EI-271
JOHN CHRISTIANSEN
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
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DENMARK, 1926
AGE 22

PORT OF EMBARCATION: SOUTHAMPTON

RESIDENCES: LOIT KERKEBY
HARTFORD, CT

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Monday, March 29, 1993. I am here in Bloomfield, Connecticut with John Christiansen, who came from Denmark to America in 1926 when he was twenty-two years old.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Mr. Christiansen, good morning.

CHRISTIANSEN: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Let's begin by you giving me your birth date, please.

CHRISTIANSEN: March 20, 1904.

SIGRIST: Ah, so you just had a birthday.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yep.

SIGRIST: Oh, happy birthday. Also present in the room, I might add, is Mrs. Christiansen. And we're having coffee and cookies and you might hear a refrigerator in the background kick on and off. Anyway, where in Denmark were you born?

CHRISTIANSEN: In, well, actually in Sunder Jutland. And that is, I was born under the German flag. And we were fighting, between Denmark and Russia to Germany in 1964. And we came, we got there on the . . .

SIGRIST: You mean 1864.

CHRISTIANSEN: 1864. And on the (?), in 1920, was handed back to Denmark again, but I have actually a German school. I went to school in Germany with all my, (?).

SIGRIST: Did you say Sunder Jutland? Is that what you said? Where was it that you were born?

CHRISTIANSEN: Sunder Jutland, they call.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: S-U-N-D-E-R.

CHRISTIANSEN: South Jutland, Jutland.

SIGRIST: And that's J-U-T-L-A-N-D? Jutland?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. And what town, what town were you born in?

CHRISTIANSEN: I was born in Loit, L-O-I-T, Loit K-I, K-E-B-Y, in Loit. Yeah. Keby. [Lojt Kirkeby]

SIGRIST: This is the hardest part of the interview. (they laugh) Did you live there for a long time in that town?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. I left there in, it might have been when I was four.

SIGRIST: And where did you move to?

CHRISTIANSEN: I started school in Haderslev. When I was five.

SIGRIST: Haderslev.

CHRISTIANSEN: Haderslev. That's a little city, they call a city over there. But we lived there for a couple of years. And then I went to a, to a little town, a Bjern Drup.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

CHRISTIANSEN: B-J-E-R-N P-R-U-P.

SIGRIST: And whereabouts is that in Denmark?

CHRISTIANSEN: That's all in Sunder Jutland.

SIGRIST: I see.

CHRISTIANSEN: And I floated from one town to the other until I felt older in different small towns, all my bringing up until I come to this country.

SIGRIST: Why did you move so often?

CHRISTIANSEN: I don't know. My father was always moving. (he laughs) He had the houses there, and I don't know whether he got it cheaper somewheres else, but he (?) their thing, who did that. Now, the trouble is that my mother, see, I lost her when I was four, and my father was alone with four children. And part-time his mother stayed

with us, and part-time we stayed alone with my father.

SIGRIST: What did your mother die of?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, I don't know for sure. She died in an insane asylum. She left, like I say, at that time they just locked them up. They didn't do nothing for them. And she died, like I say, she was taken away. I can just remember that day, a car come and took her away. And she died when I was twelve.

SIGRIST: You were twelve when she died.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So she was put into the institution when you were four.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And she died when you were twelve.

CHRISTIANSEN: And I'm glad of it. Because, like I say, not like today they do something for anybody that have a mental problem, but those days they didn't. They just locked them up, see?

SIGRIST: Oh, dear. So your grandmother sort of moved in. Is that, your grandmother helped take care of you with your father? Is that your father's mother?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

CHRISTIANSEN: Jens Peter.

SIGRIST: Jens Peter.

CHRISTIANSEN: Jens. T-E . . .

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: No, J.

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, J. E-N-S.

SIGRIST: No, J.

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, J. E-N-S. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: J-E-N-S.

CHRISTIANSEN: Peter.

SIGRIST: Peter with a D, or a T?

CHRISTIANSEN: T.

SIGRIST: With a T. And can you tell me a little bit about what your father was like, what his personality was like?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, probably like mine. (he laughs)

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Wonderful.

CHRISTIANSEN: My wife, she met him. When we were over there, when we got married thirty years ago.

SIGRIST: What did he look like? Can you describe to me in words?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, well, like, uh, who did I always say that one of the, the fellows that was in the movies. He almost looked like him. (Mrs. Christiansen is heard whispering off mike)

SIGRIST: All right. Let me say, Mrs. Christiansen, when you do say something, do it full voice. Don't whisper it, because I'd rather have it picked up than not picked up. That's all right.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: He needs my help. He was a short, handsome man who almost looked like Clark Gable, he said.

CHRISTIANSEN: Clark Gable. As a young man, he looked like Clark Gable.

SIGRIST: I see. Dark hair and . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: And a moustache.

SIGRIST: What did he do for a living?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, he worked in different places, and did whatever he could catch. I know, when we lived in Haderslev he looked, he worked in a lumber yard. And when we were out in the country, well, I know he was screening gravel in a gravel yard. They did it all by hand those days. There was no machinery to screen the stones from the, and use the stones they sold to the town, wherever it was. And that's what he did.

SIGRIST: So he was always sort of doing manual labor.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your grandmother. I imagine you probably remember something about your grandmother, since she sort of helped raise you.

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, like I say, I wasn't that much with my grandmother. She was a damn good woman. (he laughs) I don't know. But she, her husband, he died when she was, when he was sixty-six, I guess. I never knew him. He died before I got born. And, but she had a pension from, he had a farm which he had sold. And he, she had money in the bank for, she had was allowed so much a year to live on. That's the way he had it set up, see. Because she lived longer than expected. She lived till about ninety before she died, I guess.

SIGRIST: Now, so did you move in with your grandmother into her house, or did she . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: We did for a while because my father had first a housekeeper, but he couldn't get along with her or some damn thing, and whether or not he made enough money to pay her what. But then we, for a while we moved in with my grandmother, but on her pension she couldn't afford to keep us. So we had to, she kept two of my sisters, and I and another sister, we went to live with my father.

SIGRIST: So there are four kids altogether?

CHRISTIANSEN: There are four kids altogether, three girls, and I am the youngest, the last one.

