

EI-187

ANNA LARSEN GUSTAVSON

BIRTH DATE: MAY 2, 1897

INTERVIEW DATE: 7/2/1992

RUNNING TIME: 1:02:17

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1993

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

NORWAY, 1912

AGE 14

PORT: OSLO

RESIDENCES:

- **NORWAY: MOLLAND SKJAAR**
- **THE US: EAST BOSTON, MA**

Oral Historian's Note: Mrs. Gustavson's hearing aid occasionally chimes in with a high pitched tone on the recording. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Oral Historian, 6/14/1993.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Anna Larsen Gustavson, who came from Norway in 1912 when she was practically fifteen years old. She was actually fourteen, but had a birthday the next month. Today is June 26th. I'm in, I'm at Mrs.

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Gustavson's home in Winthrop, Massachusetts. And I want to start by saying that I'm very happy to be here and I would like to begin by asking you your birthdate.

GUSTAVSON: 1897, wouldn't that be?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And the day?

GUSTAVSON: May 2nd.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

GUSTAVSON: Molland Skjaar. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

GUSTAVSON: M-O-L-L-A-N-D.

LEVINE: M-O-L . . .

GUSTAVSON: . . . L-A-N-D S-K-J-A-A-R.

LEVINE: Molland Skjaar.

GUSTAVSON: Molland Skjaar.

LEVINE: Molland Skjaar.

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GUSTAVSON: That's out in the country, of course. That's the name of a place about twelve, fifteen houses.

LEVINE: Was it like a village?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. Well, I don't know if you would call it a village. Around fifteen houses, little farms, they had. That was after. We lived in a different house, when all the children were born. This isn't on tape, is it?

LEVINE: Yeah.

GUSTAVSON: Is it?

LEVINE: Yeah. This is important. We want to have all this.

GUSTAVSON: Oh, my gosh. No, we lived, we were all born in the same house not far from there while my father was at sea. But when my father stopped, retired from the sea, he sailed for forty-four years on sailing vessels like the ships that was going to Boston. So when he retired, two of my brothers over here bought this little farm, little farm like, so he would have something to do, you know. They had a cow, chickens, pig we slaughter for Christmas. And . . .

LEVINE: How old were you when your brothers bought your father . . .

GUSTAVSON: I think about ten years old, I think. Yeah.

LEVINE: Before that, did you live in a town?

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GUSTAVSON: No, just a little way, about fifteen minutes walk, I think. The trail would go through the woods, of course.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

GUSTAVSON: In the first? Oh, yeah. I have a picture of it.

LEVINE: Could you tell me, describe it? What did it look like?

GUSTAVSON: Just an ordinary little house. Two living rooms and parlor, we called it. And a bedroom beside and a kitchen downstairs. And then there was two bedrooms upstairs.

LEVINE: And how many children were in your family?

GUSTAVSON: Seven.

LEVINE: Seven. And what was your mother's name?

GUSTAVSON: Gundersen, maiden name. Gundersen.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

GUSTAVSON: G-U-N-D-E-R-S-E-N.

LEVINE: And her first name?

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GUSTAVSON: Gusta. G-U-S-T-A.

LEVINE: And how about your father. What was his first name?

GUSTAVSON: Soren, S-O-R-E-N.

LEVINE: And your brothers and sisters, their names.

GUSTAVSON: Lars Sorsen. That was my oldest. I have them all on the picture here. Lars Sorsen. And Andy, we called him here. He was next. And Samuel. How many is it? Oh, John, Lund, L-U-N-D. And then I came. Then my sister.

LEVINE: What's your sister's name?

GUSTAVSON: Gerda, G-E-R-D-A. Gerda.

LEVINE: Well, so you, what, where, did the place you lived until you were ten years old, did that have a name, the town?

GUSTAVSON: Monen. M-O-N-E-N.

LEVINE: And did you start school there?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes, yes.

LEVINE: And can you talk about the school? What was it like going to school?

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GUSTAVSON: Well, the school, there's the school there. (she gestures to a photo)
Some of the kids, two of my brothers, three of my, no, two of my
brothers are on there. I hadn't started. No, three of my brothers are
there, that's right. That's the school. Just one, there were two rooms
in the school.

LEVINE: And everybody was in the same classroom?

GUSTAVSON: No. There were two classes.

LEVINE: Was it boys and girls separate?

GUSTAVSON: No, no. Together.

LEVINE: And do you remember your teachers?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, sure. Carol Ann was the woman teacher. Oh, my gosh. Lovdal
was his last name. L-O-V-D-A-L. That was his last name. I forgot his
first name.

LEVINE: And did you like school?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. We had to go to school, so. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about school that you think about?

GUSTAVSON: Well, we had half an hour walk to school. That was pretty tough in the
wintertime sometimes.

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LEVINE: It was very cold in the winter.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah, pretty cold, snow.

LEVINE: Did you have . . .

