

**EI-115**

**HERBERT (SWEDIE) MELQUIST**

**BIRTH DATE: DECEMBER 20, 1911**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JANET LEVINE, PH.D. 1/1992**

**AND JOHN MURIELLO 3/1995**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL 3/06**

**SWEDEN, 1926**

**AGE: 14**

**SHIP: "THE STOCKHOLM"**

**PORT: GOTEBOG**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **SWEDEN: LYSEKIL**
- **US: TENNENT HARBOR, ME**

**ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Melquist is the brother of Ebba Burt, interview EI-645. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr. 11/29/1995.**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for The National Park Service. I'm here today in Tenants Harbor, Maine with Herbert Melquist, who came to the United States through Ellis Island in 1926 when he was fourteen years old. I'm very happy to be here with you today. Perhaps we could start by your telling me your birth date.

MELQUIST: [ Mr. Melquist is having difficulty hearing the interviewer. ] What did you want to know first?

LEVINE: Your birth date.

MELQUIST: My birthday? December 20, 1911.

LEVINE: What was the name of the town where you were born?

MELQUIST: It's pronounced "Lisha Sheel."

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

MELQUIST: L-Y-S-E-K-I-L

LEVINE: Did you grow up in Lysekil? Were you there the whole time before you left Sweden?

MELQUIST: Until I was fourteen.

LEVINE: Now tell me about Lysekil. What kind of a town was it?

MELQUIST: Oh, it's about ten thousand people there. ( pause ) When I was there there was a lot of sardine factories. I think there was thirteen sardine factories in that city. "Course they wasn't all operating, but there was quite a bit of them.

LEVINE: So that means it was by the sea. Was the town by the sea?

MELQUIST: Right out on the end of a peninsula. Went right out on the ocean and the fjord went right in by; right on the fjord, yeahp.

LEVINE: Was there farming there, too?

MELQUIST: Not there. All stone. All paving cutters. They were all stone cutters. [ pause ] That's all there was there.

LEVINE: So, it was a quarry town and a fishing ...

MELQUIST: Yeah, there was quite a bit of fish: salmon, herring, sardines: there was a lot of that going on. Then the rest of it, most of it, was stone: paving. The boats come in there from South America, everywhere. Sold stone to all over the world; paving, you know what you call cobblestones in the street; that's what they cut right there.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house that you lived in?

MELQUIST: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: Tell me what that was like. Describe it.

MELQUIST: ( laughs ) It wasn't much of a house.

LEVINE: How big?

MELQUIST: Oh, I think it had ( pause) four rooms I think in there. It was four rooms. ( pause ) 'Course I went back, you know, in August.

LEVINE: What struck you about the place seeing it now after all that time?

MELQUIST: I didn't know anything. I didn't know where I was. They had rebuilt the whole city. They had a big oil refinery there. And it wasn't anything that I

knew. And I went through the house where I was born and the only thing they told me, there was one stick that went out through; and that was all that was left of the old house.

LEVINE: You mean a beam, a vertical beam that went

MELQUIST: Yeah, it was a beam, a corner beam, and that's all there was left. There was a fella; well he'd been in South Africa, for seven years; he'd been down there working. He come up to Sweden --back to Sweden --and he bought the house. And he took me all through it. It was beautiful.

LEVINE: They made it into a beautiful house.

MELQUIST: Yes. I have pictures of it.

LEVINE: Tell me about it when you lived in it. First of all, who was there? Your mother and father. . .

MELQUIST: No. My father left when I was ten months old. He come over here. And he never come back until I was ( pause ), I think I was twelve when he come back home.

LEVINE: So it was, then, your mother . . .

MELQUIST: She brought me up.

LEVINE: And you had --what? --two brothers?

MELQUIST: Yeah. Well I had, when we were alone, I had one brother and one sister and me. That's all there was. And then, when he come back home, then we had another, she had another boy. That was Henry, my little brother.

He's the one that was lost in Germany.

LEVINE: During the Second World War?

MELQUIST: During the Second World War he died, yep.

