

**EI-1375**

**KAARE FORNES**

**BIRTH DATE:**

**INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 1, 2005**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW:**

**RUNNING TIME: 17:23**

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

**RECORDING ENGINEER:**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: STATEN ISLAND**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: CAROLYN LEE**

**TRANSCRIPT RECEIVED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, 4/2007**

**NORWAY,**

**AGE: 16**

**SHIP:**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

LEVINE: Today is April the 1<sup>st</sup>, the year 2005, and I'm here, it's a return engagement. I'm here with Kaare Fornes. I'm at Island Shores, which is a senior facility on Staten Island, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Well, I just wanted to talk to you briefly again. I wanted to say, when you left Norway at sixteen

FORNES: Yeah.

LEVINE: You left to go on

FORNES: I was (?)

LEVINE: Seventeen, you went on the sailing ship.

FORNES: I was on the navigation school in Norway. That was the toughest school (laughs), oh my god. It was so, the teachers there, they beat the hell out of sometime.

LEVINE: Really?

FORNES: On the, they give you so much (?) to study on the, then, if you, every evening you had to go up to the teacher and ask, "I want to see if you've done your job or not." And if you didn't, you couldn't go ashore because we were on the, on the sailing ship like that.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORNES: Yeah. There were, were about fifty, I was out there, you know, on the, then we went sailing too sometimes on the, the other trainers how to sail and handle the sails and everything, so it was not only navigation, there was everything. (laughs) I'm telling you, they were tough. (?), they get rid of them anyway, they, they were, they were too tough for the guys, you know. If you could climb up those ladders there that you see on the ship there, on the, you missed a step or you fell a little bit, when you come down, they hit you with the rope. (laughs)

LEVINE: (laughs) Oh my goodness. Yeah.

FORNES: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Would

EI-1375/FORNES

FORNES: See 'cause you had to learn. (?) you going, you going to be an officer (?), you know, so they had to train you hard because that's the way it was those days, you know, that's not like that today now. Completely different.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORNES: But then, but then, then there was they toughen you, so you can be tough, and then you take care of all the people yourself.

LEVINE: Well, how do you feel about having actually learned about and, and manned a sailing ship, a sip, a ship with sails, which we don't have anymore really?

FORNES: No, when I was finished with that, with the two years, then the, then the, we went on the regular cargo ship (?) after that, you know, to, to a retirement.

LEVINE: Did, were, was there anything about the sailing ship that you could mention that was different from the regular cargo ships?

FORNES: Yeah, all the sure is hell is there's lot of different things there. First of all, we didn't carry in the cargo, we only steward (?). And the, the, like I said, the teachers there, they were, they were terrible, oh, and on a, you have to (?), then you have all the, the homework. You study, too.

LEVINE: Oh.

EI-1375/FORNES

FORNES: You know? Oh yeah, so it was not easy to do the whole thing. It was rough, but we get through. Some of them didn't. Oh, they were sent home. You know, they said, to heck with it. (laughs)

LEVINE: Really? How many were in your class, like how many people studied?

FORNES: Fifty of them.

LEVINE: Fifty.

FORNES: Fifty, yeah.

LEVINE: And of the fifty, how many went home, you think?

FORNES: About five. Yeah. Yeah. (?). Probably couldn't keep up with the work (?), went home, and start farming or doing something. (laughs)

LEVINE: So, why did you want to become a sailor?

FORNES: I tell you, my father, he wanted to be a priest. He didn't even want to lend me the money for (?), expensive, (?). So he said, "No," he says, "(?) you go and be a priest because (?) the whole family was really religious."

LEVINE: You were Lutheran, right?

FORNES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Lutheran. Yeah.

FORNES: And, so he would lend me the money, (?), I accepted, and (?) you know, on the, I said, Jesus Christ, I have to get back on the sea, I like that, you know? So, who did we have, my grandmother came around one day, and she said, (?), you don't (?). (?) she wouldn't get on it. (laughs)

LEVINE: Is that your mother's mother?

FORNES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORNES: My mother's mother.

LEVINE: Well, tell, say something about that grandmother. What, what, what was she like?

FORNES: She was a very nice woman that (?) when I was a kid, we went to public school. She, I went up to (?) close with, close, close, there, there you see the white house there?

LEVINE: Oh, yes. The, the picture.

FORNES: That's from the grandmother's house on, house where I was born, they said the tree is hiding the whole thing.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORNES: So, so there was, there, so it was a short walk, you know? So there was, there was, she was a very, very nice woman. Also was the grandfather too. Very, very, very good.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORNES: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how did she treat you?

FORNES: She treat me very, very nice, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: You remember any times you spent with her?

FORNES: I, I, I used to, she put, I was young then, and she put me on her lap there, and she would knit, on the things on the, and then I was reading out of the book, you know, and she would correct me to read right, and (?) things like that, you know? She, she was very, very good, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

FORNES: I wished everybody had a grandmother like that.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORNES: 'Cause can't complain about that.

LEVINE: Do, do you, are you happy that you went to sea, when you think back on everything?

FORNES: Yeah, yeah, I would say so. I, it was a little rough when you're married and go away for a month or so, you know, but I, I liked

boats, liked the water (laughs), that's what made it, that's what made it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORNES: You know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORNES: So (coughs)

LEVINE: They say you fall in love with the sea.

FORNES: Well, I guess so, I guess so, yeah. Yeah. (?) maybe, you had the sea (?) up there too, on the, there was a (?) on that, you know, so.

LEVINE: Oh. Right.

FORNES: I, I, I figured I had to do something. I, you know, I worked on the farm there a little bit when I was a kid, but it's hard work, you know, and I didn't care for that. So my youngest brother took over the farm after my fa, father and mother died, and he did a very good job on it. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, how do you think about yourself? Like, do you think of yourself as part Norwegian, part American? How, how do you put together your Norwegian side and your American side?

FORNES: I, I'm already happy with what they've done. I, I love this country here, but Norway was not a bad country either on, I went here, (?) I'm sorry about that, you know, I'm really happy of being here

EI-1375/FORNES

because this is a peaceful country, and I think that's very, very good, so (?).

LEVINE: Why don't you say how it was, I know we talked about this before, but how was it that you came to Ellis Island, the circumstances?

FORNES: Oh that was a heck of a thing, you know, I get hurt in Africa, I get bombed. I was in hospital there together with a soldier, station was in, in General Patton's, you maybe hear his name, General Patton, someone who was in charge of everybody down there.

LEVINE: Now, wait, where, how did you get in the service for the firs, in the beginning?

FORNES: In the ser, there was, yeah, there was (?) no problem get a job like that.

LEVINE: No, but I mean, were you, were you fighting in the war because you were in an army?

FORNES: No.

LEVINE: Navy, I should say.

FORNES: (?) Merchant Marine.

LEVINE: Oh, you were Merchant Marine, and that, therefore, you were, okay. And were they all Norwegians on, on the ship that you

EI-1375/FORNES

FORNES: Yeah, on the Norwegian ship, there was, yeah, but then in, what the heck was it, in 1941, '41, then they started on American ships on, (?) more money. (laughs)

LEVINE: Oh.

FORNES: So I, I worked there. And, I'm sorry about that now. Now I tell you truth, I love the boats, I love the water, on the only problem was that I was away from home, you know, so much, but I had a good wife, she took good care of the kids and everything, you know, and she put up with it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORNES: So.

LEVINE: But, so say how you happened to come to Ellis Island af, you

FORNES: Yeah, yeah. When (?), we came, came upon the army transporting ships (?). And I was one of them, the, the one of the soldiers there, and, and then we come up to New York, you know, we really took a heck of a long time. The only way was through Mediterranean (?). It was terrible. I never see anything like it. A ship was coming, it was a destroyer, coming on the wrong side, it was going around the (?) on the wrong side, and that ship got torpedoed. And I tell you that I never seen a ship disappear so fast, (?) about a couple hundred sailors that were killed there. And then we came to New York here, so they couldn't find my papers, you know. There was a mess on the ship because there was so many people and, and too many handling that, so, so then they came here (?) immigration was on board, and he says, "Where is your papers?" So I said, "The doctors

EI-1375/FORNES

have (?)” (?), they coul, they couldn’t find it on the ship, they couldn’t find it, so they says, “Okay, if you have no, no proof, we, Ellis Island.” So the transportation (?), he comes and says, well, he says, “Fornes here done everything we ask him to do, and he is doing the same thing as all the rest of us, so send him to the hospital.” But I was on crutches, and I had (?) here, (?)

LEVINE: Hip?

FORNES: Hip, yeah. And then he looked, and there was a (?) from a here down to my toes for a month down there in hundred and thirty degrees and no air condition. I tell you, what a lot of suffering. And, so, so that that immigration they wouldn’t give (?), no, but he’s supposed to go to the hospital, you know.

LEVINE: The marine hospital here on, on Staten Island.

FORNES: Yeah, yeah, on Staten Island, right. So he wouldn’t give up on that, so they just sent me to Ellis Island, and I was there for twelve days. Then they find the papers, so then they, then they send me (?).