GUSTAVSON: One time my stockings were wet when I got to school. I walked in snow. I didn't have overshoes. And the teacher, he sent me home to his wife to get dry stockings to put on. (she laughs) Oh. The school is still there. I saw it in 1981. No, '81. Yeah, '81. My daughter and I was there.

LEVINE: What was it like going back to that place and that school?

GUSTAVSON: Well, now there's no school there. They don't have, they use it for entertainment and, you know, meetings, but no school. They have new schools. They have more schools there now than any place.

LEVINE: Well, who was your best playmate when you were little?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, all the neighbors' kids used to get together and play.

LEVINE: What did you do when you played? Can you remember the games?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, what did you go with now, you played with . . .

LEVINE: A ball?

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GUSTAVSON: A ball. Ooh, I love to play ball. That's why I'm interested in ballgames now.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Baseball, you mean?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. We used to, yeah. I'm interested in baseball. I love that game.

LEVINE: Did you play baseball in Norway?

GUSTAVSON: Well, sometimes I had baseball. When we had the recess, if we had two parties, we'd play baseball. I always loved to play baseball.

LEVINE: Were you an athletic little girl?

GUSTAVSON: Nah. Pretty good.

LEVINE: What else did you do for fun when you were little?

GUSTAVSON: Well, we didn't have as much as they have here, of course. And in the winter skating and skiing. We all had skates, you know. Sometimes you couldn't get to the next door neighbor sometimes if you didn't have skis on in the winter.

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LEVINE: Huh. You mean you'd have to skate to your neighbor's?

GUSTAVSON: No, ski.

LEVINE: Ski. Uh-huh.

GUSTAVSON: But different skiing is skating on the ponds in the woods.

LEVINE: And did you do other kinds of things like knit or crochet or anything?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes! We learned that in school, too. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: How else were the schools different there than they were after you came to the United States?

GUSTAVSON: Well, I'll tell you, it's so much different, of course, now.

LEVINE: But what do you remember about then that was different?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, of course, at that time we didn't know any, I mean, I don't know. I don't remember what we did.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any one of your brothers or sister? Were you, was there one that you were closest to as a child?

GUSTAVSON: No. However, sure there's one. I never confirmed. Of course, he went to sea.

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LEVINE: Oh. Now, what did your father do on the ship?

GUSTAVSON: He was a ship's carpenter.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did he tell you stories about it?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes. He used to bring presents home, oh, sure. He came, he was out two or three years at the time, because he travelled around the world, you see, in Boston with the ship. And one time he came home with a beautiful doll he had bought. And, of course, he was a stranger when he came home to us kids. And that time I remember. He was sitting in the chair with the doll in his lap, and he wanted me to go over and get the doll. I wouldn't do it. No, I wouldn't. I was scared of him. That I remember. And I have a pearl necklace. Not pearl, little tiny beads, that one of my brothers brought home from sea one time. I still have it. It's over a hundred years old.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. Now, how old were your brothers when they went off to sea?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, as soon as they were confirmed, fifteen or sixteen they went to sea.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How many of your brothers went off to sea?

GUSTAVSON: They all went.

LEVINE: Oh, they all did. Uh-huh. And then were they carpenters too, or they

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did other things?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, no. They came over here. My, they went to sea. My oldest brother, yeah. He was the first one. And then finally sometimes when they landed in New York or someplace, they left the ship sometimes. I can't remember if he left the ship and came to Boston that time. Because I had an aunt in East Boston, so that's where we all came to, my aunt, my mother's sister.

LEVINE: Now, had your father been in the United States at all?

GUSTAVSON: No. Just with the ship.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you never got used to your father being around?

GUSTAVSON: No, until after he came home for good, you know, after he retired from the sea.

LEVINE: And so he retired when he was about forty-four years old?

GUSTAVSON: I was, no.

LEVINE: Oh. How old was your father when he retired? Do you remember?

GUSTAVSON: He was, no I don't. He was, he died in 1927. I think he was seventy-six or seventy-seven when he died.

LEVINE: I see. So was he home? For how many years was he home when, that

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you were still there in Norway?

GUSTAVSON: Let's see. Well, he must have been home since, (she pauses), well, I must have been fifteen. (she pauses) I can't think to remember now.

LEVINE: Well, you left when you were practically fifteen. So when he retired were you about ten years old or were you, oh, that's right. That's when you moved to the farm, when he retired. So you were ten.

GUSTAVSON: I must have been about ten years. Two, three years, I know that.

LEVINE: So did you get used to having him around, then?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes. Of course. I used to help him haying and everything.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: Did the other kids help him, too, or just you?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. If they were home, they did. Of course, they were hardly ever home together, you know.

LEVINE: And what was your father like? What kind of a personality?

GUSTAVSON: He was a good man, that he was.

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LEVINE: Did he ever try to teach you things? Did he ever give you advice?

GUSTAVSON: He used to play the violin. That we liked to hear already. He used that violin. He taught himself to play. So he used to play for us when he used to come home.

LEVINE: Would he play by himself or would other people play too?

GUSTAVSON: And sing. He liked to sing, too. My brothers were good singers, too. They had good voices.