SIGRIST: You're the youngest. What are your sisters' names?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, the oldest one, she was Annemarie. And the next to her was Laura, and then I come, and then sister Jessie, she was the last one.

SIGRIST: I see. So you're the next to the youngest.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah, the next to the youngest, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in a house with three girls?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, (he laughs) we got along, I got along best with my second oldest sister, Laura. And we always, years back together she was always, she got in arguments or fights with my oldest sister, and she always felt I should defend her if she got in trouble. (he laughs) I can remember my sister, she got mad at me and took me by the shoulder, because I was three years younger than

her, and she could shake me so hard my head would hit the wall. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: This is a rough-and-tumble household.

CHRISTIANSEN: (he laughs) Oh, yeah. Cause my younger sister, she was quiet. She wouldn't say nothing.

SIGRIST: What did, what did you all do for fun when you were a kid in Denmark? What kind of entertainments did you have?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, when we were grown up? I mean, from the time we were, when I was sixteen we got together in the small town where my father worked, and we had a guy that could play the accordion, and one would play violin, and another one he had, I don't know. He had a long stick with wires down over a drum, and he, with the stick he would run over that keeping time, and we danced. And my father had to, a very big, in the house, he lived in a big washroom. There was probably as big as, twice as big as the front of the room there. And we used to dance to music there every Sunday afternoon when we'd get all together in growing up time.

SIGRIST: Was your family musical?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. I never could play nothing. (they laugh) But now, when I was eleven years old I went to work for this old couple. They had had three sons that was in the First World War. And my father had, was drafted in the First World War. So this old couple, they had the three sons. They needed help, and I went to work for them. I was eleven years old, and I stayed with them until I was seventeen, going on eighteen.

SIGRIST: Was that common for young boys to be farmed out to other people for work?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. I've met a couple of fellows in Hartford that was only nine years old when they, poor people, they couldn't support them. And they went out to, they shipped them out to work for, practically their room and board.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt as a young boy having to do this?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, I didn't mind. No, heck, no.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you have to do for them?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, any kind of work. Usually you had, they only had three or four cows. You had to stake them out in the morning, and then every couple of hours you had to move the stake. And when I first got there, of course, I didn't know how to milk them, and I said to the old lady, "Well, I'm not," I was fresh (he laughs) eleven years old. "I'm not," she wanted me to milk cows, I says, "I'm not hired to milk cows." (he laughs) She says, "If you want to stay here, you milk cows." (he laughs) (he coughs) But I stayed with them until I was seventeen going on eighteen.

SIGRIST: Did your sisters have to be farmed out to places to work also?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. They went different . . .

SIGRIST: What jobs did they get?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah, they went out to different places. I know my, usually they stayed home until they were confirmed. After, you had eight years of school,

grammar school. And then when you were confirmed by the minister, and then you were supposed to be adults. Eventually you had to go out and take a job on your own, maybe, I don't think you got anything for it except your room and board in the first couple of years. But they usually left home when they were fourteen, and I know my older sister, she was only fourteen. And my next one, she was probably, I don't think she was more than thirteen when she was confirmed.

SIGRIST: I see.

CHRISTIANSEN: And, like I say, I left home when I was eleven.

SIGRIST: What kinds of jobs did women get?

CHRISTIANSEN: Help, household. Usually young girls, when they are like that, day they get in a household where they had small babies they had to be taking care of, to wheel them around and change their diapers or whatever you have, or whatever they could do there.

SIGRIST: (talking to Mrs. Christiansen) The reason I asked you not to do that because it will pick up

on the microphones. Yeah, and it will sound like scraping. (Mrs. Christiansen laughs) You mentioned being confirmed. Was religion an important part of your life?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

CHRISTIANSEN: Lutheran.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about how you practiced your religion when you were a kid?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, you went to a (?). (he laughs) You went to religious instruction for six months before you got confirmed, and the thing is, the way it was when the German where I was, you had to be confirmed before you could get out of school. And the last six months before you were in, you were eighth, ninth grade. You had to go to, for . . .

SIGRIST: Religious?

CHRISTIANSEN: English, no, not English. For, go to the priest, the minister. He was not a priest, because on

the day, you had to go for instruction of the, and then you could get confirmed after six months where you had to, in six months, for two half-days a week you had to go and get to religious instruction, and then he, you could get confirmed. You had to, he asked you questions and, at that time, and you had, you, so that you know about religion and what they were. And then . . .

SIGRIST: And that was all, that was all part of your school, your . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about how Danish people celebrate Christmas.

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh. (he laughs) It's different today. They tell me about how Christmas is. When we were, we were very poor kids when I grew up, and I, like I stayed there during the wartime, there was not much of a Christmas. And I was, with the two old people, when all the boys, they had three boys in the military, the German military. So there wasn't no, we didn't have no celebrating any

Christmas. But they will contradict me if you talk to anybody that is brought up in Denmark, because they were not in the war. So that might be the difference.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Tell them about what kind of a Christmas Papa made for you kids.

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, I don't know. See, sometimes I really don't know. There was, we were not always with my father. Some of the kids were with my grandmother, and she lived in another town. But I know one night that, one Christmas Eve we were kind of disappointed that we didn't have a Christmas tree. And we had a big tree that was, what do you call them?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Fir.

CHRISTIANSEN: No, not fir.

SIGRIST: A pine tree?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. They were evergreen outside. There was a big tree. My father, he went and cut some branches off, four or five, and tied them together and made a Christmas tree for us.

(he laughs)

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: You had to make cookies.

CHRISTIANSEN: My father, (Mrs. Christiansen make a comment off mike) he was, my father and my sister-in-law, when we were with my father that year. And so he was going to make cookies for Christmas, they always had to. So he was going to make syrup cookies, and you had to boil the syrup. Now, we didn't have, like modern stoves or any goddamn thing. You had a parlor stove with a, of course it was wood-burning, and there you had to open up, you know, into, put your casserole in with the syrup. (he laughs) My father says, "Now, you go watch it doesn't boil over." And he went to the kitchen, and he was going to make them the syrup (?). And it was black, and they were in the corner of the living room, and we didn't have no electric lights. We only had a lamp burning way the Hell over there maybe. And I had to watch it didn't boil over. Finally I said to him, "It boils, it boils, it boils over." (he laughs) He come with a fire tong and stuck it in, you know, and that kept it from keep on

boiling over and saved it. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So I get the impression that you were with your father sometimes, and you were not with your father other times.