LEVINE: Did you, were you in the hospital at Ellis Island?

FORNES: Yeah, yeah, (?) was a little house there, you know

LEVINE: Oh.

FORNES: (?)

LEVINE: Well, were you like in bed? Or you were, you were able to get around?

EI-1375/FORNES

FORNES: I was walking on crutches.

LEVINE: With the crutches. Can you describe who you saw, the kind of people, what was going on at Ellis Island when you were there? That was, that was what, 1942?

FORNES: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay.

FORNES: Yeah. Well, I met the guy there. He was Swedish, come from Sweden, so he says, "(?), you know," he says, "I, I go on (?) ships to, to, to Norway," he said because he had no food over there, in bad shape, so he was a little cuckoo, you know. So I said to him, (laughs) what is he talking about? (?), you know.

LEVINE: Was it crowded?

FORNES: Yeah, it was pretty crowded, yeah.

LEVINE: And were the people like, we, Ellis Island interned so-called enemy aliens. Germans, Italians, Japanese, did you see them?

FORNES: Every, everything. Absolutely, yeah, we were mixed together.

LEVINE: Oh, you were mixed together?

FORNES: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

EI-1375/FORNES

FORNES: Oh yeah, oh yeah. It was all kinds of national, nationalities there, so. (?) been through (?) close it off, I guess, you know, all kinds of people came there, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, and was it, was it, was it clean, was it, did you get good food, did you, you say anything about

FORNES: Yeah, well, it was not the best, but it was alright.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORNES: Yeah. It was okay. Can't complain.

LEVINE: Were there women there as well as men?

FORNES: I saw some office workers, yeah, oh yeah, well, you mean coming in

LEVINE: Ellis Island, yeah.

FORNES: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah, come from all over, sure, yeah. Oh yeah. Plenty, plenty of them too.

LEVINE: So they were coming from Europe, even during the war?

FORNES: Come from all, all over the world, yeah, yeah. Except Germany.  
(laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah, they were trying

FORNES: They were (?)

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORNES: So that was, that was, I can't com, I was only there twelve days, then they find my papers, and then they took me right to the hospital, you know? And then I was in the hospital there, they don't (?) on me again because in Africa, they (?) on me, and they were bombing the damn town like crazy, and the, the doctors and nurses, they had to go to the hos, to the bomb shelters, you know? Because you couldn't afford to lose them, so, so I don't know who we had sew me together, but they sew me together with a, with a bag o, bag of rags in there (?). So they couldn't figure out what the hell (?), then (?) to the hospital here, they did find it right away.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah.

FORNES: Yeah. So they operate on me, took it out, and then they healed it right away. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, why don't, before we close, why don't you say something about your life here, these last three years in Island Shores.

FORNES: I tell you, here, I am not complaining at all. I think they're very nice people and, and put light on everything here on the ta, they, they, they make up your bed everyday, change sheet once a week, vacuum your floor everyday, and, and the food is very good. Yeah. And you get so much as you want. (?) I would say I have nothing to complain about here. It's fine.

LEVINE: Great.

EI-1375/FORNES

FORNES: I really like it. I've been here over three years, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah. I hear, I hear you're the mayor of the place. I said, I hear you're the mayor of this place.

FORNES: No. (they laugh) Who said, who, who said that?

LEVINE: Your son told me that.

FORNES: My son?

LEVINE: Yeah. (they laugh)

FORNES: Oh, he don't know what he's talking about. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay, is there anything you want to say for your Ellis Island tape number two before we close?

FORNES: Well, at Ellis Island, I was, I can't say I had any suffering there. Everything went fine, you know, except I hated to be in a place like that though, I want to be in the hospital. But they had a doctor to come and check on you once in a while. I would say they done the best.

LEVINE: They were kind, it was kind of a holding place until you could get to Staten Island.

FORNES: Yeah, yes, yeah, yeah. And I don't know why they had to close it up. (laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah, well. Yeah.

EI-1375/FORNES

FORNES: But you have it now and you should have it nice there (?), I would like to make

LEVINE: Another trip?

FORNES: Get on here, everybody has access, have buses here, you know, and if you could fix us up so we can go to Jersey

LEVINE: That would be wonderful. I'm sure we can do that. Yeah.

FORNES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, now, let's see, you're eighty-six, right?

FORNES: I'll be eighty-six in July.

LEVINE: In July. Well, you look wonderful. Okay, well this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service speaking with Kaare Fornes, and I'm signing off.