LEVINE: Did your father tell you stories about being at sea?

GUSTAVSON: No. That I can't remember. No, no. He had some tough voyage sometimes, you know. They had no motors, you know. They only depended on the sails.

LEVINE: And were these cargo ships?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: He had cargo, all over the world?

GUSTAVSON: Yes. All kinds of cargo.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GUSTAVSON: There wasn't any big ships in them days. All these years ago, no.

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Ninety-five years ago, my gosh, no. Now in Norway, they had so many ships that, beautiful ships. I think they're the third in the world with ships, a small country like that.

LEVINE: So did your mother work at all, or did she . . .

GUSTAVSON: No.

LEVINE: She was a housewife.

GUSTAVSON: Enough to do home.

LEVINE: And what was her personality like? What was she like?

GUSTAVSON: Ah, I think I take after my mother.

LEVINE: In what way?

GUSTAVSON: In looks and, I don't know. She was always happy and always, you know.

LEVINE: And can you think of any advice that she ever gave you, or any kind of sayings that she used to tell you, or . . .

GUSTAVSON: I can't think of them now, not at all.

LEVINE: Any values, ways she wanted you to be?

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GUSTAVSON: No.

LEVINE: Was she a religious woman?

GUSTAVSON: No. Religious? We couldn't, we had an hour and a half to walk to church.

LEVINE: So you didn't go to church every week?

GUSTAVSON: No, but sometimes they had missionaries come. And they used to come to and preach in the house, and sometimes they asked if they could come and have a meeting in such-and-such a neighbor's house. So that's what we had sometimes, people coming like that.

LEVINE: So then what, the neighbors would all get together?

GUSTAVSON: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And . . .

GUSTAVSON: The neighbors used to come to the meetings. Yeah, that happened quite often.

LEVINE: Oh. Like maybe every month, or something like that.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah, maybe. Of course, in the winter it would have been hard to travel.

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LEVINE: Can you remember some of those missionary meetings?

GUSTAVSON: No, that I can't. I was only a kid, then.

LEVINE: And let's see, so then when your father retired you went, you moved.
And did you go to another school when you were in . . .

GUSTAVSON: Oh, no. The same school.

LEVINE: Oh, the same school.

GUSTAVSON: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: The kids came from all around the whole region for that school.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember how the decision got made for you to come to America.

GUSTAVSON: Well, on account of our brothers going over there. And, of course, when you are confirmed then in most countries, I guess, in Europe, you're supposed to make your own, go out and work. And there was no work, you know. Out in the country what kind of work could you do?

LEVINE: Most people were farmers, were they?

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GUSTAVSON: Well, out in the country little farmers. So many big farms, but in our place there wasn't room for any big farms. Just one or two cows we only had one.

LEVINE: What was the ceremony when you got confirmed? What happened?

GUSTAVSON: Well, we were all lined up in the church. There were quite a few because they didn't have that too often, you know, confirmation.

LEVINE: Was it a Lutheran church?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. Lined up, and the minister used to have to ask us questions, you know, for Bible questions. We had to go to him for so long before we were confirmed, you know.

LEVINE: For lessons, on the Bible.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. So I had to walk for an hour-and-a-half to church one way and back. And that was hilly, too, in order to go there.

LEVINE: And did, was it, did you feel proud when you were confirmed?

GUSTAVSON: Well, it was, you felt you were grown up, I guess.

LEVINE: So then when you were confirmed, really there was no work for you to do.

GUSTAVSON: No, there wasn't. Because the city was too far away. My mother used

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to go every Saturday. She could usually walk to the city.

LEVINE: Oh. How far away . . .

GUSTAVSON: That was an hour-and-a-half walk to the city one way, and shop. Sometimes she would get a ride with the neighbors. They had a horse and buggy, you know.

LEVINE: What was the name of the city?

GUSTAVSON: Grimstad.

LEVINE: G-R-I-M . . .

GUSTAVSON: S-T-A-D. Small city, one of the small cities. Right on the sea coast, right on the North Sea.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what would she bring back when she went into the city?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, meat. Of course, some of the vegetables we had ourselves. Potatoes. We planted potatoes and carrots, cabbage, you know. So she would buy something that we didn't have. Fish, we caught our own fish. We had a boat and we caught our own fish. It was good fish, too.

LEVINE: What kind? Do you remember?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, cod and mackerel, and the little ones, they looked like smelts, but a

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little bigger. There were plenty of them. So that was fun, to go fishing.

LEVINE: Do you remember any special dishes that your mother cooked or that you learned how to cook when you were in Norway?

GUSTAVSON: I'll tell you, we lived plain. Of course, when they killed a pig we had salt pork all winter long, all over that. They salted that for the winter. So we had plenty of pork.

LEVINE: Did they salt it themselves?

GUSTAVSON: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember doing that? Did you ever do that?

GUSTAVSON: No, that I don't. It was, sometimes we would salt the fish, too. And, of course, our own eggs we had, and milk. And our chickens had eggs.