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, like I say, growing up, when I was eight years old my grandmother took us all four to live with her. But she had, like, on a pension, you know. She didn't have that much money to live on, and she found that she couldn't support us on the pension she has. So two of us, like I say, Laura and I to go back to my father, and I think, at first I know my older sister Anna, she stayed with my grandmother, and the younger one.

SIGRIST: And then from there your father then farmed you out to this elderly couple eventually to work.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. Oh, he had to go into the service.

SIGRIST: Oh, in the First World War.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about the First World War and how that affected your family. Talk about your father

going into the service, and how that affected everybody.

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, I know I was, it got so that the Germans finally took all the ones up to forty-five. That's, German, they call them. And I was in Haderslev when my father, he got inducted. I don't know how come I was out there anyway. But there was quite a few that, unless they had a good-sized farm they could, they could stay home, but if they had, they didn't have nothing to hold them, just because they had kids that didn't mean nothing. And like I say, the old people that I was with, he had a small farm, the oldest son, the two sons was in from the beginning, because they had been in military service before the war in 1914. So with this here, older ones, he had a small farm of his own, but he was drafted in 1916. And I think that's the time my father, he was drafted too. (?) But they apparently didn't, especially the ones that wasn't out in the, early in the war. They were more or less behind in the lines, you know. They didn't get enough to eat, because I know the old people,

sent the older one that was brought in in 1916, they had every week she bake their own bread and she send him a loaf of bread, I think every week to supplement whatever he gets.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Tell about your grandmother's son that was in the service.

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, yeah. Well, that was before the war.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Oh.

CHRISTIANSEN: The one I was named after. He died even before I was born. His name was the same as mine, Johann.

SIGRIST: Was he an uncle of yours?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. But he had been, I was home on leave, and his father was, died of cancer, and he was home on leave from the service. They had, they had to go two years in military service under Germany, from the, when they were twenty years old. And they had to serve two years in the military if they were qualified. If they were not, if they didn't have one leg or something. (he laughs) But he was home on leave and my grandmother always worried about him, because he no sooner

got back, he had been home on leave, and they get back to the service, I don't remember what city he was in, but he had a telegram that he had . . .

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Strep.

CHRISTIANSEN: Strep throat. And apparently they didn't have nothing to do for it at that time. And the next telegram she had that he had died, and he was only twenty-one at the time. Like I say, that was before I was born.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: But she always blamed herself.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. She always blamed herself because he was with her up in the attic, and his father's, he has heavy underwear laying, hanging up there to dry, you know. And he told his mother that, "I could use them," he says, "in the military." Well, my grandmother didn't want to give them to him as long as the old man was still living, but then she blamed herself that maybe he wouldn't have gotten strep throat if he had gotten his father's underwear.

SIGRIST: That's kind of a sad story, actually.

CHRISTIANSEN: It is! Well, he was . . .

SIGRIST: Yeah.

CHRISTIANSEN: All her life she blamed herself that . . .

SIGRIST: Yeah. And you said you were named after this uncle. Tell me a little bit more about working for the elderly couple. I'm just curious, you dealt with the cow. What else did you have to do for them?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, we had to bring hay in and grain. We, they always grew oats and barley and things like that brought in for. And then, like I say, we bought the cows out early in the morning, stake them out. And they had a field, they were quite a ways from home. They're funny, in Denmark, they didn't have, like here they have all the fields right around. But the way that they have in Denmark, you understand, all the townspeople were close together in town. And they had the fields away from home because, see, they got it together in the olden days for the big house for

protection. They didn't have a split, the farms around town. They had them close together and they had their fields out in different directions from the town.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Tell about the day you were threshing with the old man.

CHRISTIANSEN: That was when I was fourteen. He had a little machine, and we could have horses pull us around. But the old man, he thought, well, there was too much work for him and I. He was over seventy, and I was fourteen, and we were flailing the grain. We laid it out in long strips upon the floor. And so I said to the old man, "There was nothing said about me," it was my birthday. I said to him, "You know," I said to him, "today is my birthday. I am fourteen." "Well, let's go into Moore and have a cup of coffee," he says. That's all the was made of it. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: No celebration for you.

CHRISTIANSEN: No celebration. But I didn't want to let it go without me telling him.

SIGRIST: Were you the only person who worked for them, or were there other young boys?

CHRISTIANSEN: No, I was the only one. I worked there from when I was eleven. I stayed there until, the old lady died. She had a heart trouble, and she never went to a doctor about it. Apparently a calf kicked her right underneath the heart. And she could not, she was always short of breath. And a neighbor over there, the closest neighbor to them, they were spread around. He was sick, so she wanted to go over and visit him. And on the way back she had to go against the wind, and I could see her coming. And then a young woman from the man that was sick, a sister to him, I saw her run up, you know. And I sat at the side of the road. And I was out harrowing, and I said to him, "Well, (?)." The wind was blowing quite hard. And so I turned around, I went over to the further end of the field. Then I saw her run home to, for the old man, and they came with a blanket. So I came down. We had to carry the old lady home and she died right then and there from heart. She go walking against the wind,

that she lost her breath.

SIGRIST: What else do you remember about when she died? Did you stay on working for the people?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember her funeral, or anything?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about that, what funerals are like?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, at that time they were, there were no undertakers or anything like that. A person dies, well, they just get in touch with a gravedigger and, well, you went around. And one, through some places they didn't even have a telephone at that time. It was just by word of mouth it got around, that she had died. And, like I say, she was, well, she was always afraid that she would be buried before she was, she heard so much about they had died and buried them before they were actually dead, see. It might have happened once in a blue moon, but she wanted to lay there for a week before she was put. And

actually I was one of the bearers, and she was ripe. (he laughs)

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

SIGRIST: Where was she laid out?

CHRISTIANSEN: Right in the house, in, well, they had an extra room that wasn't, there wasn't room. There were quite big homes. They didn't, their house, houses were always built for big families, like they did here, you see. Farms, homes, what they build in the, in the 1800's. They always built big homes, not like they do today, a two-family . . .

