

EI-137

LISA OSLUND NELSON

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RESIDENCES:

- **SWEDEN: MATTMAR**
- **THE US: GLEN COVE, LI, NY**

HEID: This is Debra Heid for the National Park Service. Today is April 24, 1992 and I'm here with Lisa Nelson who came from Sweden in 1921 when she was eighteen years old. Good afternoon Mrs. Nelson.

NELSON: Good afternoon.

HEID: Well first to start with Mrs. Nelson, could you state your full name including your maiden name for me?

NELSON: Well my real name is Lisia Marie Oslund. That's my maiden name.

HEID: Could you spell your last name for me?

NELSON: O-S-L-U-N-D. But you see we have three more letters in Sweden than you have here. So, it's like an "A" with a dot over it makes it an "O." So that's Oslund, so I had to change the spelling when I came here. And what happen when I was going back to Sweden, 1926, I forgot that it was a different spelling so when I sent in for the re-enter permits, I spelled it like I did here and got a letter back "Was no one that came on the ship with that name." (she laughs)

HEID: And what is your date of birth?

NELSON: April 25th.

HEID: And what year?

NELSON: 1903.

HEID: And what town did you come from?

NELSON: Well, I'm born in Mattmar, Jantlind.

HEID: The town you were born in, I'm sorry.

NELSON: Yeah, I'm born in Mattmar, Jantland.

HEID: Now could you spell that for me?

NELSON: Mattmar is spelled M-A-T-T-M-A-R. And the province is Jantlind. That's

spelled J-A, and that's another letter you don't have, N-T-L-I-N-D. Jantlind.

HEID: And how large of a town was it?

NELSON: Well, that was just a little bit of a place uh, mostly farmers there really. And a little mill. My father worked in the mill there. But this was a really small, small town. And of course we went to school. You didn't start school until you were seven of course and you went two years to a small school, (Swedish) what you call it and then four years to the, but I was skipped; I skipped one year so I only went five. The only schooling I had was five years. (she laughs)

HEID: And what is the name of your father?

NELSON: Nils Oslund, N-I-L-S. Oslund, O-S-L-U-N-D.

HEID: And you said he worked in the mill?

NELSON: Yes.

HEID: What exactly did he do there?

NELSON: Well, they made boards out of lumber, you know. And he was, with another man brought the lumber in to be made into boards. That's what he was doing.

HEID: Okay. And what is your mother's name?

NELSON: Selma, S-E-L-M-A. Selma.

HEID: Okay. And her maiden name?

NELSON: Klaesson, and that's spelled K-L-A-E-S-S-O-N. Klaesson.

HEID: And what did she do? Did she stay home or did she go out to work?

NELSON: Yes, she did then. No, she didn't, she stayed home. She was, from the time we were born she stayed home. I'm the oldest, so.

HEID: And how many brothers and sisters do you have?

NELSON: I had, well we were, I was the oldest and I had a brother Gustave, he died when he was eight. And then I have a brother, Erick. He's still alive. And then my youngest brother he was born 1910 but he passed away a couple of years ago, there in Sweden.

HEID: So you were the only girl?

NELSON: Yes.

HEID: And the oldest!

NELSON: And the oldest, yes! (they laugh)

HEID: So you had to help out a lot at home I imagine.

NELSON: Well, my mother was very good though. She let us play, because she was the oldest in her family, with an awful lot of children. There were twelve, I think. And she had to work all the time so she made up her mind that if she ever had children, she was going to let them have the childhood. And so we

benefited from that.

HEID: That's good. You're lucky! (she laughs)

NELSON: Yes, yes.

HEID: So tell me, now where did you live? Did you live on a farm?

NELSON: No, you mean as a child?

HEID: As a child.

NELSON: No, we lived in a house. Just a regular house.

HEID: How large of a house was it?

NELSON: Well everybody slept in the kitchen of course in the winter time. (she laughs)
It was so cold. Big kitchen, most, uh, everything that happened, you lived in the kitchen, you know, in the winter. The kitchen, and then what we called the "scoffery," like a little pantry. We had it full of dishes and stuff and then a little bit of a bedroom along side that and then you had a room what we call "solen." That's where if you had company you went in there, but otherwise you never went into that room.