LEVINE: And so when you got confirmed, was there, your -- two or three of your brothers were already in the United States?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. Four.

LEVINE: Now, had they been writing to you?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember what they told you?

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GUSTAVSON: No, no. That I didn't.

LEVINE: About the United States before you came?

GUSTAVSON: Of course, my aunt had been home to visit, her and her husband. They never had any children. So they were home just before, when I was in school, and I remember they wanted, her husband wanted, they wanted to take me over with them because they never had children, but my mother wouldn't let me.

LEVINE: Did you want to go?

GUSTAVSON: I don't know if I did want to go that time.

LEVINE: But then when you did go, were you looking forward to it?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes, yes.

LEVINE: So did you, who did you travel with?

GUSTAVSON: I travelled with a lady who was home on a visit from New York, a neighbor of mine. She had been over here, and then she came home to visit her parents.

LEVINE: And then did your, who paid for your ticket?

GUSTAVSON: I paid my own. My mother or father paid my own, my ticket. As far as I

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remember.

LEVINE: Was there any trouble getting the papers for you to go or anything?

GUSTAVSON: No.

LEVINE: So when you left your little town, where did you go?

GUSTAVSON: I went to the city, Grimstad. Take the boat.

LEVINE: I see. And . . .

GUSTAVSON: To another, to, I think I had to go to Oslo, the capital, to get the boat for America.

LEVINE: And the boat's name?

GUSTAVSON: Either Oslo or Bergen. I don't know which city now. The boat that I came over here with was United States. I have that written down here.

LEVINE: When you got to Oslo or Bergen, did the steamship company examine you, or did you have to go through any kind of a procedure?

GUSTAVSON: No, I don't think, dear. I don't remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving the town?

GUSTAVSON: I felt bad leaving the town. That I remember. (she laughs)

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LEVINE: Did your mother, do you remember saying goodbye . . .

GUSTAVSON: She didn't go to Oslo with me. That was too far.

LEVINE: Did you plan to come back again, or did you think you were leaving for good?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, no. I always planned to come back. Everybody comes back usually from United States.

LEVINE: Did you think you'd just stay a few years and come back?

GUSTAVSON: Now, that all depends on how my life did, you know.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything you packed to take with you, anything you brought from home?

GUSTAVSON: I just had a suitcase, I guess.

LEVINE: And clothes?

GUSTAVSON: Just, not too much.

LEVINE: Nothing that you brought that was special, that meant something?

GUSTAVSON: No. That I can't remember.

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LEVINE: Do you remember what you wore when you got on the ship?

GUSTAVSON: (she sighs) I think it was a suit. I think I got a new suit. For the confirmation I think I got a new suit, yeah.

LEVINE: So right after you were confirmed, you left.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was it soon after?

GUSTAVSON: I was confirmed on the 11th of October.

LEVINE: In 1911.

GUSTAVSON: I left that Spring.

LEVINE: And when you were on the ship, what was the voyage like?

GUSTAVSON: Well, of course, it was new to me, on a big boat. So, of course, I wasn't expecting any. But, of course, I think we were six in the cabin, as far as I remember.

LEVINE: Was one of the people the lady who had come for the visit?

GUSTAVSON: I think she was, yes. I think we had a cabin together.

LEVINE: And the other people? Did you know them?

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GUSTAVSON: No, no.

LEVINE: And what were the accommodations like?

GUSTAVSON: We enjoyed it. We didn't know any better. I didn't. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Were there bunk beds?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And what about food? Did you go to a dining room?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes. Plenty of food.

LEVINE: Was the food good?

GUSTAVSON: Three days, three times a day. It was good.

LEVINE: And was there anything else that happened aboard ship that you remember?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, we enjoyed the music they had. The orchestra played and everything up on the deck.

LEVINE: Did they have that more than once, they had the orchestra playing?

GUSTAVSON: Every day. Every day, orchestra. I have pictures of them, too.

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LEVINE: Oh, good. And did people dance on the deck?

GUSTAVSON: You could if you wanted to.

LEVINE: And do you remember what went through your mind when you were en route to America, what you were thinking about that you would have here?

GUSTAVSON: No. (she pauses) That I can't remember. I met this Danish fellow, and we were together for the whole trip.

LEVINE: And did you see him after he got here?

GUSTAVSON: No, I don't know where he went.

LEVINE: Were there, there were Danish people on the ship, Norwegian people, and were there other people as well?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yeah. They were all Scandinavian, I guess. They all were Scandinavian, Swedish and some, but mostly Norwegian.

LEVINE: And did you know any English when you first came?

GUSTAVSON: No. "Yes and no."

LEVINE: And so do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

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GUSTAVSON: Oh, remember? Yes.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that.

GUSTAVSON: Of course, all these big houses and buildings I had never seen before, you know. That was . . .

LEVINE: Even in Oslo or Bergen you never saw buildings that tall.

GUSTAVSON: No. But now you do, now you do.

LEVINE: And the Statue of Liberty. Did you see that?

