

EI-236

EDITH MOSTROM SWANSON

BIRTH DATE: MARCH 20, 1906

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 25, 1992

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 2/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 3/1994

SWEDEN, 1925

PORT: GOTEBOG

AGE 19

**PASSAGE ON "THE KUNGSHOLM" RESIDENCES: SWEDEN: GUNNARSKOG
US: MONTCLAIR, NJ**

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: There is a television audible in the background throughout the recording of the interview. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr. Director of the Oral History Project, 3/9/1994

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine from the National Park Service, and it's November 25, 1992. I'm in Verona, New Jersey at the home of Edith Mostrom Swanson, who came from Sweden to America. She arrived on October 7th, 1925, when she was nineteen years old. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I'm happy to get a chance to talk to you and tape your story. Why don't we start by your telling your birth date and the town you were born in.

SWANSON: My birth date was, that's the 20th of March. But I, I wasn't born in any town. I was born out in the, on the farm, out in the...

LEVINE: Okay, it was 1906.

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SWANSON: 1906, yeah.

LEVINE: And, well, tell me about where you were born. Where was the farm?

SWANSON: Well, it was in a community called Gunnarskog.

LEVINE: Do you know how to spell that, Gunnarskog?

SWANSON: G-U-N-N-A-R-S-K-O-G. Gunnarskog.

LEVINE: And that was a community.

SWANSON: That was a community. That was, it was two and a half mile to the next town. The next town was Arvika.

LEVINE: Oh, boy, can you spell that one?

SWANSON: A-R-V-I-K-A. Arvika.

LEVINE: Okay. Now did you live in this little village community...

SWANSON: Yes...

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LEVINE: ...until you left for America?

SWANSON: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: Oh. Good. Well, describe it for me. What was it like there?

SWANSON: Well, it was very pretty. We had a lake right below us. And my home was way up on the hill. It was really a very pretty place.

LEVINE: What was your home like? Can you tell me what the house was like?

SWANSON: Well...

LEVINE: What did it look like?

SWANSON: It was, (she pauses) well, it was only three rooms in it, but it was, and it was painted red with white, window, window frames.

LEVINE: Was it all on the same floor, or did...

SWANSON: Yes. Well, we had a room, we had the room, one room upstairs, too. But the three rooms downstairs.

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LEVINE: What was the kitchen like?

SWANSON: Well, it was small, but it was cozy.

LEVINE: What did your mother cook on? What kind of a stove?

SWANSON: Well, first we had a big stove that was made out of brick, I guess. But then she remodeled it. So then after they, after that we just had a smaller, a wooden stove. In one room, in one room we had an open fireplace, and in the biggest room we had the, well, there was another fireplace, but it wasn't open. It was, I don't know what they call it. I have never seen them in this country.

LEVINE: Could you tell what it looked like?

SWANSON: Well, it was, (she pauses) well, it was like a square thing, from the ceiling, from the floor up to the ceiling. And then there was, like a door that you put the wood in. You, you fired it with wood.

LEVINE: And would it burn...

SWANSON: And it made the, made the whole room nice and warm. Really. It was a nice stove. I have seen open places, open fireplaces in this country, but I've never seen anything like that. We called it "Kokalum."

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LEVINE: How do you spell that?

SWANSON: Well, that, (she pauses) (whispers) Kokalum. Let me see. I think I have to write that.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, maybe when we finish we'll remember to write that.

SWANSON: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, so, that's how you heated. And your mother cooked in the fireplace, or where did she cook? How did she cook?

SWANSON: She cooked on the wooden stove in the kitchen.

LEVINE: And it was a wooden stove.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: What did, what did you burn in it?

SWANSON: Food, wood. From birches and pine trees and stuff. When she baked, she always used wood from the birches.

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LEVINE: I see. Well, was the stove itself made out of brick or metal?

SWANSON: No. That was made out of iron.

LEVINE: Oh, iron.

SWANSON: I think so. Made out of iron. And it had the four different plates on the top. And then it had, it had a little oven on, on the side that she used for baking.

LEVINE: Do you remember things that she made that you particularly enjoyed eating?

SWANSON: Oh, she made a lot of good things. Bread and coffee, coffee bread.

LEVINE: What...

SWANSON: And cake and cookies. Oh, she made all kinds of things. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you still cook like that?

SWANSON: I don't make bread. I make coffee bread and cookies, but I don't make the regular bread. She used to make round bread like that this. (she gestures) Then she used to cut it in squares.

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LEVINE: Was it white bread, or was it something...

SWANSON: No, rye.

LEVINE: Rye.

SWANSON: Rye. The coffee bread was white bread. That was from white flour. But the other bread that, that we ate everyday, that was rye, that was from rye.

LEVINE: And, getting back to your house, was it made out of stone, was it made out of wood?

SWANSON: No, that was made out of wood, the house. Yeah.

LEVINE: And, oh, you said it was red with the white trim?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about, like, then did you have a living room? What you'd call a living room?

SWANSON: Yeah, we did. Yeah. And then, and the other room, and then the kitchen. There

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was three rooms in it. Yeah.

LEVINE: So everybody slept in the, in one room that was the bedroom?

SWANSON: Oh, we slept in all the three rooms.

LEVINE: Oh, you did.

SWANSON: Even in the kitchen. We were eight kids, but we were not home all at, all at once. Because my brothers, my oldest brother was seventeen year old, and my youngest one, and by the time we were fifteen, sixteen, we had to go out and work. So we were, we were not all home at the same time.

LEVINE: I see. Well, now, what your mother's name, and her maiden name?

SWANSON: Her maiden name was Matilde Nilson.

LEVINE: Nilson. And your father's name?

SWANSON: His name was Anders. But he, he, (she pauses) well, he, he had another name, but he took Mostrom. He changed it, I don't know what his name was, but he, he changed it, and changed it to Mostrom.

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LEVINE: Did he change it after you were born?

SWANSON: No, no, before we were born. Before he was married.

LEVINE: I see. Do you know why he changed it?

SWANSON: No. I don't, that I don't know. No.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. And then your brothers and sisters. You, do you want to tell me their names?

SWANSON: Yes, I can tell you their names. My, the oldest one was Ernst. Fritjof, well, Fritjof was an odd name to, to spell, I guess.

LEVINE: Can you spell it, Fritjof?

SWANSON: F-R-, F-R-I-T-J-O-F. Fritjof. Ernst and Ellen Kristina, Maria Augustina, Albert Ijfran, Astrid Mathilda, Robert, Robert, what was his second name, Ferdinand, I think; and Edith Nora and Gunar Alf.

LEVINE: What was the last one?

SWANSON: Alf.

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LEVINE: Gunar?

SWANSON: Gunar.

LEVINE: G-E-R?

SWANSON: G-U-N-A-R. Gunar.

LEVINE: Oh, Gunar.

SWANSON: The same as Gunnarskog. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, you were the youngest girl?

SWANSON: Yeah. I was the youngest girl.

LEVINE: So, when you say you slept in each of the rooms, did you have beds, or what did sleep on?

SWANSON: We had, we had beds that we pulled out. In the kitchen we had bed that was this long, (she gestures) and then we pulled them out this way. But in the big room there was the beds for, you pulled them out this way. (she gestures) But, they...

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LEVINE: So it must, the house must have been full of open beds at night.

SWANSON: Yeah. Of course, it was. And we, we slept together, my sister Astrid and I slept in one bed, and Robert and Alf, Gunar slept in another. We slept two in each bed. And as I say, the oldest, the oldest were out working when the little ones, like my, my two sisters, oldest sisters were in this, went to this country when I was only five and six.

LEVINE: So, what did people do for work in that community?

SWANSON: Well, we had a, we had a farm. So we got a lot of food from there. And then my father made baskets.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing him making them?

SWANSON: Yes. I helped him sometime. Because when he started it, you know, he, he had to have somebody to hold on them, on to the things that went up and down. And before he got them all round up, he used to thread them, they, he made, I think he made them out of wood. Thin, very thin.

LEVINE: Could you describe how he made a basket? Can you remember that? How he...

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SWANSON: Well, I can, yes. Well, I don't know. The only thing I remember, I used to hold the, hold things that was standing up, so he could thread the others around to hold it together.

LEVINE: I see. So he would stand up some of these thin slats of wood...

SWANSON: Yes.

LEVINE: And then they were standing on the ground up, and then he made the other ones go around.

SWANSON: That's right. Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you describe any more about how he handmade these baskets?

SWANSON: No, I can't.

LEVINE: Did he go out and get the wood for them?

SWANSON: Yeah, we had the wood on the, that belonged to the farm. And he cut that down, and then we had the place where he used to make different things out of the wood, like shingles for the roof and, and all kinds of things. And he also made these thin things that he used for the baskets. They came out of wood, too. That

was wooden baskets. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did people used those wooden baskets?

SWANSON: Well, we used them a lot.

LEVINE: What would you use them for?

SWANSON: We, well, they even used them for fishing. He used to make, make, well, about this long. (she gestures) And then at one end he used to make an entrance. And then he used to get it together, so when the fish got in there, it was small enough inside that the fish couldn't get out. So they got caught in there. See what I mean?

LEVINE: Yes. So they were like traps for fish.

SWANSON: That's right. He made them, and then he made baskets for, well, we used baskets for a lot of things.

LEVINE: Like what?

SWANSON: Well, for carrying the hay in, and then we, we took up the potatoes. We had shorter basket, like this, (she gestures) that we put the potatoes in. We pick them

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from the ground and then put them in the basket. So he was busy with that in the wintertime. Of course, in the summer they had to work on the farm, you see.

LEVINE: Did he sell any of the things he grew on the farm?

SWANSON: Yeah. No, I don't think so, I, but he sold the baskets that he made. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what did he grow? Do you remember what the farm produced?

SWANSON: Well, we had potatoes, we had rye, we had oat, sometimes we had, I think you call it flax in this country. My mother used to make thread out of it, linen thread.

LEVINE: Oh, do you remember how she did that?

SWANSON: Well, (she pauses) I think we had the heat, so we get it real warm. And then she used to, she used to bang it with, and get the outside off.

LEVINE: Oh, like the husks of the, of the flax?

SWANSON: Yeah. And then inside was the thread. She made the thread, she made it herself on one of them...

LEVINE: Looms. I don't know.

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SWANSON: No, they don't call them, "spinrocker", we called them. (she laughs) There was a...

LEVINE: Spinning wheel?

SWANSON: Spinning wheel. That's right. She made linen thread. And then from the sheep we cut the wool off, and make woolen thread from the, from the wool.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. And then did make things out of the...

SWANSON: Yes.

LEVINE: What would she make, for example?

SWANSON: Well, she used to weave the material, and weave it.

LEVINE: That's a loom, I think, no?

SWANSON: What do you call it?

LEVINE: Loom.

SWANSON: Yeah. That's right. And then she used to make dresses and shirts for the boys,

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for the boys. We had to, everything, you couldn't, we couldn't go out and buy stuff in the store. There was no money for that. We had to make everything.

LEVINE: Did you learn to make things?

SWANSON: Yeah, I made some. Yeah. Which, I guess he had to help me with some things, but I did it. I did some sewing. And in the winter we knitted an awful lot, because it got dark three o'clock in the afternoon.

LEVINE: Oh.

SWANSON: Made all our hats, our gloves, our stockings. We had stock, socks that went all the way up here. (she indicates) Woolen socks.

LEVINE: Now what would wear typically? What would you wear when you were a little girl?

SWANSON: Well, in the winter we had, we had those, those long woolen, woolen socks. And the warm dresses, warm underwear. I don't think she made the underwear. I think she bought them.

LEVINE: Where would you go to buy something like that?

SWANSON: We had to go to Arvika, at the town.

LEVINE: And then, would you go there very often?

SWANSON: Not too often. No, not too often.

LEVINE: What did your family have to go there for besides certain things that your mother didn't make? Why, what would be a reason to go to that next town?

SWANSON: Well, there was some things that we had to buy. And, of course, we went to the dentist, I guess, once a year, or so.

LEVINE: How many people lived in your little village, your community?

SWANSON: Well, that I don't really know.

LEVINE: Was it like twenty families, or...

SWANSON: Oh, there was more than that. I would say about seventy-five. Yeah. I think so.

LEVINE: Did you have a school in your community?

SWANSON: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: So, did you go?

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SWANSON: We went, I went the sixth, seventh, I went seven grades.

LEVINE: Can you describe the school? What was that like?

SWANSON: Well, it was just a building by itself. I mean, we called it the school house. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have separate teachers for each grade?

SWANSON: No, we didn't. We only had one teacher.

LEVINE: And how many children would be in school?

SWANSON: Well, that was, of course, that was different. Some years there was more. I don't think we were more than twenty-five. I don't think so. Maybe sometimes there was less. It all depends how many kids there were around, you see.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, you went as far as seventh?

SWANSON: Eh?

LEVINE: Seventh grade?

SWANSON: Seventh grade. Yeah.

LEVINE: And then why did you stop?

SWANSON: Well, we couldn't go any more. Because the, well, then, then we had Confirmation. Then we went to the minister, and he taught us the Bible.

LEVINE: I see. So...

SWANSON: Before we were confirmed.

LEVINE: What church did you go to?

SWANSON: There was a big church for the whole community.

LEVINE: Was it a Lutheran church?

SWANSON: Yeah. Lutheran church.

LEVINE: And what was the, was it very important to be confirmed?

SWANSON: Yes. I think it was. I think everybody was.

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LEVINE: And what did it mean? In other words, what did it mean to you to be confirmed?
What was the significance of it?

SWANSON: Well, to believe in Jesus Christ, and at the same time we got, we were members of the church. We got, we didn't have to go in, like they do here. We just automatically went, got to be Lutherans.

LEVINE: I see. Was that a big, important day for you, when you got confirmed?

SWANSON: Oh, it sure was. It was for everybody. We thought that we were grown up then, you see. (she laughs)

LEVINE: And was there like a party, or did you celebrate?

SWANSON: Yes, we did.

LEVINE: And what would you do, like, when there was a celebration in your village, what would happen?

SWANSON: Well, I don't think too many things happened, but we...

LEVINE: Would other people come, and, I mean would there be dancing, would there be singing...

SWANSON: Oh, yes. We used to, when we grew, after we grew up we went there. They had dances outside in the woods, in the open.

LEVINE: And what would, what would, who would play the music, or what would you...

SWANSON: Oh, we had the, we had some, there was some boys that knew how to play. I don't think he got paid, I think he just played, played anyway. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, did you enjoy that, going to dances?

SWANSON: Yes. I did.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: Had a good time.

LEVINE: And, let's see. So, when you went to school, you were in the same class with some of your brothers and sisters then, who were in school, too.

SWANSON: Yes, I guess I was. Yeah. Well, my, yes, I was, because my, Robert was three years older than me, and Gunar was two years younger than me. So I guess we, we were in, together in school, the three youngest.

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LEVINE: And, tell me about your father. What kind of a man was he, what kind of a father?
Was he strict, or...

SWANSON: Well, I'll tell you. He was, he died when he was fifty-one. I was only seven years old. So I don't remember much about him.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences that you might...

SWANSON: Well, I remember he, he always called me Nora. He gave me the name of Nora.
And when he wanted me to help him, to hold these...

LEVINE: The pieces of wood.

SWANSON: Yeah. He always called me Nora. He was the one that gave me that name. Well, what I remember of him, I think he was very nice looking. And I think he was, I think he was a very nice man the little I remember of him. But I was only seven years old when he died.

LEVINE: So you remember, did you ever go any places with him that you remember, or do...

SWANSON: The only place I guess I went with him was the church, I imagine.

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LEVINE: How often did the family go to church?

SWANSON: Well, that I don't know. We did not go every Sunday. No. No.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other times with your father that, when you think of your father you, something that you remember?

SWANSON: Well, he gave me a spanking once.

LEVINE: Oh, what was the occasion?

SWANSON: I hit my brother Robert with a pole in the head, so he got the bump up on his head. But he was mean to me, so that's why I hit him. But I got the licking.

LEVINE: And how about your mother. Was she, did she discipline you, too?

SWANSON: Oh, yes, she did. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how do you remember her? What kind of, like, when you were a little girl, can you remember things you did with your mother, or any experiences you had with her?

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SWANSON: Well, one thing I know, you know, when anybody had, had a baby in the neighborhood, they always came and got her first before they got the midwife. And then she used to wake me up. Sometimes it happened in the middle of the night, and she used to wake me up, and said, "Now you have to milk the cows tomorrow morning." (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, why would they call her first?

SWANSON: Well, I don't know. I guess she was, she must have been pretty experienced with, I don't know, they just, they just came and got her. And then we got the midwife, of course. And, okay, so then they had to get a doctor, too. But, most of the time they, it went all right with a midwife.

LEVINE: Was there a doctor right in the community?

SWANSON: No, that, he was in, in the town, Arvika.

LEVINE: So, did your mother, did your mother do anything else in the community? I mean, was she a, was she a person that was looked up to in the community?

SWANSON: Well, I think so. I think so. I really do.

LEVINE: So, she, did she, well she had all those children, so I guess she didn't work.

SWANSON: No, no, no. Just, oh, well, there was plenty work on the farm, milking cows, and feeding the pigs and the chickens, and there was plenty work, and then all of those kids. And all she did, weaving and making clothes for us, and, oh, she was busy.

LEVINE: What kind of a lady was she? What was her personality like?

SWANSON: Well, I think she was nice. I think so. She was liked by everybody, I think.

LEVINE: Was there anything she tried to teach you that you remember?

SWANSON: Well, she, she taught me how to bake things. And we used to make rugs to put on the floor, and I used to make some of those. But she made tablecloths and things, but she, she didn't let me do that, she did that herself. But the rugs I used to weave.

LEVINE: Do you remember any, like, values or attitudes, beliefs that she had, that she tried to, to instill in you, any ideas she tried to teach you?

SWANSON: Oh, I think she did. Yes. Well, she taught us to be honest, a good citizen, she did.

LEVINE: And, let's see. So what else do you, well, you had animals you said.

SWANSON: Yes.

LEVINE: Did you have a lot of animals?

SWANSON: We had sometimes three cows and sometimes two. Then we had calves, and we had a pig, and she used to buy one in the city in the spring, and then feed him up, so he got nice and fat. And then they killed him for Christmas. And we had chickens. We didn't have a horse. There wasn't big enough for that.

LEVINE: Was it a big farm that your family...

SWANSON: No. No, no, there wasn't, it wasn't a big farm.

LEVINE: Anything else that you remember about that town? What did you do for fun? What would you play when you were little with your friends, or...

SWANSON: Well, we went to dances and...

LEVINE: I'm sorry. Say that again?

SWANSON: We, we went to dances, and, that's about all, I guess. Well, we used to visit each other. And we had, they had festivities in the, in, not in the church, but in the Covenant Church they called it, I think.

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LEVINE: That's another church in town?

SWANSON: That was a more religious church. My, my mother went to that, too.

LEVINE: She belonged to both churches?

SWANSON: Yeah. And, they used to have festivities every so often.

LEVINE: What do remember with most pleasure about, about growing up there?

SWANSON: Well, it was nice to grow up on the farm. That it was. We were free, we could run around, and we didn't have to be afraid of anything. And we had that lake right below us. So in the summertime, we used to go down there and bathe two, three times a day.

LEVINE: And what was it like when it got dark at three o'clock? What did you do then?

SWANSON: Well, then we used to sit in and knitted, made stockings, and girls' hats.

LEVINE: And were the boys in the family treated differently that the girls in your family, would you say?

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SWANSON: I, I don't think so. We were all the same.

LEVINE: So, then your oldest brothers and sisters went to work.

SWANSON: Well, my oldest brother was out on the sea, on, on the freighter for eight years.

LEVINE: Oh.

SWANSON: But, then he got, he didn't go, he, well, he got married, of course, he bought a farm and stayed home. But my two sisters, my sister Ellen came over here 1911, and my sister Maria came over here 1912.

LEVINE: Now how was it that they happened to come?

SWANSON: Well, there was a lot of Swedes that went over here, because there was tough times in Sweden. It was hard to get work, and get very little pay. So we just came over here. Six of us was over here.

LEVINE: Well, when your two older sisters came first, did they write to the family?

SWANSON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything that they said about America before you ever

came here?

SWANSON: No.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you knew about it?

SWANSON: Nothing special.

LEVINE: What did they do when they came here.

SWANSON: House, they did housework.

LEVINE: Housework. And then did they stay here?

SWANSON: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: They stayed. So, how was it decided when you would come? What was the circumstance?

SWANSON: Well, I just wanted to come over, I really wanted to come over just to visit them.

LEVINE: Oh.

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SWANSON: But I had to borrow money for the trip coming over, and I had to make enough money to go back again, and by that time I didn't want to go back.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it cost to come over, how much you had to borrow?

SWANSON: I think it was a couple hundred dollars.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

LEVINE: So, you worked for some time before, or...

SWANSON: I worked, I worked in the, in the, in a store, in the country, right near my home for three years before I came over here.

LEVINE: What kind of a store was it?

SWANSON: Well, there was a, we sold practically everything you, not everything, but I mean, all kinds of things that you needed for the household.

LEVINE: Can you remember some the of things you sold that we don't have anymore, that we don't use anymore?

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SWANSON: No, I think you use everything.

LEVINE: Were there some things over there that you used, that when you came to the United States, they didn't have here?

SWANSON: Oh, no.

LEVINE: No.

SWANSON: No.

LEVINE: So, what was it, like, you would sell everything from food to household items?

SWANSON: Well, we sold some, mostly was food, but there was some household items, too. I think we sold material. But there was mostly food.

LEVINE: How about things like hardware? Did you sell any...

SWANSON: No, we didn't sell any hardware, no, no, no.

LEVINE: No.

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SWANSON: No. That we didn't. Then...

LEVINE: Go ahead.

SWANSON: They had to go to town to get that.

LEVINE: I see. So, you must have known everyone in your community. Did you...

SWANSON: Oh, yeah, no. Well, I don't know if I knew everyone, but, pretty, pretty much. I, I think I knew practically everyone.

LEVINE: Was that nice knowing everybody?

SWANSON: Well, it, sometimes it was nice, and I don't, sometimes I don't think it was so nice, because they all, they knew all about you.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: So, I guess sometimes it would have been nice if they hadn't, maybe, I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's see. Is there anything else that when you think back to Sweden, you remember about it, about being there for your first nineteen years?

SWANSON: No, I don't think so.

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LEVINE: Did you meet your husband there?

SWANSON: No, no. I met him here. He came from another part of Sweden, the southern part.

LEVINE: I see.

SWANSON: I came about the middle of Sweden.

LEVINE: I see. So...

SWANSON: Well, it was nice to grew up on the farm, that it was. I wouldn't want one now, but it was nice when I, when you were young. Kids.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular one of your brothers or sisters?

SWANSON: No, I don't think so. We were all about the same.

LEVINE: So, you came by yourself?

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SWANSON: Hm-hmm.

LEVINE: You borrowed the money...

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you came, and how, when you, do you remember leaving your town, when you left the town for the ship?

SWANSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: What was that like for you leaving?

SWANSON: Well, I, I don't think nothing spec-, particular.

LEVINE: Were you excited or were you...

SWANSON: No, I don't so. (she laughs) There was, it was, every, so many people went, there was nothing unusual about it.

LEVINE: Oh. So, a number people had gone from your town.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And so, did you ever hear stories that, you know, about them? Did they write to you, or...

SWANSON: Oh, yeah. My sisters would, yes.

LEVINE: So, okay, so, when you left, do you remember what you took with you?

SWANSON: Not, I don't think I had too much. Just a little bit in the, I didn't have too much with me. No.

LEVINE: Did you have a basket? How did you carry...

SWANSON: No, no. I had a suitcase.

LEVINE: A suitcase. So, you had mostly clothes in your suitcase.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did your mother or father, oh, your father wasn't alive then. Did your mother or your older sisters or brothers give you any advise when you were leaving that you remember?

SWANSON: No, I don't think so.

LEVINE: So how did you leave your town? By what mode of transportation?

SWANSON: A train.

LEVINE: A train. A train actually came to your community?

SWANSON: No, no. They, (she pauses) I think by that time some people had cars. So, I think I, I think we even had buses. Yeah, we did. That was not long before I left, though. That, some people, there was two, two fellows came from the northern part of Sweden and opened a bus line. So I took the bus into Arvika. And then I took the train from there to Goteborg, (altering her pronunciation) Guttenberg.

LEVINE: Guttenberg.

SWANSON: And that's where the boat went out from.

LEVINE: Okay, well, you arrived here on October 7th, 1925.

SWANSON: Yeah.

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LEVINE: When did you leave your, actually leave your house? Do you know how long it took you?

SWANSON: I had to leave my house two days before we left. I was in Guttenberg two nights. And then it took us eleven days to come over.

LEVINE: I see. So what was it like in Guttenberg? How did that strike you?

SWANSON: Well, I had a friend there, so she took me out both nights.

LEVINE: Had you ever been there before?

SWANSON: Once.

LEVINE: Was there anything about, that was a big city, I guess.

SWANSON: Yeah, well, that is a big city.

LEVINE: So, was it, was it, did you notice anything different than, than you were used to in the big city, that struck you?

SWANSON: No. It is quite, Guttenberg is quite a big city.

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LEVINE: And you knew this friend from your town?

SWANSON: That was a, that was a friend of the, from the community, that had been, was working there. She was working in the bakery.

LEVINE: Oh. So, you stayed with her...

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...two nights, and she took you...

SWANSON: No, I stayed in a hotel. But she, she picked me up and took me out. We went to, there was a place they called "Liseberg." That's, well, they have entertainment. She took me there one night.

LEVINE: Could you spell that for me, "Liseberg?"

SWANSON: Liseberg. L-I-S-E-B-E-R-G.

LEVINE: So, then, did she take you to the ship, or you went...

SWANSON: No, no. No, no.

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LEVINE: You went on you own.

SWANSON: I, I was on my own then.

LEVINE: Did you have any, did you have any dealings with the steamship company before you left.

SWANSON: No.

LEVINE: You were...

SWANSON: Well, I had to get the, buy the ticket, of course.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: But I got that in town in Arvika. We had, like, travel bureaus there.

LEVINE: And, by then there was a quota system. Do you remember anything about that?

SWANSON: Yes. Yeah, I had to wait, I think I waited for about six months before I, after I, (she pauses) I can't think.

LEVINE: You applied for the visa?

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SWANSON: Applied for the visa, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: I had to wait for about six months.

LEVINE: So then, were you able to apply for the visa from your town, or you had to go into the next, I mean, from your village? Or you had to go...

SWANSON: No, I had to go into town to do that.

LEVINE: Okay, so then the name of ship that you came on.

SWANSON: Kungsholm.

LEVINE: K-U-N-G-S-H-O-L-M?

SWANSON: K-, K-U-N-G, I don't know if it says "g" right.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: "G" and "j" is all the same for...

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LEVINE: Oh, I see. So G-, or J-S-H-O-L-M? Does that sound right?

SWANSON: K-U-N-G-S-L, no.

LEVINE: S-H. Does that sound...

SWANSON: Let me see. (she reads)

LEVINE: S-H-O-L-M.

SWANSON: Ku-, no, you have it right there. You have it right.

LEVINE: Okay. So that was the name of the ship. Now what was the ship like?

SWANSON: Well, it was, it was nice.

LEVINE: Where were your accommodations? Where were you sleeping?

SWANSON: That I don't know.

LEVINE: Was there a steerage? In other words, were you in the bottom of the ship with a bunch of people?

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SWANSON: Well, we were six in the cabin.

LEVINE: Oh, six in the cabin. Did you know anybody?

SWANSON: No.

LEVINE: And where did you eat? Do you remember the food at all on the ship?

SWANSON: No, that I don't remember.

LEVINE: Did you go to dining room, do you know?

SWANSON: Yeah. We went to a dining room to eat.

LEVINE: And, did you have any experiences on the ship that you remember?

SWANSON: No.

LEVINE: And, do remember the ship coming into the New York Harbor?

SWANSON: Yeah.

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LEVINE: And what did that, what was that like?

SWANSON: (she chuckles) Well, I don't know. Nothing particular. I don't know. Just, as I say, there were so many that left, that it was really no, no...

LEVINE: It wasn't unusual for you.

SWANSON: No. That's right.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SWANSON: Yes. I remember that.

LEVINE: What was that like? Did you know what that was?

SWANSON: Yes. I knew. I knew what it was. I had read about that.

LEVINE: I see. I see. Well, did that have any particularly meaning to you?

SWANSON: No, not especially. Not then, no.

LEVINE: No. And so, then you took a little boat, I imagine, to Ellis Island.

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SWANSON: I think they took us on a ferry, yes.

LEVINE: Yes. Now, could describe your impression of Ellis Island?

SWANSON: Well, it looked like a jail to me. And I had to stay there for four hours. And they asked me questions. Then my two sisters came and met me. So then they asked them the same questions to see if they corresponded.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the questions that they asked?

SWANSON: No, that I don't.

LEVINE: And, was there an interpreter then? Did you speak any English when you came?

SWANSON: No, I didn't speak it, I speak, spoke only Swedish.

LEVINE: Was it, what was it like for being alone and not speaking the language, and...

SWANSON: Well, I don't know. I, I wasn't afraid. I just, well, of course, when I was young I wasn't afraid of anything. And I knew my sisters, they were going to meet me, so I, that was okay.

LEVINE: And did they meet you right on Ellis Island?

SWANSON: Yes. They did.

LEVINE: And what was it like seeing them again?

SWANSON: Well, that was kind of nice. (she laughs)

LEVINE: How long had it been since you had seen them?

SWANSON: (she pauses) Well, my two sisters were home '21.

LEVINE: Oh, they came back for a visit?

SWANSON: Yeah. I had, I hadn't seen them since '21.

LEVINE: So, it was '25. Hm-hmm. And, let's see, do you remember about an examination on Ellis Island?

SWANSON: Well, they did examine us for, you know, at, they made sure we were healthy. And they even had a, we had, we had a sharp light in the ceiling to see if we had anything in our head that was crawling around. (she laughs) Oh, we had a good examination. That we did.

EI-236/EDITH MOSTROM SWANSON

LEVINE: And, okay, so then you met your sisters, and that was nice. And then where did you go from there?

SWANSON: To Montclair.

LEVINE: So...

SWANSON: Montclair is just below here.

LEVINE: So, your sisters came, met you at Ellis Island, you got back to New York, and how did you get to Montclair?

SWANSON: I don't know if they, I guess they took the train. Of course, I don't think that, well, they didn't, they obviously, they must have taken a train, or the bus, train or a bus. We, we went on a ferry from Ellis Island to New York, the terminal, I guess. And then I guess we took the, maybe a bus or a train, I don't know which.

LEVINE: And did your two sisters live together in Montclair.

SWANSON: No, no. My one sister was married. She lived in, in Montclair, and the other one was doing housework in Montclair.

LEVINE: I see. And the other one was living where she worked?

EI-236/EDITH MOSTROM SWANSON

SWANSON: Yes. She wasn't married. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, Lyon went to live with your sister who was married.

SWANSON: Yeah. I did.

LEVINE: And do you remember any of your impressions, of your first impressions of America, or...

SWANSON: No, nothing particular. No, I don't, can't say I did.

LEVINE: And then what happened? Did you go right to work, or...

SWANSON: I think in a couple of weeks, yeah. It was a few, I stayed with her for a few days before I went to work. Then I went to work.

LEVINE: And your sister wasn't working at that time.

SWANSON: No, she wasn't working at that time. No.

LEVINE: So, where, what was your first job when you came?

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SWANSON: I worked in Verona, on the other side of the avenue. Took care of a little girl.

Well, I did housework, too. I did other things, I, but I heard that, her mother was working, so I took mostly care of the little girl.

LEVINE: And did you stay there a long time?

SWANSON: Six months.

LEVINE: And then what?

SWANSON: Then I got another job in, in Upper Montclair. I took care of three kids.

LEVINE: Do you remember why you changed?

SWANSON: Because the first mother I worked for, she had to quit working, because she got pregnant again.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So then you went and took care of the three kids.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you stay there long?

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SWANSON: I was only there for six months, because this girl that I worked for, first off, she was a hairdresser, and she got me in the beauty parlor where she worked, and I learned to be a hairdresser.

LEVINE: Oh. She taught you herself?

SWANSON: No, she didn't. But the boss, the, the one that owned the beauty parlor, he taught us.

LEVINE: And, so then did you get a job doing that?

SWANSON: Hm-hmm. So that's what I did.

LEVINE: And that's what you did for the whole rest of the time you were in...

SWANSON: Yeah. That's right. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you enjoy that work?

SWANSON: Yes, I did. That's what I did till I got married.

LEVINE: Then how did you meet your husband?

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SWANSON: A friend of his brought him down to my sisters house one evening. That's how we met.

LEVINE: And he was also from Sweden?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

SWANSON: His name was Fred Swanson.

LEVINE: And do you remember your first impression of him?

SWANSON: No, that I don't. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So, did you see him very often before you realized you were going to marry him?

SWANSON: Well, I went out to, I guess it took about six months before I realized it, I guess that, about six months, I think.

LEVINE: Now what did he do?

SWANSON: Carpenter.

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LEVINE: And, let's see. Then, you got married, and did you have children?

SWANSON: I had a boy, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

SWANSON: William.

LEVINE: William.

SWANSON: But he died when he was eighteen. From polio.

LEVINE: So, when you think back on your life and coming here, what do you think about it, about starting out in Sweden, and making the decision to come, and then building your life here?

SWANSON: Well, I was never sorry. I think this is a wonderful country. But, getting kind of bad lately. You can't even go out at night.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: Well, of course, I don't go out at night, anyway. I'm too old.

LEVINE: It looks as though you have your health.

SWANSON: I'm, yes, I do. Thank God, I do. I'm eighty-six.

LEVINE: You look great.

SWANSON: Yeah, I have my health. That's one good thing.

LEVINE: And do you keep up with your, with the Lutheran church?

SWANSON: Yes. I belong to a Lutheran church?

LEVINE: And what could you say about your life now, at this age in your life? How do you, what do you do, or how do you feel about it, or...

SWANSON: Well, I don't know how to describe that. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, are you enjoying your old age?

SWANSON: Well, as long as I'm well. I'm not complaining.

LEVINE: And what do you do for enjoyment now? What kind...

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SWANSON: Well, I don't do much. I belong to the club in church. I belong to another club, Viking, they have meeting once a month. And I have friends that I see. But, of course, a lot of my friends have gone, because when you get that old, you know, that happens. And all my, I'm the only one left out of eight children.

LEVINE: Now, the Viking club, are they people who come from the Scandinavian countries?

SWANSON: Oh, yeah. But there isn't many left in that either because they've died.

LEVINE: And, are there some things that, ways of doing things that you keep, that you learned in Sweden, that you still, that you still carry on, like traditions? Any customs or habits that you have, that you learned back when you were there?

SWANSON: I don't think so.

LEVINE: Was your, your mother never came here, is that right?

SWANSON: No. We wanted her to, but she didn't want to.

LEVINE: Was it your idea to become Americanized, or did you want to keep the Swedish heritage?

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SWANSON: No, I became, I'm an American citizen.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SWANSON: I don't know what the year, I think, I don't remember what year I got, I think it was '44 I got my citizen paper.

LEVINE: You took a test and everything?

SWANSON: Eh?

LEVINE: You take a test?

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was that a, were you proud of that when you got it?

SWANSON: Well, it was nice.

LEVINE: What would you say you're proudest of that you've done in your life?

SWANSON: Oh, I don't know. (she laughs) I don't think I have anything to be proud of.

EI-236/EDITH MOSTROM SWANSON

LEVINE: Well, I don't know. It looks like you, I mean, you have this lovely house, and you take care of it yourself?

SWANSON: Well, I'll tell you, this isn't, my sister's house, my sister Maria. She was, lived to be ninety-six. And she broke, she was healthy, but she broke so many bones. And the last one she broke her arm up here (she gestures), she broke her hip, she broke the wrist, she broke something else up here (she gestures), and she really couldn't be alone. So I moved in with her '85 to take care of her.

LEVINE: I see.

SWANSON: She died last year in August at age ninety-six. But she was well up to the end.

LEVINE: So you kept a lot of contact with your family the whole time.

SWANSON: Yeah. Oh, yeah. And her son lives next door. And he's very good to me.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. What's your nephew's name?

SWANSON: David Oster.

LEVINE: O-L-...

EI-236/EDITH MOSTROM SWANSON

SWANSON: O-S-T-E-R.

LEVINE: Oster. Oh, well, that's nice, isn't it to have a family member like that...

SWANSON: Yeah. He is so nice, and his life is just, he is so good to me. Take good care of me.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. Good. Let's see. I forgot to ask you before about learning English. What was like for you to come here and not be able to speak, and...

SWANSON: Well, it was kind of tough in the beginning, but being that I took care of little kids, you know, they, I, I think I learned quite quick from them. Because, there, there was a little, the second place I had, there was a little, the youngest one was three. And I tell you, she didn't give up before I knew what she was talking about. So she was a good teacher. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Good, good. Okay, well, is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to mention...

SWANSON: No...

LEVINE: ...regarding coming here, or...

EI-236/EDITH MOSTROM SWANSON

SWANSON: No, I don't think so. I think we went pretty much over everything.

LEVINE: Well, this is a very interesting story that you have.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And I thank you very much.

SWANSON: Well, now that's going to be...

LEVINE: It'll be in the Ellis Island Oral History Library, so people can come and listen to peoples tapes. Maybe somebody will be interested in tapes from Sweden, or tapes from a certain time period. And it'll be there, and I'll send you a copy.

SWANSON: Oh, that'd be nice.

LEVINE: Yeah. You, and nephew and his wife, everybody will be happy to hear it.

SWANSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I've been here today, and I'm talking with Edith Mostrom Swanson on November 25, 1992 in her home in Verona, New Jersey, signing off.