HEID: So do you remember what the kitchen looked like?

NELSON: Oh yeah, sure! It had a wood stove, of course. And that what was the children's job to bring in wood and water you know, we had to pump. And that was a little distance to get to the pump where we brought the water in, cause that belonged to my grandfather and grandfather lived across the

road. So the pump was on his property so we brought water from there.

HEID: And what type of food did your mother make? Was there something special that stands out in your mind?

NELSON: No, a lot of milk food, a lot of puddings and we had cereal twice a day, cereal for breakfast and cereal at night, and sandwiches and then sometimes even in the middle of the day you had a pudding. (she laughs) Very little meat because meat was too expensive. You couldn't afford that. Most of the time if you had meat, it would be meatballs or some meatloaf, something that you could stretch out. We had a lot of fish. That we had, because my father would go fishing, fresh water fish so that was nice.

HEID: So that helped out feeding the family.

NELSON: Oh yeah, and vegetables you know. Of course my mother had a little garden.

HEID: So sounds like, you know, although you were happy, sounds like it might have been...

NELSON: Oh yes, I had a wonderful childhood, so.

NELSON: ...might have been a little hard though, stretching you know, the dollar trying to make ends meet.

NELSON: Well, you don't realize that. When everybody's in the same boat, you don't realize that. (she laughs) Everybody was more or less in the same boat.

HEID: Now you said your grandfather lived across the road?

NELSON: Yeah, my father's father.

HEID: And was your grandmother still alive then?

NELSON: Oh yes, yes, she was.

HEID: So tell me about them.

NELSON: Oh they were, my grandfather, he was wonderful. He made a little playhouse for me and he made skis for us, and he made little sleds, and he was really wonderful, yes.

HEID: Oh, that sounds so nice!

NELSON: Yes, no that was very nice. But then when I was, I wanted to be a teacher you see. But I had to wait and I was finished schooling when I was twelve, and I had to wait until you get eighteen. Well first you had to be confirmed. You were confirmed when you were thirteen so you had to wait another year for that. And then at eighteen you could go into the semenaria to, so that was four years still. Then I was sent to my grandparents in Sundsvall, which is, it's a town really. But it was on an island outside that town because he was a tailor. He had his own tailoring business and they needed help and my youngest aunt was going to get married so they needed to have somebody to take her place. So that's where I was for four years before I came out to this country.

HEID: Helping your grandparents.

NELSON: Yeah, I stayed for four years.

HEID: And you say it was on a little island?

NELSON: Yeah.

HEID: Now I'm going to ask a tough question. Do you remember how that island is spelled?

NELSON: Alna, A-L-N-A, but that's a letter you haven't got either! (they laugh) So I was there for four years. It was mostly, that island was mostly, they had saws, from lumber you know, they made, all around that island was saws, (Swedish), I don't even know what you call it in English. Mills, sawmills, yeah sawmills.

HEID: Well now going back a year, your still living at home with your parents, and your going to school. Did you have a school in the town?

NELSON: Yes.

HEID: Do you remember the school?

NELSON: And one teacher for four classes.

HEID: So was it like one big room?

NELSON: One big room, uh-huh. The first two years it was one room for two classes. That was small school then and there was a woman teacher and then, uh, the other four years you went to one room and that one teacher took care of four classes.

HEID: And do you remember what they taught you?

NELSON: Well, believe me, you learned how to read or write that's for sure (she laughs) spell, that's all very important. And you see he took like two classes at the time. If you had drawing or something, he could vocally teach the other two classes. So he switched over like that. And believe me, you didn't get any fancy education...

HEID: But you learned to read and write.

NELSON: That's for sure, and we had history and geography, and all that sort of thing.

HEID: So you went to school for five years then...

NELSON: Uh-hum.

HEID: And then you went to your grandparents to help them...

NELSON: Yeah, uh-hum.

HEID: And you were there for four years...

NELSON: Uh-hum.

HEID: And you know, describe them for me, describe your grandparents for me.

NELSON: (she laughs) Well, I wasn't happy there at all.

