVINE: Oh!
- SWANSON: But the same—the same course! [Laughs]
- LEVINE: I see. Oh, that's funny! So then you went to Norfolk, and then she got a job with the Navy?
- SWANSON: Yeah, yeah.
- LEVINE: So, did you stay in Norfolk for a while, or what happened after that?
- SWANSON: For the duration.
- LEVINE: Of the war?
- SWANSON: Yeah, yeah.
- LEVINE: And are there any remembrances, or memories, of your time in the Navy, and of the war, that are something that stayed with you?
- SWANSON: Yeah, well, as I told you, I was supposed to go out on an air carrier, but the Japs surrendered, you know? So, but I had to stay—I could have gotten out when the war was declared over, but being in the Dispersing Office, I had to stay in the Navy six more months to take care of the other guys that were being, you know, yeah.
- LEVINE: Right, but tell about the edict that came down once the Japanese had surrendered. What you said before the tape was on.

SWANSON: [Laughs] Well, I as I said, we—that day, we had a picnic. The whole Dispensing Office, Department, had a picnic down in Virginia Beach. And Eleanor went with me, and another officer that used to ride with me into the base, because to get gas, you had to have a car-full. So I had myself, Eleanor, and three officers that I picked up and delivered every day, to go to the base. Well, as I said, that evening we went to Virginia Beach for the picnic. And we got out there, and we had a lot of men from the cook outfit with us. We broiled steaks and beer, and everything, you know. We were having a good time. And I took my radio with me. So while we were having a good time, a crewman came out and declared war was over, and all Naval or Army personnel would have two days off, and also the, like my wife, who worked for the Navy Department. We had two days off. So after we finished the picnic, we went from house to house, playing cards and drinking, of the fellows that lived down there, like I, you know. So we didn't home almost 'til five o'clock in the morning, and the people that we stayed with—it was an old couple. He was an old retired police chief. They got very anxious about us [laughs], and they called several police departments to see if they had been hurt, or in the hospital, or something like that, you know. But we finally got home about five o'clock in the morning!

LEVINE: Are there any other memorable events of our century, you might as well say, things that happened, that you can remember, either the news coming of it, or anything that affected you directly?

SWANSON: [Laughs] Well, [pause] oh, we bought some land in Oakland, New Jersey, when we were home on leave, and we built a house in 1955. And in 1970 we sold the house; that's when I retired, and came to the Cape. Came to the cape in 1971. [Tape off/on]

LEVINE: Could you just say, do you think coming here as a twelve year old, and having a whole different life—do you think it made a difference in the kind of person you are, the kind of person you became once you were here?

SWANSON: Yeah, I think so. I didn't want to leave Sweden, you know. I had a lot of good memories, good friends, and I know if I would have stayed there, I would have become a college, college material. I would have been, you know, same as my oldest brother. And I think if my oldest brother would have stayed there, he would have become President of A.S.E.A., Sweden's largest electrical company, just like General Electric, because before he left, he was the head of the accounting department. He had about fifty people working under him.

LEVINE: Is that by way of saying that—

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END OF INTERVIEW