GUSTAVSON: I bought one when I was there.

LEVINE: And what was, how did you feel when . . .

GUSTAVSON: That was nice. I liked to see the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: What did you think about that when you saw it.

GUSTAVSON: I don't know, but . . .

LEVINE: Did you know what that was?

GUSTAVSON: That time? I don't remember if I did or not. I'd heard about it, of course.

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LEVINE: Did people come on deck to look at it when they . . .

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes. They all wanted to go up and see.

LEVINE: And did the people on the ship do anything when they saw the Statue?

GUSTAVSON: They got excited, of course.

LEVINE: Let's see. Then you were taken to Ellis Island. Do you remember that, your impression, when you got there?

GUSTAVSON: Well, I remember that I thought it was an awful lot of different people you saw that you had never seen before, all the kerchieves on the heads, and some had shawls, you know. And I felt I was so dressed up, (she laughs) coming in a suit. We saw all kinds of people there. But we went from different room, seems to me, to be examined, and they looked in your head. And I remember one time there was only lady, she had to go and wash her hair or something. They turned her back. She had bugs in her hair. (she laughs)

LEVINE: And do you remember the eye examination?

GUSTAVSON: What they do, maybe they look in your eyes. Yes, I think. But there was nothing wrong with me. (she laughs)

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END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

GUSTAVSON: One time I remember came. I had been home in Norway. And I had a coat over my arm. It was the second time I came through Ellis Island.

LEVINE: What year was that?

GUSTAVSON: Must have been 1915. And I had my coat hanging on my arm, and the doctor said, "What's the coat there for?" Or something. He thought I had a broken arm or something.

LEVINE: Well, now, you came and you stayed three years, then you went back, or you went back before then?

GUSTAVSON: I went back in 19 . . . I have that written down. (break in tape) My hearing aid. I went back again, the, in 1914. That was two years after. My aunt, two of my brothers, John and Sam, they wanted to go take a trip to Norway. And, of course, they couldn't leave me all alone, so I went too, after two years. So the war broke out, and, of course, they were citizens, my brothers were citizens, and so was my aunt. So they left me in Norway, and I didn't. So I came back in 1915. I stayed

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home until I came back on the Frederick, was the ship.

LEVINE: And where did that leave from?

GUSTAVSON: From, I think that left from Bergen, Norway. That was the 8th of May, 1914. No, when we went home. We left, oh, yeah. No. (she pauses) On the S.S. Stavanderfjord. Now, where's my bag to find this? This is awful. (she murmurs to herself) I went back on the Frederick.

LEVINE: You went back on the Frederick.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: From the United States to Norway.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: In 1914.

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you came back again in 1915.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. That's the time the war broke, in 1914. So they left there and came back again in 1915, October, yeah. October 20th.

LEVINE: And what ship did you come back on?

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GUSTAVSON: Stavanderfjord. That's the Norwegian, that was their first ship, I guess.

LEVINE: Could you spell that one?

GUSTAVSON: S-T . . . Christianmafjord. No, Christianmafjord. They have two names. They have one Stavanderfjord. And this is Christianmafjord. C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N-M-A-F-J-O-R-D. Christianmafjord.

LEVINE: And that's what you came back on?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. October 1915.

LEVINE: And then did you stay here?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. (she pauses) Yeah, I stayed here, and came back to Boston. Then I went back to Norway again on Stavanderfjord. May 18, 1922. That was when father was married.

LEVINE: Oh. Could you spell that one?

GUSTAVSON: Stavanderfjord. S-T-A-V-A-N-D-E-R-F-J-O-R-D. Stavanderfjord.

LEVINE: So that you went back to Norway on. And how long did you stay that time?

GUSTAVSON: May 18, 1923.

LEVINE: May 18, 1923.

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GUSTAVSON: Oh, I left Norway on the same boat April 20, 1923. I stayed for a whole year. I was about to just stay for the summer, but the summer went so fast that I stayed for the winter.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then you came back to the United States, and then did you stay here?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah, in East Boston.

LEVINE: In East Boston. Well, when the first time when you came in 1912 and you were checked and examined at Ellis Island, then who met you?

GUSTAVSON: I think my oldest brother met me. I can't remember, but I think it was my oldest brother that met me in New York.

LEVINE: You think he came right to Ellis Island?

GUSTAVSON: Well, I don't, that I can't remember.

LEVINE: And where did you go?

GUSTAVSON: I had an aunt in New York too, at that time. My cousins. But it seems to me my brother met me.

LEVINE: Your brother Sam or John?

GUSTAVSON: No, Lars. The oldest.

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LEVINE: So where did you, if Lars met you, then where did you go?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, we went to Boston, East Boston, to my aunt.

LEVINE: And do you remember the train ride? Did you take a train?

GUSTAVSON: I don't know if I took the train or they had steamships at that time, Eastern Steamship. I was going on them, so I think one of them tugs must have been on the ship.

LEVINE: Do you remember arriving at your aunt's apartment or house?