HEID: O h, why?

NELSON: Because, um, it wasn't like my own home. I don't know. The one thing... I was a grandchild there, right? But I slept in the kitchen just like a maid and they were sitting in the bedroom and never talked. They never spoke. So I mean, I was never happy those four years absolutely not.

HEID: So it was a big difference from your other set of grandparents.

NELSON: Oh, yeah, that's what I mean. There was no likeness at all. No. That's the reason I came out to this country, because you see I was seventeen and I was supposed to go into the seminary and I had to study to be able to pass, to get in there. And I didn't have any time to study because I had to work all day and the light went out at ten o'clock because the light came from the mill and the light went out at ten, and I was getting so nervous because I thought, "Oh, I'll never make it. I'll never make it." I took lessons, you know, and I was getting frantic, so I thought, "Well, I have to out and get away from it somehow, I have to get away..."

HEID: So what did they have you doing for those four years? What type of work did you have to do?

NELSON: Housework. Cleaning and, really hard work because my grandfather had his own business, you see so, there was a house on the outside where the people sat that was working for him. And I had to clean that all the time, morning and night. Clean his own office, and take of the animals, and no, I was (she laughs) I was more than amazed that I never had a cent for it. Not a red cent.

HEID: Was your grandmother ill that she...

NELSON: No, no, but she was, no but she was old then you see, she was quite old

then. She needed help. But she was good but he was so terribly stingy. Oh! She never had any money for herself either.

HEID: So it doesn't sound like you were very happy there.

NELSON: No, those four years, (she pauses) I wish I had never had to live those four years. If I hadn't, I probably would still be in Sweden but that's (she laughs) that's the reason I came to the country, to get away. And the thing was that I felt that my parents are going to be ashamed of me because I'll never pass and they would have to be so ashamed of me, so I have to get out of it somehow.

HEID: Now during these four years did you get to visit with your parents at all?

NELSON: Once, in four years.

HEID: Only once?

NELSON: Yeah, but I didn't have any money and they wouldn't give me any money. My parents didn't have any money, so. Once in four years. And it wasn't that far. It was like from New York to Albany, probably.

HEID: You must have been very lonely.

NELSON: I was, and never allowed to go with any of the young people. No, I could see the young people go to dances and I was never allowed to go anyplace except with them. No, well it was a period I like to (she laughs) like to forget. But...

HEID: So you were very disappointed that you couldn't go on to school at that point.

NELSON: Yes. Well I was afraid you see, I was afraid I wouldn't pass. That's the thing, because I had to study so much and I couldn't keep anything in my head because I was too tired and...

HEID: And you working all day long and were trying to study...

NELSON: Yeah, yeah.

HEID: Too much. So now, what made you decide to go to America? Why America?

NELSON: Because my grandmother was saying, "If I was a young girl, I'd go to America." I heard that, you know, she was always talking about that. "If I was a young girl, I'd go to America."

HEID: Now, which grandmother said this?

NELSON: The one that was working with, you know the one.

HEID: The four years, the one that was stingy?

NELSON: Yeah, the one four years, yeah, those ones, right, that's right. So I thought, "Well, that's one way to get out, (she laughs) get out of this dilemma." And then I had to get the permission from my parents because I was under age, you know. So, but my father finally gave in, but I never told my mother the reason why I came here.

HEID: Did you know anything about America before you came?

NELSON: Except I had three uncles living here.

HEID: Did they write letters home?

NELSON: Oh yeah, they came home to visit too, so.

HEID: So they told you stories about....

NELSON: Well, nothing exactly, you know. But there was a lot of immigration even when I was a child. You see, people get immigrated to America and we used to go down to the train and watch the train. There was a train station where I lived in Mattmar. And you knew when these people had the wreathes of flowers around their necks, they were going to America, because that was, that was the end. They would never see them again, you see? So that was funeral flowers practically, they had around their necks.

HEID: So how did you get money to come to America?

NELSON: I borrowed from my grandfather. And he couldn't understand how I could pay him back so fast. (she laughs)

HEID: Now which grandfather did you borrow from?

NELSON: The one I was working for.