LEVINE: What was your mother's first name and her maiden name?

MELQUIST: Anna ( pause ) Anna Johnson.

LEVINE: And what was your brother's name?

MELQUIST: Gust

LEVINE: G-U-S-T?

MELQUIST: Yeah. eah

LEVINE: And how about your sister's name?

MELQUIST: Ebba. E-B-B-A.

LEVINE: So it was your mother, Gust, Ebba and you living in this house.

MELQUIST: Right. Yeah. 'Course when my brother, he was fifteen years old, he went off to sea. Yeah. He went cook on one of those schooners, you know the sailing vessels.

LEVINE: What was your mother like?

MELQUIST: Oh, she was a nice woman. She worked awful hard. ( pause ) She was

working in a brewery all the time. Them days you know we had wood; we sawed wood. And she'd come home at night, and she'd have to stand there and saw wood and split it. She worked hard, awful hard. Her hands was just like a man's hands, where she had worked so.

LEVINE: So did you go to school there?

MELQUIST: I went to school in Sweden as far as I could go; seven years. That's what they went then. 'Course they go longer now, you know.

LEVINE: Had you learned any English when you were in Sweden?

MELQUIST: Not a word. I didn't know aye, yes or no. Nothing. ( laughs )

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about your childhood? When you think of your childhood in Sweden, what is it that you think about?

MELQUIST: Well, ( he laughs ) it's so long ago. I can remember one thing. I got a lickin' everyday in school. ( They laugh. )

LEVINE: What did you get a lickin' for?

MELQUIST: I don't know, he just didn't like me I guess. ( laughs ) Aaugh.

LEVINE: What did you get hit with --a ruler?

MELQUIST: Oh, no, no, no. He had a great big stick. He threw me right on the bench and he let me have it.

LEVINE: On the hand?

MELQUIST: No, right across the butt. ( He laughs. )

LEVINE: Really?

MELQUIST: Ohho.

LEVINE: And did he do it to other children too?

MELQUIST: Not that I know of so much, but he didn't like me.

LEVINE: And there was nothing you did to deserve it?

MELQUIST: No oo. I didn't do anything. He just had to have somebody to pound I guess. But I got through it. I didn't care.

LEVINE: Were you a naughty child?

MELQUIST: No. Of course not. ( laughs ) I'm a good little boy now, ( laughs ) and I always have been. I never been in any trouble: Never been arrested or anything.

LEVINE: What did you do for fun when you were in Sweden?

MELQUIST: ( pause ) We played soccer, all the time. That's just like baseball here. Soccer. That's what we played. And in the wintertime we, it was hockey. Skating.

LEVINE: Were you a good soccer player?

MELQUIST: The best. Yep. I'm even in the museum down here in Port Clyde. ( laughs ) You go down and read in the book. ( He laughs. )

LEVINE: Wasn't there a story about a game that you won the final point or . . .

MELQUIST: Yeah. That's down here in Port Clyde in the museum.

LEVINE: Why don't you tell the story so we have it on tape.

MELQUIST: Well, we played, the Scotchmen was over on this side, and the Swedes was over to Clark Island. And the Swedes wouldn't let me play with them. There were so many of them over there; they all wanted to play, so I played over here. And I ( laughs ) scored two goals, and they only got one. We beat them two to one: And I scored both goals. ( They laugh. )

LEVINE: So then did the Swedes let you play with their team?

MELQUIST: Well after that, we had a league all over [ the ] state of Maine, everywheres: We played in Lewiston, Rumford, Portland, Bath, we played all over, everywheres: Sanford, we used to play in Bar Harbor, whenever there was a boat come in there. Sometimes there'd be a British boat come in. They always had a team, you know We played against them.

LEVINE: So the Swedes in this area still kept up soccer as an important . . .

MELQUIST: Oh, they all could play, yeah. They all was good players. And a lot of them was Norwegians; yeah.

LEVINE: When you were in Sweden, were you a religious family, at all?

