

EI-240

KAYE HARTWICK SORENSON (KAJ HARTVIG SURENSEN)

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SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is January 22, 1993. I'm here in Albany, New York State, with Mr. Kaye Sorenson, who came from Denmark to America in 1923 when he was fourteen years old. Good morning, Mr. Sorenson.

SORENSON: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Could we start by you giving me your full name and your date of birth, please?

SORENSON: Well, my, my first name is Kaye, K-A-Y-E, and middle name is Hartwick, H-A-R-T-W-I-C-K. My last name is Sorenson, S-O-R-E-N-S-O-N. And I was born on April 30, 1909.

SIGRIST: And could you tell me the story about how your name was changed?

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SORENSON: Well, after I came to this country I found it necessary to go to school. And when I, while I was in school, the principal of the school sat down to talk with me quite a bit in trying to learn the language, and he suggested that I, we should Americanize my name. So therefore my name was changed to Kaye Hartwick Sorens-, Soren-, Sorenson from Kaj, K-A-J, which I was known as in Denmark, and my middle name was Hartvig, H-A-R-T-V-I-G, and my last name was Surensen, S-U-R-E-N-S-E-N.

SIGRIST: And why did he suggest that you change it from Kaj to Kaye?

SORENSON: He more or less indicated that (he laughs) it would be Americanized somewhat.

SIGRIST: You mentioned something about Hans Christian Andersen.

SORENSON: Well, he mentioned the fact that he had read stories by Hans Christian Andersen, and said that the name Kaj had been changed to Kaye in the English language.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, where were you born in Denmark?

SORENSON: I was born in Frederiksvaerk.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SORENSON: (he laughs) Frederiksvaerk is F-R-E-D-E-R-I-K-S-V-A-E-R-K.

SIGRIST: And whereabouts in Denmark is that?

SORENSON: It's in North Sjaellands, I think in English it's "Sheeland." It's some forty miles north of Copenhagen.

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SIGRIST: Is this a large town, small town?

SORENSON: No, it's a small town. It's a city. Today it's rather bigger than when I remembered it, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you describe it as a child a little bit for me what the town, for instance, what the industry in the town was, what it looked like?

SORENSON: Well, there was an old steel factory there that made guns and stoves and stuff like that. And there was also a gun powder factory there. And, of course, fishing was a big industry. There was quite a few fishing places, you know, that sold fish and smoked fish and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Was this right on the ocean, or on the...

SORENSON: Well, it's, no it's, actually in the, it's what they call the Roskilde Fjord. It's like a, you know, an inlet, see?

SIGRIST: Did your family live in this town, or...

SORENSON: Yes. My father and mother both, you know, they had a family there.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

SORENSON: His first name is Lauritz, L-A-U-R-I-T-Z, Sorenson.

SIGRIST: And what was his profession?

SORENSON: Well, he was a fishing captain for a good number of years,

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and towards the latter part of his life he became an insurance agent.

SIGRIST: We're going to be pausing for a moment. (pause in tape)  
Okay, we're now resuming with Kaye Sorenson.

SORENSEN: Okay.

SIGRIST: You were talking about your father. He was a captain, you said.

SORENSEN: Yeah. He, well, he was free, on a fishing boat. A small fishing boat. And during the war, during the First World War, he was in charge shipping fish down to Germany from Denmark.

SIGRIST: Did he own his boat?

SORENSEN: No, no. He didn't. He worked, he was employed.

SIGRIST: What did your dad look like if you had to describe him in words?

SORENSEN: Well, I would say he was typical Scandinavian. (he laughs)  
He was probably six feet, at least. Rugged individual.

SIGRIST: What was his personality like?

SORENSEN: Well, he was very friendly, and seemed to get along with everybody. And I guess that more or less brushed off on me, I would say. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What's your earliest memory of something that you did with

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your father?

SORENSON: Well, my earliest, one of my memories was the fact that, things were a little rough during the First World War. I mean, it was tough, and we had it very hard, and my father decided to take me along on a trip to Germany. And I don't know, when I was probably seven or eight years old. Let's see. No, I was born 1909, the war was 1917. Yeah, eight or nine years old. And going down to Germany there was a, a ship had struck a mine and was blown right out of the, of the water. So after completing the trip my father said, "You're not going with me any longer. You're going to stay home, see?" (he laughs) But...

SIGRIST: Did your father ever talk about his experiences of going to Germany and selling the fish? Any things that come to your mind that he ever talked about that experience?

SORENSON: Not that I remember. No, I don't remember too much because, I mean, I was small at the time, and...

SIGRIST: It was a business transaction for him?

SORENSON: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

SORENSON: My mother's name was Olga, O-L-G-A, and her maiden name was Christensen.

SIGRIST: With a 'K', or...

SORENSON: C-H-R-I-S-T-E-N-S-E-N.

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SIGRIST: And was she from this town?

SORENSON: No, she wasn't. She was born in Copenhagen. And my father was born not too far from Frederiksvaerk. So, he was from that area.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

SORENSON: Not really. I, I don't know exactly. I think my father probably had something to do in Copenhagen at a time when they met, and...

SIGRIST: Do you know when they married?

SORENSON: Yes. I don't know the exact date, but it was in 1908, I know that.

SIGRIST: What did your mother look like if you had to describe your mother in words?

SORENSON: Well, she was I would say a stunning looking woman. Very typical, as we would say, "Kopenharnag", from Copenhagen, you know. And well educated. Very smart woman.

SIGRIST: What was her personality like? What was her temperament like?

SORENSON: Well, she was the same way. Very friendly and got along and eager to please everybody, and...

SIGRIST: Did she work?

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SORENSON: No, she didn't work. No, no.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

SORENSON: Yes. I, I had two brothers and a sister. And one brother and sister are twins.

SIGRIST: What were their names?

SORENSON: The oldest boy's name was Ejnar. And...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SORENSON: E-J-N-A-R. And the other boy's name was Thorkild, T-H-O-R-K-I-L-D. And Rijmohr was, they were twins, my brother and sister.

SIGRIST: And so the household is your mother, your father, you, the twins, you say that you had another brother...

SORENSON: Another brother.

SIGRIST: And another brother. Okay. How do fit in to all of that chronologically? Are you the youngest, the oldest?

SORENSON: Well, I was the oldest. Ejnar was born I think three years after I was born. And then two years later my brother and sister, the twins, were born.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you grew up in or the living quarters?

SORENSON: Well, (he laughs) the house was, it was an old house when we

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lived there, and this was back 1909, you know. And incidently I was in Denmark last year, 1992, and stopped, and the house is still there. But it's not occupied. Now, there was no facilities in the house. The, there was an outhouse (he laughs) in back of the house, and no central heating. We had a stove. And no running water. There was a well outside. Well, it was, of course, it's a good many years ago, you know. They didn't have the facilities they have today.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

SORENSON: It was a brick house.

SIGRIST: How many floors?

SORENSON: No, there was just, there was, there was two families in the house. One on each side, and there was like an attic with a bedroom upstairs. And my father and mother occupied the bedroom upstairs. And outside of the bedroom there was a little area, and I had a small cot, and that's where I slept. (he laughs) Believe me, in the winter time it was cold. I remember one time as a child my father, I asked my father to get me a glass of water. But from then on I took my own glass of water upstairs. And in the winter time it was not unusual to have a coat of ice on the top of the water. So, I mean, it was cold sleeping.

SIGRIST: It gets very cold in Denmark.

SORENSON: It did get very cold. Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember as a child perhaps a blizzard, or a

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particularly hard winter that sticks out in your mind?

SORENSEN: No. I remember we did have, which was unusual, a big snow storm one time. And my father made me a sled, and you know, and sliding down the hills and stuff like that. But, no, they don't have, never did have much snow in the winter time there.

SIGRIST: Are there certain activities that you remember as a child that would have been done only in the winter when it was cold?

SORENSEN: Well, we all had skates. Oh, yes, we all, all used to go skating on the ice, because it got real cold and there was plenty of ice there, you know. And then also we used to go ice fishing. My father and myself, you know, we used to go out and cut a hole and fish, and most likely come up with eels. Eels were very famous at that time.

SIGRIST: Would you bring the eels home for food?

SORENSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: How would your mother prepare an eel?

SORENSEN: Well, there was any number of ways. Usually fried or there was, she would boil them, you know, different ways of preparing them. But I remember we always, always had more fish than meat. Meat was very scarce. We had a lot of fish.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about the kinds of food that your mother prepared. When you think back to your childhood in Denmark,

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what foods stick out in your mind?

SORENSON: Well, mostly, mostly she made soups. I remember she made soup out of kale. Kale is like, you know, it's broccoli or something like that. And I didn't particularly care for that. Well, the next door neighbor usually had soup, too, but a different kind of soup, and I was fortunate enough that they would give me soup, and I wouldn't eat soup my mother made. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you describe the kitchen in the house for me?

SORENSON: Well, the kitchen was very small. Very small. And I know there was a wood stove, and everything was cooked on this wooden stove.

SIGRIST: Did you sit in the kitchen? Was there furniture in the kitchen or was it simply a place to prepare food?

SORENSON: Well, I don't really, it was a very small kitchen, I know that. So there couldn't have been very much furniture. I don't remember exactly how, how it was.

SIGRIST: What room in the house did the family stay the most in?

SORENSON: Well, we had, we had a, a living room, and then another room. I wouldn't say it was a dining room because there was a couple of cots in it, small beds in there. But there was a table and chairs and we used to sit and eat there. But we did have a pretty good size living room.

SIGRIST: Is there a piece of furniture that you had in that house that sticks out in your mind when you think about your

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childhood?

SORENSON: Well, I do remember a table, a square table, because I ran into it. And I still got the scar on my forehead. (he laughs) So I remember that very clearly.

SIGRIST: Talk to me a little bit about the neighborhood. What was the character of the neighborhood that you lived in?

SORENSON: Well, the neighborhood was all small houses, all one or two family houses. And the streets, there was no paved streets, you know, it was plain roadways. There was no, at that time there was no paved streets. Of course, today the streets are all paved. No electricity. We had oil lamps and candles at the time I was there.

SIGRIST: Did your mother make the candles?

SORENSON: I don't even know. I don't even know whether she did or not.

SIGRIST: Did each room have its own stove to heat?

SORENSON: No. Oh, no. No. I know in the living room was a stove and then the kitchen stove. And then upstairs where my father and mother had their bedroom, there was a small stove up there.

SIGRIST: How did you get wood to heat with?

SORENSON: My father used to gather it. Yeah. I, and I used to go with him every once in a while and help him.

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SIGRIST: There was forest nearby?

SORENSON: Oh, yeah. There was a lot, a lot of forests. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what you would do to go gather wood?

SORENSON: Well, I would usually follow him and he would chop it up and, you know, and then saw it up in big pieces. And then there'd be a big pile there, and he'd say to me, "Now, you chop this up." And he showed me how to chop it, the proper way to make it easier to chop it, see.

SIGRIST: What other chores did you have to do in the house as a boy that you remember?

SORENSON: I had to take care of the chickens. We had, we raised chickens and also a couple of geese and ducks sometimes. And I remember on incident that stands out in my mind, is we had two geese. And one of them was very friendly. It used to follow me all over. You know, I'd come home from school and, oh, it'd make a lot of noise and follow me all over. And, of course, come Christmas and holidays we would have roast goose. And I remember this incident at Christmas time when my mother cooked the goose. And she gave me some on a plate, and I took one bite out of it and I started to cry. I couldn't eat the goose. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your mother slaughter the chickens and the geese or...