HEID: So they were happy to... Were they happy that you were leaving?

NELSON: No! I'm they were not because they had to pay for somebody that came after me! (they laugh) And they couldn't understand why they didn't give any of us enough money to go to America, but at least second class, so we could

of gone with the other people that came from there, but no.

HEID: They didn't try to stop you?

NELSON: No. No. But my grandmother, she would have gone. If she had been a young girl, she would have gone too you see.

HEID: She would have gone with you.

NELSON: Yeah.

HEID: So now you borrowed money from your grandfather.

NELSON: Um-hum.

HEID: Now how did you get from where you were living, 'cause your on a little island, to the port where you were leaving. How did you get there?

NELSON: By train.

HEID: By train?

NELSON: Um-hum.

HEID: Was this....

NELSON: Goteborg, the Goteborg.

HEID: Goteborg?

NELSON: Yeah, um-hum.

HEID: Now this all by yourself?

NELSON: No. There was an old lady from the same place and her younger son. They were coming over here because she had all the rest of her family here. So they came over at the same time, but they came second class you see, so I didn't see them really.

HEID: Do you remember their names?

NELSON: No, I can't remember their name, no.

HEID: So you had company on the train?

NELSON: Yeah, well I mean just on the train, that's all. Not on the ship because there were...

HEID: Do you remember packing and taking anything with you?

NELSON: (she laughs heartily)

HEID: Did you have anything to bring with you?

NELSON: Yes, I had my father's trunk that he had when he was a young man. It was a square wooden box, you know, painted it blue and had a wooden, it had a padlock on it. And then, I had, instead of a suitcase, I had a basket, a square basket. And it was also painted blue and it also had a padlock on it.
(she laughs)

HEID: Do you remember what kind of things you packed?

NELSON: No, I don't remember that. Couldn't have been too much, believe me! I don't know why I needed that big trunk. I can't understand that. (she laughs)

HEID: Okay, so then you take the train and you get to the ship. Do you remember the name of the ship?

NELSON: Stockholm, yes, MS Stockholm. Yes, um-hum.

HEID: Okay, and you only had enough money for third class?

NELSON: Yes. Um-hum.

HEID: So tell me, you go on to this big boat. What type of accommodations did you have?

NELSON: Oh yeah, we had nice accommodations, cabins for four people. Oh, none of us come. And you met a lot of other young people that were coming over here...

HEID: So there were other...

NELSON: ...in the same predicament, you know, so.

HEID: So other single people like yourself?

NELSON: Oh yeah, young girls, and young fellows like myself. There was one, I can't remember, one brought his sister and brother over. He went back and came back with them. No, you meet a lot of nice people on the ship.

HEID: So now you have four people in a cabin.

NELSON: Yeah, um-hum.

HEID: So was there like bunk-beds?

NELSON: Yeah. Very comfortable. Yes.

HEID: Did you have a top one or the bottom one?

NELSON: Bottom one I had. I remember that now. Yes. (she laughs) I didn't think of it before then. (she laughs)

HEID: And how was the ship ride over?

NELSON: The ship ride was fine, yeah um-hum. I think it took seven days if I remember right. No, that was fine.

HEID: And what type of food did they serve you?

NELSON: Yeah, the food was fine. No complaints about that at all. The food was good, except when we landed here, we had to stay three days, you know, to get out Ellis Island, they ran short of food, so that's... (she laughs)

HEID: Okay, before we get there now. Now on the boat, were you able to do anything? Did you just stay in your cabin? Did you walk around?

NELSON: No, we went upstairs and played games, and....

HEID: Oh, what sort of games? Do you remember?

NELSON: Oh, shuffle board I think, if I remember right. I don't remember anything else really.

HEID: So this is really the first time you had a good time with people your own age.

NELSON: Yeah, yeah, yes, right. It was very nice. (she laughs)

HEID: And you had a little bit freedoms first time on your own.

NELSON: That's right, that's right. (she laughs)

HEID: Okay now, you're on the boat and seven days has passed and you're going into New York harbor and you see the Statue of Liberty. What do you think? What do you remember?