MELQUIST: No. In Sweden you had to go --well the first hour in the morning, that was church. You had to, you know, you had to read the Bible and everything,

when I was there. That was, 'course, the minister or the priest, he controlled everything in Sweden. He had your birth certificate, he christened you, everything. He had control.

LEVINE: So where did you have this church service in the morning?

MELQUIST: In the school.

LEVINE: Oh, it was a part of school?

MELQUIST: Yeah, we had part of the schoolhouse-- you could open up the, and that's where we had every Sunday; we had to go to church right there.

LEVINE: Was your mother religious?

MELQUIST: ( pause ) Oh, you know, well, just like people are around here; they go to church, you know. She wasn't religious-crazy or anything like that, like some people are: You know they carry it too far.

LEVINE: What was the religion? Was it Lutheran?

MELQUIST: Lutheran. Yeah, that's all there was then. 'Course there was the Salvation Army and things like that, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, you had that in Sweden?

MELQUIST: Oh yeah. Yep. There was a valley, two mountains and a valley and you walk right down to the water. And every Sunday in the summer the Salvation Army, they'd be down there and they'd sing. And the people would be all around. It was nice. I loved that. ( laughs )

LEVINE: They'd be in the valley and the people'd be on the mountains around them?

MELQUIST: Right. Yeah. They was everywheres. It was really nice. And they could really sing. They was good. I liked that. Yep.

LEVINE: Did you have a best friend when you were growing up?

MELQUIST: Oh well yes, just like you do here, you know. There's always somebody that you chum around with. Fella lived right next door to me.

LEVINE: Did you have pets?

MELQUIST: I had a dog. And that teacher, he wanted that dog. And my mother gave it to some other people up in the country; and I think that's why the guy got mad at me. Yeah, he wanted that dog. It was a beautiful dog. ( pause ) I think that was one reason why I got, ( laughs ) I got a lickin' everyday. ( laughs ) He took it out on me.

LEVINE: ( laughs ) Did you have favorite foods over there that you remember from childhood?

MELQUIST: pause ) Food was scarce.

LEVINE: what was it like growing up? Times were tough when you were growing up.

MELQUIST: well, when I was little, you know, they had World War I. And everything that come in to Sweden was shipped right into Germany. We didn't have anything. You remember the other day when we was in Rockland, the lady told you about we had nothing but carrots and turnips, things like that.

That's all we had during the First World War; we didn't have anything. It was hard. Hard times.

LEVINE: Your town wasn't affected directly, but it was affected in the sense that you didn't have ( pause ) food.

MELQUIST: There was no food, yeah. That was it, I guess.

LEVINE: Well, how did you feel about coming to the United States?

MELQUIST: Oh, well, when you're fourteen years old, you don't think about much -- ( laughs ) about anything. Yeahp. Oh, I wanted to come over here and see, you know. We left. I come over on the "Stockholm".

LEVINE: What port did you leave from?

MELQUIST: We left from Goteborg. That's where they have all the shipping, on the west coast of Sweden. All of it come from there. And we come right to Canada. We come into Halifax. Then from Halifax we went New York.

LEVINE: Now your father had come back when . . .

MELQUIST: Oh, yeah, he was here for nine or ten years I guess, you know, first time. Then he come home. And he didn't like it so he come back here. Then, when he come back, my mother decided to come over here with him. Because he wasn't going to stay there, so she had to come over here.

LEVINE: What did he do when he came here for those ten years or so?

MELQUIST: Cut paving. That's all he ever did. Yeap.

LEVINE: Was he here in Maine?

MELQUIST: Most of his time he was... most of his time he was... Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina; that's where he was when we wasn't here. He was down there all the time.

LEVINE: And how long did he stay when he came back to Sweden then?

MELQUIST: He was there two years.

LEVINE: And what did he do when he was back in Sweden?

MELQUIST: Well, he worked a little bit cutting paving. And then he went to work in a lumber yard. He was working in a big lumber yard. He got tired of it and he come back here.

LEVINE: And then after he came back, then did he save money to send . . .

MELQUIST: No. My mother sold the house. She sold the house, and that's how we got money enough that we come over here.

LEVINE: I see. So, then you arrived in New York. Did you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

MELQUIST: Oh, I was up four o'clock in the morning. We was anchored off Sandy Hook I guess. You know, we was anchored out there waiting for the pilot. And I was up four o'clock in the morning, and I was going to look and see ( laughs ) the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: So did you see her?

MELQUIST: Oh, sure, well we come up by, yeah. We come up; we went right into the dock. Went right aboard of a ferry and over to Staten Island ( coughs ) --over to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: What did you think when you saw the Statue of Liberty?

MELQUIST: ( coughs ) ( pauses ) I don't know. ( coughs )

LEVINE : Were people on deck? Are you okay? Want me to stop it for a minute?

MELQUIST: No, that's all right ( clears throat ) go right ahead.

LEVINE: Were other people on deck to see the Statue of Liberty?

MELQUIST: Oh, yeah, they was, all people, you know, walking, looking at New York City and the skyline and everything like that. 'Course it's been built up a lot since 1926.

LEVINE: Were you excited then when you saw all the New York Harbor?

MELQUIST: ( pause ) Well, I don't know. I know I was wondering what ( laughs ) was going to happen next, I guess, you know, when you're little you don't think much of anything. You just wonder where you're going and . . .

LEVINE: Well do you remember then when you pulled up to Ellis Island and what that was like?

MELQUIST: Yep. Well, we was just examined, you know, went into a doctor's office. It was ( pause ) I don't know just how it is now, but I remember when we come out of the office, and my father he was down [ in the ]great, big hall. We walked right down and there he was. Yeah, he met us right there, so

we was all right from then on. You know, he took care of us. He could speak and he knew where to go. He'd been up here and he got a home right here for us; had furniture and everything.

LEVINE: What was it like for your mother to meet your father again, knowing that she was going to stay here then?

MELQUIST: Well, ( pause ) I don't remember much about that, you know, when they . . . 'Course he took her around here and there was a lot of Swedes, and a lot of people around. And we used to have big, they had an Order, Swedish Order, like a lodge; and she went and joined that and she met all of the Swedes up here and she made friends. And she learned to talk real good, oh yeah, quick.

LEVINE: Do you think your mother was happy that she had made the decision to come here?

MELQUIST: Oh, I think so, yeah. Yeah, she had it awful hard over there. Oh, that was . . .

LEVINE: So then your father settled here in town and was doing stone cutting?

MELQUIST: We settled right here. We come right here. I think it was May the fourteenth, we come here, 1926. And that fall I went to school over here. I was fourteen years old. I went to school over here in this, and I didn't know one, I couldn't say anything. I didn't know any English. But I picked it up little by little.

LEVINE: Was that when all the grades were in the same classroom, in that school?

MELQUIST Was it what?

LEVINE: All the grades were in the same classroom?

MELQUIST: Oh, yeah. There was, you know, primaries and grammar school and high school, over here in this school I started down in the primaries. And then I went into the grammar school and I was up there and was going to go into high school, and then I quit, and ( ( ( ause ) I went up on the quarries and I went to work. I wanted to earn money.

LEVINE: What was it like going to school with kids who could speak English?

MELQUIST: They was good to me. Oh, yeah, yeah, they wasn't --there as just one fella down here that was kind of a, he'd fight with everybody anyway. He was ( pause ) a nasty kid. But he never, you know, he didn't bother me. I got along good with them. Yeah.

LEVINE: So did you feel happy that you had come here?

MELQUIST: Oh, yeah, after everything, you know, when I got to know people and everything. Yeah we had, I had a good time. Well, you might as well say that I grew up here, you know, after I come, fourteen and from then on why, I had a lot of friends here. And we did good. We did good.

LEVINE: Was there any --what do I want to say? --prejudice against immigrants who came here and settled?

MELQUIST: Well, the old, old timers that come on the Mayflower ( he laughs ) I guess they, you know, they favored the people that was here: People that come across, why they was foreigners. You read the history of the town of Saint George, the book that Smalley wrote; and you get an idea of what it was like. You know, he wrote pretty good: He wrote the way it was, yeap.

LEVINE: Did you become, did your mother and father become citizens?

MELQUIST: Yep. Yeah, both of them did, yeahp. But I was too old then, so I had to go and get my own papers. When they had become citizen [s], then I had to go and get . . . I married first, I got married; and after I got married then I become citizen.

LEVINE: What year did you get married?

MELQUIST: 1935

LEVINE: Oh, so you were here nine years before you got married.

MELQUIST: Oh, yeah, I was around.

LEVINE: So how did you meet your wife?

MELQUIST: Dances. We used to ( he laughs ) dance. I don't know; three, four times a week I guess, we went to dances.

LEVINE: Where were the dances held?

MELQUIST: Well, we had down to Martinsville, Spruce Head, Rockland, East Union, South Thomaston, Odd Fellows Hall up here. Oh, we danced everywhere.

LEVINE: And would you have live music?

MELQUIST: Oh, sure. Yeah, had orchestra. Yeah, I used to love to dance.

LEVINE: So then you were married and you settled here, in Tenants Harbor. And you had ( pause ) two children?

MELQUIST: Two boys.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

MELQUIST: The oldest boy is Harry; he lives in Hartford. And the other one is Edwin; he lives in Rockport.

LEVINE: And you have grandchildren too?

MELQUIST: I have five, yeah. My oldest boy's got three and the other boy's got two, two boys.

LEVINE: So after you quit school, then what did you do?

MELQUIST: I went to work up on the quarry. I went to work up here in this granite quarry up there.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay there?

MELQUIST: I think I worked for ah, I learned to cut stone up there. I think I was, oh, around, the granite business kind of died out, you know. It, it --'37, '38, '39, right there it --asphalt come in and they took over everything. So the paving business died out. But I learned to cut stone. I can cut pavement. But I went into the building trades. I went work in the carpenter's Union, and I worked there all my life. That's what I done, building.

LEVINE: So you traveled out from here to wherever there was a job

MELQUIST: Wherever there was a job, I went. Yeap. I worked all over ( pause ) New England, you might as well say. I worked a lot in paper mills.

LEVINE: Building buildings?

MELQUIST: Paper machines. Putting in paper machines. Millwrighting. Yeah.

LEVINE: And didn't you work on a bridge, also?

MELQUIST: Not too much; mostly buildings. Yeah.

LEVINE: What are you proudest of that you've done?[ Mr. Melquist pauses.]

LEVINE: What's the thing that makes you most proud?

MELQUIST: The Samoset Hotel. I ( he laughs ) built that. I built the nursing home in Rockland. That's a nice building; sixty-bed hospital. And the hotel; that's a nice hotel.

LEVINE: Yeah, sure is.

MELQUIST: Yeah, I built that, all . . .

LEVINE: Can you think of anything that your mother or your father told you as a child that was something that they wanted you to live by? I mean, did they give you any kind of . . .

MELQUIST: Oh, we had to live, they were strict! Old country people were strict!

LEVINE: How were they strict? What were they strict about?

MELQUIST: Well, you did what was right, and if you went wrong, you found out about it. ( He laughs. ) Yeah, they didn't fool around.

LEVINE: So was your father strict too, when you came back over here.

MELQUIST: Oh, yeah, he, we had to live by the rules, you know; you couldn't do anything . . .

LEVINE: Is there anything you would like to say about growing up in Sweden, and coming here, and growing up here; and having your whole life really, here?

MELQUIST: Well, most of my life, you know, was right here, after I come here. I got through school. About the only thing we did over there was go to school and, ( pause ) well when you're little, it's just like here, you know, kids play and that's it. Then when I come here, of course I, I grew up then, right here, more. When I got seventeen, eighteen, nineteen; then I was, ( pause ) I liked it. I had a lot of fun.

LEVINE: So you feel satisfied with the life that you've had here?

MELQUIST: Yeah, yeap. Everything's been all right.

END OF SIDE A: END OF INTERVIEW