SORENSON: No, my father did.

SIGRIST: How did he do that?

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SORENSON: Well, my father, he asked me to help him. And what he, he tied a cloth around the head of the goose, and he says, "Now, you hold it." And we stretch it over a block of wood and he would cut the head off. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your mother then pluck the goose?

SORENSON: My mother then plucked the goose and she cooked it. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did she do that? How did she pluck the goose?

SORENSON: I don't know. I mean, just, whether she used any, I think you just pluck the feathers off, and that was it.

SIGRIST: Did she do anything with the feathers?

SORENSON: Oh, yes. Saved them, and that was duck feathers, goose feathers and all, chicken feathers, all that was all saved and put into pillows and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember sleeping on a feather mattress?

SORENSON: Oh yes. Yeah. Well, not mattress, but I remember the, there was a quilt made like with, stuffed with feathers. You know. Well, it was nice and warm in the winter time (he laughs), you know.

SIGRIST: If you had ice on water on your water, you'd have to have some warmth.

SORENSON: (he laughs) Yeah.

SIGRIST: Were you a religious family at all?

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SORENSON: Yes. Oh, yes, we were made going to church. We were all brought up Lutherans, you know. And I remember I broke my mother's heart one time when I was going to confirmation class. We sat up like in the back of the church, you know, like a balcony there, the confirmation class. And I had a girl friend sitting downstairs, you know? And I had a long string in my pocket and a knife. And I tied the string to the knife, and I was bouncing it off her head, you know. So I got put out of church. And, oh, my mother was so embarrassed. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember to name of the church?

SORENSON: Well, it was Frederiksvaerk's church. I don't know exactly the name of it. It was, that was the only church in this town, or the city at that time.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me some kind of holiday celebration, for instance, Christmas? What would you...

SORENSON: Well, Christmas was a big deal. They, my mother would start long time before Christmas, and make candies and cookies. They have a certain type cookie over there that's, and all that stuff. And my father would go out and chop down a tree, Christmas tree. It would be decorated. And the lights were all small candles. They were all lit. And the family would gather around, sings songs, walk around the Christmas tree.

SIGRIST: Did you have extended family in...

SORENSON: We had some family, some relatives in, you know. Yeah.

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Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you exchange presents at Christmas time?

SORENSON: Oh, yes. Yeah. Well, (he laughs) presents, something you could use. It was a great thing to get an orange for Christmas. I mean, oranges don't grow in Denmark. But if you got one, an orange for Christmas, that was a great thing. And, also I remember my mother making rice pudding. And she would put the raisin in it. Just one raisin. And whoever got that raisin got a separate recognition (he laughs), or something.

SIGRIST: Talk about the other family that you had in this town. Who else was in the town, grandparents or something along those lines.

SORENSON: Well, I had a grandfather and grandmother on my, on my father's side. They lived in town. And I used to visit them when I was small. And my, my grandmother would give me, oh, two, couple of small coins or something like that. And she would say, "Now don't tell your grandfather about it," you know (he laughs). And she would always, I would go over there in the afternoon or something, and she would have cookies or something ready for me, you know, give me stuff like that. And she made slippers out of old clothes, you know, sewed it together and make slippers for us. And I remember one Christmas I got a new pair of wooden shoes. I thought that was great. And they were very good. And I had occasion to go to the store after Christmas and it was really cold. It was frozen, and I noticed a stone in the roadway and I couldn't resist kicking it. So I kicked at it, and it was frozen in the ground. And as a result my

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wooden shoe split. And, oh my God, my father was so mad. (he laughs) He got so mad because the thing, my brand new pair of shoes is split. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did someone make the wooden shoes?

SORENSON: Oh, yeah. They, the shoemaker there. Oh, yeah. He would take your impression and make the shoes for you.

SIGRIST: And what kind of wood was it made out of?

SORENSON: I don't even know, but it had to be something kind of hard wood because, and then my, later my father would take old, old tires, you know, rubber tires, and cut a piece off and put that under the wooden shoe, the heel, so they would last longer, you know. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Talk to me a little bit about these shoes. When would you wear them and when would you not wear them? I mean, was this something you wore all the time, or...

SORENSON: Yeah. We wore it all the time, but not in the house. The minute you got to the house you left the shoes outside.

SIGRIST: But while you were outside you had to...

SORENSON: In the summer time when I kid, outside, I wore those shoes. We went around bare, everybody was barefooted, see. And then in the winter time, why, then we had, had wooden shoes.

SIGRIST: Did the adults wear the wooden shoes also?

SORENSON: Oh, yes. Yes. My father always wore wooden shoes.

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SIGRIST: That's interesting. So your father's parents lived in this town?

SORENSON: Yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What about your mother's parents?

SORENSON: My mother's parents lived in Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: Do you remember visiting them?

SORENSON: Oh, yes. I used to, in the summer time I used to go in there, small, and visit my grandmother and my grandfather and stay with them for a few days. My grandmother would take me a walk to Copenhagen, visit the Tivoli Garden and stuff like that. And I remember King Christian the Tenth riding to Copenhagen on a white horse. I saw him when I was a kid.

SIGRIST: Was that a big deal to go to Copenhagen?

SORENSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. Yeah.

SIGRIST: As a child, was the city some place that you liked to be or was it a frightening place?

SORENSON: No, I enjoyed visiting my grandma, my grandparents in Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what their personalities were like, and how you interacted with them.

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SORENSON: Well, my grandfather at that time, he, he worked on the docks. And my grandmother was, of course, kept house. She didn't, she didn't work. But she had, my mother had sisters and a brother, you know. And I remember one, my mother's sister, she lived with, with the grandparents at the time.

SIGRIST: What were the grandparents' names?

SORENSON: Christensen.

SIGRIST: First names.

SORENSON: Now you got me (he laughs). I don't recall what my grandfather's first name was at this particular time.

SIGRIST: So your mother's sister lived with them?

SORENSON: Yeah. And her name was Gunhild, G-U-N-H-I-L-D. She lived there with her. And she had a, a little daughter who is now probably, well think she was about five or six years younger than I, I was. And I remember the day, well, this is getting ahead of the story.

SIGRIST: That's okay. Go ahead.

SORENSON: I haven't come to how I decided to come America yet, so.

SIGRIST: We'll go back to that. But if you want to tell this story...

SORENSON: Well, I remember before sailing to America I was at my grandparents house. We spent the night there, my father and mother, myself. And I remember my cousin, this little girl,

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Else her name was, E-L-S-E. And she said, she said, "Kaj is going to America to wash 'tellerkne'". In other words she said I was going to the United States to wash dishes, which was true, of course. (he laughs) And when I saw her last year, I asked her if she remembered saying that, but she didn't remember it.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about school when you were growing up.

SORENSON: Yeah. Well, of course, I didn't like school too much, but I, I went to school, and had a great time. And I was given the opportunity to learn some English. At that time there was twice a week for an hour, two days, it meant if I wanted to stay an hour after school on these two particular days, there would be someone teaching English. And I said, "Who needs it?" You know, so I didn't bother taking it, (he laughs) you know. But, anyway, the graduating class, when I finished school, the graduating class, they had their picture taken. The whole class had their picture taken. And I still have it, of course. And in 1983, sixty years since I left there, you know, since I got out of school, I went back to Denmark. And my brother, Thorkild, had arranged to contact as many as he could of that group that was in that picture. Now, some of them had moved away from Frederiksvaerk. A couple of them lived in Sweden, and you know. But he managed to get them all together. And in 1983 when I went home, we had, my brother had hired a hall in the school where I went to school, and we had a big party with all these same ones, and they took another picture of the group together then. Sixty, sixty years. (he laughs) But they couldn't understand why I didn't remember incidents that took place when I was there. I mean, I couldn't remember. Of course, they were there all these years, and

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they probably about it every once in while. But I didn't have occasion to do that, you know, so.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the school building for me?

SORENSON: Well, the school building was two stories. It had classrooms on the second floor and classrooms down the, probably, oh, I dare say about ten different classrooms at least, you know.

SIGRIST: Was, was the school, would you say, was the school progressively minded, or what it sort of an old fashioned kind of place to learn?

SORENSON: Well, it was (pauses), well, I mean we had to go to school, you know. I mean, that was compulsory, and, and they taught us a little bit of everything, you know. And...

SIGRIST: Were there sports?

SORENSON: What?

SIGRIST: Were there sports?

SORENSON: Oh, yeah. Football. We used to play football. Soccer as they call it here, you know. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, we had a lot of, and they had a gym. There was a gym there, and, oh yes, a lot of sports. And I was, when I got out of school, my father, you have to have some kind of an occupation. And my father decided I should be a mechanic. So after I finished school, that fall I was supposed to go back to industrial school, like, you know, something like that, to learn to be a mechanic. And it order for my father to break

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that, to permit me to come to the United States, he had to agree that my brother would take up the occupation as a mechanic. But I, one reason I was curious about America was when I was about twelve years old, I worked in a clothing store after school. And a next door neighbor at that time was a young girl. And she visited, she used to work in the store, and she visited there. And I overheard her talking to her friend who was there about America. And, of course, I was curious (he laughs)...

SIGRIST: What did you know about America as a kid growing up in Denmark?

SORENSON: Well, we heard about everything. About champion Jack Dempsey, and I mean, there was a lot of news about America. And everybody had the impression that the streets were paved with gold, you know, I mean, this was the (he laughs) idea. Everybody was a millionaire. So what happened was, after I got out of school I gave up the job working in the clothing store, and I took a job at a pensionat as they called it, which was a summer resort.

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BEGINNING OF SIDE B, TAPE ONE**

SIGRIST: What did you call it?

SORENSON: Pensionat.

SIGRIST: Can you spell it?

SORENSON: P-E-N-S-I-O-N-A-T. Pensionat. And it was a summer resort. And my job there was work in the kitchen, help the maids,

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and meet the guests at the railroad station, and carry their baggage in, and shine shoes, and, I mean, a little bit of everything, see? And this man came, there as a guest with his two sisters. His name was Henry Petersen. And he had two pairs of shoes, which was, to me was, really, he had to have money, you know, I mean, he had two pairs of shoes because up to this point I hadn't had my first pair of leather shoes yet. All I had were wooden shoes. And I had to shine a pair every day because, as I say, there was no paved streets, they were dusty. The shoes got dusty. So I had to shine his shoes every day, you know. That was part of my job. And I'd run errands for him and kind of got friendly with him. And one day he said to me, he said, "How would you like to come to America?" Oh, right away I said, "When do we leave?" I mean, (he laughs) you know, sure, why not, you know. But when I told my parents about him, of course, they said, "No way," you know, "You're not going to America," you know, no way. But he was insistent, I mean, you know, kept talking about going to America and the opportunity and all this and that, and so I kept after my father and mother. I was determined I wanted to go to America. Well, it so happened that my mother had a first cousin living here in Albany. And she contacted him. And he said, "Why don't you let him come. If anything happens, you know, I will look out for him. You know, it's a great opportunity." So anyway they decided, yeah, I could go, you know. So I remember one night, well, it was known that I was going to America, you know. But one night my, my mother's sister, my aunt, we took a walk, you know, going to the store. And a couple of kids went by, and they said, "Hello! Hello, Kaj!", you know. And she said, "You know, when you get to America there won't be anybody to say hello to you. You won't know anybody there." (he laughs) You

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know, she trying to discourage me, you know. But even so I was determined that I wanted to come.

SIGRIST: Had your father ever been to this country...

SORENSON: No.

SIGRIST: ...or had, neither of your parents, except for your mother's cousin...

SORENSON: Well, he was here. He since returned to Denmark. He died in Denmark. And he had a son here that I called my cousin. Of course, he wasn't. He died two years ago. But, no, my brother had been here two or three times.

SIGRIST: So they were against you coming initially.

SORENSON: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was their reasoning?

SORENSON: Well, I was only fourteen years old. I mean, you know. Of course at that time, fourteen years old in Denmark, you start out, you get a job on a ship, or you, you know, you figured you're grown up, you know. So. But I was determined that I wanted to go, and I had the opportunity, and so my mother finally said to my father, "Well, why don't we let him go. Because later on if something happens he's always going to say, 'Well, why didn't you let me go, you know, when I had the opportunity.'" I mean, my mother looked that far ahead, you know, she was. So I packed up.

SIGRIST: How did your friends react to, to you when you said you were

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coming to America? Do you remember anything specifically?

SORENSEN: Well, there was one, one fellow, and I visited him a couple of times when I went back to Denmark. He was offered the job to work in the summer resort. But he didn't take it. So I took it. And he said, "If I had taken that job," after I went back to Denmark, you know, "If I had taken that job, I would have been in America, and not you." (he laughs) You know. But no, I had a lot of friends, you know, school pals. And of course, they thought it was great that, you know, coming to America.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, did, did your mother or father give you a present to take with you? Something, something from them to you to take with to America?

SORENSEN: My mother gave me a small book that she had written in poems from famous authors, you know. She gave me, I still have it. And other than that, no. I, I was measured for a suit. I got a new suit. I got my first pair of leather shoes, you know.

SIGRIST: These are exciting things...

SORENSEN: Oh, I mean, they, you know. And I, shirts, they had to arrange for somebody to make them. They, you know, you couldn't go in the store and buy ready made. They had to be made, and that was all new to me. You know, I mean, I was really... (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Were these significant financial investments for your parents to have a suit made for you and to have shirts made for you?

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SORENSON: I don't how they arranged it, because my parents weren't that well off, but they did.

SIGRIST: Your father being a captain on a boat, was he gone for long periods of time?

SORENSON: Oh, he would gone for a few days at a time. Out, they were out fishing. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Days.

SORENSON: Days. And then, of course, the trip to Germany, I don't recall how many days that took, you know. But, oh yeah, he was...

SIGRIST: I wanted to ask you one more question before we get you on your way to America. You told me one story about going to Germany with your father during World War I. Do you have any other memories of World War I, or how your family was affected by the war?

SORENSON: Well, I'll tell you, I don't remember too much about it. I remember that food was very scarce. We were lucky that my father was a fisherman, because we had a lot of fish. I remember one day when my mother, my mother boiled an egg. And I don't know whether you know, in Denmark they have a egg cup. They eat, you know, the egg right out of the shell, see. And she gave me this egg, and she says, "Now, you eat half of it, and give your brother the other half." And I forgot. I ate the whole egg. (he laughs) So, but, no, I know it was tough during World War I at that time. Yeah. Very tough.

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SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed?

SORENSON: The what?

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed? When you were getting ready to leave, do you remember what you packed? What did you have to take with you other than your new clothes and your shoes?

SORENSON: I really didn't, I took a little camera that a neighbor had given me. A little box camera. I brought that with me. And I don't remember much of anything else. Of course, my mother and sister that I take a couple of pencils and writing paper with me, because (he laughs) she wanted me to write to her. But...

SIGRIST: Can you describe what luggage, what...

SORENSON: I just had one bag. One suitcase.

SIGRIST: And was this suitcase something that had to go out and be purchased, or was it something your family had?

SORENSON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That was purchased. That was a new, new suitcase. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So really sending you off to America really...

SORENSON: It cost them money.

SIGRIST: ...it cost them money.

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SORENSON: It did, you know. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did, can you tell me a little bit about how you went about getting your papers, and that sort of thing before you left.

SORENSON: Well, I remember my mother taking me down to get the, my picture taken for the passport. And I remember her taking me into the office there to get the, get the passport. And, of course, the ticket for my passage was arranged by the, the American there, you know.

SIGRIST: Did, did you have to go to Copenhagen, did you say, to do this?

SORENSON: Yeah. The ship sailed out of Copenhagen. The ship was named Frederick the VIII. And I think during the Second World War, I remember reading about it, Italy bought it for some sort of a ship or something, you know. But, it was, at that time was supposed to be an exclusive ocean liner, you know. It took eleven days to cross the ocean at that time.

SIGRIST: Were you given any kind of send off party, or dinner, or some kind of little celebration?

SORENSON: Well, no, not really. I went to my grandfather and grandmother's house, and we had a big meal. I remember that. And I was the center of attraction, of course. And, so, and after I boarded the ship, I was up on, looking over out the gangplank, and I looked out, and of course my family was there. And I saw my mother crying. And I remember a lump coming up in my throat, but I was determined I wasn't going to cry.

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SIGRIST: My next question was, what was sad for you to leave in Denmark. What...

SORENSON: What was...

SIGRIST: What was sad for you to leave? Was there something that you felt sad about having to leave?

SORENSON: Not at the time. No, I, I was tickled to, looking forward to getting off to America.

SIGRIST: Well, good. Let's talk about the boat. What season is this? What month?

SORENSON: This was in September. I landed in New York I think on the twenty-third of September.

SIGRIST: Did you have to stay in Copenhagen a few days before you could board the boat?

SORENSON: No, no. Just a day before. We went in the day before, stayed overnight, and the next morning the ship took off.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what the boat looked like?

SORENSON: Oh, it was a great big, at that time I would say it was a great big boat. But, of course, today it wouldn't be that huge. But I thought it was a very exclusive ocean liner. And, of course, they had first class, second class and steerage class, (he laughs) you know. But...

SIGRIST: Which one were you?

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SORENSON: Well, I wasn't even, I was below the steerage, because when the fellow tried to get passage for me on the ship there was no accommodation. See? But he pulled some strings, and he was able to get me on. And I had to share a cabin with three sailors that worked on the ship, which was good for me, because when I got seasick, they really took care of me, you know. I mean, they, even though I couldn't eat the food they, you know, they took care of me, and it was, you know, it was great. But, yeah. I had the feeling, after, stopped in Sweden to pick up more passengers. And then the second day out in the ocean, when I really got seasick, I mean, I was sick. I thought at that time, I said, "Damn it, if I thought I could swim, I'd jump over off the ship and go back to Denmark." But, of course, I couldn't, you know. But at that time I did. But the greatest memory I have was early one foggy morning eleven days later after I sailed, when somebody hollered, "There's the Statue of Liberty." And I looked out through a porthole, you know, and looked out and saw the Statue of Liberty. And at that time I said to myself, I said, "Gee, this is the first day of the rest of my life." You know, what's in store, you know. It was really exciting, believe me.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the accommodations for the sailors, what this looked like?

SORENSON: Very small cabin, a very small cabin, and it was probably one or two decks below the water line. And in them days, there was no air conditioning. This was very little air come down. That's probably one reason I got seasick, you know. But, no, very little, everything was stale air, you know, it was...

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SIGRIST: Can you remember any of the remedies that they used to try to ease your discomfort with the seasickness?

SORENSON: I don't remember anything there, you know, other than the, the sailors were the only that, you know, looked after me. I couldn't get out of the bunk. I mean, I was really, they had a basin there all the time (he laughs) to accommodate me.

SIGRIST: I won't bother asking you about dining on the boat. (he laughs)

SORENSON: No. I done very little dining on the ship. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: All right. So the trip took about eleven days you said.

SORENSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was it, even though you were sick, was it basically a smooth trip or...

SORENSON: No, it was rough. It was rough. I would say. Yeah, yeah. Of course I had never been on the ocean, so I don't know. But I, to me it was rough. Yeah. It was a rough trip.

SIGRIST: I wanted to ask you this question earlier. Mr. Petersen, who is putting up the money for you to come over, was he expecting anything in exchange?

SORENSON: Oh, yes. He sure was. He, he ran a rooming house. And, a boarding house. Now he had, I think there was eight or ten roomers, but there was about sixty boarders that came in.

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You know, they had a dining room, and they had breakfast and dinner. And most of them were working men, and they would prepare lunches. I made more sandwiches when I, you know (he laughs) at that time.

SIGRIST: So you knew before you left Denmark.

SORENSON: I knew I was going to work as houseboy or something like that. Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. So he basically wanted you to do the same sorts of things that you had been doing at the resort.

SORENSON: Right. Now, what he told me, before he got off the ship, he gave me fifty dollars. He said, "You'll need this to get through immigration. To make sure you have money on you." Well, nobody ever asked me if I had money, of course, you know. But anyway he insisted that I take the fifty dollars and return it to him later. And then he told me they would put me on a train, and I would ride for four hours, and then get off, and he would meet me at the train. Well, there was a delay at Ellis Island. I didn't get the train that I was supposed to get. So there was delay, see. So, when I got to Albany, the conductor come over and says, "Here's where you get off." You know. So I got off carrying my suitcase. I get out. I don't see him. I sit down on a bench and wait, you know, figuring that, you know, eventually he'll show up. And a taxi driver, I assume it was a taxi driver, came over, grabbed my bags, and says, "Come on with me." See, so I went with him. And he brought me up to where I was supposed to go. And Mr. Petersen met me there then.

SIGRIST: I see. So he was not actually on the boat.

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SORENSON: He was on the boat all the way over.

SIGRIST: Oh. But he...

SORENSON: He, he got off the boat, took his train. He didn't have to go through Ellis Island, you know.

SIGRIST: So the reason that you left in September then was because your stint at the summer resort was over at that time...

SORENSON: That was over at that time.

SIGRIST: ...and that he was now returning to America.

SORENSON: Right. Right.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see.

SORENSON: He spent the whole summer there with his two sisters, you know.

SIGRIST: So you're leaving actually all kind of happened very quickly, didn't it, for the most part?

SORENSON: Oh, yes, it did. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's interesting.

SORENSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well let's back track a little bit, and, you see the Statue of Liberty.

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SORENSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then what happens?

SORENSON: Well, then, going down the gang plank to a, what do they call them?

SIGRIST: Did the boat dock?

SORENSON: Small, no, no. Well, it, the boat docked, but we had to take a smaller boat to Ellis Island. Now, going down the gang plank, there's a fellow coming up on another, on the other side, who was my next door neighbor in Frederiksvaerk. And I said, "Hello!" You know, oh my God, that was like a letter from home, you know, when I saw him. And we just said hello, I mean he had to go up because there was people going behind him going up. He had to move. And I, people behind me, I had to move, you know. But, oh, I was so happy to see him, you know. And he had been a sailor on Frederick VIII, and he had friends there. And every time the ship came in he would go and visit his friends, I found out. You know, so. But that was really exciting when I saw him. But then going to Ellis Island we sat down and waited, you know.

SIGRIST: You were put on a ferry.

SORENSON: Yeah. I was put on a ferry. Then we got off at Ellis Island, went into a great big room or whatever, and we're sitting there. Now, there was a fellow, I think he was from Poland. I'm not sure. But he was on the ship anyway with me, see, and he knew me. And somehow he knew how to get a bar of candy out of a machine, or something, see. And he

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came over and he broke a piece of candy off and gave it to me, and I says, "Oh my God." You know, that was the greatest thing in the world, you know. (he laughs) So. But then after that, we were just, I, I went up to a fellow that spoke Danish, you know, one of the, I mean, whatever he was there. Asked me questions about where I was going, where I was coming from, and showed him my passport and everything else. He put a tag on my lapel, and told me, "Now, you follow that group there," and that was it. I followed that group there and I wound up on the, on the train for Albany.

SIGRIST: Can you for me a little bit what it looked like inside the building at Ellis Island.

SORENSON: Well, the impression I got at that time I would say, I felt like we were a bunch of cattle, you know, moving around, go here, go there, and, I mean. And it, it was, I would say mass confusion because nobody could talk to each other. There was all different languages spoken there, you know. And people looked frightened, you know. Of course, I was frightened, too. (he laughs) I mean, I was scared, too. I didn't know what was coming next, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember having to undergo any kind of medical exams.

SORENSON: I remember a doctor talking to me. I don't know, I didn't have to go through a physical or any that I remember. But I mean, I, I did have to see a doctor there. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Mr. Petersen gave you fifty bucks to show if you to...

SORENSON: If I, he said that it was necessary for me to have money

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before I could get into the country. That's what the impression he had. So therefore he gave me the fifty dollars. But nobody ever asked me for it. So, I mean, I returned it to him when I got to Albany.

SIGRIST: All right. So you got to the train station somehow.

SORENSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember going into New York for the first time, what your impressions of seeing New York City for the first time were?

SORENSON: I didn't, I don't remember seeing anything of New York City. I don't remember. I know, we were probably on the subway, but I even, I can't remember that too, too well. But I do remember getting on the train, and, I mean, that was it.

SIGRIST: And you had your suitcase still with you.

SORENSON: Oh, yes. Yes. I carried a suitcase with me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you got off the boat?

SORENSON: I was wearing the suit that they, my father and mother had given me when I, when I left. Yeah. Of course, in the, when I was on the boat, I had an old pair of pants and a shirt. You know, it wasn't the suit that I had.

SIGRIST: You didn't have to impress anyone. (they laugh)

SORENSON: No. No.

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SIGRIST: Do you remember any, does anything stick out in your mind about the train trip to Albany?

SORENSON: No. I remember looking out the window, and saw the Hudson River. Of course, I didn't know it was the Hudson River at that time. But, I tell a joke about that trip, that years ago, when I retired, I told a joke. It was ninety-five percent true. But I don't know whether you want to hear it or not.

SIGRIST: Sure. Go ahead.

SORENSON: Okay. All right. I came to Albany in 1923. In 1923 there was a man, a politician took control of Albany by the name of Dan O'Connell. I don't know whether you heard of Dan O'Connell or not, but he was the political leader for years and years starting in 1923. Prior to 1923 Albany was a Republican, but after '23 it became Democratic, see. And I tell a story that I dare say is probably ninety percent true, that I'm on the train and a man sits down along side of me, and starts to talk to me. Well, he realized I couldn't speak English. So he proceeded to teach me English. And he pointed out the window. And he said, "Look at that over there. That's a farm house." And he had a pad and pencil, and he wrote, you know, drew a picture of a farm house. He now, "Remember that. That's a farm." I said, "Okay." So he gave me the slip. We go further. There's a field with cows in there. He says, "See? Those are cows." And he drew a picture of a cow. And he said, "Remember that. That's a cow." So anyway, we go a little further, and there's a funeral procession. There's a hearse, and a closed car behind that and some other cars. And he points

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to that, and he says, "You see that car there." And he drew a picture of the car. He said, "That's a sedan. See. Now you remember that. That's a sedan." See. So now we get to Albany. And as I say it was in September month. And it was during the Indian summer. Of course, we had no Indians in Denmark, so I didn't know anything about Indian summer, see.

But it was warm. And they had had the heat on in the railroad station, so it was warm. Really hot, see. So I took my hat off, and held it out in front of me, and wiped my forehead. And an elderly woman came by and she dropped a quarter in my hat, and I knew, she said, "God bless you." You know. And before I had a chance to take out the quarter, a great big cop come over. He reached in my hat, took the quarter, put it in his pocket, and apparently he said, "Who are you, where're you going, and what?" So I reached in my pocket to get the slip of my benefactor's name, you know. And not realizing I gave him the wrong slip. I gave him the slip with the car on it, see. And he looks at it, and he said, "Sedan. Oh, you come to Albany to see Dan. Oh, you're all right." (they laugh) He, I got more kicks out of that story. But, I mean, it's partly true.

SIGRIST: Who did meet you at the train station?

SORENSON: Nobody.

SIGRIST: Nobody.

SORENSON: The taxi driver grabbed me bag, and he says, "Come on with me."

SIGRIST: Was that at Union Station in Albany?

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SORENSON: Union Station in Albany, yeah.

SIGRIST: So where did the taxi driver take you?

SORENSON: He took me up to Lancaster Street, where this Mr. Petersen lived.

SIGRIST: And can you describe for me seeing Mr. Petersen's house and Mr. Petersen.

SORENSON: Well, it, of course, it was a big high stoop in front of the house. Big red stone building, you know. And it was huge to me, you know. I was really surprised. And the taxi driver says, "Come on." Took me up the stairs, rang the bell. Mr. Petersen showed up, and paid for the taxi fare, and says, "Come on in." And, by this time I was really tired. I couldn't keep my eyes open, you know. So I went right to bed. He showed me where the bed, bedroom was. Now, that's another thing. I didn't have a bedroom as such. It was, really it was a big closet, and it had a cot, small cot, small dresser, and a mirror and a chair. That's all that was in the room. And there was no window in the room, you know.

SIGRIST: But it was actually in Mr. Petersen's house.

SORENSON: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And so the intention was that you would stay with them...

SORENSON: Yeah. I was going to stay there with them and work, of course. So I worked a few days. You know, I got up early in the morning and came downstairs. And my job was to start

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the fire in the, in the stove, you know, stuff like that. And then he said to me, he said, "I think you ought to learn English," you know. "You have to learn English, so I'm going to send you to night school." So I went up to where they were conducting classes in English, you know, night school. And I brought my birth certificate, showed them. So, the teachers says, well, I mean, I didn't know what he said. But, I mean, he wrote a letter to Mr. Petersen that I wasn't going to be accepted there, that I have to go regular school. I was only fourteen years old, you know. So the next day, in the next block from Lancaster Street, there was a street called Chestnut Street, and there was a school, public school there Number Two. So Mr. Petersen brought me over there, and I got enrolled in school. And I started in the first grade. Now I'm fourteen years old, and these kids, you know, six (he laughs), five or six years old. But I stayed in the first one month. Then I went in the second grade, and I stayed there another month. And before the year is up I'm in the eighth grade with kids more my age, you know.

SIGRIST: And height.

SORENSON: And height and size and everything. You know. Which was all right. And, of course, it was just a matter of learning their language. And I picked it up pretty quick, I guess. And anyway I graduated in grammar school, you know. And then I went to what they call industrial high school, part time school, or something like that, for a year, you know. I took up printing and electricals, you know, stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Was the language the hardest thing to adjust to?

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SORENSON: Yes. Yes, it was. And the kids, they talked to me, and I, you know, I wouldn't know they, what they said. And they laughed, and, you know, made fun of me. But, I mean, that goes along with it. So I didn't care, you know.

SIGRIST: Were you the only immigrant child in the class that you can remember?

SORENSON: Yes. Yes, I was. And I was surprised because I sat right next door, I mean, desk next to a colored fellow. And we had never seen colored people in Denmark, you know. So, I mean (he laughs), to me it was a surprise. But he turned out to be a very good friend of mine, you know. I mean, we made friends.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any stories off the top of your head about the process of learning English and the problems that you had with that? An incident that sticks out in your mind, perhaps?

SORENSON: Well, I know one day the teacher, I don't know what grade it was in, but the teacher called on me to spell the word "necessary." I remember that. And the principal of the school had just opened the door when she asked me the question. See. And I stopped, and she says, "Go ahead." So I spelled "necessary," and I got it correct, you know. (he laughs) But, yeah, and then of course, writing was a little difficult, because we had to, in school I learn the Palmer Method. See. We didn't have that in Denmark. I mean, my writing was altogether different in Denmark. But, as I say, I managed it. But the problem was that instead of getting up at seven o'clock in the morning, I had to get up

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at five o'clock in the morning and work in the kitchen, so I could go to school. And then coming home, eleven-thirty we got out of school, and had to be back at one. So that hour and a half I spent in the kitchen washing dishes. See.

SIGRIST: And this was at the Petersen home.

SORENSON: Oh yes.

SIGRIST: And was the home where the Petersen's lived also the boarding house?

SORENSON: Yeah. Oh, yeah. And it was one big, great big building there. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So you really, you had to jump right in the saddle the next day.

SORENSON: Oh, yeah. I sure did. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, just sort of list off the chores that you were expected to do. You said light the fire in the morning, wash the dishes. What were some of the other things you...

SORENSON: Wash the dishes. I had to mop floors. And Saturdays we had to clean all, I ran Bissells vacuum cleaner, no electric va- (he laughs) on the rugs. And dusted, and all the rooms. Of course, Mr. Petersen done some of the work himself, you know. He helped along with it. But, oh no, and then as I say, at night after serving dinner, you know, I had to help peel potatoes and carrots and all that stuff, you know. And after dinner was served, then we had to start making

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sandwiches for everybody that, you know, took their lunch. And Sundays, of course, there was no dinner served. There was just breakfast. We served no lunch or dinner on Sundays. So I had a few hours off on Sundays when I could take in a show, or something like that. I did make a friend. His name was Don Carr. And we were very friendly, you know, at school. And we used to go around together. We went up in Washington Park, you know, on Sundays and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause right now, and I'm going to put in another tape in the machine.

**END OF SIDE B, TAPE ONE**

**BEGINNING OF SIDE A, TAPE TWO**

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist. We are now resuming the interview. This is tape two of the interview with Kaye Sorensen. Mr. Sorenson, you were just sort of telling me about the things you had to do at Mr. Petersen's boarding establishment. Can you talk to me a little bit about Mr. Petersen himself, his background and what he was like to work for.

SORENSON: Well, I understand that he, he was a chef. He was a professional chef, and that he had a, one of his jobs was up in Lake George, in some big hotel in Lake George. And that's where he met, he said it was his son, but I understand that he adopted this boy that was supposed to have been his son. His name was Bert Petersen. I think it was Albert, perhaps, but Bert, he was quite a bit younger than Mr., Mr. Petersen was up in age at that time. I sure

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he was over sixty, seventy years old when he brought me over. And I would say that Bert was probably, oh, around fifty years old, you know. But, he seemed to know his business about cooking. You know. He really was an excellent cook. And, of course, his son had worked with him in the hotel. So, I mean, he was a pretty good cook, too. You know. It was a famous place. I mean, they, they had a lot of good, good people there. A lot of good roomers, and, you know. I remember there was a few law students, and one fellow, after, he worked, he lived there before I even got there, he lived there as a roomer. But he came back while I was there, and he was a big lawyer in New York City. You know, he had lived there in his younger days when he went to law school. He had, but I don't think Petersen socialized too much. He did have some friends that came in once in a while to visit, you know. But I don't think he socialized much.

SIGRIST: What was your relationship with Petersen like? Was he, did he treat you like staff, or was he perhaps warmer in his...

SORENSON: No. I would say he treated me like an employee. He didn't treat me like one of the family, you know. I was strictly an employee as far as that. And I had to pay, I was getting five dollars a week. That was my salary at that time. And one dollar was taken out towards my fare for coming over here. And I think I owed him about a hundred and fifty dollars or something like that, you know. And I kept track of it. And when it was paid up I said, "That's it." (he laughs) You know. And the understanding was that after working for him for a while, he would see that I got a job someplace. Well, it went on and on and I didn't get a job, you know. He didn't suggest go getting a job, and I was

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working, and I had finished school and, you know. And so Don Carr, my friend and I, on a Sunday afternoon in Washington Park, we met a couple of girls. You know, we got talking to a couple of girls there, and we took them for a boat ride. They had boats in the lake there, you know. We took them for a ride, and we saw them the next Sunday, you know. Took them for a ride again. And got real friendly. As it turned out, later on I married one of the girls. And she was working in the laundry at the Albany Medical Center, called the Albany Hospital at that time. And...

SIGRIST: Albany...?

SORENSON: Albany Hospital.

SIGRIST: Oh, Hospital.

SORENSON: Hospital. Yeah, okay. So, well, we went pretty steady together. I see her every Sunday, and then Mr. Petersen had a telephone down in the kitchen, you know, that I could down and use, where nobody ever heard of me or knew about it or anything. So I used to call her a couple of times, you know. So she says, "Are you going to be a dishwasher all your life?" You know. And I got thinking about it. I said, "Well, no, not really." Now I'm getting to be eighteen years old, you know. I says I ought to start looking for a job. So I went looking for a job. And I found a job working for a contractor. He was building houses up in Pine Hill, and I got a job. Thirty-five cents an hour working ten hours a day. But them days there was no backhoes or anything. You pushed the dirt out with a wheel barrel, and I'm telling you, after working washing dishes and then going in to being a laborer like that, it was quite

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a job, you know. (he laughs) So, but anyway, I moved out of Petersen, I got a room.

SIGRIST: So you worked for Petersen four years.

SORENSON: Four years. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he employ other immigrants?

SORENSON: No. No. Well, yes. Before me there was another fellow. There had been another fellow that I don't what arrangement he made with him, but I know there was another fellow some years before that had done the same thing, that he had brought over from Denmark, and...

SIGRIST: Was Petersen himself a former immigrant?

SORENSON: Oh yeah. Oh, he was born in Denmark. Yeah.

SIGRIST: I wanted to ask you, in those first couple of years, when you were first here, was there something that you simply could not get accustomed to in this country? Something that really was hard to adjust to other than the language, which was an obvious thing.

SORENSON: No. I don't think so. I know the way we used to eat in Denmark, you, you'd use, you would eat with a fork and a knife, both, you know. And I got accustomed to just using the fork. You cut your meat, laid the knife down, and then just using the fork. I mean, that was something I had to overcome. But, I mean, no, no big problem. No, I don't think I had too much of a problem getting accustomed to it.

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SIGRIST: Were you instructed at the boarding how to behave in front of the guests? Were you instructed in protocol of some sort by Petersen, how you had address guests, or...

SORENSON: Oh, no. I had, I had learned that in Denmark, you know. I knew how to handle the guests in Denmark, you know. Being very polite, smile, and, you know (he laughs) all that. And I think that's what got me through. I'll never forget, though, the day I sailed. My father said to me, "Remember this." He said, "If you cry," no, "If you smile and laugh, everybody will smile and laugh with you. But if you cry, you cry alone." And I often remember that. Often remember that.

SIGRIST: Did, speaking of your dad, did you write back and forth to them?

SORENSON: Did I what?

SIGRIST: Write back and forth.

SORENSON: Oh yes. Yes. Even my sister when I went home remarked that how faithful I was, and my mother had kept all my letters. Postcards and everything I had sent to her. Oh, yeah, I was very faithful to my, even today I keep in close contact with my brothers and sister.

SIGRIST: Who would write back, your mother or your father?

SORENSON: My mother. My mother would write.

SIGRIST: What kinds of letters would she write back to you? What sorts of things did she express to you in those letters?

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SORENSON: Well, I would say more or less like an educational kind of thing, you know. Now she sent me a book in Danish, of course, about women. You know, about getting married, and you know, something like that. It taught me a little bit about (he laughs)...

SIGRIST: She was thinking.

SORENSON: She was thinking, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you, in your first couple of years in Albany, did you ever experience any kind of prejudice because you were an immigrant? Do you remember an incident where anyone made fun of you or...

SORENSON: I, I did, but I ignored it. I was, I don't know how many times I was called a "square head," and you know. Oh, yes, I was on the receiving end, end of a lot of, you know. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Was there a Danish community in Albany?

SORENSON: No, I never, in twenty-five years that I was here I had never, there, there probably was, but I didn't know about it. I knew, I never spoke any Danish, you know, after, only with Mr. Petersen. He was the only one. And then, of course, my uncle as I call him, my mother's cousin. But all the while I was here I don't think I saw him more than four or five times. When I got married I had to get a sponsor, because I was only eighteen years old. And Mr., I knew I couldn't ask Mr. Petersen, you know. So I did contact, I say my uncle, and he said, "Well, is that what you want to

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do?" I says, "Yeah." He said, "Well, you're crazy." I said, "Well, maybe I'm crazy." But he said, "That's what you want to do, don't, you know, no problem." So he went with me. And then a Danish, a Danish girl, her family were Danish. And I did know that family. That's right. Yeah. I did know that family. And they were a Hansen family. And they had...

SIGRIST: H-A-N-S-E-N?

SORENSON: H-A-N-S-E-N. Yeah. And I really don't remember how I got to know them, but I know there was a bunch of kids my age, you know. Boys and girls, and stuff. And I, every once in a while on a Sunday I would go up there, and I would join them for dinner, you know. I was more or less accepted for dinner. But, and I thought of her when I wanted to get married, and she was kind enough to stand up with us, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember ever being very lonely in those first couple of years? Regretting that you had made the decision to come?

SORENSON: No. I made up mind I would never regret it. I would never regret it. I never thought about that. But, oh, there was plenty of times when I was lonely, I mean, you know. I was alone, I had no friends. For quite a while I couldn't talk to anybody because I couldn't speak the language. But...

SIGRIST: Mr. Petersen isn't really a surrogate father. He's basically an employer.

SORENSON: That's right. I mean, he, we never had any friendly talk or

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anything like that, you know. I learned very quickly to speak English. I had to. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me, when did you get married? What year was it?

SORENSON: I got married in 1927.

SIGRIST: And what was your wife's name?

SORENSON: Her name was Elizabeth. They called her Betty. Fyvie. F-Y-V-I-E.

SIGRIST: F-Y-V-I-E?

SORENSON: F-Y-V-I-E. She was one of thirteen children.

SIGRIST: And did you settle in Albany?

SORENSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah...

SIGRIST: What...

SORENSON: After, after we got married, we got a room together, jointly. And, I don't know, later on we talked it over, we should get furniture, and you know, it would be a lot cheaper living in a flat than a room, you know. And back them days there was no electricity. They had gaslights, you know. And if you sneezed, (he laughs) the damn mantle would go out and you had no lights. You know. But anyway, there was a place on Clinton Avenue. There was an outlet for the Salvation Army. And I think for fifteen dollars I bought furniture, kitchen set, bedroom, and, you know. Whatever, enough to start, you know, furnish an apartment.

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SIGRIST: Was your wife of immigrant stock?

SORENSON: No, no. No. She was born here. Both her parents were born in this country, too.

SIGRIST: How do you think her parents felt about her marrying a foreigner?

SORENSON: Well, they didn't, they didn't object. I went, before we were married I went up with her a couple of times to visit the family, and told them we were going to get married. But, of course, the old man, her father worked in the General Electric. He was a painter in the General Electric. And they had thirteen children, and she was, I think about the fourth or fifth child, you know. So, I mean, they had a lot of young kids. And they probably said, why object, you know. It's okay, so we got married.

SIGRIST: What did people do in Albany at that time for fun, for entertainment? You were saying you didn't have to work on Sundays. What did you do on Sundays?

SORENSON: Well, at that time, on Sundays I would take a trolley and go up to Troy and see the movies, because Albany didn't have the movie theaters open on Sundays here. And then we had Mid City Park in the summertime, which was open, which was an amusement park between Albany and Troy, you know, up in Menands.

SIGRIST: Mid City Park?

SORENSON: Mid City Park.

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SIGRIST: M-I-T-T...

SORENSON: M-I-D City Park.

SIGRIST: Mid City.

SORENSON: Mid City Park. Yeah. And that was an amusement park. And we used to, in the summertime we'd go up there. And then they had a pavilion where we had dances and stuff like that, you know. It was real nice. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember who your favorite movie stars were at that time, or, was there someone that you particularly like to see?

SORENSON: I don't know. I think I was crazy about Gloria Swanson.  
(he laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, kind of progress us through your life. Because I know later you were to join the police force.

SORENSON: Well, that was some time later, yeah. No, after we got married, right? In December, we got married November, '27 .  
And my son was born in December, '28, a year and a month later. But surprising to me was when my wife said to me, she says, "I went to the doctor." And she was pregnant. But I, I mean this. (he chuckles) So, anyway, my son was born. Of course, that put a crimp in it, you know. And, but, by this time I had lost my job with the contractor because he didn't work in the wintertime, you know. And I went to the biggest hotel in Albany, the old Teneyck Hotel.

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SIGRIST: Can you spell Teneyck, please?

SORENSON: T-E-N-E-Y-C-K. That was the biggest hotel. It was on a chain, you know, of hotels. And I went in there to inquire about a job. And luckily enough I got a job as a bus boy, you know. It didn't pay much money, and I used to get tips from the waiters, and my personality got me through, because I was smiling at everybody, and you know, I mean, I done all right, you know. So that was okay. And the waiter was a Greek. Very nice fellow. Very, and he, he took very good care of me. Now I didn't expect the Depression to hit. I went to work there in 1927, in the winter of 1927. And, in the meantime I was there about a year or so, I became a waiter, you know. The head waiter made me a waiter. And then in 1932 the Depression hit, and I was laid off, see. Now while I worked in the Teneyck Hotel I became a citizen. I got my citizenship papers. And, in fact, the day before I went for my citizenship papers, I waited on the judge that was going to preside at it (he laughs), so I said to him, I said, "I'm going to appear before tomorrow." He says, "Yeah? What did you do?" (he laughs) I said, "No, I want to become a citizen." Now, I had been studying the Constitution and, oh my God, everything I, I knew everything, you know. I had read up on it, and everything else, expecting to be asked a lot of questions. And I got up before the judge. He addressed me by my name. He says, "Admitted." Nothing to it. I said, what, (he laughs) great. You know. So I became a citizen. Well, while I was working in the hotel, in the Teneyck Hotel, some of the waiters there, you know, said, "You ought to look for a better job, where they have a pension system, you know. You're married, and you should look to the future. And

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there's no pension system here, you know. Why don't you apply for the police job?" So I said, "Well that might be a good idea, you know." So, I asked different people, you know, what I should do, and they told me. So I filed an application. That was back in 1931 or '32. Yeah. It was after I became a citizen, because I had to be a citizen to apply for the job, see.

SIGRIST: You became a citizen in '30...

SORENSON: '32.

SIGRIST: '32.

SORENSON: Yeah. So I made out an application for the police, and I took the test. And when the test was published, there had been something like thirteen hundred applicants, and there were, there were no jobs, you know. And surprising to me I was number forty-eight on the list out of all these people, see. Which, you know (he laughs). So anyway the list was good for four years. After four years the list is obsolete again, see. And I had to take the test over again. In the meantime I got laid off in the Teneyck Hotel. They had to cut down, you know. So, I was one of the last waiters, so I had, I got laid off. But the head waiter said, "Anyway banquets, or anything, you know special," he said, "you're the first one to be called." So I mean, I didn't worry too much, because banquets, you know, I had two or three banquets a week, and I was making money. And then I took another job Saturday nights working in the night club, which helped, you know. So we done all right.

SIGRIST: Did your wife work during the Depression?

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SORENSON: No. No. No, she was pregnant at the time, see, so she didn't work. So, I remember, one, oh, then I had to get a job, I took a job as a taxi driver. You know, I could drive, work as a taxi driver and work banquets, too. So, you know. But I had to get a license, a taxi license from the chief of police. So now I go into the chief of police, apply for a license to drive a taxi. And he asked me a few questions. He says, "Where is Our Lady of Angels Church?" I says, "I don't know." He says, "Where's the Howell Library?" I says, "I don't know." He says, "You want to be a taxi driver and you don't know the city?" So I, he says to me, he says, "Your size, you ought to be a cop." I says, "Yeah? What do you have to do?" I mean, I says, "Geez, I got him interested." You know, I says, "What do you have to do?" He didn't know my application had already been in, you know. So then he tells me, he says, "Who's your ward leader?" You know. (he laughs) I said, "Well," I said. Well, he said, "See him." And then he took me on the whole thing, you know. I says, "Oh, great." Now I get outside. He approved me for a taxi license. I get outside, I says, "Geez, I can't figure that out. I'm too dumb to be a cab driver, and he wants me to be a cop." (he laughs) So anyway, the second test comes up, see. And I said, "Geez, I'd better go and see my friend the chief." So I went down and asked to see the chief, and I went in, and I saw him, I said, "I got notified. I have to take the test again. Do you have any suggestions?" He says, "Yes." He says, "I'll tell you what you do. Get the questions. Answer the ones you know right away, and if there's anything you don't, you're not sure of, pass it by. And answer all the questions that you know, and then go back. Go over the questions again, and the ones that you have difficulty with, think about them. And then answer them." I says, "Okay."

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Thank you." So as long as he lived he thought he was instrumental in me applying for that (he laughs) police job. But I took the second test. And there was only about nine hundred took it, you know, it was cut down a little bit. But I came out twenty-sixth on the list, which was good. And I know there was another Danish, well, he wasn't born in Denmark, but his family was in Denmark. And he said, "I can't figure this out. I was born in this country. I graduated from high school. And you got way ahead of me on the list. Now, how come?" I says, "How the hell to I know?" You know. So, but anyway, it was, well, it was the beginning of the war, problems, and Hitler invading Denmark, and all this and that, you know. So I was still working in Keeler's. I got, oh, I didn't tell you about getting a job in Keeler's. It was a cold day, I'm walking in, I'm driving a taxi then, but I felt I would like to get a steady job. So this restaurant, Keeler's Restaurant on State Street, State was one of the most famous restaurants in Albany. It was known all over the country. I said, just for the heck I ought to go in there and apply for a job. It was cold. I wanted to get warm, you know (he laughs), so I went in. And I asked the head waiter for a job. He says, "Oh, no," he says, "We don't have any changes here. We have the same waiters." And he says, "We don't have any jobs." I said, "Well, okay. Thank you." So I started out, and Keeler's son, Gaynor Keeler, was coming down from upstairs, down the stairs, and he saw me. And I happened to have waited on him in the Teneyck Hotel in the roof garden, you know, where they dance, and all that, you know. And he knew me, you know. And he says, "Kaye, what are you doing here?" I says, "Well, I'm looking for a job (he laughs), but there is no job." He said, "Wait a minute." So he asked the waiter. He says, "Now, one of the waiters is out sick, isn't he?"

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He says, "Yes." "How long is going to be out?" He says, "Well, he didn't know." He says, "Why don't you put him on the shift?" So the head waiter says, "You have to get what they call a monkey jacket." You know, we wore aprons. But you have to get a monkey jacket. I says, "Yeah, how much do they cost?" He says, " Oh, about five dollars." I says, "Well, if I had the five dollars, I'll go get it." So Gaynor Keeler gave me the five dollars to get the jacket. And I wanted to pay him back later, but he wouldn't never take it, see. So I got the jacket. I'm working there, oh, geez, I think about six weeks. Almost two months, you know. And the waiter comes back. I says, "Oh, geez, there goes my job." You know. But I didn't know Gaynor had told the head waiter, "You ask some of these waiters to take an extra day off, and put him in." So I got, I come in one morning, one of the waiters had died. I said, "Oh, I got it made." (he laughs) So I, I worked there until I got appointed to the police.

SIGRIST: And what year did you get appointed to the police?

SORENSON: 1940.

SIGRIST: Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, I believe while you were waiting in the Teneyck, that you have a significant story about waiting on somebody there.

SORENSON: Oh, I waited on a lot of famous people. One of the most famous that I think I waited on was Judge Cardozo, who became the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in New York State. But he later, I think Franklin Roosevelt appointed him to the Federal Supreme Court. But a lot of other, other famous

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people. I waited on the governor, at that time it was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I waited on him. Governor Lehmann. All those people. A lot of...

SIGRIST: The person that I'm referring to was in the newspaper article that I read that you supplied with your oral history form, concerning the gentleman who was shot.

SORENSON: Oh, that's Dutch Schultz.

SIGRIST: I think that would be a good story on the tape.

SORENSON: Arthur, his name was Arthur Fliegenheimer. Okay?

SIGRIST: I won't ask you to spell that.

SORENSON: OK. (he laughs) Well, he was known as Dutch Schultz, and he was a big beer baron. A gangster from New York City. And he used to peddle booze. And he was brought up to Albany, Albany area for tax evasion charges. And he used to come into Keeler's and eat. Well, for some reason or other, he selected me as his private waiter. Every time he came in he wouldn't have anybody else wait on him but me. I had to wait him, see. So he had a lawyer by the name of Dixie Davis. That was his, what he called his "mouthpiece," you know, at the time. (he laughs) He was his lawyer. But waiting on him, it appears that he had to have a local lawyer represent him. So they hired a fellow by the name of James Noonan. He was a local attorney. And everyday they come, you know. They go over the defense, and, you know, talk about law, and I'd be waiting on them, and everything like that. And, so one day, there were three or four of them, and he pays his check with a brand new hundred dollar

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bill. So anyway, his body guard, who was well known, Beau Weinberg they called him, and he supposedly wound up in the East River in a cement box or something like that, you know, they - so anyway, Beau comes in, and Dutch Schultz says, "Give him anything he wants." So, all right, so I waited on him. And his check at that time came to about three dollars, you know. So I gave it to Dutch Schultz. He gives me a brand new hundred dollar bill again. And I said to him, I said, "Gee, why give me hundred dollar bill. I just gave you about eighty dollars in change?" He says, "Go on, take it. I make it myself." (he laughs) Well, I didn't know whether to believe him or not, you know. Well, I remember one night there was a question of law came up. And Jim Noonan said to Dutch Schultz, "The only man I know who can answer that question is Judge Prior." Well, Judge Dan Prior was a famous criminal lawyer at that time. So he says, "Call him." So they called Dan Prior. And Jim Noonan said to me, he said, "Dan Prior will be coming." This was upstairs. "Dan Prior will be coming. Will you bring him up?" I says, "Yeah." So, anyway, Dan Prior comes, and I says, "Right up this way, Judge." And he says, "No come here." So I went down. He says, "You tell Jim Noonan I want five hundred dollars before I come upstairs." I says, "Okay, no problem," you know. So I went in and told Jim Noonan, I says, "Judge Prior is here. But he wants five hundred dollars before he comes in." So Dutch says, "Okay." One, two, three, four, five brand new hundred dollars bills. (he laughs) So I, the judge came up, and I don't think he was in there five minutes, and he left. I says, "Boy, what a racket." You know. (he laughs) But then, one Saturday afternoon, Beau Weinberg is there and two strangers, and there's a guy - let me see if I can remember - Jules Martin his name was. He was from New York City.

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And he owed Dutch Schultz money or something, you know. He was brought up to Albany. And the poor guy had a slipper on one foot, he had an injury to his one foot, and he walked with a cane, you know. So he came in, and I waited on him, the four of them. And I remember one of them saying to this Jules Martin, he says, "Why don't you eat anything you want. You never know when it's going to be your last meal." You know, I mean, they're kidding the guy. So this is Saturday afternoon. Now I waited on them, they're gone away, you know. Sunday paper comes. Well there wasn't too much business upstairs in Keeler's on Sunday, so I'm reading the paper. And all of a sudden I see, "Body Found Outside Of Troy With A Bedroom Slipper And A Cane." I mean. "Oh, my God," I said, "Gee." I didn't tell anybody. I says, "I'm not going to say anything to anybody." You know. That's the guy I just waited on, you know. So anyway, the state police came in a few days later inquiring about any, if anybody knew, had waited on him. You know. I says, "I don't know nothing." You know. (he laughs) Now, couple of days later they're back again, see. He says, "Come here. The fellow that was killed, right?" I says, "Yeah, what about him?" He says, "He had a veal cutlet, tomato sauce, spinach, french fried potatoes, and you're the only one served a veal cutlet that day." (he laughs) Holy Christ, you know. So I said they got me, you know. Well, I don't know how many times, believe me, that they picked me up all different hours of day and night, brought me up to Troy, "Take a look at this guy. Take a look at this guy." The state police picked him up. No. I couldn't, I could identify him, but they weren't the ones that they had, you know. So anyway, later on I get subpoenaed to appear, appear before the grand jury, like, in this murder case in Troy. Now Jim Noonan, Dutch Schultz's local lawyer, called

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Keeler's and asked him to send me over to his office. So I go over to his office. He says, "I heard you're going to be subpoenaed before the grand jury in Troy." I says, "Yeah, that's right." He says, "What do you know?" I says, "I know, I don't know nothing." He says, "Well, just make sure you don't know nothing." So I, I really got scared, you know. So I told my wife. I said, she had an uncle up in Camden, New York. I said, "Why don't we take a vacation." Let's get the hell out of town. (he laughs) Because every time I saw a limousine I expected the machine gun to come out, you know. So, we took a weeks vacation, and things cooled off.

**END OF SIDE A, TAPE TWO  
BEGINNING OF SIDE B, TAPE TWO**

SORENSON: But anyway I went up to testify before the Grand Jury in Troy. They picked me up in a taxi. They come in at noon time, I busy waiting on people. "Take that apron off and come on." (he laughs) You know, just like that. So I go up to Troy, and Charles Ranney was the district attorney at the time.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

SORENSON: Charles Ranney. R-A-N-N-E-Y. He was the district attorney. And he says, "Now I want you to go in and tell what you know." I says, "Okay." So we're all sitting in a room, and one of the fellows that was there to testify also was Dixie Davis, his lawyer, you know. And he had a habit of twisting a chain around his finger like this (he gestures), you know. He says to me, "How is everything doing in Keeler's?" I says, "Okay." You know, all right. But there was another

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fellow there. And he was brought in by an inspector from New York City Police Department. And his name was Marty Krumpier, see. He was a gangster in New York, and he had been shot at two or three times, I found out later, in New York. So (he pauses) the inspector, what was it, his name was Grafnecker. He said to Marty Krumpier, he says, "Now when you get in there, you tell him the truth." And he said to me later, you know, I told him I was going to be a policeman, you know, I was on the list for policemen, you know. So I got friendly with him. In fact, later on I visited him down in New York City, you know. He took me around headquarters and stuff like that after I became a policeman. But anyway, after Krumpier came out, Grafnecker says to him, he says, "Did you tell him the truth." He says, "I told him my name and address." (he laughs) Now Charlie Ranney comes to me. He says, "Kaye, when you leave here, there's a taxi waiting for you outside. Go out, get right in the taxi. There's reporters, photographer's, they're going to take your picture. Don't stop. Don't say a thing to them." I says, "Okay." You know. Now I'm going out of the court room and I taking my hat to put it on, see, just as they snap my picture, hiding my face, you know. And Charlie Mooney was there, was the big reporter from the Time, Knickerbocker Press at the time. And I knew Charlie Mooney. I waited on him a half a dozen times. But he had, at that time had a mental block out, he told me later. He couldn't recognize me for some reason or the other. He didn't see me with an apron on, you know, (he laughs) so he didn't recognize me, and I got by him, see. So anyway when the paper came, big headline paper, "Mystery Witness" - I'm the mystery - "Testifies Before The Grand Jury", and it shows me with the, you know, hiding my face. (he laughs) So later on it was, oh, I was on the police about ten years

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when Charlie Mooney reminiscing finally revealed in one of his stories in the paper who the mystery witness was, see. And, of course, the next day he knew because he went by Keeler's, he saw me standing in there (he laughs), you know.

But he says, "You know, Kaye, it made a better story, you know, the mystery witness."

SIGRIST: You know, we're laughing and smiling, and you're smiling and telling me this story, but, I mean this is really kind of frightening stuff, isn't it?

SORENSON: It sure is. I'm telling you, I, I, the sweat ran down my back there a couple of times, because they knocked these guys off like nothing, you know. And here I could put the finger on the two guys that, you know, that killed him. Obviously, you know. Of course, later on before the grand jury I never did agree with Charlie Ranney. Charlie Ranney said that Dutch Schultz killed Jules Martin in a hotel in Cohoes. I mean, that was, so, what the hell, what's the difference? They, they settled the case, you know. They solved it, what's the difference, you know. But I know damn well he didn't, because the same two guys that was in for lunch about eleven o'clock that night, Dutch Schultz was in the room with Dixie Davis and Jim Noonan. They was very nervous. I remember waiting on them. And these two guys, two guys came in, and Dutch Schultz handed each one of them an envelope, and I remember one guy say, "Is it all there?" And the guy, and Dutch Schultz says, "It is." And the guy says, "It better be." And they walked out. But, I mean, who now would believe you. You know. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: It's an amazing story.

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SORENSON: Yeah. I know. (he laughs) I mean...

SIGRIST: And then the irony that you would later become a police officer...

SORENSON: Well, that's it. (he laughs) Sure.

SIGRIST: Well, we need to sort of progress here. Tell me just sort of in a nut shell about your police career, how long you were in the force and...

SORENSON: Okay. Well, let me tell you, I, it was reaching a point. The list lasted four years, and the four years were just about ready to give up, see. Then the war had started. You know, '39 in, over in Europe and everything else. Things were a little rough at the time. So I came, oh, by this time my wife had died.

SIGRIST: What did she die of?

SORENSON: Well, being a waiter I had to work Christmas and holidays and New Year's, and I worked New Year's Eve. And at that, that time, see I had two, two children, right. And she says, "I'm not going to stay home New Year's Eve alone. I'm going up with my family." I says, "Well, why don't you stay." She was expecting the third child at the time, see. I says, "Why don't you," no, I didn't know she was going away. She left me a note. I came home early New Year's Day, and I found a note. She had gone up to visit her family in Schenectady, see. Well, we had a snow storm. And she had to walk about a mile from the trolley car to her parent's home, carrying two kids, you know, one, well the boy able to walk, but the girl she was carrying. And she

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fell in the snow, got all wet and everything else. She came back, couple of days after New Year's, she came back, and she had an awful cold. And there was a nurse living in the same house where we lived at that time on New Scotland Avenue. And I asked the nurse to come in and look at her. And she says, "Kaye, you better get her to the hospital." You know. So I sent her up to the Albany, Albany Hospital. And the ninth of January she died of Lobar pneumonia. There was nothing, they didn't have the anti-biotics them days that they have today.

SIGRIST: What was the kind of pneumonia?

SORENSON: Lobar.

SIGRIST: Lobar.

SORENSON: Lobar pneumonia. That's what they called it. I don't know what it was. But anyway, and of course she was carrying which was about maybe five or six months, the baby died, too, You know.

SIGRIST: This is January 9th. What year?

SORENSON: 1935.

SIGRIST: 1935.

SORENSON: Yeah. 1935 she died. And that created another problem because I had to provide for the kids, see. Well, I had a very good neighbor. She had half a dozen kids of her own, but she was good enough to take care of the kids, you know, for a few days. And I thought her mother would take them.

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But her mother wouldn't, no part of them. She wouldn't take them. So I finally arranged to get them in to a, a Protestant home. And they were both baptized Catholics, you know. But, of course, it didn't make any difference, because my wife didn't live up the Catholic, we joined the Protestant Church, you know. At the time the kids were going to Sunday school and everything, you know. So I didn't think it made any difference. So we, I get them in the Protestant home, they're in there a couple of weeks, and the grandmother, my wife's mother come down to the home and raised particular hell. Said the kid didn't belong there because they were baptized Catholics. The home contacted me, said I had to get them out of there. So I says, geez, that created another problem. But anyway her, my wife's twin brother, she was a twin also, my wife's twin brother and his wife felt sorry for the little girl, my daughter was a little blond, you know, cute little girl, decided to take her. But nobody would take my boy, my boy. He was a regular boy, you know, I mean, geez. (he laughs) So nobody would take him. So I finally got him into a, a Catholic home. Saint Coleman's in Watervliet. And he was up there.

So, oh, three or four months later some of my friends says, we going, giving a little party, want you to come, see. Well, the purpose was they were going to introduce me to a girl. (he laughs) You know. But I didn't appreciate the girl that they, they had picked out for me, see. But there was another girl there with her boyfriend, you know. I says, see, she really looked, you know. So I got her name, her telephone number and I called her. And we made a date.

And as it turned out we got married, you know. But on Sundays, every Sunday I would go up to visit my son up at Saint Coleman's. And I would bring my girlfriend with me, you know. And she fell in love with him. So now we planned

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on getting married in June of 1936, see. My wife died January of '35. And we were going to get married June, 1936, but it was her birthday. We were out celebrating her birthday the seventh of February, 1936. And she says, "What do you say we get married now?" I says, "You're kidding?" "No." "Okay. So, (he laughs) let's get married." Well, I had to go to Catholic church. She wanted to get married in a Catholic church, she was Catholic. And I had to take instructions from the priest, right? Well, that was all right. She was eighteen years old, and by this time, what, I'm about twenty-seven, yeah, twenty-seven, yeah. So anyway, that was all right. But her family didn't go along with it. They didn't want her to get married, see. Now the night we got the best man there, and the bride's maid, we're waiting at her grandmother's house ready to go to church. Her mother let me borrow her car, you know, to get married, you know. And her uncle was there. He was a policeman, and he's on his way to work. And he stopped in, and he says to my, well my girlfriend at the time, he says, "Mil," he says, "You don't have to go through with this now. It's not too late to drop out." Right in front of me, you know. But she didn't. She says, "No, I'm going to get married."

SIGRIST: What was her name?

SORENSON: Mildred Bellville. B-E-L-L-V-I-L-L-E. Mildred Bellville. And so we got married. The next day we went to Saint Coleman's and picked my son up, and we went up to Scenectady, picked my daughter. And the first day of our marriage she had two children.

SIGRIST: The 1930's were very difficult years for you.

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SORENSON: They were. Yeah. They, they really were. And I never, all these problems, I never once mentioned it to my family in Denmark. Never.

SIGRIST: Did they know that you had been married?

SORENSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, they knew I was married. Oh, sure, they knew I was married.

SIGRIST: But the hardship that you had gone through.

SORENSON: No. They never knew about that.

SIGRIST: Was it sad for you that your parents had never gotten a chance to meet your first wife?

SORENSON: Well, I don't know, no, no.

SIGRIST: That never occurred to you.

SORENSON: No. No. Of course they met my, my second wife, was, I took, brought her over to Denmark a couple of times.

SIGRIST: In our few remaining minutes, perhaps talk a little bit, for maybe five minutes or so, about your police career.

SORENSON: Well, I would say, I probably had ninety-five percent luck and five percent deficiency, you know. Because it seemed no matter where I went in I was lucky, I was doing a good job, you know. And...

SIGRIST: Did you enjoy this work?

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SORENSON: Oh, I enjoyed it. There wasn't, at the time there wasn't enough hours in the day for me, because I, I really enjoyed being policeman, and helping people and stuff like that. And I made some good arrests as a patrolman. One time we got, my partner and I captured three kids that broke away from an industrial school. And chasing them, my partner fired a shot over the car to bring it to a halt. And we picked them up. And I frisked the guy to see if he had anything up, the biggest guy, you know, who was sixteen years old at the time. And he had two candy bars. A flat candy bar and a tall, and it felt to me like an automatic pistol in his pocket, you know (?). (he laughs) But anyway it was two candy bars, see. Now the next day I take them down to court, and I'm riding in the wagon with him. And the kid said to me, he says, "Listen, copper. I'm going to come back. But," he says, "the next time I'll do the shooting first." I made the mistake of telling my wife. And the bum escaped a few years later, and all she could think of, oh, my God, he come back to kill my husband. You know. But of course he didn't. And eventually he got out, and I talked with him, and we more or less became friends, you know, I mean. (he laughs) But that exciting. And then, it was funny, I, I went to the Teneyck Hotel where I used to work, with my wife and I. We went to the show. We stopped in there to visit some of the old friends. I got drink. And the bartender said to me, "Why don't you come down the second precinct, downtown?" I said, "Tony, I'm lucky I'm on the police," you know. Never mind trying to get down to the second." "Well," he says, "wouldn't you like to come down to second precinct?" I says, "Sure, everybody would like to come down, downtown precinct. Why, sure I would." Two weeks later I come into work, one afternoon, and the sergeant said to me, he says, "What's the

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matter, don't you like it here?" I says, "Yes, I like it here." He says, "Look at this." So I looked at it. An order. The chief ordering me transferred from the fifth precinct to the second precinct. I said, "Geez, that's pretty good. A bartender got me transferred." (he laughs) I was down the second precinct, in the first, first couple of months I was in on I think eight manslaughter cases. There was three people burned to death. Somebody had set the fire. Somebody else killed. Oh, what a place. I mean, you know. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about this very different kind of career that you decided. I mean, what was your parents' impression...

SORENSON: Well, I, I don't think I told them too much about it. I mean, they knew I was a policeman, you know. And so, anyway, I got promoted to plainclothesman. Now I don't know, apparently all the notoriety, my name got in the paper, you know, and I made good arrests, and everything else. So anyway, one day a detective come over. I'm sitting there playing cards just before I'm going on duty. And he come over, he said to me, he says, "Can I see you a minute?" I says, "Yeah, sure." He says, "Doc wants to know if you want to take the plainclothes job." I says, "Who the hell is Doc?" (he laughs) You know, I didn't, he says, "That's what they call the chief." I said to myself, I says, "Well I'll think it over." He says, "You don't have time to think it over." Then I said, "Geez, if they offer you something I supposed I'd better take it," you know. I said, "Yeah, OK. Tell him I'll take it." The next day I'm transferred to another precinct in plainclothes. Again I solved a big burglary, you know. There were a lot of

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musical instruments stolen and everything else. I got them all back, and, you know. My name got in the paper and all this and that. The first thing, you know, I made, I was promoted to detective, see. Very short while, you know. So now, I work as detective, and that was when I first went back to Denmark. 1948 I was promoted to detective, and a couple of months after that I got a letter from my mother saying that my father had a heart attack, he would like to have me come home, you know. So I cashed in an insurance policy, and my wife borrowed money, and I was able to go pay for my fare over. And my mother's brother-in-law at that time, he paid my fare one way, you know. So I was able to go over.

SIGRIST: What was it like seeing your mother for the first time in all those...

SORENSON: In four, in twenty-five years. I mean, what a fantastic party they gave me. They got the whole family together. And, oh, I really, but I couldn't, I couldn't talk to them. I couldn't understand Danish. It was difficult.

SIGRIST: You had pretty much forgotten...

SORENSON: I forgot the Danish, you know. But eventually it came back, you know. I could understand some. Now I just went over last year, and I could get by, you know. I could understand, get by. But then what happens, I'm back here two months in 1948, after visiting my family for the first time in twenty-five years, I get word my mother had suddenly died. And I was tickled to death. And my father lived on. He died in 1962, I think.

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SIGRIST: So you had actually gotten a chance to see her.

SORENSON: Yeah. I saw her before she died. Yeah.

SIGRIST: When did you retire from the police force?

SORENSON: I retired the first day of January, 1976 after thirty-six years. I got appointed June the 27, 1940. And, and then of course, I was, I was a detective, you know, so long, and I'm watching fellows that joined the police at the same time wind up lieutenants, captain, and I'm staying here a detective, you know. So I said to my partner who was also a detective, I says, "I'm going to take the sergeants test when it comes up." He says, "Maybe they don't want you to." I said, "The hell with them. I going to take it." (he laughs) You know. So I took the sergeants examination, and I come out, I don't know, one or two or three on their list, you know, right, and I'm going to be appointed. And it was right near Christmas time. And I didn't do too bad around Christmas in the detective office, you know. (he laughs) I said, "Geez, I don't want the job." So I asked the chief, I said, "What can I do to pass it up?" He says, "You have to write a letter to the commissioner." So I wrote a letter due family problems and stuff like that I decline the appointment. So I didn't take the appointment, right? But another vacancy came up short while after that, I declined that, see. Then the chief said to me, he said, "The next time there's a vacancy, either you take it or you're off the list." I says, "Okay." There wasn't going to be a vacancy for months, you know, so I didn't care. Geez, one Thursday afternoon, one of the new sergeants went over to the chief, puts the gun on the desk, and the shield. He says, "You better take this before I shoot myself." Had a nervous

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breakdown. That was Thursday. Friday I'm sworn in as a sergeant, (he laughs) Saturday I go to work. I didn't have a chance to turn it down. So now I'm a sergeant, back in uniform, working around the clock.

SIGRIST: What year is this?

SORENSON: 50-, '56. '56, yeah. '56. I became a sergent. And so, of course, that didn't set so good with my wife, you know, because I was taking her to work every day, and picking her up every night, now I'm working around the clock, I couldn't do that, you know. And it meant losing money, because as a sergeant, as a detective I was getting clothing allowance. I didn't pay, have to pay tax on. But as sergeant I got more money, a higher tax bracket, and I paid higher taxes. Well, I was a sergeant for two years, and then I, I could take the lieutenants exam. I took the lieutenants exam. I come out number one, and I was appointed lieutenant. Then I stayed lieutenant for a long time. I says, holy cripes. It was 1969 when we had, there was riots all over the country. We had a disturbance here. And everybody's hollering about the, getting somebody to intercede between the public and the police. So one day the chief says to me, he says, "Stop up in the office. I want to talk to you." So I went up to the office and he says, "The mayor wants to organize a community relations unit, and he thinks you're the one who can do it." So I says, "Geez, that's a pretty good opportunity." I says, "Yeah, I'll take it providing he makes me a captain." "Oh, no, no," the chief says. I says, "Well, then I'm not interested." And I walked out. Two days later I'm made a captain. (he laughs) So, I organized a community relations unit.

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SIGRIST: That's quite something, you know, from a kid from Denmark, who worked summer jobs in...

SORENSON: Well, Paul, let me, let me tell you, our, very, a lot of people have said to me, "How did you do it?" Well, the only thing I can say, the reason was I was cordial to people, I was nice to people, I done everything I could for them, you know. And one, I mean, I didn't have to ask for favors. They would go out, you know, I mean, I don't know. The, my attitude or something, you know.

SIGRIST: What do you think has remained Danish about you through your whole life to this day?

SORENSON: Well, I've always been proud of being Danish, always been that. And I have a granddaughter, the one that's into genealogy, she's very proud of it. In fact, she wrote me a letter I got couple of weeks ago. She said, "Did you know that during the war when Hitler invaded Denmark, that Hitler ordered all Jews in Denmark to wear a star of David, and that the king ordered all Danes to wear the star of David?" And I said, "Yes, I knew it. Yes."

SIGRIST: I hope your granddaughter is happy with the tape. I hope that...

SORENSON: Well it, I, Paul, I hope you give me that tape because...

SIGRIST: Yeah. It'll take a while...

SORENSON: Well, I, I mean, that's okay. That's fine. Yeah.

SIGRIST: My final question to you is this. I think I know the answer

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already, but, are you glad that you made the decision to come here?

SORENSON: I've never been sorry. I've never, it was a decision I made, and I said, "Damn it, I'm going to abide by it. I'm going to stick it out." And there was plenty of times, I mean, when I was left with those two small children, all alone, nobody to turn to, I said, "What the hell do I do? I've got to do something." But I, I, I fought it, and, you know. Oh, I admit there was, there was some sad times, but I would never have had the opportunity to get this far in Denmark, I don't think.

SIGRIST: Do you think...

SORENSON: Now my, my brother went up to, went on to be a mechanic, and he wound up one of the biggest automobile dealers in Denmark. Sold new cars. He came over here, and I said to him, I said, "I get a car, a new car every two years." He says, "Yeah? I get two cars every year." (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Chances are you're so enterprising and so affable that you would have been successful no matter where you stayed.

SORENSON: Well, it's possible. It's possible. I mean, now, I don't know, I'll, I'll tell you a little incident that happened in Keeler's. The head waiter was away from the front of the room, the dining room, see. And there's waiters, every three tables there's a waiter standing. One night a colored man came in the door. All the waiters turned their head, and I stepped out, "Right here, sir." Right here, you know. Sat him down. And he was the most interesting individual I ever talked to. He was a doctor from India, and was over

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here to give a lecture to a medical college in Chicago. And then, back them days a twenty-five cent tip was a big tip, you know. He gave me a dollar, and I left it laying on the plate. (he laughs) But I, I mean, it didn't hurt me, I mean, I, you know. I'm not that prejudiced.

SIGRIST: Well, you came from a society that didn't have that kind of prejudice. I mean, as you said, you never saw a black person in Denmark.

SORENSON: I know it. No.

SIGRIST: So you didn't have that ingrained sense of bigotry that Americans...

SORENSON: No. No. I didn't.

SIGRIST: Well, I want to thank you very much for letting me come out here...

SORENSON: Are you, is the end of the tape, is it all over?

SIGRIST: Yeah, almost two hours...

SORENSON: (he laughs) Well...

SIGRIST: Did you have a final statement perhaps that you'd like to make of some sort before I sign off?

SORENSON: Well, I'll tell one thing. The fellow that I got to work with me in community relations was a black fellow. My, the first black policeman I ever had. And I said to John Dale, he's now the chief of police here. I said to John, "There's

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going to be a lot of problems. You're not going to like. There's going to be a lot of things you're going to see, you're not going to like. There's going to be a lot of things you're going to hear, you're not going to like. But if you can learn to overcome it, you'll be a good policeman." And he was. And he and I worked together in the community relations unit, and Father Young in Albany, he invited us down to a breakfast one Saturday morning I think it was. And Father Young and I was the only two white people in the place. There was about twenty black ministers from the area, you know, all black. And I'm sitting along side of John. Now I worked with John for a good many years, and I never gave it a thought. I leaned over to John, I says, "John, are we ever out-numbered here." He turned around, "Captain, what do you mean, we?" (he laughs) You know. So, I mean, but, no, I, and one night a colored woman came in. And she was beat up with two small children, complaining about her man had beat her up, see. I said, "Well do you have some place to go?" She said, "Yes. But I don't have any money." I called the prowl car and I said, "Take this woman and her two children up there." And he, when she didn't hear him, she, he said to me, he says, "When am I running taxi for niggers?" I said, "Right now you are." But, I mean, you know. There's always going to be prejudices and it's unfortunate. It's very unfortunate. I've got a lot of friends, in fact, I argue with a black professor from State University. It so happened that two detectives stopped a cab driver one night. And they were watching couple of dope peddlers. Two black guys, you know. And they went up to the cab driver and says, to say, and one of them said to him, "Where'd you take them spooks to?" See. Well he complained to this professor, and, oh my God, letters. He wanted the two guys fired. Letters between him

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and I, and oh, my God, trying to save the jobs for them, but, you know.

SIGRIST: Well, of course as an immigrant you might have experienced, you might been on the receiving end of a similar kind of prejudice.

SORENSON: That, that's right. That's right. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, anyway, I want to thank you again for having me come out to your house, and for conducting this interview with you for the Oral History Project.

SORENSON: Well, I really enjoyed it, I mean (he laughs), getting my, it's going to please my daughter no end, because she's been after me.

SIGRIST: Good.

SORENSON: I don't know whether you would want to take it or not...

SIGRIST: Yes, we'll take a look at that in just a moment.

SORENSON: Oh, okay.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Kaye Sorenson in Albany, in upstate New York.