

EI-1446

EVERT ANDERSON

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- **SWEDEN, SKOVDE, IN THE COUNTY OF SKARABOURGS**
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LEVINE: Today is May the 17th the year 2007. I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Everett Anderson who came here as a three year old for Sweden, in 1928. And he came with his mother, he um – yeah his mother, his brother who was only seven months, and um his father was already here.

ANDERSON: No.

LEVINE: No he had come back.

ANDERSON: He he –

LEVINE: He had gone back.

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ANDERSON: My my father came over the first time in 1910. And then he ah was in encountered the war. He was drafted into the First World War.

LEVINE: Here.

ANDERSON: Yes. And the United States and he served in France for ANDERSON: better part of a year right up through the war of November 12 and past and the clean up, then went back to Sweden married my mom. I believe that must have been about 1920 or so.

LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: And then um my and then in 25 ah I was born and then my brother was born after that. And ah so ah on August 18th I believe of ah 27.

LEVINE: Your brother was born?

ANDERSON: Yes.

LEVINE: And so your father came over with you and your mother –

ANDERSON: Oh yes.

LEVINE: -- and your brother.

ANDERSON: Ah ha.

LEVINE: Okay well why don't you say your name as it was when you immigrated.

ANDERSON: Ah – you the pronunciation is Evert Rof Andersson.

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LEVINE: Maybe you could spell it how it was spelt.

ANDERSON: Ah the first name is E-V-E-R-T, the middle is R-O-F and Anderson is A-N-D-E-R-S-S-O-N.

LEVINE: And your name today then how did you –

ANDERSON: It the sa – well the only – the only name we changed was the middle which is Ralf R-A-L-F. And ah well also Anderson we left out one of the S's, A-N-D-E-R-S-O-N.

LEVINE: Now why did you change that Anderson?

ANDERSON: Well I don't really know if that might have been here at the tables here at Ellis Island. I'm I'm not sure. But Anders – originally I believe at a time when there mainly first names it would be Anders.

LEVINE: Oh Anders son yes.

ANDERSON: And then the son was born and so therefore it was son of Anders which is Andersson.

LEVINE: I see. Ah but you have nay relatives in this country who had – who were either using Andersson with two S's or Anderson with one S.

ANDERSON: Ah no. I had an Uncle who preceded my dad over here I'm not sure what year it was it was prior – just prior to 1910. And ah but I believe that he used ah S-O-N as well. That was a conformity in this country.

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LEVINE: I see. Well now um (clears throat) what was your fathers (clears throat) first name?

ANDERSON: It was Oskar O-S-K-A-R. Johan, which is J-O-H-A-N, Anderson.

LEVINE: Okay. And ah could you say why he came to this country in around 1910?

ANDERSON: Well my ah Uncle Karl who came over prior ah – he came over here I'm sure because ah all of Europe primarily – it was very difficult to make a living. Most of the people in ah Europe actually were farmers, they lived off the land. And this was right around the time – during the time of the Industrial Revolution that was occurring in this country. I believe when we came over it was towards the end of the Industrial Revolution possibly. And actually what that means of course is that this was – there was a beginning of machinery. And ah which ah lightened the labor load because prior to that everything was very laborious. And ah actually products were hand made and so on but ah here during the Industrial Revolution is when the assembly line began and the machinery helped lighten the production of um materials. Like when Henry Ford came in and he was one of the ones that started the assembly line and making the ah first Model-T. And this was the land of milk and honey. And I believe at this time all of Europe from all countries – that's what makes this country so late – so great – all the people from Europe, Bulgaria, Russia, Italy, Sweden, all the Nordic Countries, they came over here with all their talents.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: And and ah that's what really what makes this country great because with their skill is the reason where we are today.

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LEVINE: Hum. Now was your father skilled at at some particular kind of work?

ANDERSON: No he wasn't. He was a farmer.

LEVINE: Oh he was a farmer.

ANDERSON: Yes.

LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: And when he came over here the first time well he worked on a cattle ranches and also wheat land up in ah North Dakota. And ah he ah worked in the wheat fields and the machines were primarily ah horse drawn. Then he worked on a cattle farm down in Iowa after that. And and he received an important letter. He couldn't read it so he took it to his foreman and he said, yeah I think you better go and it was it was a letter from the draft office. And that's that's where he ah was ah was indoctrinated into the First World War.

LEVINE: Um.

ANDERSON: And ah found himself over in France for ANDERSON: better part of a year.

LEVINE: Um hum. Well um (clears throat) how would you describe your father as just as far as personality, temperament?

ANDERSON: My father was a very very kindly man. He got along good with everybody just like many of your European people. And um ah he ah he was very arduous in providing. He didn't have a family at that time but

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ah he was skilled in what he was doing in farming. That's how he grew up in Sweden so he knew what he was doing.

LEVINE: Um hum. Um hum. So did you – so it sounds like you moved around a lot those first years when you got to this country?

ANDERSON: No ah.

LEVINE: No.

ANDERSON: We stayed in Moline [ph]. My father prior when he fi – came over the first time –

LEVINE: Oh first time.

ANDERSON: -- he moved around. And ah but then he he settled in Moline Illinois and that's where John Deer ah located his mills on ah turning out the plow and ah other implements after that because of the water power he needed. And then Moline ah and all up and down the Mississippi and that area become the farm implement center of the world, where J.I Case, Moline, Minneapolis, ah provided machinery for the entire world to wor – to till the grounds. And this was during the Industrial Revolution where it made the work easier.

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LEVINE: So did your father work for John Deer?

ANDERSON: Oh yes. Ah ha.

LEVINE: Yes.

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ANDERSON: At Farm All and John Deer there was J.I. Case and all of these known companies.

LEVINE: So he became ah – he went form being a farmer to being a par tof the Industrial Revolution.

ANDERSON: That's right.

LEVINE: Ah ha,

ANDERSON: Um hum.

LEVINE: I an and with farm equipment.

ANDERSON: Yes. And probably most the people working in those plants I dare say were possibly farmers at one time.

LEVINE: Ah ha. Now do you recall ah as a child – did you know whether there were lots of different ethic groups working in that plant with your father?

ANDERSON: Oh yes but seems like in Moline it was just like ah Little Scandinavia.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANDERSON: Ah there wasn't – there was a Swedes, Norwegians, ah Finns, ah Danes and as I remember growing up at that time and ah also Belgiums.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANDERSON: And ah and ah we belonged to lodges and at that time people congregated together just for survival, just to socialize ah of their own

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ethnic groups. Because when they acme over here they knew nothing except their own – what they were used to in their own countries providing the langue. And that's where your lodges came in, like Vasa is a Swedish lodge still going today. And um and also you might say it could have been a Scandinavian borough. There were Scandinavian people just like Brooklyn that's a borough you find there.

LEVINE: Right.

ANDERSON: Like in in ah Brooklyn you know there's – there's a big Norwegian borough.

LEVINE: Right right.

ANDERSON: And they settle there you see.

LEVINE: Right. Yes.

ANDERSON: So round Moline you found ethnic groups of that kind.

LEVINE: Now do – were your mother and father active in the – in the – is it Vasa, the lodge?

ANDERSON: In Vasa yes.

LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: Ah ha they were.

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LEVINE: And what did it do? What what – could you say anything about that lodge what it – what the – what the services or entertainments or ah – what did it entitle the members to?

ANDERSON: Well I believe that it was kind of an extension from what they had experienced in their native country. And ah when ah – course they they ah formalized ah the ah programs and so on in order to conduct a lodge. It was a business ah lodge just like ah many ah just like Elks and so on. They they had their own ah conduction of meetings and so on and officers. But then they also brought in their ah their ethnic customs. Ah we would get together for ah for dinners, Christmas programs, traditions like like the Christmas tree, which is actually ah originate in Europe, in Germany and then went to Sweden. Ah many things like that. Folk dancing – ah they didn't just dance that had – they had ah music my accordion and violin just like in the old country. And they would also dance the Schottische and their Hambo ah which ah their – which they were used to. So they brought that all over with them just like other ethnic groups would.

LEVINE: Um hum. Um hum. So um did your – do you think your mother and fther mixed with with the um parent of the other kids that were different ethnic groups?

ANDERSON: It it took – it took a little while because of the discomfort of not being able to communicate. I remember when I – we came over here and ah we lived – first year we lived here ah my mother said I come running in the house one day and said those peop – those kids are mean to me. And the reason we I could understand what they were saying.

LEVINE: Ah.

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ANDERSON: But ah yes they socialized. However we also went to a Lutheran church and religion in in ah in many of the ethic countries was very important and this was kind of a central part of their life. Like it is today in in many countries like it is here as well. And that would draw them together and we would have Swedish services – services in Swedish language.

LEVINE: And in that same church would they have services in Finn –Finnish or or Norwegian.

ANDERSON: No just Swedish.

LEVINE: Just Swedish. So another church would have another ethic ah – um service.

ANDERSON: Yes ah ha. If the – if there was ah – yes that's right. In – I don't recall when it – excuse me – in in Moline where there would be one in ah Finn or Danish. I don't recall there possibly was.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: I was just very little at that time and I was just very much aware of our Swedish heritage.

LEVINE: Were you able to speak English when you went to school.

ANDERSON: No ah well I was three but you know kids pick it up pretty fast. So my first experience I had was a real downer then I'm sure I caught on.

LEVINE: You mean when you first went to school.

ANDERSON: Ah ha.

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LEVINE: Because your mother and father were speaking Swedish at home?

ANDERSON: oh yes. Ah ha.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did – was your – had your father gained much of a mastery of the language?

ANDERSON: Yes to quite an extent. My mother ah didn't it took her a long time. I always thought of my mother ah – as ah possibly never leaving Sweden.

LEVINE: (laughs)

ANDERSON: Ah because she loved Sweden and I don't know if she came over kinda against her will or not. But ah um – but she fit right in just like all your immigrants do and she was able to communicate at these various functions we had. We were very tight.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: Just like ethnic groups are today in this country.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: It hasn't really all changed that much. When your Latinos come on over here and your Orientals come on here. It's the same thing.

LEVINE: Yeah yeah. So what was your mother's name.

ANDERSON: Augusta.

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LEVINE: And here maiden name?

ANDERSON: Sophia.

LEVINE: S-O-P—

ANDERSON: H-I-A.

LEVINE: Sophia and ah so um do you think she was happy she had come. You say she never really left Sweden but did – do you think she she made her peace with this country or or she just never really – wanted to be here?

ANDERSON: I think that she made her peace here because she had her family here.

LEVINE: Hum.

ANDERSON: So that she did.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: But she she really missed her family over in in Sweden and she was kinda a writer. She wasn't ah – she was talented. She never took courses and so on. And she would ah – she was quite talented writing poetry in Swedish and also articles that she would send in to the Sv sv – Svenska Amerikaner and that was a paper. That's Swedish-American paper Svenska Amerikaner. And they would publish her articles.

LEVINE: Um hum. Hum hum.

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ANDERSON: And so I know she had a real longing – they never went over – back over there till fifty one, on the same ship the Gripsholm that we came over here on.

LEVINE: Oh and so they – so um (clears throat) did you go back? Did you – have you been back to your little place?

ANDERSON: Well it was in ah 19 ah 85 and I had a longing to go back kinda to my roots and ah (coughs) so I went over to London on business ah I ah and ah It was in 85. And I thought well its just the mind works you know I said once so close to Sweden I might as well go fly over there.

LEVINE: (laughs) Right.

ANDERSON: And I set all this up before hand. And so I made the journey over there. I stayed for two weeks and I have relatives from Stockholm all the way to the west coast of Gothenburg, Göteborg. Because you see (clears throat) reason I have is that when the children would get up to seventeen eighteen years old they left the little towns they were born in because they had to get out and make a living. And so therefore they went to Stockholm, the bigger cities and Göteborg are the two largest cities.

LEVINE: I see.

ANDERSON: So they went however when my folks grew up they knew each other from very little kids, probably three or four years in this same little town – like a village. They knew each other. So then you might say my dad went back there in about 1920 and married his childhood sweetheart after he came back.

LEVINE: Yeah.

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ANDERSON: However it was a real shock to me when I went over there in 85 because neither side except the sisters – like my my father's sister Frieda she was still la – living and she knew some of the people from my dad's – from um my mother's side.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANDERSON: But my cousins they didn't know each other from either side. It was a shock to me. But I knew them both.

LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: And the reason I did is that after I left home I was in sales thirty-four years after I retired here with the manufacturer and any time I came home I just drove my mother crazy trying to – going through the old black and white albums -- picking people from both sides out. Who are these? Who are those?

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: I was very inquisitive and that's how I got to know them.

LEVINE: I see.

ANDERSON: But they didn't know each other.

LEVINE: They didn't know each other.

ANDERSON: No.

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LEVINE: But they were in in close proximity to each other and you had really not met these people. You knew them from their photos.

ANDERSON: Yes.

LEVINE: Ah ha. Wow wow. Yeah. So – so how do you see yourself as far as being Swedish and being American?

ANDERSON: Oh I'm very proud of my birth right – of my of ah being Swedish. And I'm at – just as proud and I fe – I feel so fortunate that we did come over at the ti – at the time that we did. I fe – I feel very comfortable and um and I'm – I'm married of course and and we had three children. And ah raising them here in this country. And they really feel their heritage too. Although they also are part German and Irish.

LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: And half Swede (both laugh).

LEVINE: Is there anything in particular – any attitudes or values that you tried to instill in your children?

ANDERSON: Yes the values. I found that in ah in ah my experience of growing up um it was almost right at the beginning of the of the de – depression.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: In 28 it was in – beginning about 29 and 30 when the depression hit. I really never knew we were poor – and course at that time when I was just a little kid – four or five years old I didn't realize that. We always had something to eat. But looking back I could – I realize what my parents

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went through. We we had we had no ah social security or anything like that. That started about 1937 and so on.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: So if you didn't have any money there were other ways that you could get help. I don't recall what it was. But I believe that during that time and looking back and ah in my memory is when I was able to pick up values that have stayed with to this day. Appreciate – appreciative values. Ah like such as my father – I remember that ah and others too – I remember that he swept streets for a dollar a day.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANDERSON: And ah also ah working off a bill that he had – my mother had a serious operation and working at the hospital. And some of it I just remember a glimpsly looking back some of the things they went through. But I think it was ah a time and other people my age at that time I think that's where you really pick up values – appreciation. And that I ah – I believe that I retain to this day.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: And I tried to instill those in our kids and ah at times they – they really don't understand it because they haven't experienced it.

LEVINE: Yeah. Ha – how would you articulate that? You you you're talking about a work ethic – you're taking about not taking something –

ANDERSON: Yes.

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LEVINE: -- for nothing and working and doing what you can to – yeah yeah. Ah ha.

ANDERSON: Yes.

LEVINE: Um (clears throat) what do you feel has made you very satisfied that you've done in your life?

ANDERSON: I feel the satisfaction ah because I I feel – I believe that ah things that I have accomplished actually started with those values. Ah I was ah in something I believed in I really – I was – I have always been very persistent in following with through.

LEVINE: Ah.

ANDERSON: When I had a goal. And ah to this day and um I just wouldn't give.

LEVINE: And you – that was instilled in you by your parent's – to be persistent?

ANDERSON: I believe it was. Ah ha. They lived that way. They weren't stubborn. My parents were very frugal. Ah they went through the depression. They never had a checking account. They ah paid everything for cash which we don't today of course. And a – but the – those are some of the virtues that um I grew up and still have.

LEVINE: Ah ha. Ah ha. DO you think your mother and father were happy they had come here?

ANDERSON: I think tho – I think they were although there was a real longing as to what the experience growing up. You see in Sweden and in other countries too – other ethnic groups – um they – the hardship was making

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a living. The hardship was not ah internal friendship with their relatives and ah their families and so on. Ah they – it was very joyous atmosphere.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANDERSON: When they got together there was a lot of flowers like it is today. And they really celebrate and ah a real joy of being together.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: And it still is to this day. And I know – and you can observe other ethnic groups when they get together – it's the same thing. There's a lot of love and ah interchanging like that.

LEVINE: So so it would have been the difficulty of making a living that would have driven them away. It it wasn't that they weren't happy where they were.

ANDERSON: I think it was entirely.

LEVINE: Um hum.

ANDERSON: I don't think it was really – not in Sweden and not in any necessarily political cause that the – that we – they were came over here. I don't think it was because of political causes.

LEVINE: Um hum. Um hum.

ANDERSON: No.

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LEVINE: And when your father came when the family did in 1928 ah was there a particular ah push at that time or pull from here or push from there that got the family ah moving in 1928.

ANDERSON: Well I Ah I think that it was ah some of both. I think that ah from what my father experienced the first time he came over here and he knew that he could make a living with the skills he acquired when he was here the first time. Ah went back to Sweden and they were ah – ah on a – they ha – were on a farm. It was ah – they didn't own – it was like a share. Ah what do you call that ah – sharecropping like.

LEVINE: Um hum

ANDERSON: And ah they were – would – they lived on this farm and then they would share some of the profits probably with the owner.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANDERSON: And it – and by the way I was born in that farm house. We went back there like in 85. I went in there and met the people [not understood] – same people who owned when we lived there.

LEVINE: Wow.

ANDERSON: I mean their sons.

LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: I saw the same rooms where I would have been. And ah but I I believe that ah it was still very difficult to make a living and my father probably had recollections that he could make it here – a living for his family.

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LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: And he already had ah his – his brother was still here.

LEVINE: Oh his brother stayed – in Moline?

ANDERSON: In Moline [superimposed]. In Moline – he never went back.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANDERSON: So we had a place to come ah when we came over as a family of four.
And then ah shortly after that we acquired our own place.

LEVINE: So this is your Uncle Karl?

ANDERSON: Uncle Karl.

LEVINE: Uncle Karl was already in Moline.

ANDERSON: Yes –

LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: -- and established. He was married and had a family.

LEVINE: Ah ha. What do you remember about Uncle Karl? What was he like?

ANDERSON: Oh he was a a very kindly man too. And he was older than my dad and I
– and in a way – a comical way I don't think they let he forget it (both
laugh).

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LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: I always got that impression.

LEVINE: Ah ha.

ANDERSON: You know they loved each other very much and but they also had a lot of respect for each other.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ANDERSON: Um hum.

LEVINE: Yeah um hum. So you had – you had cousins and and an aunt and uncle in Moline –

ANDERSON: Yes.

LEVINE: -- when you got here.

ANDERSON: Ah ha. Ah ha. So I – I did have – I did have that fellowship. I had that family atmosphere because of my cousins who lived here.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ANDERSON: And then I had a – another aunt and uncle who came over through Chicago years later. And ah they established here and that was about ah 19 ah ah middle 30's. They came from Sweden. Now the family grew.

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LEVINE: Were they close to Moline?

ANDERSON: Yeah. They lived in Moline too.

LEVINE: Oh. Ah ha. Ah ha.

ANDERSON: They came from the same area.

LEVINE: Yeah. So so you grew up in a rural area. Would you call Moline rural?

ANDERSON: No no.

LEVINE: No.

ANDERSON: We lived right in – right in town.

LEVINE: Right in town.

ANDERSON: Ah ha.

LEVINE: Ah ha. Um so – was it – what was it like for you learning English?

ANDERSON: Well I think I just kind of went with the flow and ah so I think – I can't recall that I had any difficulty. I'm sure I could communicate ah shortly after we came over when I was 3. Just playing with the kids outside and ah I I ah I think I did. I remem – recall a one time when – whi – we had white bread. And ah and all the other kids would come to school with white bread – you know for their lunches. And my mother she'd bake delicious bread you know rye bread – Swedish rye – Limpa we called it – with the orange peels in it. And which it was a much better bread.

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LEVINE: Yeah.

ANDERSON: But I was embarrassed.

LEVINE: (laughs)

ANDERSON: So I would go – so my mother had to buy a loaf of bread – make me sandwiches to take to school (laughs).

LEVINE: Did the kids tease you in any other ways –

ANDERSON: Um.

LEVINE: – that you remember?

ANDERSON: I don't recall.

LEVINE: Yeah. Um (clears throat) so do you consider yourself – I guess you consider yourself both American and Swedish.

ANDERSON: Oh absolutely. Yes. Ah ha. I ah I feel very fortunate to have um a Swedish heritage just like many of us do. But I had it as a first generation – which I am.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ANDERSON: Ah other ah people here they might ah now have that experience and I thin it's ah a rich experience to grow up that way. And I believe that I – maybe I have more of an appreciation of that because I am first generation. That's possible.

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LEVINE: Yeah. Yup. Um is there anything else you can think of that we haven't touched on that has to do with – how this – coming to this country maybe – well you just said that maybe you have more of an appreciation of the Swedish and the American because you yourself came over.

ANDERSON: Yes.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can think of related?

ANDERSON: Yes I think that the – for my part – the way I I fell very deeply is the freedoms that we have. And I know this is just a byword that a lot of times we take it for granted. But even today come from other countries I think a person doesn't live here too long when they have good experiences they realize that freedom means a lot – and as long as we don't abuse it. And that we use those freedoms in a – in a friendly social way ah – within the – for each other in a fair way and ah and ah I think it bring respect.

LEVINE: Okay. Well maybe that's the perfect place to stop. I want to thank you very much. I'm so happy that you were visiting New York and I got a chance to interview you. I have been speaking with Evert Anderson and I'm here at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio. He came here with his family when he was only three years old ah in 1928 and has lived out his life here ah as a – as a salesman I think you said. Right that was –

ANDERSON: Yes.

LEVINE: -- You did you did most of your life.

ANDERSON: I was in ah sale ah 34 years. I was my first and last full time job right out of college.

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LEVINE: Wow.

ANDERSON: I was with – wherever aluminum cookware owned – we were owned by Arcola.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANDERSON: And I sold are [not understood] commercial lines. So I retired in 83.

LEVINE: Wow. Okay. Well this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off. Well I'm glad we –