NELSON: Well, you have seen it on pictures before so you sort of expected you know to see this. But it still was a wonderful sight, you know, to see, in person. (she laughs)

HEID: So did everybody go upstairs on the deck?

NELSON: I can't exactly remember how it happened that, when we came in. I remember the tall buildings. That I remember, of course.

HEID: And were you able to go to Ellis Island right away?

NELSON: No, that was three days we had to wait.

HEID: You had stay three days on the boat?

NELSON: Three days on this boat, yes, because Ellis Island was filled up, couldn't get out.

HEID: Oh my goodness. After a whole week, you had to stay another three days?

NELSON: Yes, at the end of July. Yes. Three days, yes.

HEID: You have no idea why? I guess there's just so many people trying to get in?

NELSON: Yeah, there was not enough room at Ellis Island for us. There was no room. Had to wait until there was room enough to come out here.

HEID: Okay, so finally they brought you to Ellis Island, right?

NELSON: Yeah, um-hum.

HEID: And what do you remember when you came into Ellis Island?

NELSON: Well, I remember you had a tag on, of course. You walked (she laughs) like you're cattle you know, you were herded into this great big hall. I remember that tremendous big hall. And they had tables there, and you went through there and I know they asked you questions and I'm sure they asked them in English. Now, of course, you couldn't answer them again. But I had the feeling at that time you had to have fifty dollars. At least that's the way I remember it.

HEID: And you had some money in your pocket?

NELSON: Oh yeah, you had to show that, you know. But we didn't go through any on that physical examinations that they showed on this film at all.

HEID: Why was that?

NELSON: I don't know. Well because, you see, before you left Sweden, you had to go your doctor and get a clean bill of health, that you had been vaccinated against smallpox. So probably that was enough, I don't know. And then I remember on the ship, they examined your head to see if you had lice. You had to go under a big light in the doorway there, and if you had lice your hair came off, so.

HEID: They shaved the people's hair on the boat?

NELSON: Yeah, yes they did. I saw some girls that really didn't have any hair after that. But as I say, from that film they had to go through an awful lot, but maybe they were suspicious they were sick maybe, that they were sick or something. I don't know, because we didn't have to go through that at all.

HEID: Do you remember coming into the Ellis Island you know, big room and then going up the staircase. Do you remember that?

NELSON: Well, I remember, I don't remember the stairs or I remember this hall. That really was impressive because it was so big.

HEID: And you saw a lot of people there?

NELSON: Yeah, and (she laughs) but I didn't see---then they herded you downstairs. There was like different rooms. There were a lot of tan colored rooms because there was netting between to separate the room off. And I was put

into this room, I didn't see anybody from the boat, and thought, "Oh, maybe I'm in the wrong place. I certainly can't belong in here," and saw a black man. I'd never seen a black person in my whole life before that. (she laughs) So I tried to walk out but, of course, I was pushed back. But I guess I was in the right place alright. But what happen was, my uncle, I had the address to my uncle, and he was a single man, and he was not allowed to take me out because he was not married. So, luckily Pastor Haelandler from the Swedish Seaman's Home used to come out there when the ship's came in to see if anyone was stranded like that so he took, well, quite a few of us girls back to Ellis Island. He was supposed to be responsible for us for the whole year after that.

HEID: Well, let me ask a question. Here, you're in a room all by yourself, and you're just eighteen years old. Weren't you frightened to death?

NELSON: Well, I wasn't all by myself in this room. There was...

HEID: You had a lot of people?

NELSON: Oh, my Lord! There were hundreds of people there.

HEID: But did you know anybody?

NELSON: No, that's it. Because there was no one from the ship, so I thought, "I must be in the wrong place."

HEID: Well, wasn't that scary?

NELSON: It was. That's why I tried to get out of there. (she laughs)

HEID: They wouldn't let you out.

NELSON: They pushed me back.

HEID: So how long did you have to stay on Ellis Island?

NELSON: Oh just one day. Not the whole day even. I was out that same afternoon.

HEID: Oh so you were very hungry.

NELSON: So then we went up for lunch, I guess. I don't remember what we had, but I know we had one meal here. But we went out that same day.

HEID: Did they have an interpreter for you or you had to wait for the pastor to come?

NELSON: No, I knew I went through that...

HEID: Because you didn't know any English at this time.

NELSON: No, I didn't know any English at all, but probably my papers would have cleared it up, I guess, so there wasn't any complications there. It was all speedy, that's for sure. I went though there and then they pushed you downstairs. And then, as I say, they had an entertainment in the afternoon. They took us upstairs and they had entertainment, and this lady was singing and we were supposed to applaud and I thought, "Oh I don't know." (she laughs) It was just singing. I didn't feel like applauding. (she laughs)

HEID: Was she singing in English do you know? You didn't understand her?

NELSON: No, I didn't know any English at all. I didn't know a word of English. (she laughs)

HEID: So you listened to the music, and then you---(they laugh)
So then the pastor came and he took you I guess through...

NELSON: He took us to 5 Water Street, to Seamen's Home.

HEID: And how long did you stay there?

NELSON: We stayed there two weeks.

HEID: Was this a big home for a lot of girls?

NELSON: No, it was for seaman when they came in, you know. It was a seaman's home, really. It was a nice little house, 5 Water Street. I don't think that's there anymore.

HEID: How many girls were there with you?

NELSON: Well I think there were three or four together that they took out at that time. But then most of them were going. You see, I stayed in New York City, but most of them are going to different places and if you had an address to a single man, and a single man came to meet you, he could not take you out either, you had to get married, so I was with Mr. Koppler when I was there for those two weeks.

HEID: Oh, at the home?

NELSON: Yes, um-hum.

HEID: Oh, so the gentlemen would come and the pastor would marry them there?

NELSON: Yeah, they had to get married, otherwise they would go back.

HEID: Do you know if they came over specifically just to get married?

NELSON: No, no they had the address (she laughs) to the, probably a boy that they knew, you know. But they had no intention of getting married but it was either that or go back.

HEID: So now where did you go from there?

NELSON: Then I got a job as a kitchen maid, I think Glen Cove, Long Island.

HEID: Well, before that now, did your uncle come and get you?

NELSON: Yeah, he came and got me. From the Seaman's Home, I went right to the job. See, I got a job. I went to the employment agency and got the job as the kitchen maid, Glen Cove, Long Island. So I went right from the Seaman's Home right to the job.

HEID: Did you see your uncle at all?

NELSON: Yeah, he took me out there. He introduced me to some friends of his, you know, so...

HEID: Okay, so you went right to your job on Glen Cove and what did you do there?

NELSON: I was a kitchen maid.

HEID: Was the work hard?

NELSON: No, not compared to what I was used to from home, (she laughs) as far as I was getting paid. (she laughs) I got fifty dollars a month. That was a lot of money.

HEID: That was a lot of money then.

NELSON: No, it wasn't that bad. But the only one that was Swedish was the cook. The rest of the help are all, and one was English and one was Scottish, Finnish, and, but I was, well, I shouldn't, I guess, complain too much but, the cook there, she was a son---(she laughs), she was impossible too because she was not a good cook. She had been a laundress all her life and she started to cook and she was nervous and didn't know what she was doing half of the time. And she took it out on me. And she said, in Swedish naturally she told me, "You're so stupid." She says, "You will never make it in this country," she says. "So the best thing that you can do is go back home, 'cause you will never make it here." And, of course, I believed her! I thought, "I guess I am that dumb." So at night, I would, and of course I would not write home and tell them. So at night my pillow was soaking wet in the morning. It was really terrible. Then she had to show me how to mop a floor. Well, that took a while to learn with a mop. She always told me I was stupid. That was all I heard all day long. So then I went back to the agency. The only day you had off was two days a month, that was the only time you had off.

HEID: That's all?

NELSON: That's all. Two days a month. So on that two days I went back to the agency. I asked if he could do something because I was so unhappy there. So, she says, "Well, I'll try to get you another job," she said, "but wait another month because," this was in August, you see, "people come back from the country at the end of September." So I felt better that I only had one more month.

HEID: So what were you writing home? Were you writing letters home?

NELSON: Everything was fine. Everything was fine. Sure. I got to be so careful about getting the tears on the paper. (she laughs) And I thought, "I can't go back and admit I'm so stupid." You know?

HEID: So did you send any part of your money home? Or were you able to keep it all for yourself?

NELSON: No, the first thing I did was save my money to send back to my grandfather; the money that I'd borrowed from him. And he couldn't understand how I can make that kind of money in such a short time.

HEID: Well, how much did you borrow from him?

NELSON: I forgot how much the ship was. I still have the ticket, I should remember. I don't remember. I really don't remember now.

HEID: How long did it take you to pay him off?

NELSON: Well, I got fifty dollars a month. I think it took about four months. I paid him back. And you see, you have to have fifty dollars when you came in too, you see, so.

HEID: So he was really surprised.

NELSON: Yeah, he couldn't believe it, I know. (she laughs)

HEID: And how were you learning English? Do you remember a teacher?

NELSON: Well, you hear people speaking and you pick up a little bit here and a little bit there. It takes a while. You understand long before you're able to speak, that's for sure. So then when I, after the two months were up, then I left then, you see, and I went and got another job also as a kitchen maid. Because most of the time in those days there are Swedish cooks. The rich families, they had Swedish cooks so they'd put you in as a kitchen maid. You know?

HEID: Well, one question, I'm curious about. When you left your first job...

NELSON: Yeah...

HEID: ... Did you say anything to that cook that was nasty to you?

NELSON: No, no, no, no, no.

HEID: Didn't dare to?

NELSON: No, no, it was done. No, no, no. She had problems enough. (they laugh) It was her disposition, the problem. Oh yes, I must tell you this, because the lady was in New York having a baby. She didn't know what to make up for me to do. So, she had me wash the ceiling in the kitchen. And that was one of those metal ceilings with the figures in, you've probably seen them.

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They're not flat, they're patterned, patterned ceilings. Tremendous big kitchen. She had me wash the ceiling. So the waitress, she was German. She had been there quite a while. She came and pulled me off. She said, "Man will do that, man do that," she said.

HEID: Okay, were going to pause for one moment because they have to turn the tape over. Okay?

NELSON: Do you want to hear more?

HEID: Yes, yes! So let's pause one moment. Okay?

NELSON: Okay.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

HEID: Okay, we're going to start again now. Okay?

NELSON: Oh, yes.

HEID: So now you left your job in Glen Cove. Where did you go from there?

NELSON: Well, I went to the employment agency again, and they sent me to 19 East

70th Street, to people, Morris, Dave and Ann Morris and I went in the front door, the doorman opened you know. I was ushered into a side room there. Of course, I didn't speak any English. After two months, you don't speak any English. So the housekeeper had the cook come upstairs because she was Swedish so she was going to speak to me, you see. And of course, she wasn't too pleased because here I'm eighteen years old, and at that time, they used to have, there used to be three in the kitchen. There used to be cook, second cook and the kitchen maid. And that winter, they were going to do away with the second cook. So they wanted a kitchen maid that was very experienced, that could take over as a second cook. And they send me, eighteen years old. (she laughs) So she was not too pleased, naturally. So she said to me, in Swedish, (Swedish). What can you cook? You know? (she laughs) I couldn't cook anything! (she laughs)

HEID: Did you tell her that?

NELSON: Well, I told her a little bit what could I cook, after all. So she was not a bit pleased. I didn't know what they were talking about, but I could see she was not pleased. And she talked to the housekeeper, that, evidently they wanted somebody with experience, you see. And that's what they had asked for, and I don't why they sent me there. But evidently the housekeeper wouldn't let go. I found out afterwards she said, "Well she looks so wholesome, let's give her a chance." So I got the job alright, and she was wonderful to me! She really was.

HEID: How long did you stay there?

NELSON: I was there a year and a half; first as a kitchen maid, and as a second cook, and as a cook, finally.

HEID: And where did you go from there?

NELSON: From there, I had a job just for the summer. Van Norton's. That was a cook job also. That was just for the summer because, Watch Hill, Rhode Island, because she was going to a hotel in the fall. So then, in Watch Hill, I met these Swedish girls, and they were working for Mrs. Harder. And she was going to fire her cook because she wasn't feeding the help. So, they said, "Come and see Mrs. Harder, come and see Mrs. Harder." So I went to her and that's where I got the job after that. And that's where I was for seven years until I got married.

HEID: That's wonderful.

NELSON: 1931.

HEID: And what is your husband's name?

NELSON: Alte. A-L-T-E. Nelson. And he came from the southern part of Sweden. I come from the northern part. But I met him at not at a large meeting, but at a banquet, a large banquet.

HEID: But at this time, your able to speak English though. Right?

NELSON: Oh yes, oh yes. For heaven's sakes.

HEID: Were you ever able to go back to school?

NELSON: Beg your pardon?

HEID: Were you ever able to go back to school when you came here?

NELSON: No, no, no, no, no, no.

HEID: You always had to work.

NELSON: Always had to work, you see. You always worked at night. You always worked late at night. No I never went to school here. No.

HEID: I guess you missed that.

NELSON: Well, I don't know. Well of course, when I'm going to school in Sweden, it was to be a teacher, you see. That was the idea. If you went to school there, it was just to learn English, you see, really, more or less. So, I managed anyway I guess. (she laughs)

HEID: One thing I didn't ask you about. In Sweden, what religion were you?

NELSON: Lutheran.

HEID: Lutheran?

NELSON: You're born a Lutheran. That was the state's religion.

HEID: And did you go to church every Sunday?

NELSON: No no, no no. We had quite a distance to church so, and we had a distance to school, too. Believe me! The school was in one end of the little town and we lived in the opposite end, so we had---The winter, of course the winter was so long there in the northern part of Sweden. It's dark up until about nine, and then it gets dark again about two, you know, so you went out in the

dark and came back in the dark.

HEID: And what about when you came to America? Were you able to go to church here?

NELSON: Not too often, because you work. You work on Sundays you see. In those days, you had every other Thursday afternoon off and every other Sunday. Every other Sunday off and every Thursday afternoon off. But you had to do a lot of cooking before you could be off.

HEID: So by the time you got off, you were tired.

NELSON: By three o'clock, yeah usually by three o'clock. That was your day off.

HEID: By the time you got off, you were really tired and all you probably just wanted to take a nap.

NELSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But that was the custom then, so.

HEID: Well, you know, looking back at everything, and you know, it's hard you know because you came over here when you were eighteen by yourself, I mean, that was very brave of you. And looking back at it all, do you have any regrets coming to America? Would you do it again?

NELSON: Oh, well I don't know. Oh I probably would. At that age I would have done it. If I'd known now what I know now, I probably wouldn't have. But there are many things I regret. I feel I should have told my mother a lot of things, you know, but that's...

HEID: Like what?

NELSON: Why I wanted to come to this country. Maybe she could have talked me out of it. You see? 'Cause she didn't know.

HEID: She didn't know you were unhappy.

NELSON: No, she didn't.

HEID: And you think she would have stopped you from going?

NELSON: Yeah, I'm pretty sure she would have. As I say, I saw her once in four years. Just, I think went home for Christmas that time in four years, so.

HEID: Were you ever able to go back to Sweden to visit?

NELSON: Oh yes! I went back in 1926, and 1930. Oh yeah, I was back several times. Yes.

HEID: Was everything still the same as you remembered it?

NELSON: Ah, no! (she laughs) It got a lot smaller it seems. The things that seemed big at that time was very small. I still have one brother over there. I don't think I'll go back anymore. Now, it's too difficult to travel when you get my age.

HEID: Well, you seem pretty healthy to me.

NELSON: Yeah, but your legs, oh!

HEID: Well before we conclude, is there anything else that maybe I forgot to ask

that you would like to add at this time?

NELSON: I think I've talked more than I should! (she laughs)

HEID: Well Mrs. Nelson, I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you very much. I know it was on a spur of the moment that I got you in the movie. But I want to say thank you very much for sharing your memories with me. They were very special and they were important.

NELSON: You're very welcome. Yeah, thank you.

HEID: This is Debra Heid with Lisa Nelson for the National Park Service. Today is April 24, 1992 and we're signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW