

EI-124

AGATHE HANSEN KRISTIANSEN

BIRTH DATE: MAY 28, 1903

INTERVIEW DATE: 3/21/1992

RUNNING TIME: 8:21

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 6/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 7/1993

NORWAY, 1923

AGE 20

SHIP: BERGENFJORD

RESIDENCES: FAEDE: BROOKLYN, NY

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here in the Ellis Island recording studio with Agathe Kristiansen, who came from Norway to the United States in 1923 when she was age twenty. Today is March 21, 1992. I'm very happy to have a chance to talk with you, I just wish we could speak for a longer period of time, but I know you have to leave in order to catch your bus back. But let's start by giving me your birth date.

KRISTIANSEN: My birth date? I was born in Norway, May 28, 1903.

LEVINE: And what was the town you were born in?

KRISTIANSEN: The name of the town was Faede.

LEVINE: Can you spell that?

KRISTIANSEN: F-A-E-D-E, Faede. It's near Flik, if you knew

Norway, not far.

LEVINE: And did you grow up in Faede?

KRISTIANSEN: I did.

LEVINE: And what was the town like? Can you recall?

KRISTIANSEN: Very nice. It's a beautiful town.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

KRISTIANSEN: The what?

LEVINE: The house that you lived in?

KRISTIANSEN: Of course. I was back in 1929 and then later on with my husband.

LEVINE: Well, could you, what do you remember about the town from when you were a little girl?

KRISTIANSEN: Oh, we had a very good life. My mother and my father worked in Toledo, Ohio and made a trip, and my mother didn't want to sell the house and go to America.

LEVINE: So did you, when you came to America, who came with you?

KRISTIANSEN: My twin sister. She's in Florida now.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you come, you just came alone, the two girls.

KRISTIANSEN: Yeah. Us two, yes, with friends, too. There were some friends on the same boat, you know, but they went different ways. My cousin came to meet us at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: What had you heard about America before you came here?

KRISTIANSEN: Oh, well, everybody seemed to go that year. There was an awful lot in 1923.

LEVINE: What was your reason for going?

KRISTIANSEN: Just because, eh, the work was a bit better. The work really hard in Norway. I worked in housework. I had some nice jobs here.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

KRISTIANSEN: Regine Hansen.

LEVINE: Regine?

KRISTIANSEN: Regine, what you call.

LEVINE: R-E-G-I-N?

KRISTIANSEN: R-E-G-I-N-E, E, N-E.

LEVINE: Hansen. And your father's name?

KRISTIANSEN: My father's name was Johann, John they called him, Johann Hansen.

LEVINE: So Hansen was your maiden name. And did you have any other brothers and sisters besides your twin sister?

KRISTIANSEN: Oh, yes. I had two brothers in Colorado and my mother had a lot of relatives in Colorado, and one sister was left home. She took care of my mother and father. But otherwise, yeah. I had, we were three brothers and three sisters.

LEVINE: And did you, you went to school in Norway?

KRISTIANSEN: Oh, yes. The same place, Faede.

LEVINE: And do you, when you think about your childhood in Norway, what are the things that you think about?

KRISTIANSEN: Well, we were very happy, yes. We had a church and we had bazaars. We liked to go to the bazaars, you know.

LEVINE: What's that?

KRISTIANSEN: Bazaars is like a, uh, like you would call, it's

not like a flea market, but it's like, bazaar's like . . .

LEVINE: Oh, a bazaar.

KRISTIANSEN: Yeah. They raffled off a few things and they served coffee, you know. It was nice.

LEVINE: And, well, how about food. Is there any food that you remember?

KRISTIANSEN: Plenty of food. Plenty of food.

LEVINE: Liking as a child?

KRISTIANSEN: Yeah, we had, my mother had two cows and she had some sheep, you know. I remember her cutting wool. And we had all we could eat. We had plenty. There was no food shortage.

LEVINE: And are there ways that you have retained from the old country? Are there any things that you do or ways that you think that you think stem from the way you were brought up in Norway?

KRISTIANSEN: What do you mean? In the work, or what?

LEVINE: Well, just work, or the way you think about things, or . . .

KRISTIANSEN: No, it's about the same. We did a lot of

embroidery, knitting. We learned knitting and crocheting very early, all that. I'm still doing it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, great. And what ship did you take? Do you know the name of the ship?

KRISTIANSEN: Yeah. It was, I think it was Bergenfjord.

LEVINE: How do you spell that? Do you know?

KRISTIANSEN: Bergenfjord. B-E-R-G-E-N, and you know what fjord. Bergenfjord. I think it was Bergenfjord.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about the trip over?

KRISTIANSEN: The trip over? Oh, we were playing games on the deck. I won two prizes. We played, we run with potatoes and we run with eggs, and my sister and I, we had two sweaters on, and the captain said, "Which one is, who is who?" Do you know what I mean? He didn't know. That's how much we looked alike. We were identical twins.

LEVINE: And do you remember your first impression of Ellis Island when you first got here?

KRISTIANSEN: Well, like I said, yes. We didn't know in that time. When my cousin came to get us and it was closing time, the line was too big so she didn't get us out that time. She

was waiting for us. We had to go back in again because the time was up. I think it was five o'clock.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So you had to stay over?

KRISTIANSEN: Yeah, we had to stay over at night.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Ellis Island?

KRISTIANSEN: Ah, I remember a few colored people in one corner. I never saw them before.

LEVINE: And what did you think? What did you think about . . .

KRISTIANSEN: Oh, I didn't think much about it, because they're people, like we think now, they're just as well as the white. And that's sad, you know, I can't remember anything. I don't know how we ate or anything. I can't remember that. No, I can't remember how we ate. It was nice.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of your first impressions when you got here to this country after you got off the boat and you were in the United States? Any things that struck you as different or interesting or unusual or . . .

KRISTIANSEN: Well, I don't think as much unusual with so many people here, you know what I mean? There's a difference.

LEVINE: Yeah. A lot more people.

KRISTIANSEN: Busy all the time.

LEVINE: Are you glad that you came to the United States?

KRISTIANSEN: Yes. I'm glad. I had a pretty good life, yeah. I got three children. They've been very good to me, even, you know, come down and see me. I lived in Brooklyn, New York for years.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you want to say, because unfortunately we're so short on time, that you would want to say about, you know, coming here or being here in the United States?

KRISTIANSEN: I don't know. I never feel lonesome, but I know 1929 I wanted to go home and see them again and I did. I was so glad I went home that time because they were both living, you know.

LEVINE: Well, good. Well . . .

KRISTIANSEN: That was just during the Depression when I come back, 1929.

LEVINE: Well, Agathe Kristiansen, I'm very happy to have this chance to talk with you. I just wish it was longer.

KRISTIANSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

KRISTIANSEN: It's very nice to meet you, too.

LEVINE: Thank you. The National Park Service signing off, and it's March 21, 1992, and I've been here with Agathe Kristiansen.

KRISTIANSEN: Okay, thank you.