SIGRIST: Can you describe their house for me? Can you describe what the outside looked like, the old . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, they were still straw-thatched. And, of course, the bricks were made right, they dug it up in their own fields. There was brick, a clay bank. And they dug up their clay there, and they used the, they mixed in, they made the cows walk

around in it to mix it up. And all, and that's what they, like I say. From the old clay bank they made the bricks out of it. And they had the old guy, I saw him even later in life, that did the brick work. And then they had rye straw to put, see, they put straw-thatched roof on.

SIGRIST: What did it, how many rooms? Describe the inside now for me.

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, there was two rooms, three, four, five. Five rooms, plus a little bedroom. They were, the old people. And I also slept. There was only a six-by-six, and there was just a walk-in, and there was a bed, too, for the old people on one side, and I, and when their son was home on furlough or what, we were in the other one. And there was, all they had the board, outside boards on the floor. And then they start with rye straw, put in there, and that's the mattress. And that's all.

SIGRIST: How did they keep the house warm?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, they had, we made turfs every year for the old people. We dug turfs, we had maybe five

thousand. They figured they needed five thousand turfs to keep them over winter. And they used that turf just for heating and also for cooking.

SIGRIST: How? How would they use the turfs?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, you had to dig them. They had a form where, on a wheelbarrow. There you put, well, I don't know. Where they were laid out, there was, the farmer, I know there was room for twenty-six turf in that wheelbarrow, flat wheelbarrow. It was probably as long as from here over to my wife, and about that way. And they had, you mixed up the turf in there more, and filled them forms there. There was a form where there was twenty-six, like I say, in that, on that wheelbarrow. And spread them out smooth. And then you had, there was a trick, you know, to dump them. Because if you didn't know how to do it right there was a mess going on. But you had to dump them so that they flopped over and go down and lay in there for two or three weeks till, well, till it was half dry anyway. Then you stacked them up so they, like, would dry more, until they were totally dry, and you took

them home.

SIGRIST: And then did you burn these pieces in a fireplace, or some kind of a stone?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. They had a regular kitchen stove and a parlor stove also, so they'd burn them in there. But, see, they were on the dry soil. There was nowhere where the other places, see, that was more in the east, on the west side of the island where all the, where we lived, that the old people lived. On the east coast they didn't have no turfs, but they had trees. They fired with trees, with the wood.

SIGRIST: Did you live the longest in one place when you lived with the old people?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah, I think so. Because when I was a kid growing up I was always moving here and there.

SIGRIST: Did you feel, did you feel at home with the old people?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Or were you very much just sort of the hired

hand?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. I felt at home with them. Because at first I didn't know what to call them. Father and Mother? But after a little while they had a son, the older son, he was still home, and he said, "Father and Mother." And, well, in no time at all I did the same thing, called them Father and Mother.

SIGRIST: What kind of foods did you eat? What kind of foods did the old woman cook for you?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, the main thing, what we had, a lot of porridge.

SIGRIST: Porridge.

CHRISTIANSEN: Porridge. (he laughs) Like my father said, I had some places, they were farms that he knew of, they had porridge twenty-one times a day, twenty-one times a week. (he laughs) They, she had a cast-iron kettle. Oh, it was probably that big. And she set that on the stove. Oh, heck, they'd sit there practically and cooked all day, you know. If we didn't eat them when they were hot,

you know, the first time, well, then you could have it a second time, a second sitting with just hot milk and the cold, whatever what was left. And potatoes, maybe potatoes. I personally, even when I was a kid, I didn't care much for meat. And they had some, see, they had a lot of soup also. She could make soup out of anything. They all ate. Just a bone, heck, you put all kinds of, whatever you had out in the garden, vegetables and potatoes and whatever and carrots and made soup. And, like I say, they usually, they had a kettle big enough, you didn't have to make it every day, you know, because there would always be enough for the second time.

SIGRIST: It would last a long time.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What would she cook for a special occasion, if there was a special occasion during . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: Rice pudding. (he laughs) For Christmas Eve. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Where would she get the rice?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, she had to buy it.

SIGRIST: Did your father ever come and visit you at the farm?

CHRISTIANSEN: No.

SIGRIST: You always went to visit him, or . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. I visit him.

SIGRIST: Were there long periods of time where you didn't see your father?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, yeah. Heck, yeah. I tried to come home and visit for the Christmas because his birthday the 24th of December, so I tried to go home and visit him. But during the war there was, I know once they came home when to visit, and there was nobody home except him. And he didn't even have a kettle to light up. I know he went out. He was doing shop work and wood work and things like that, and he went out to get the pan for the . . .

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Frying pan, like, or . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: No, large oven pan. And he had some sticks of

wood that he put in to light up so we could see each other. It was dark. We didn't have no, (he laughs) not even a candle to light up, so. But at least we was sitting talking together so could see each other.

SIGRIST: So he was, your father was sort of a gypsy of a sort. I mean he just kind of went from place to place and just lived the best that he could.

SIGRIST: During the war, when the war started and, well, you couldn't buy a pair of shoes, for instance. And he had a shoemaker. I don't know what you called the thing you put a shoe on. And as long as people would bring it, they had to be soled. Even I remember the shoemaker in town, he was drafted. And I, he even had five or six children. But he was drafted, so there was nobody. And my father, he used to sole shoes for people in town. Only they had to bring their own leather, because he couldn't buy it anywhere. So they brought usually old harness leather. And he cut that up for a sole, and he sat there and he got to be good at it.

SIGRIST: He was really sort of a jack-of-all-trades, wasn't he.

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, he was a jack of all trades. And he was, when there was anything on a wagon that broke down he could, the wheel, or any damn thing, or pole or whatever. Of course, at that time there was no tractors over there, it was work with horses at that time. But he was handy at doing any damn thing.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Christiansen, let me ask you. Is there perhaps a story that you can think of to suggest to Mr. Christiansen, perhaps about living with the elderly couple. You've been very good at thinking of individual things.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I love listening to John when he tells these things. No, I think the reason why you left, finally, the elderly, dear.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. See, the old lady died.

SIGRIST: Right.