GUSTAVSON: I think I'll run down by that house to see if the house is still there. It's still there and it looks good. It's all painted up and everything. It was a new house. She rented the house, three deckers. And she had a rooming house. You see, all my brothers were there and a couple of her brothers were there, my aunt and my uncle's. So she had a rooming house. The house is still there. I thought it looked bad. East Boston, I thought, was a dirty place when I came. I did. I thought the streets were trashy.

LEVINE: And do you remember when you met with your aunt and what that was like when you first got here?

GUSTAVSON: Well, it was an experience. (she is moved)

LEVINE: Was it a celebration when you first . . .

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GUSTAVSON: Well, I think they liked to have me over there. And my brothers, you know, they all got along so good.

LEVINE: So then what did you do? Did you study English, or how did you learn English?

GUSTAVSON: Well, I went to evening school for a year, just for a winter.

LEVINE: Right away, after you came, or you went . . .

GUSTAVSON: I can't remember if it was right away, but I did, in the wintertime, evening school.

LEVINE: And did you learn pretty easily. Do you remember learning?

GUSTAVSON: Well, then I got a job on State Street where they were making, putting up all kinds of jams, jellies and maraschino cherries and all these things. And my aunt had a friend that worked there. She was the boss, a lady boss, there. So she got me in there. So I worked there for I think a year or so. And a year, or maybe two years. I can't remember now.

LEVINE: Was that . . .

GUSTAVSON: And I learned English good there. There was a young fellow there from East Boston, an Irish fellow. He must be dead now. He tried to learn me English, too. So I liked it because Mike, I remember his

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name, Mike O'Connell. I had to put the cherries, maraschino cherries. He always wanted me to put up the best, you know. So I got that job.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: So did, when did you leave there? Why did you leave there?

GUSTAVSON: I don't know why. They moved, anyway. They moved finally. I think they moved, well, I wouldn't have stayed anyway, but they moved. So I was, one time I worked as a waitress up in Dana Hall School in Wellsley, as a waitress. I was there for a while.

LEVINE: Was that after you . . .

GUSTAVSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: . . . did the jams. Uh-huh. So you were here two years, then you went back. How was it that you went back, because someone wanted to visit.

GUSTAVSON: In 1914?

LEVINE: Yeah.

GUSTAVSON: Well, my brothers and my aunt wanted to make a trip. So . . .

LEVINE: Were you happy to go back?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yes. I thought it was fun to go back. I had a lot of things to tell my

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friends, you know. But they all had people in this country anyway. All my neighbors went to America, it seems. They all did that time. Nobody comes now because they all have good education, they have all kinds of schools. There's more schools that I never saw before.

LEVINE: So when you went back, did it seem strange to you or . . .

GUSTAVSON: Well, it was, you know, just different. I thought

LEVINE: Can you remember some of the things that struck you as being different there than they were here, or different here than they were there?

GUSTAVSON: Well, I don't know. I was surprised to see all the new schools they had, the universities and all kinds of, and everybody went to, they all had an education.

LEVINE: That's now. You mean more recently.

GUSTAVSON: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, what was it like to see your mother again after two years?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yeah, well, that was nice. And my sister too was there at that time. She was the youngest. She's now living in Minnesota. All my brothers are dead.

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LEVINE: So you stayed there how long that time when you went for that first visit back?

GUSTAVSON: That's the time that the war broke out, wasn't it?

LEVINE: Yeah. So you were there . . .

GUSTAVSON: I was there for a year.

LEVINE: A year. And then when you came back, who did you come back with?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, that sister, the one I came for. She was home visiting with my neighbor from New York. They're dead too, if you want to know.

LEVINE: So then you came again into the New York Harbor. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty the second time?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you looking forward to coming back to the United States?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah, because I felt that when you don't have an education, you can't go to any office job, so I mean, what could you do? Out in the country there was no place. Work on a farm?

LEVINE: So then who met you the second time?

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GUSTAVSON: Well, I think it was just my aunt in Boston. If my aunt in New York, my cousins. I think it was one of them.

LEVINE: And where did you go to?

GUSTAVSON: I think I took the train to Boston that time, or maybe the Eastern . . .

LEVINE: Eastern?

GUSTAVSON: Eastern Steamship, maybe. I think it was one of them.

LEVINE: And where did you go?

GUSTAVSON: I think I took the train to Boston that time, or maybe to Easton.

LEVINE: Easton?

GUSTAVSON: Easton, the steamship, maybe.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh. And then . . .

GUSTAVSON: But I came along that time, I remember.

LEVINE: Oh. And by then you knew English.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. Oh, sure.

LEVINE: So then what did you do after you got back to the United States?

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GUSTAVSON: Well, I worked in Back Bay.

LEVINE: A waitress or something else?

GUSTAVSON: The whole family there. I got that through my aunt, too.

LEVINE: What was your aunt doing? Well, she had the rooming house.

GUSTAVSON: She had enough to do to take care of the house, because she lost a husband. He drowned. He was a captain on the coal barge. So they disappeared in a storm in the winter. So she kept on with the rooming house to make a living.

LEVINE: So your aunt knew somebody who wanted up a waitress and their family?

GUSTAVSON: She knew a Swedish girl that worked for families. I got in there.

LEVINE: And did you like that?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay there?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, I worked there for eight years. Then I talked to the trip to Norway in '22.

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LEVINE: And why did you happen to go back again that time?

GUSTAVSON: Well, there was parents' home, you know. You want to go back, so I did. My mother and father were lonely, and my sister was over here then.

LEVINE: Did your sister go right to Minnesota, or did she come to Boston?

GUSTAVSON: She came to Boston. She came to New York. She came to the United States. She got married in New York.

LEVINE: And did you see her?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yeah, yes.

LEVINE: Now, did she come through Ellis Island as well?

GUSTAVSON: No, I don't think she came through Ellis Island at that time. I can't remember when that place closed. When did it . . .

LEVINE: 1920 . . . Well, they were open still. 1922, did you say, did she, when did she come? Do you remember?

GUSTAVSON: I can't remember, no. Oh, she came before then.

LEVINE: Oh. So she could have come, easily, through Ellis Island.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah, maybe she did.

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LEVINE: So let's see. So then you went back for a visit, and you were just going for the summer that time? Was that the time you were . . .

GUSTAVSON: 1922. (she laughs)

LEVINE: But you stayed, the summer went quickly, so you stayed for a whole year.

GUSTAVSON: Was that when I stayed for a whole year? Yeah. Was that the time I said for a whole year? You know better than I. (she laughs) 1922. Left Norway April '22, '23. Yeah, I came, yeah. That's the time, yeah.

LEVINE: And what did you do when you were there for that whole year?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, I had the best time of my life.

LEVINE: You did?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, I think so.

LEVINE: Why was it so nice?

GUSTAVSON: Well, I had a bicycle. My sister, oh, yes, my sister left her bicycle. So I learned to ride a bike. So the whole crowd of us used to go on trips with bicycles, girls and boys. Took lunch with us, and we could ride to the next city in summertime. We had a good time. Go out fishing. Oh, yeah. That was a good time.

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LEVINE: Well, let's see. You were twenty-five, about, by then, twenty-five years old.

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. So '27 I got married, uh '25 I got married.

LEVINE: When you came back? Now, when you came back, did you come through Ellis Island then again?

GUSTAVSON: No.

LEVINE: Where did you come in then?

GUSTAVSON: Just to New York.

LEVINE: Did you come in a cabin, first or second class?

GUSTAVSON: Second? No. Now they had, no, I came third class. But that's different. Much nicer, much nicer.

LEVINE: It was less people in the cabin?

GUSTAVSON: Yes. I don't believe, maybe they had four now, I don't know, but oh, yeah, much nicer.

LEVINE: And then were you examined on board ship?

GUSTAVSON: No.

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LEVINE: Were you examined at all?

GUSTAVSON: No. I don't think so.

LEVINE: You just came right off to New York.

GUSTAVSON: Of course, I was a citizen at that time.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So then did you meet your husband here?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah. Met him at a dance in East Boston. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember when you first met him?

GUSTAVSON: No. He was Swedish, he was Swedish. So I went to a Swedish dance.

LEVINE: And, what, did he ask you to dance, or how did you meet him?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yeah. He liked to dance.

LEVINE: And were you fond of dancing, too?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: So after you first met him, then did you see him for a long time or you got married right away?

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GUSTAVSON: No, no. We were engaged for a year until we got married in '25.

LEVINE: So was it a marriage that had to get arranged? Were your parents involved or his parents, or . . . ?

GUSTAVSON: My parents were over in Norway. His parents was in Sweden. (knock on the door)

LEVINE: Let me get it. (break in tape) So, we're resuming now after a knock on the door, and we're going to when you got married, did you have a big wedding or a small wedding?

GUSTAVSON: No, a small wedding and then to an apartment we went.

LEVINE: And where was the apartment?

GUSTAVSON: East Boston.

LEVINE: And, um, and your husband was from Sweden. And what was your husband's name?

GUSTAVSON: John.

LEVINE: And his last name?

GUSTAVSON: Gustavson.

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LEVINE: Right. And was he here with his family, any members of his family?

GUSTAVSON: Just him. He left the ship and came here.

LEVINE: Oh, he left the ship. So what did he . . .

GUSTAVSON: He was a sailor on a Swedish ship.

LEVINE: I see. What did he do for work after you were married?

GUSTAVSON: He was a painter, a painter. House painting.

LEVINE: And did he have his own business, or he worked for someone?

GUSTAVSON: No. He worked for a company. Johns and Foster. He worked there for thirty years, I think.

LEVINE: And did he ever go back to Sweden?

GUSTAVSON: Him and I went in 19 . . . (she pauses) (she ruffles papers) Oh!

LEVINE: Oh, wait, watch the microphone. (break in tape) Okay, we're resuming again after a break to check the date that Mrs. Gustavson went back to Sweden with her husband.

GUSTAVSON: (she pauses) Um . . . (she murmurs to herself) The plane to Sweden. Yeah, John and I went by the, yeah, we went to the Swedish Lodge. They had a trip to Sweden.

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LEVINE: In 1939?

GUSTAVSON: No, 1960.

LEVINE: Oh. Oh, okay. Well, tell me, then what did you do? Did you work after you were married?

GUSTAVSON: No. Off and on sometimes over there, some of the girls were sick, they had seven maids, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, in the same family that you had worked for.

GUSTAVSON: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Then when did you start having children?

GUSTAVSON: In 19, I was married, in '25. 1927 my oldest daughter was born.

LEVINE: And what are your children's names?

GUSTAVSON: Alice Talcott. Her married name.

LEVINE: And what other children?

GUSTAVSON: Esther Carstensen. He was Danish descent.

LEVINE: How do you spell her last name?

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GUSTAVSON: Carstensen. C-A-R-S . . . C-A-A . . . C-A-R-S-T-E-N-S-E-N.
Carstensen.

LEVINE: And do you have other children besides . . .

GUSTAVSON: No, just two girls.

LEVINE: And how about grandchildren?

GUSTAVSON: Five. Three girls, two boys.

LEVINE: And how about great-grandchildren?

GUSTAVSON: Uh, two is in Florida. One is three, one is six. And one out in
Worcester, she's two. And one in Bradford, Mass. She one, one in
May.

LEVINE: Well, so you, when did your husband die?

GUSTAVSON: '64. How many years would that be? I think it was '64.

LEVINE: '64. Twenty-eight years.

GUSTAVSON: I think it was '64. I have it written down.

LEVINE: So did you work after your husband died? Did you go back to work or
anything?

GUSTAVSON: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GUSTAVSON: I was alone in my house. We had a house, he bought the house here in 1929 after my oldest daughter was born. It was too much. We lived on the third floor in East Boston, but we had a lovely apartment, you know. You could see all of Boston Harbor. But when she got old you have to walk, you know. Three flights of stairs. So my brother lived in Winthrop and he knew about this house that was for sale, so he bought that and moved to Winthrop.

LEVINE: I see. Well, looking back on your life from starting out in Norway and coming here and staying here, how do you think about . . .

GUSTAVSON: I've had a good life, I must say. And after my father died in Norway, my mother came over here and stayed with me. She was, fifteen years she stayed with me.

LEVINE: I see. Did she ever go back?

GUSTAVSON: No. She's buried here in Winthrop because she was alone, and she couldn't stay there.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything that you're very proud of in your life?

GUSTAVSON: I have lots of things to be proud of! (she laughs)

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LEVINE: Oh, that's great. Like, what are some of them?

GUSTAVSON: Well, I got nice children, nice grandchildren. And the little ones. (she laughs) They are fun. The little one was here, she was here a couple of weeks ago. She was all over the place. I had to move all my knickknacks up on the table. But they're fun.

LEVINE: When you settled here in the United States, did you want to become American, or did you want to hold on to being Norwegian?

GUSTAVSON: I wanted to be in America because all my brothers were citizens. So I planned to stay here because I knew there was no place home, to do home.

LEVINE: And did you become a citizen?

GUSTAVSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember the occasion. Was that a big occasion for you?

GUSTAVSON: That I don't. That didn't take long.

LEVINE: Okay. Before we close, is there anything else you would like to add? Anything you remember about Norway or . . .

GUSTAVSON: Well, I was there in 1981.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how did you feel going back to visit then?

GUSTAVSON: Oh, it was fun, fun. Oh, I was there before that with my oldest daughter, my oldest daughter and her family, her two children, her mother-in-law and I went together.

LEVINE: So you've been back several times since you first left?

GUSTAVSON: And I stayed there. They left me in Norway, in Sweden. We went to Sweden, too, to visit my husband's family. And they did, too. So then they left me, and they were going to Paris and Denmark and I think they went to Holland, too. But they left in Sweden, and then I went back to Norway and stayed longer in Norway.

LEVINE: And so you always enjoy going back?

GUSTAVSON: Yes. But now there's nobody there. There's only one girl I send a Christmas card to. But all my girlfriends are gone. They have all gone.

LEVINE: What kind of a man was your husband like? What kind of a temperament?

GUSTAVSON: He was a nice man, a good man. So, I've been pretty lucky.

LEVINE: It sounds like it. Well, maybe this is a good place to stop. I want to thank you so much, because this is a very interesting story, and it's been a pleasure to hear it.

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GUSTAVSON: I was wondering what it was going to be, and my granddaughter said, "You'd better not sign any paper. You never know," she said, "what's going on."

LEVINE: (she laughs) Okay. Well, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I've been here talking with Anna Gustavson, who came from Norway in 1912 the first time when she was fourteen, practically fifteen years old. And we're in Winthrop, Massachusetts, at Mrs. Gustavson's home, and it's June 26th, 1992, and I'm signing off. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW