

EI-199

KNUD AAGE STRETON

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AGE 11

PASSAGE ON "THE OSCAR II" PORT: COPENHAGEN

RESIDENCES: DENMARK: BORNHOLM US: HOBOKEN, NJ

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, July 31, 1992, a very raining morning, I might add. I'm here in Clifton Park with Knud Streton who came from Denmark. He arrived November 11, 1924 here in America. He was eleven years old when he arrived, and he and his whole family were detained at Ellis Island for eight days. Good morning, Mr. Streton.

STRETON: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Can we start with you giving me your birth date, please?

STRETON: My birthday is June 30, 1913.

SIGRIST: And where were you born, sir?

STRETON: In Bornholm.

SIGRIST: In Denmark.

STRETON: In Ronne, Bornholm.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

STRETON: Yes. (they laugh) Uh, R-O-N-N-E.

SIGRIST: That's the name of the town.

STRETON: Ronne, yeah. B-O-R-N-H-O-L-M. Bornholm, Denmark.

SIGRIST: Is that . . .

STRETON: Bornholm, Denmark.

SIGRIST: Is that, is Bornholm, is that like . . .

STRETON: It's a little island outside in the Baltic Sea, from, it takes a nice boat ride from Copenhagen to Bornholm.

SIGRIST: I see. So Ronne is the name of the town on the ocean.

STRETON: Yeah. Ronne is the name of the town I was born in.

SIGRIST: Well, can you tell me a little bit about this town?
What was this town like?

STRETON: It's quite a nice little town. It's like any other, like you go up maybe the New England states and see a

little town, like, you know. Something like, of course, there's water all around there. It was on an island, see. And they had like cliffs and all and nice beaches and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Was this the only town on the island?

STRETON: Oh, no. There was other towns, too. But I can't remember them all. You know, there was . . .

SIGRIST: So it's a good-sized island.

STRETON: Oh, yeah. It takes about, maybe a day to go around it in an automobile, something like that, I think.

SIGRIST: What was the major industry in this town?

STRETON: Mostly, mostly like with pigs and stuff. There's, you know, well, what can you say. Like ham and stuff like that. And also butter, too.

SIGRIST: Would they export this to . . .

STRETON: Yeah, to England, yeah.

SIGRIST: To England? Really?

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about how the town was set up, where the church was, where the municipal buildings were.

STRETON: Well, the church was, they were like, one was down near the, down near where the ships come in in the, you know, like where the piers are and stuff. And then some churches are on the outskirts, on the countryside also, and the biggest churches are down in the city itself, which wasn't a big city, you know. It wasn't too big a city. So . . .

SIGRIST: One main road in it, or many roads?

STRETON: Well, the, you know, yeah. It was one main road, and then there was, like, small roads off the, and then the houses in Denmark there, they're small, you know, and they're side-by-side. And then they have the cobblestone streets. At that time they did. I don't know what about today, whether they have it or not.

SIGRIST: Did you live in town or outside town?

STRETON: No, we lived on the outskirts. We had a house on the, on the outskirts, just like you'd see here in Clifton Park, maybe a little village, like, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your house for me?

STRETON: (he laughs) It was just a one-story house, you know, and all the rooms were on one floor. And it was made out of brick, a brick house with a, with these here tile roofs, you know. So that's about it. And then we had a nice garden. We had a pig and chickens. (he laughs) So.

SIGRIST: The, how was the house heated?

STRETON: We had these here stoves, you know, what they call pot-bellied stoves. We had one in the living room and one in the dining room. And then we had the old, the wood stove in the kitchen also.

SIGRIST: Describe the kitchen for me, what it looked like and what was in it?

STRETON: Well, we had, you know, like the old-fashioned stove, you know, where we had to heat the water. We had no hot water. We had to heat water on the stove to take a bath and stuff like that. And, in other words, we had, you know, like cabinets and things like that besides that.

SIGRIST: Was there a bathroom in the house?

STRETON: No, we had an outhouse. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What, tell me a little bit about the backyard. You said you had a garden.

STRETON: Yeah, we had a garden and a pig there and chickens. It wasn't too big, you know, maybe a quarter of an acre or something like that.

SIGRIST: Was the pig a pet pig or did you . . .

STRETON: Oh, no. We slaughtered him. (he laughs) Oh, yeah. He was to eat. We ate him.

SIGRIST: Tell me about slaughtering the pig. How . . .

STRETON: Well, we always sent for the fellow from the slaughterhouse. He came. His name was Mr. Nielsen, and he used to kill the pig for us and cut him up and, you know, and we'd put it away and different things, you know.

SIGRIST: What did, how did he kill the pig? Do you remember? Did he have . . .

STRETON: Oh, yeah. He used to put him on a bench and then just stick him in the throat, you know. (he laughs) And

then the blood all flowed out. Oh, yeah. He washed him, then he cut it up.

SIGRIST: Did you have any pets that you remember, you know, animals that were like house animals?

STRETON: No. No, we didn't have any pets there, no.

SIGRIST: Did the house have electricity in it?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. We had electricity, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was this a free-standing house, or was it attached?

STRETON: No, it was attached. It was one house, you know. Then one family on this side and one family on that side.

SIGRIST: Who lived in the house? Who was your family at that time? Can you list your brothers and sisters for me?

STRETON: My brother, well, all of us five children were there and my mother. My dad was here in the United States because he stayed here in 1919 when the war was over. He was sailing, but then he got a job over here, and he stayed here in 1919, and then he sent for us in 1924.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

STRETON: Hjalmar.

SIGRIST: Can you spell it, please?

STRETON: (he laughs) Yup. My father's name was H-J-A-L-M-A-R, T., S-T-R-E-T-O-N, Streton.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what your father looked like in words?

STRETON: Ah, he was, well, let's say he wasn't too tall, about the height of me, I guess. And he was kind of a stern looking man with a moustache, which he always had. And he was very strict, brought us up real nice, you know.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that strictness? What were some of his rules in the house?

STRETON: Oh, some of his rules was, like, you know, things we had to do, help him with things. I mean, he was, not that he hit us or anything like that. He maybe hit us once in a while when we deserved it, but otherwise he was, he was very strict. And we always did what we had to do.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your chores were? Did you have any chores that were specifically yours?

STRETON: Well, like in the garden, you know. We took care of the chickens, the pig and cleaned the pigpen and things like that and feed them and all, like that, you know.

SIGRIST: What did your father do for a living?

STRETON: My father in Denmark?

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, like I said he was sailing, you know, for fourteen years.

SIGRIST: And with what line did he sail with?

STRETON: The Scandinavian-American lines.

SIGRIST: How did he get that job? Do you know?

STRETON: Well, when he was a young sailor, I mean, you know, he went to the Academy, he served on one of the training ships, you know, Danish training ships. And then when he had been on there for what, I think, what is it, eighteen months or something like that, then he took

out sailing. So he was on the ocean fourteen years.

SIGRIST: What was his specific job? I mean, what did he do on these ships?

STRETON: Uh, he was, he took care of, like, all the baggage and stuff, that they call the baggage master on the ship, you know, for the tourists and the passengers.

SIGRIST: Did he ever name any of the boats that he served on?

STRETON: Well, he only served on the one, Oscar II. That's the one he served on.

SIGRIST: And did he ever tell you stories about things that happened during some of his trips that you remember?

STRETON: Well, you know, just a little bit, not much. You know, sometimes they had a, sometimes they had a very rough trip over, you know, where they, where the waves used to go over the ship and all like that, you know. That's about all.

SIGRIST: If your father was out at sea, how often did you see him?

STRETON: Well, at that days it took fourteen days to come over, and fourteen days to come back. So we saw him

probably once a month or something like that, you know.

SIGRIST: So he'd get to come home for a little while.

STRETON: Yeah, for a few days, you know. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did the Oscar II sail from?

STRETON: From Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: Was your father's family from this town?

STRETON: No. They were all from Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: They were from Copenhagen.

STRETON: Yeah, yeah. And he was born in Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: Do you remember his parents at all?

STRETON: Uh, vaguely. I only saw them just for a few days, you know, when we went over here, you know. I remember his mother, his mother was very stern also. And his father was more or less easygoing. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

STRETON: My mother's name? Gertrude.

SIGRIST: What was her maiden name?

STRETON: Uh, Larsen.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

STRETON: L-A-R-S-E-N.

SIGRIST: Again, can you describe your mother in words for me, what she looked like?

STRETON: Well, my mother was, she was tall and she was also very stern and, you know, we had a lot of respect for her. And she was a very pretty looking lady, you know. I must say, my father was a nice-looking man, too.

SIGRIST: What were her jobs around the house? What kinds of things did she have to do?

STRETON: My mother was a very good cook.

SIGRIST: Yeah? What do you remember that she cooked that was your favorite?

STRETON: Oh, she used to make all these very, like cream puffs, you know, for coffee and stuff, and coffee cake. And also she made a lot of nice roasts. And she always

made a goose for Christmas, which was very good. And we also had duck, and she made that very good, too.

SIGRIST: Were those your birds, or did you purchase those?

STRETON: No, we purchased those, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you also just name your brothers and sisters for me?

STRETON: Yeah. My older sister's name was Gertrude, and she was, she looked a little like my mother, and she wore glasses. And she was a nice person, too. And then my oldest brother, he was, he was tall like my mother. He looked like my mother, too. And then my other brother, he was, he was more like a little heavy set and he was quite a nice-looking boy, too.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

STRETON: Harold.

SIGRIST: Harold?

STRETON: Yeah. And my oldest brother was Carlo. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then you were born? You're the fourth.

STRETON: I was, yeah. And my name, of course, is Knud. And

then my young sister was born. Her name is Elin, E-L-I-N.

SIGRIST: So you were kind of a big household?

STRETON: Yeah. We were, yeah. When we stayed with Mother for five years all alone, you know, while Dad was over here.

SIGRIST: So in 1919 he . . .

STRETON: He stayed in the United States.

SIGRIST: He stayed, so he was no longer sailing with the Scandinavian-American Line by then.

STRETON: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: What was he doing here in the States?

STRETON: He was, he was with the, I don't remember the name of the company, but he was with a company that drives the spiles down for where the ferries go into, like Staten Island, you know. Those, where they hit the piling there?

SIGRIST: Building piers, sort of?

STRETON: Yeah. Piers, like, you know. He was with that

company.

SIGRIST: Where was he living?

STRETON: He was living in Hoboken, in New Jersey there.

SIGRIST: Was there a Danish population in Hoboken, or did he . . .

STRETON: Not that I recall. I don't believe so. Not much. But he bought, he got an apartment there where we landed when we came here to America, so he had that apartment for us when we came over.

SIGRIST: So what did you do for money for those five years that he was in America?

STRETON: Oh, he used to send us, he used to send Mother a check through the, through the bank, you know. Yeah, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did she ever work at all to take in . . .

STRETON: No.

SIGRIST: What about your older sister or your older brother?

STRETON: No. She, they went to, my oldest brother and my older sister, they were in high school just before we left.

They had little side jobs. They used to peddle paper. And also we did, too, when the farmers come into the slaughterhouse, we weren't too far away from the slaughterhouse. We used to go up and sweep the wagons out when they brought the cattle and the pigs in, and then we got, you know, a quarter, which is, you know, for sweeping them out. We did that all the time.

SIGRIST: What, can you describe the slaughterhouse for me that you lived near and what you remember about that?

STRETON: Well, it was just a big building and we used to watch them, you know, they used to bring the pigs in, like, in a big pen, and then they used to put a chain around their leg and then they'd hoist them up and then they'd go through a conveyor, like, with a chain, and then they'd go in there and then the butcher's right there with the knife and just, you know, right up in their throat, and all the blood goes out like in a, where they have, well, it goes into sort of a, like a drain, you know. And then they just go in and then somebody else cuts them up and that's the way they do it.

SIGRIST: Was that something you guys would do for fun as kids, go down and watch this, or . . .

STRETON: No. We just watch them when we didn't get any wagons to, before, you know, waiting for the farmers to come in from the countryside with their wagons with the pigs on it and cattle, you know.

SIGRIST: What did you and your brothers and sisters do for fun in this town? How would you . . .

STRETON: Well, we played soccer, which is an international game in Denmark, which you know, European countries, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was there a, was this school-based, or did the kids just all get together and do it?

STRETON: No, we'd just get together. And after we did a lot of gymnastic in school. We always had gymnastic in school.

SIGRIST: What was school like in Denmark? What was the school like?

STRETON: Well, we wore wooden shoes, you know. And when we went to school we had to leave the wooden shoes outside the door and we had, like, little slippers to

stick on and go in the classroom. We couldn't wear the wooden shoes in the classroom. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you ever wear leather shoes?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. We wore leather shoes right there. Only on Sundays, to Sunday school. There they are.

(he gestures to a photograph) See them? Had the high buttons. You had to have a thing to button them up, it went up to here. We could only wear them on Sundays. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So those were your good shoes, and the wooden shoes were . . .

STRETON: The wooden shoes was every day. We'd run in them, play in them, played soccer in them and everything. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Was that the same for the adults, too? Did they wear wooden shoes?

STRETON: No, no, no. They wore, you know, business people and stuff like that, they wore shoes.

SIGRIST: Let's keep talking about the school. Can you describe the building for me?

STRETON: Well, the buildings, we were separated. The boys were all in one building, and the girls all, we didn't go to, we didn't have girls and boys together in the classroom. All the boys were in separate classes, and all the girls in separate classes. They had a building, you know, across the yard, and we had one over on the other side. So . . .

SIGRIST: Were these big buildings, or was this a small school?

STRETON: Well, yeah. They weren't too small. I forget how many classes was in each room, you know. It went from, right from the first grade right up to before you go to high school like, say, the eighth grade like over here.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite subject as a kid?

STRETON: My favorite subject was geography. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, what did you know about America as a kid?

STRETON: Well, I didn't know very much because I hadn't learned that much. I was in, I was only about, I think, the fourth grade when I left, something like that.

SIGRIST: Was your father writing to the family?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What was he telling you about what things were like there?

STRETON: Well, how things were here, you know. Just different things, you know. And he said that we sure would like it over here, you know, and all, like that.

SIGRIST: When you were in school, do you remember any of your teachers? Do any of them stick out in your mind?

STRETON: Where, in Denmark?

SIGRIST: In Denmark.

STRETON: No, I don't. No. That I can't remember.

SIGRIST: And did you also play, you must have had a gymnasium.

STRETON: Oh, we had a gymnasium in school. Oh, yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: And can you describe, you said you did gymnastics and things. Can you describe a little bit about it?

STRETON: Yeah, we did them. Well, like they have over here, the horses, you know, we'd jump over. And also on the mats, and climbed the, they had, like, what do you call, latticework. Well, they were round, they were

heavy, around the walls. We had to climb up and down, and then also rope, you know, climb the ropes, stuff like that.

SIGRIST: So physical education was very important.

STRETON: Physical, oh, yeah. Very important.

SIGRIST: Talk about religious life a little bit. What denomination were you?

STRETON: I'm Protestant, yeah. Of course, in school over there we had to, we had to, you know, we had religious study every morning before class opened up, you know.

SIGRIST: Which particular sect of Protestantism? Lutheran, or . . .

STRETON: Yeah, Lutheran. Yeah, Lutheran, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was there a church near, near where you lived?

STRETON: Not too far away, I forget. Maybe a mile we walked.

SIGRIST: Was your mother a religious person?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we all are. See this here?
(he gestures to his Bible) I read that every day.

SIGRIST: What ways did you practice your religion in the house?

STRETON: In the house? Well, we used to say our prayers and, you know and before we'd eat thank the Lord for what He gave us this day and things like that.

SIGRIST: Would you say that your, you were a religious family or sort of an average?

STRETON: Well, I wouldn't say we were a real religious family. We were an average family, you know. But we were brought up that way. We went to Sunday school. We were baptized, we were confirmed, and everything like that.

SIGRIST: Can you describe Christmas for me?

STRETON: Christmas? Oh, yeah. Christmas was very pretty over there. We decorated the Christmas tree, and all the things that we put on the Christmas tree we made ourselves. Heart baskets, and Mother used to make roses out of crepe paper, like, you know. We made most of the things for the Christmas tree.

SIGRIST: Where did you get your Christmas tree?

STRETON: We went out in the woods on some farm and cut it down

and brought it home. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: And was there a celebration that accompanied Christmas or a dinner or something?

STRETON: Yeah. We used to have a nice dinner Christmas Eve, you know. And then, like I say, my mother made a goose for Christmas. That was our Christmas dinner all the time.

SIGRIST: Was it just your mother and the kids, or were there relatives that came over?

STRETON: Well, relatives came, like, Christmas Day, you know. Then they'd come over. My grandmother and things like that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a specific Christmas present that sticks out in your mind that you received in Denmark?

STRETON: (he laughs) Well, we didn't receive too much, you know, because we had, like Dad over here, you know. As far as I remember I got a little wooden horse, which I was very happy for, you know. I always liked horses, so that was something that I enjoyed.

SIGRIST: You said your grandmother came and visited. Is that

your mother's mother?

STRETON: Yeah. My mother's mother.

SIGRIST: Did you spend time with those grandparents?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. They came all the time.

SIGRIST: Can you describe those grandparents for me, your mother's parents?

STRETON: Well, just my mother's mother, she was also a strict woman. And she used to, you know, chase us around sometimes when we didn't behave ourselves and all, like that. And, but otherwise she was a nice person also.

SIGRIST: Did they live near you?

STRETON: Not too far away, no.

SIGRIST: Can you describe their house for me?

STRETON: Well, that was similar to, like ours, you know, all rooms on one floor and, you know, like a brick house.

SIGRIST: What did your grandfather do for a living?

STRETON: That I don't know. He was dead.

SIGRIST: He was dead. So it was just your grandmother.

STRETON: Yeah. He died before I was born, so I don't, I didn't know.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, so your father's in America. He's been here for a while . . .

STRETON: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Sending you guys money. When did they finally make the decision that the family should come and join him?

STRETON: Well, he decided, when he had enough money, to send the ticket so he could bring us over, you know. That's when they decided.

SIGRIST: Can you remember how you felt about leaving your town?

STRETON: How I felt?

SIGRIST: Yeah. How did you feel about going to America and having to leave your . . .

STRETON: Well, at that age I don't know. I was, I don't think I thought too much about it, really. You know, I think I had, I was looking forward to seeing something else, you know, really. Because Dad had, you know,

told us a lot about it up here, over here and, you know, so, it was a new adventure for us, I guess, more or less.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the process that your mother probably had to go through of getting papers and any of that, where she had to go to get the papers?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. She went up to, I had a very good friend in the bank there that we knew, that she knew and Dad knew, and he helped them, you know, doing all that. So there was no problem there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember going to get the passport photo taken? Do you remember having the picture taken?

STRETON: No. I, we just went up the photographer and he took that picture on the passport, you know. My sister's, my older sister's not on that one because she was old enough, she had to have her own. I don't have her picture. She had to have her own.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing to come?

STRETON: Well, we didn't pack too much.

SIGRIST: What did you take?

STRETON: Huh?

SIGRIST: What did you take?

STRETON: Well, we took most of our clothing and stuff like that, what we had. But all the rest we sold, you know, like the furniture and all, like that, you know, in the house. Well, the house my dad and mother sold. I don't know much about how they transacted that.

SIGRIST: What did you do with the animals?

STRETON: Oh, we did, I mean, we did get rid of those, no. We gave them to farmers or whoever had, so that was easy. It was no big problem there to get rid of the animals. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Maybe you don't remember, but did you pack your wooden shoes?

STRETON: Yeah. (he laughs) I had them with me. But I didn't use them too much over here.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your mother felt about leaving Denmark?

STRETON: She was kind of sad. She really felt, you know, that, well, she was leaving, she left her mother behind, you

know, and we never saw them again, so that was, you know, that was a big problem for her.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your grandmother?

STRETON: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that, can you describe that a little bit for me?

STRETON: Well, like, we all cried, you know, and we hated to leave, but it was a thing we had to do, and they felt bad also.

SIGRIST: Where did you leave from?

STRETON: From Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: How did you get to Copenhagen?

STRETON: We sailed with a boat overnight from Bornholm to Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: Were you with other people who were doing the same thing that you were, going to Copenhagen to come to America?

STRETON: That I don't know. That I don't know. That's just a small boat that take just a night trip over to Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: Like a ferry, sort of.

STRETON: Well, yeah. But a little bigger than a ferry, of course, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, how long were you in Copenhagen?

STRETON: We were there about four or five days, something like that.

SIGRIST: Where did you stay?

STRETON: Well, we stayed with my dad's parents, grandmother and grandfather.

SIGRIST: So they were sort of the last people that you saw?

STRETON: Yeah, they were the last ones we saw, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was it fun for you to go to Copenhagen?

STRETON: Yeah, I'd never been in Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: What did you guys do for the four or five days? Does anything stick out in your mind?

STRETON: No. We just walked around and saw little different things, saw some of the castles over there and things like that, you know. That's about all.

SIGRIST: Did anyone give you any goodbye presents before you came that you can remember?

STRETON: No, not that I remember. Not that I can recall, no.

SIGRIST: What boat did you come on?

STRETON: We came on Oscar II.

SIGRIST: You came on Oscar II. And was that the first time you'd ever been on a really big boat?

STRETON: Big boat, yeah. That's the first time.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what you thought, as a little kid, looking at this boat?

STRETON: Well, that was, to my eyes it was pretty big, you know, but now today it would be a small one, right?
(he laughs) So.

SIGRIST: What were your accommodations like on the boat?

STRETON: Very nice. Very good accommodations.

SIGRIST: Can you describe where you slept?

STRETON: Well, we slept in a cabin down, because we had, my mother and my little sister and my big sister, they

had one cabin, and us boys had one cabin. It was, I guess, down maybe one deck below the main deck, something like that, I think.

SIGRIST: Do you have any idea how much the passage cost?

STRETON: No, that I don't remember.

SIGRIST: They probably never told you, actually.

STRETON: Well, they probably did, but it probably skipped my mind. I wouldn't, I wouldn't try to, you know, steer you wrong on that today, because I really don't know.

SIGRIST: And, let's see, this is, what month is this that you left? You arrived in November, I know. Did you leave . . .

STRETON: November 11th, yeah.

SIGRIST: You arrived November 11th.

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did the trip take?

STRETON: Fourteen days.

SIGRIST: So you actually left at the end of October.

STRETON: Yeah, something like that. I don't know exactly the date.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the boat ride? What sticks out in your mind?

STRETON: Well, it was nice, but I remember one day we had a real big storm and water was coming over the, and we had to stay below decks, you know. And the ship was going sideways and up and down. And my mother was seasick. She got seasick, but we didn't, you know.

SIGRIST: The kids never did.

STRETON: No. We didn't get seasick.

SIGRIST: So what do young boys do on a boat? What did you do all day?

STRETON: On the boat? Uh, there was different things on the boat that you could, you know, do, play with or something. I forget. Games and stuff we had in the, downstairs in the main, what they call a cabin. I guess it's like a recreation room, you know. So we had to, we occupied ourselves, you know, with a lot of things there to play games in.

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being other kids on the boat?

STRETON: Yeah, there was other children on board too, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did they all speak Danish, or was there a mixture of nationalities on this boat?

STRETON: Well, as far as I remember most of them were Danish, but there might have been some different mixture of nationalities. I don't know for sure.

SIGRIST: Describe to me where they fed you on the boat.

STRETON: Well, they fed us in the, what they called the dining room, you know. And we had, you know, our, where we, we had our own seats. We knew just where we had to sit and so on.

SIGRIST: What did the room look like?

STRETON: Just a big room, you know. And then they had the waiters come in and wait on you and bring the food in.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the food?

STRETON: (he laughs) Not really, no.

SIGRIST: Nothing stuck in your mind.

STRETON: Probably something like, you know, probably hamburgers and had roast and stuff like that, you know.

SIGRIST: So the boat trip is fourteen days?

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember coming into New York Harbor?

STRETON: Oh, yeah, that's a big day. Remember, we landed her just about eleven o'clock, November the 11th which, you know, is a national holiday here, which we didn't know. And we saw, we were up on deck and we saw, you know, we passed the Statue of Liberty, we saw all the fire boats and, were spraying the water along the ship, you know, and all the horns blowing. Because that's Armistice Day. That I remember. And we landed on Pier 14 in Hoboken.

SIGRIST: What was it like to see New York City from the boat?

STRETON: It was, it was a really big sight for us. We had never seen buildings that tall before, you know. Stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Now, did you know what the Statue of Liberty was? Did you know ahead of time what that was?

STRETON: No, not really, no, no. No, I didn't. I know now.
I've been out there.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, tell me what happened once you
docked, because I know you ended up at Ellis Island.
Tell me about how you ended up at Ellis Island.

STRETON: Well, the, well, I had to go through the customs, of
course, which is, you know. And that's how they took
us over to Ellis Island. You know, Mother had the
papers there. But my dad was there also, but they
didn't, you know, they wanted, I guess sort of go
through my sister and see if it was not contagious,
you know.

SIGRIST: And what was it that she had?

STRETON: She had eczema in the joints here. It wasn't bad, but
she, and we had the letter from the doctors in Denmark
that it was not contagious, that she could be allowed
to come in, you know, but they wanted to make sure.
So she spent eight days in the hospital over on Ellis
Island, and we were there eight days, of course, too.

SIGRIST: How did you get from Pier 14 to Ellis Island?

STRETON: I don't recall. I think they took us on a boat from

Hoboken to Ellis Island, as far as I remember.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me at all about how your parents felt about this?

STRETON: Well, there was nothing they could do. Because my dad, he was kind of sad that he couldn't take us home, you know. But he came over every day and visited us so, you know. Eight days went, we had a great time us kids, you know, running around over there. You know Ellis Island. I guess you've been over there, haven't you?

SIGRIST: My office is there, yeah.

STRETON: And we were upstairs, you know, where the things is now. I was over there last year with my young daughter. We went over. And I remember, I recall up there where we used to run around. I remember the dining room and everything.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Describe the dining room for me.

STRETON: You know, well, it was big and the windows were way up

high, and they had all these big, long tables where we sat, where they fed us morning, noon and night, you know. And they used to give us an apple and an orange. And then we used to be able to go outside for recreation in the back.

SIGRIST: Were you with, did they separate your family, the girls and the boys, or were you all together where you were staying on Ellis Island?

STRETON: No. We were, we were all together, like, but we had separate rooms, you know, I mean, where we slept, the women used to sleep in one dormitory, and we slept in another one. But we saw each other every day, you know.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your impression was of Ellis Island and all the people there.

STRETON: (he laughs) Just, well, it was, you know, it was just, to me, like, it was just a big, a big hall with a lot of people, you know. And just gathering around, and sit and talk, and things like that. It's . . .

STRETON: When you were there, did you have to undergo any kind of medical exams?

STRETON: Well, they examined us when we came in. That's all, as far as I remember. But we were all okay. We had the vaccination and everything like that from Denmark, so.

SIGRIST: Did, do you remember talking to any other kids on Ellis Island? Do you remember making any friends of other people?

STRETON: Well, I guess we did. As far as I remember we used to gather together and play together, I guess. Because there was other people that came, like, from Russia and from Poland and Czechoslovakia and all over, you know.

SIGRIST: Did your sister ever tell you about being in the hospital?

STRETON: Being in, well, she was so small, you know. She didn't . . .

SIGRIST: How old was she?

STRETON: She was seven. She don't remember too much. She knows she was there when we were over there. She remembers . . .

SIGRIST: But, I mean, did she ever talk about what they did in the hospital to her?

STRETON: No, not really, no. She just said she was taken well care of, you know. And the nurses were nice, and they fed her and all, like that. So . . .

SIGRIST: Did any of you speak any English?

STRETON: My older sister and my oldest brother, they spoke a little. They learned some in Denmark. But we didn't, I didn't, and my other brother didn't either. My little sister didn't either.

SIGRIST: Pretty much you were just communicating with your family any way you were talking.

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You said your father came to visit you.

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he ever bring anything for you?

STRETON: Oh, he brought us sometimes a little candy and things like that, you know. But food, we were well taken care of over there as far as that was, you know, with

food and all like that.

SIGRIST: Did you sleep in a big room with lots of other men, or did you . . .

STRETON: Yeah. Yeah, we slept in a big dormitory, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember . . .

STRETON: It had bunk beds.

SIGRIST: And there were lots of other people?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, were there guards or anything tending to you?

STRETON: Oh, I, they had men around, I know, guards, or whatever they called them at that time, you know. We didn't pay much too attention to them because we couldn't go any place. (he laughs) We had to stay there.

SIGRIST: Do you know, did your luggage go with your dad or did it come to Ellis Island?

STRETON: Huh?

SIGRIST: Did your luggage stay with your father in Hoboken or did it come to Ellis Island?

STRETON: Uh, no. He took care of that. I think he had that sent home, up to the apartment he had.

SIGRIST: Tell me about getting off of Ellis Island and going to your father's apartment in Hoboken.

STRETON: (he laughs) Oh, God. Yeah, well, the day he took us out we went on the ferry and caught the ferry. It took us over to the Battery, and then from the Battery, I think there was another ferry that went over to, from the Battery over to Jersey, over to Hoboken, as far as I remember. And then we had, then we took a taxi from, from there up to the apartment. It was in Hoboken.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the address was?

STRETON: I don't remember the address, but it was 14th Street in Hoboken.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the apartment for me?

STRETON: It was on the fifth floor, and it was like a railroad apartment. It had five rooms, you know, from the

front to the back.

SIGRIST: How did your mother feel about this, having come from a house in Denmark and . . .

STRETON: (he laughs) Yeah, well, it was kind of, you know, kind of, a little strange for her, I guess, but we got adjusted pretty good.

SIGRIST: Yeah? How long did you stay in Hoboken?

STRETON: Uh, I think we stayed there about a year.

SIGRIST: In that same apartment?

STRETON: Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about, for you, what that first year in America was like? What was it like being a Danish kid in Hoboken which, of course, had a big Italian population at that time.

STRETON: Yeah, it did.

SIGRIST: And tell me, you know, what was hard to get adjusted to?

STRETON: Uh, I don't know. I think, we got adjusted fairly well. You know, we went to school and started to

learn the language and all, you know, and played with all the other children and stuff like that. I don't think it was a big problem, really.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

STRETON: Well, in school, and then we got books and, you know, and sort of, well, like I said, my oldest brother and my older sister, they knew a little English so they helped us, you know, too. So that was a big help there.

SIGRIST: What about your father? Did he speak English since he'd been here?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. Yeah, he spoke English.

SIGRIST: Did your mother try to learn to speak English.

STRETON: She tried, and she went to night school to learn English, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you, let's see, you're eleven years old, so what grade did they put you in?

STRETON: First grade. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: They put you in, well, how did you feel about that?

STRETON: (he laughs) I didn't know the difference really, you know. But I stayed there for I don't remember how long. But then I know, I remember I skipped grades, you know, after I learned English a little better.

SIGRIST: Did you find that, were you ever discriminated against or made fun of because you were an immigrant?

STRETON: No, no, never, no.

SIGRIST: Because Hoboken had so many immigrants at that time.

STRETON: Yeah, I know. No, we weren't.

SIGRIST: Did you ever, would your family go into New York?

STRETON: Uh, not when we lived in Hoboken, no. No, we stayed mostly in Hoboken, yeah.

SIGRIST: Your father, he's still working, still doing this pier work at that time.

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he do that, did he continue to do that?

STRETON: Yeah, right.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever work?

STRETON: No. No, she never worked, no.

SIGRIST: Where did you go after you were in Hoboken for a year?

STRETON: Then we, we moved to, let's see, where did we move to?
I think we moved to the Bronx, as far as I remember.
Yeah. We moved to . . .

SIGRIST: Why? Why did you go to the Bronx from Hoboken?

STRETON: Well, we wanted to get away from there, and my dad's
work was a little easier for traveling and stuff like
that.

SIGRIST: What was it about Hoboken that you wanted to get away
from?

STRETON: Nothing really. Just wanted to get to, to another, a
different place, I think. That's, as far as I
remember, you know. And then, of course, we moved up
to the Bronx. I forget what's, what part of the Bronx
it was. I think it was Hoe Avenue, I believe, that we
moved to.

SIGRIST: Hoe?

STRETON: Hoe, yeah. H-O-E. Hoe Avenue. It was around 179th
Street, something like that, I believe.

SIGRIST: Did you take a whole house, or just an apartment?

STRETON: No, an apartment there, too, yeah.

SIGRIST: It, was there something about America that you just didn't like that was very different from what it had been in Denmark and you just didn't like some aspect of being in this country?

STRETON: No, I don't think so. I think we got well-adjusted to it and liked it very much. I don't think there was anything, you know, that we could discriminate against. I thought it was very nice.

SIGRIST: What was your first job?

STRETON: My first job? I worked for an exterminating company.

SIGRIST: How old were you?

STRETON: I was twenty-seven.

SIGRIST: Oh. What did you do between being a young man and being twenty-seven?

STRETON: Oh, I had, like, off jobs, you know. I ran errands in the drug store, you know, for a drug store after school. And then when I got into this exterminating

company, which was a big company in New York. And I was there till I joined, I was, when I went to war in 1943.

SIGRIST: Talk to me a little bit about your mother and your mother getting adjusted to America. Did she, did she communicate with her family back in Denmark?

STRETON: Oh, yeah. They wrote letters, you know, to, only till they passed away, then there was no more communication, you know.

SIGRIST: She never saw them again.

STRETON: No, never saw them again.

SIGRIST: Did she ever want to go back to Denmark?

STRETON: She had the intention of going back there. We told Dad and Mother many times to take a trip back there, you know, when we got older, but they never seemed to want to go. Of course, then her mother passed away, and then his parents passed away, so there was nothing really to go back for.

SIGRIST: But neither of them ever wanted to go back to live.

STRETON: No, no, not really, no.

SIGRIST: Did they ever help bring anybody else from the family to America?

STRETON: Uh, no, not that I know of, no, no.

SIGRIST: Did either of them have any family here in America before the . . .

STRETON: No. No family.

SIGRIST: So they pretty much came by themselves.

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So how long did you live in the Bronx?

STRETON: Oh, gosh.

SIGRIST: A long time?

STRETON: Not too long. I mean, then we moved up to the West Side near the George Washington Bridge, 179th Street.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you did that?

STRETON: Uh, hmm. How old was I? I guess I was in my twenties, something like that, you know, as far as I remember. And we stayed there, we stayed there for quite a while. Then from there we moved to Hastings-

on-the-Hudson. Then we bought, then we got a house there.

SIGRIST: Finally back in a house.

STRETON: Yeah, we had a house there. We lived at 96 Lincoln Avenue. And that's where I went into the service from.

SIGRIST: I see.

STRETON: And while I was in the service, that's when my dad and mother bought that farm up there which Bob Olsen bought after.

SIGRIST: Which is in Lansingburg?

STRETON: Yeah. Well, up in Johnsonville, New York.

SIGRIST: Johnsonville. Well, I guess my final question, I have a couple of final questions for you. One is how do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Denmark? What do you think would have happened to you?

STRETON: (he laughs) It's a hard question, really, to say, you know. Who knows. Maybe I'd gone, I'd probably have gone out to sea like my dad did. That's about

the only thing you can do over there unless you learn a trade, you know, go to trade school or something like that.

SIGRIST: When you were . . .

STRETON: But I did love the water. Of course, that's why I joined the navy, after my dad.

SIGRIST: Did you spend a lot of time down at the piers in Denmark?

STRETON: Oh, yeah, we did.

SIGRIST: Was that near where you lived?

STRETON: We'd usually go down there in the wintertime. We used to put our skates on and skate right out. The boats used to get stuck out in the ice, and they had to wait for the Russian icebreakers to come and break them open and make a channel so they could come into the pier, and we used to skate out around the ship there, right from the harbor. And the passengers used to throw apples and oranges down to us. (he laughs) You know, it used to freeze real solid, you know.

SIGRIST: So you were always interested in the sea.

STRETON: Yeah, I was, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, why don't you just quickly kind of cap up your military career for us.

STRETON: Well, like I say, I joined the navy in 1943 and I was on an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific during the war, and I was a Shipfitter First Class. And we had to repair the ship if any airplanes came in and, you know, tore up the flight deck or something like that. We had to do the welding and put new planks and stuff like that in.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the carrier?

STRETON: The carrier was the S.S. Monterey. It was one of the small CVS carriers. We had nine of them. I operated with Admiral Halsey in the Third Fleet, South Pacific. We operated with the New Jersey and the Hornet, and then some of the cruisers and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: That must have been exciting, actually.

STRETON: Yeah, yeah. I enjoyed it.

SIGRIST: And let me just ask you when you married?

STRETON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When, when did you marry?

STRETON: I married in 1939.

SIGRIST: And what was your wife's name?

STRETON: Elizabeth.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

STRETON: Chiles, C-H-I-L-E-S.

SIGRIST: And did you have children?

STRETON: Yeah. We had one daughter.

SIGRIST: And what's her name?

STRETON: Shelia.

SIGRIST: Well, I think we've zipped you through your adult life here. My final question for you, then, is are you glad that your father had come to this country and brought you guys over?

STRETON: Yes, we are, we all are, yeah. We had a, I think we had a little better life here than maybe we, I don't, that's hard to say, of course. But I think as a whole we had a good life here. Everybody was together. We

were a close family. So . . .

SIGRIST: Great. Well, I want to thank you very much for letting me come out here and pick your brain.

STRETON: I just hope I did all right, that's all, you know.

SIGRIST: You did great.

STRETON: I did what I can remember as a child, that's all.

SIGRIST: You have very vivid memories. I love the ice skating out to the . . .

STRETON: Oh, yeah. We were, I was practically born on skates. I did a lot of ice skating.

SIGRIST: Did you make your own skates, or did you buy them?

STRETON: No, no. No, we used to buy the ones that you used to, you know, put on like roller skates over here. They had those big things in the front. We used to put them right on our wooden shoes and skate.

SIGRIST: Well, this is Paul Sigrist in Clifton Park signing off with Knud Streton.