CHRISTIANSEN: And I think I was seventeen. So then he had, they had an old maid daughter. She was about

fifty. And she came to, home to keep house for the old man. And she was very high strung. We had a cement floor in the kitchen, and we had a couple of stones out in the yard. And when I, I was always, and we used to have wooden shoes. But we had put iron on them so they wouldn't wear out, we have iron in the heel and iron like that with wood inside. And I always was fast, and I always come marching across the yard, a couple of stones, and cement floor in the kitchen. And I said I would put the pail down, maybe came in with a pail of milk and let the handle flop down. And she would go like that (he gestures), she was so goddamn high strung. And it would get so, one day I was almost ready to knock her down, I got so mad at her on account of acting that way. I told myself, "You'd better get out of here, otherwise that's going to happen some day. I'm going to," because I was making too much noise.

SIGRIST: What did you know about America when you were a kid growing up in Denmark? What did America mean to you?

CHRISTIANSEN: It didn't mean nothing. I just wanted to get out

and see the world. At least when I worked for the old people I actually, well, I didn't know, believe it or not they were paying me, and I got that little clothes. Of course, you couldn't buy it during the war time. But the old lady, the old people had at least I think eighteen hundred crowns, they had put in the bank for me. Instead of they could have bought something. Just as well, because during the war, I mean, all the Germans marks, they were worth nothing. But they had at least put some money in the bank for me. But I, like I say, when the old lady, I couldn't stay there any more with that high strung woman there. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you know anyone who was in America?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. Well, I had, I had two aunts in, out in Iowa. And, but I didn't want to go out in Iowa. I had a friend of mine that was a bricklayer. And actually I, the last couple once I worked for had, either they quit their job on the farm. I used to work, do farm work all the time. And he had a sister that lived here in Hartford. And I was thinking of going to Canada, you know.

That's, because you could go there, just take a passport and go over there. But he tells me, well, he says, "You don't want to go to Canada." He says, "I'll write to my sister in Hartford." And she wanted him to come over here in the first place, so he wrote to his sister. He would be happy to take me. That's all I needed, introduction to go to somebody, because you couldn't buy a ticket and come to the United States and just go off the boat. They wanted to see what you, where you're going to go.

SIGRIST: Tell me about these aunts in Iowa. Whose sisters are they, your mother's or your father's?

CHRISTIANSEN: My mother's.

SIGRIST: Your mother's sisters.

CHRISTIANSEN: They left, then when they were young girls. I never, I mean I never saw them, they left before I was born. I know, in 18-, 1880 or something like that.

SIGRIST: What were they doing in Iowa?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, they got married. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: There's not a lot in Iowa at that time.

CHRISTIANSEN: No. (he laughs) I mentioned that, at the time, see, there were plenty of bachelors out there because a lot of women, they wouldn't go with any guy going out there to, on a farm work.

SIGRIST: Did you keep in contact, when your mother was institutionalized, did you have any contact with any members of her family?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. I had an aunt in Denmark that I visited. See, to get my papers, birth certificates, I had to get a birth certificate, and I (?), they were over in this town. I'd take my bicycle and go down to the town where I was born to get my birth certificate. I had to go to the minister. He had found the birth certificate when I was born, and baptized there. And that wasn't very far from there, from here, maybe to Bloomfield Center where my aunt lives. And I haven't been down there since I was five years old, I guess. But I went, I decided, well, that was over the east end and I would go down visit her. And he was so happy to see me. And so I went, like I say, I

went to get my birth certificate, and so I was over on the east side. I was from the same town. And she had two sisters. The one sister she says she is, she didn't hear from any more, and that was the sister that used to write to her, and the other one didn't. (he laughs) See? They wanted me to go with them. Well, heck, I come over here, I wasn't going to take a train and go out to Iowa. For what?

SIGRIST: If I may ask you a question about your mother, did you ever visit her, or did your father, once she was institutionalized, did you never see her again?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, my father said that he went down there once, but he said he took my aunt's husband, because he could talk German, he says. I took him along because, so he could talk his way out, because they were up in Germany. He said he went once, but he didn't say much about it.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about when she died?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, that was during the war, and I know that I got notified that she had died. But I was only

twelve years old, and my grandmother and my younger sister went up there to the funeral. And she said that they were looking for me because the train goes through (?), and, well, I didn't even know they would be on it, so I, (he laughs) how would I get up there at twelve years old.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: As a little boy, tell the last sight you had of your mother.

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, they, I remember that in those days, like I say, they didn't have no cars or anything, what I remember. These guys in white coats, they had a horse and wagon. That was closed in, and closed in like a, well, I can remember her crying when they took her out, that's all. Like I say, I didn't know really what was going on. I was only four years old.

SIGRIST: And you were twelve when she died.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did she die of? Do you know that?

CHRISTIANSEN: I don't know.

SIGRIST: All right. So you've decided that you want to come to America. You want to get out of Denmark. You're unhappy with the maiden daughter in the house.

CHRISTIANSEN: You know, they tried to talk me out of going.

SIGRIST: Who did?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, guys I worked for. "Oh, there's nothing there." They said, "Talk to him. He's been over there, on account of that." I said, "I don't want to talk to nobody." I says, "I have enough money," that if I didn't like it over here I had enough money I could go right back again. But I says, "I don't care. I want to go and see what it's like. I don't expect anything." And I didn't.

SIGRIST: How did your father feel about wanting to go to America?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, he didn't say nothing.

SIGRIST: Did he ever want to go to America?

CHRISTIANSEN: No, I don't think so.

SIGRIST: He sounds like sort of the person that might have gone, you know, being a bit of a wanderer. Well, let me, where were you living when you left?

CHRISTIANSEN: I was living on the big farm, or working on the big farm. For that matter, my older sister was on the same farm as the cook. We were six fellows, young fellows working on that farm.

SIGRIST: How long had you been on that farm?

CHRISTIANSEN: Only since fall. See, you were hired out, either the first of November or the first of May you hired out for such a length of time.

SIGRIST: Sort of per season you were hired?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. Well, you could hire out for six months or you could hire out for a year, what you, if you hired out for any, you had to, if you, for instance, when I was only there a couple of months when I decided we were talking with a guy I had to work with three years prior, and we roomed together. And we started talking about Canada. We had talked about it, like I say, three years prior when we worked together. Now

we came to work and room together again on this farm. So we started talking about going to Canada, and he was going, too. But at that time they had such strict, if you hired out for any length of time, for six months or a year, you had to stay there, otherwise they could take a month's rent or a month's pay away from you. And they didn't pay you much in the first place.

SIGRIST: It was like a contract, almost.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. And that's the way you were settled by the farmers themselves that you worked for, not by the workers. You couldn't break agreement.

SIGRIST: So you had to wait until your time was up.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. Well, see, that's why when I started working, like I say, and living together with this guy on that farm from the first of November, and I know that I had, if I wanted to, I had to give him three months' notice that I was going to leave. So, well, then the guy, we roomed together, like I say. And he says, "Well, you tell him from me also that I'm leaving." But as it turns out he got cold feet or he's, his

parents didn't want him to leave. And he didn't tell him that he was going, that he would say so. He didn't, the boss didn't like it because he hired himself out in the same town with somebody else.

SIGRIST: You said one of your sisters is working on this farm also. Which sister is that?

CHRISTIANSEN: She was a cook, the oldest one.

SIGRIST: Is that, that's Annemarie?

CHRISTIANSEN: Annemarie, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did she feel about you going to America?

CHRISTIANSEN: She didn't care. We weren't that close.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see.

CHRISTIANSEN: I tried to get her over to this country afterwards. I wrote to her, and no. She didn't want to leave home. But I wrote to her. I says, "The maids over here, you can cook and do what you're doing." I says, "You can get seventy-five dollars a month." She was working for twenty-five crowns, and she couldn't buy a poor dress

for that month's pay. So I, but she didn't want to leave home. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What did you take with you? What did you actually pack to take with you?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, I only had one suitcase. I didn't want to take too much clothes with me. A few shirts, and exchange of clothes. That's all.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Where did you get the money for the ticket?

CHRISTIANSEN: In my pocket. (he laughs) I had the money.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: You saved for it.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, you're working. You have a job.

CHRISTIANSEN: I have, well, like I say, I had eighteen hundred crowns that I, and a ticket cost me six hundred.

SIGRIST: Six hundred dollars, or six hundred crowns?

CHRISTIANSEN: Six hundred crowns.

SIGRIST: How much is that in dollars?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, about a hundred and fifty dollars.

SIGRIST: And do you remember saying goodbye to your father, or . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, yeah. He took me over to, he took me over to the train, and he had a horse and buggy. Well, we hadn't been much together anyway.

SIGRIST: That's true, that's true. Where did you, you went from the station to, where did you leave from in Denmark?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, in Esbjerg.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

CHRISTIANSEN: (aided by Mrs. Christiansen) E-S-B-J-E-R-G.

SIGRIST: And you told me you left from England, so you . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: The ferry, like a little ferry, whatever, a small ship, go from Esbjerg over to Halington. And London is not on the coast. From there you had to take a train into London. We got in there and, I don't know, in the afternoon there was a big open bus. They didn't have no top on it, that they came out to take us up on the rails, at

the boat, open. Just like a bus, I mean. There was no top. And they picked us up and took us into London. I figure, from Denmark there was about I would say twenty young fellows. There was one from Denmark, the guy went over there, but there was only one guy that went there, down to Southampton the next day, with the English boat. But the rest of them went to, they were going to Canada, the rest of the guys.

SIGRIST: So did you, you left actually from Southampton.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in London?

CHRISTIANSEN: Only overnight.

SIGRIST: What did you think about London?

CHRISTIANSEN: I didn't dare go anywhere, because I know some of the guys went out and branched out at night. But I couldn't speak a word of English, so I didn't want to get stuck. (he laughs) I couldn't even ask for help to find back to the hotel again. I didn't want to take a chance.

SIGRIST: Were you, how were you brought to Southampton the next day?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, by train.

SIGRIST: And do you remember the name of the boat that you took?

CHRISTIANSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the boat?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. White Star Line, Homeric.

SIGRIST: The Homeric. Yeah, sure. Can you tell me, were you in Southampton for a long time?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. We went from the, from the hotel, I mean, we were brought down there and we got right on board ship. And the boat left from there down to Cherbourg to the harbor. They seat outside, but it was a small liner that they come for, people brought them in. A lot of them, I guess, they came from Poland, or wherever they came from, and they were from (?). They were brought with a little boat there out to the, it was too big to get into Cherbourg. (break in tape)

SIGRIST: [How long] was the trip across the Atlantic?

CHRISTIANSEN: It took eight days.

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

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, we were, each cabin, there was four guys. And you just walked in, and there was two, one above the other one. And we were three from Denmark, but I don't know whether the other one came from because he never spoke a word. (he laughs) He was laying in bed all the time. (he laughs) But one, the two was going to Chicago. And the one had been over here before. He was a middle-aged man, and he was a masseur by trade, and he was going to go out to Chicago and get a job. The other one, I guess he was, I don't know. He had family, but they were both going out to Detroit, I think. And when we came out to the, like I say, on, when we came in with the boat to New York I made a mistake. I should have taken second class instead of third class. I wanted to save a few dollars.

SIGRIST: Where on the boat was the third class?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, they were down pretty near on the bottom of the boat. (he laughs)

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: Was that an uncomfortable way to travel?

CHRISTIANSEN: No, it wasn't too uncomfortable. But I, I tell you, I didn't want to go with the English boat in the first place. But when I was over to get my papers the 4th of May, I was told that I could go in and present myself with, what do you call the, the American consulate. And I had a little varicose vein. So I had gone to a doctor over at home, you know. And he found me physically fit. Well, they wanted to know, "Why were you not taken into the military?" Well, I, on account of that little varicose vein. Well, then the whole day, "You go out, you go to a doctor." Well, I had the doctor's certificate from home, you know. But they wanted me to go to a doctor again. And I went, well, somebody told me right across the street, there was a doctor there and I got up, and I never told him that I had a varicose vein.

And he gave me a clean bill of health. So I was kind of nervous because I had taken a trip from home. It was quite a ways to go by train over to Copenhagen to get, where they got the papers. Well, they told me, "You go to the doctor and you come back this afternoon." So he gave me a clean bill of health, and I got my papers to go. And, well, a friend of mine came. They had a sister here in Hartford. He wanted to go over too. She wanted him over here. So he said, and he was a bricklayer. So he says, "You ask him when you go there when I hope to hear from him." And they told me, "Well, not before November." And this was for the May that I was over there. So I come down and told him. I says, "You have not been (?) before November." Well, then there was this guy, a salesman for the, from the English line, you know, White Star Line. And they are all hanging around, you know, trying to sell tickets to the guys, and he found out to know what's wrong. He says, "Come over there to the office and we'll have a, I'll see that the application gets forwarded." He knew the guys up in the office. And, but with the provision that I sail

with the White Star Line. And the goddamn fool (he laughs), he go over the Danish Line. He didn't go over the White Star Line, but I did on account of doing him a favor. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: That will teach you.

CHRISTIANSEN: And I couldn't speak a word of English. And anyway, he came over here in, I think it was August instead of waiting till November.

SIGRIST: What, so what month is it that you're traveling?

CHRISTIANSEN: I came over here . . .

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: July.

CHRISTIANSEN: I had my papers for May, but I left, I came to this country in July 27th, the hottest day that summer.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you some more questions about the boat. Tell me some things that you remember about being on the boat. What did you do on the boat?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, there wasn't much to do. There was very few women. It was all guys. And they had somebody

playing the violin, no, a recording, I think it was. There wasn't much to do except talk and walking around.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

CHRISTIANSEN: No, heck, no.

SIGRIST: Was it stormy, or was it a smooth?

CHRISTIANSEN: No, smooth sailing, yeah.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: What didn't you like?

CHRISTIANSEN: I didn't like their coffee or their tea. They were too damn strong. But I liked the ice cream. (he laughs) Another guy got along with me. We were traveling together, and he was a Dane, too. And we got ice cream for the thirds now. And that, (?) around home, we want another dish of ice cream. (he laughs) We had two dishes of ice cream. That's what was new to us, see.

SIGRIST: Did they have a dining room on the boat?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah, but we were sitting on line. I remember, this is the third class. And we were sitting on long benches. It was walking in the middle, and,

heck, the benches were twelve feet long, I guess, tables and benches. And we didn't even know how to order. A couple of guys, they had been home on leave. They were Norwegian. And they were sitting right across the table from us, and we asked him about what we were going to eat, you know. (he laughs) There was one young, I think he was Norwegian or Swedish. He ordered every damn thing that was on the menu. He had his own. He couldn't eat. He didn't hardly eat any of it. (he laughs) But we'd eat there, guys, like I say there, I think they were Norwegians, they would tell us what we were going to eat, what it said.

SIGRIST: And the ice cream was a surprise.

CHRISTIANSEN: (he laughs) Yeah, the ice cream was the best of it.

SIGRIST: Did they have any kind of activities at all for you on the boat?

CHRISTIANSEN: No.

SIGRIST: Did you go up on deck at all?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah, I walked up on deck, yeah.

SIGRIST: Would you say it was kind of a boring ride?

CHRISTIANSEN: It was.

SIGRIST: How long did it take?

CHRISTIANSEN: Eight days from Southampton all the way across. That was a long ride.

SIGRIST: Do you remember coming into New York Harbor?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah, that was the damn trouble. See, we came in in the afternoon, and by being in third class we had to go to Ellis Island. And we had to stay on board all night, and it was the hottest day they told me afterwards that the 27th, I guess, of July. And it was so goddamn hot, no air conditioning, no nothing. The Danes and I, we were walking up on deck and, hey, we didn't go down. It was too damned closed up down in the cabin. We stayed up and walking around all night until the next day. We, with a little boat we were taken over to Ellis Island. And they, I tried to, funny thing now, we had all kinds of doctors' certificates and everything from home.

And when we come in Ellis Island you got to strip and go into a room probably as big as our living room. And there was, I think, six doctors sitting around the outside edge, and you go from one to the other. And they had to get examined, even pull on your balls and (he laughs) looking up your ass. And touch your eyes with these damn things. (he laughs) And then, of course, after we went through there, you could go. But, uh, then you had to hang around, well, for two, three hours, I guess. Then the most of the people that was over there had to go to Pennsylvania Station. And I didn't know that. This guy here, he touched me, like I say, I didn't know a word of English. And he told me, "You stay here." And there was a big hall, and there was only two people besides me that had to go with the station, to go north here. Then this guy, he's going to see (?). He said to me, "Why don't you come up with us?" He says, I was down there all by myself. And I take my suitcase and I started to go, and this guy that was supposed to take, keep track of us, he started hollering like hell. "I told you to stay there!"

(he laughs) And I said to, I told him, I said something in German. Well, he could talk German. Then he was all right.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Tell him about how bad you felt when you saw those people that had to go right back.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. There was a lot of people that was, now, I can't understand. They give you a medical examination at home. You have to have a medical examination, otherwise you can't get papers to go in the first place. And I feel sorry for the people that was up, you saw them upstairs on the second floor, waiting for a boat to take them back to Italy or wherever they came from. Now, why in heck they let them come over here and then ship them back again. They probably lost their job and whatever money they had to, they probably had to borrow the money to get here, and that was sad. Then, funny thing is this. We still had to sit there from before noon. Well, we got a sandwich and a cup of coffee they gave us at noon time. Then this guy from Denmark that I knew, we traveled together, he says, "You know," there was a soda fountain up there at one end, and he says,

"You know, they got beer up there. And I've been trying to get some, but they won't sell it to me." So I was fresh, and I went up there and asked for a beer. "No," he says. I says, "I know you got it there." "Yeah, but that is only for the workers working over there." Well, I hang around the counter there, and now this guy who worked over there, he come and asked for a beer and he got one. I got it before he got it. (he laughs) And the guy, he says, "I (?)." He wanted to pay, get paid for it. I don't know what it was. I just got the American money, because I just had the exchange. I throw a nickel on the counter. Well, he wasn't satisfied with that. Well, the Norwegian, he gave the difference. But it didn't for me. (he laughs) I was fresh like anything.

SIGRIST: You just mentioned the money exchange. Let me ask you how you went about exchanging your money that way.

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, there was a place where you could exchange money where they had a guy that was taking the change and whatever different currency you had

you could get your money exchanged. So I brought it home, from home, they always say watch out they didn't cheat you. So I didn't think that I got enough money from, when I exchanged. I think it was six hundred crowns I had, and I got about a hundred, a little better than a hundred and fifty dollars. And he could tell on me that I wasn't satisfied. "Oh, you can see up there on the blackboard how much your money is worth," he says. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember where that was in the building, where the money exchange was?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, there was, like I say, when you first get in the doctors were there first when you walk in. And he was like a hall you went through, and here was the money exchange. And the big hall was further along.

SIGRIST: What did the big hall look like to you?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, just like, it had a lot of chairs. There was room for a couple of hundred people in there to sit in that big hall.

SIGRIST: It was crowded.

CHRISTIANSEN: No, it wasn't that crowded, because I know that when he told me to sit it was right down the other end. And all the other ones, they had gone to, have to go to Pennsylvania Station, they were up in another area. So, but like I say, I, this guy I had been friends with on the way over, and he says, "Why don't you take your suitcase and sneak up there? They're going to Pennsylvania." But I was going to Grand Central. I wasn't going to Pennsylvania Station. And I didn't know that. He was that he was trying to (?). But, like I say, that guy that was directing us or telling us where to go, he could speak German. When I said something to him in German then he said, "You wait here," he says, "and I'll have a young man take you up to the station after a while." And he got a hold of, I don't know. Probably knew a guy, I don't know. He didn't talk to me. That's why we couldn't understand what he got hold of a young fellow that they would take me up to the Grand Central, and you just have to give him a little, a little. So, I

don't know. I had some change, and I just gave it to him. And we got up to Grand Central, but he got me. Then we got on the, he showed me what train to get on. And I got, they put a sign on, you know, get off at Hartford, you know. I didn't want that goddamn sign on there, just like a prisoner of war or something. I took that off, and we were going along with the train. And every so often I said to the guy across the aisle, I says, "Hartford?" "No," he says. I keep, every time the train stopped I asked him if it was Hartford. "No, no." Finally we got there. (he laughs)

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: What did you think of when you were looking out the windows of the trains?

CHRISTIANSEN: I thought it was a desolate country. Being a farmer, you don't see nothing on the train except bush, goat. I tell you what the hell kind of country got (?). You couldn't get grow grass or nothing, growing out the side of the train. I tell you, it was a lousy, goddamn country to get to.

SIGRIST: What did you think about New York City when you, when you were going through New York to get to Grand Central? What were your impressions of the city?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, I was taken up, I didn't really see much of New York City. Because we had, like I say, we were probably taken by trolley car right up there, I don't know. I didn't see much of New York City.

SIGRIST: Now, was there somebody waiting for you in Hartford?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. This lady that I had, a friend of mine, like I say, that I wrote to that would take me in. She got notified when I was on the train, and she came to the railroad station. She got a neighbor to take me there, to take her up there. And she was there to meet me when I got off the train.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me about what those first couple of days in America were like? What was it like to be here? What problems did you have when you first got here?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. I, the only problem I had was that I wanted to get the job. I didn't want to hang around, see? I didn't want to live off her. I wanted to get a job right away, because, well, we paid her ten dollars a week for room and board in those days. But then a guy that had come over the same year earlier in the year than me, he worked out on a vegetable garden out in Wilson. And that way he had a fellow that worked together with him that had been over here longer. He had a car, and he brought him in. Because he also came to the same place where I come, and he come in for a visit on a Sunday afternoon. And then this guy, that had a truck. He says, "I know a guy up the street where he worked that's, his boarder just quit that same spring, and he is looking for a man. Well, I went out to there to work for him there.

SIGRIST: And what kind of work was that?

CHRISTIANSEN: Vegetable garden, raising vegetables.

SIGRIST: Now, were you living in Hartford, still? You were in a boarding house in Hartford?

CHRISTIANSEN: No, yeah, no. I wanted to stay there a week, like I say, the lady that I came to. And I had room and board out in Wilson where I went to work in the vegetable garden.

SIGRIST: Who were your coworkers? Were you working with other immigrant people?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. They were Danish people that I worked for, and of course they could tell Danish. Just the guy come over to this country in 1912, I think it was, and he had raised vegetables on his own vegetables market. There was a lot of them at that time, small market gardeners who went to market with him, to market every morning in Hartford.

SIGRIST: Did you work for this man for a long time?

CHRISTIANSEN: No, actually I didn't work for him more than the first of January. And then his brother-in-law took over the farming, and he only peddled, took a load into every morning, into Hartford. And, well, I didn't like it too well waiting for him, so in I think June I left there, and the next

fellow.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: When did you start going to night school to learn English?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, I went to night school the first winter I was here. They had a school down in Wilson, well, down to, foot of the hill, I guess. And, but I didn't, I didn't think that I learned enough. In the first place, she was an Italian girl, she was a schoolteacher in the daytime. But there was a couple of, I think they came from Canada. They were French-speaking people anyway. And she liked to use her French that she knew to talk to them. And, heck, for a couple of words that I learned going to school for two hours, I got damn little out of it. So I went to night school, I guess, for that first winter. Then I, the following winter I was in Hartford I went to night school up in High Street, night school.

SIGRIST: Is there a story or an anecdote of some sort about you learning English and maybe making a mistake? Yes, Mrs. Christiansen? (he laughs)

CHRISTIANSEN: I'm still making mistakes today.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: The episode when you wanted to go buy a pack of cigarettes, how aggravated you became.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. You know, you go to, especially a young, there were so many little stores, you know. But they usually had the young kids, you know, a high school kid, maybe, helping out in the store. And they, you came in and says, well, you want Camels. Well, maybe you didn't pronounce it the way it's supposed to be pronounced, and the guy make you a hard time out of it, you know.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: That upset you.

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, sure.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Where did you learn a lot of the English, sitting where in the afternoons you could learn English?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, I went to a, to a theater.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: A movie theater.

CHRISTIANSEN: Down, I lived near Lincoln Street with the (?) that I first came to. And I went to the movies

in a little theater down on Park Street. And you could go in there for ten cents in the afternoon and sit all night. (he laughs) You didn't have to go out. They had two movies for the afternoon and nights, and at that time there was all written down. There wasn't, the loudspeaker they only got on in '27, I think it was, or '28. And I didn't like it when I first, I liked it better when it was written down, because I could read it better than I could understand it.

SIGRIST: Was there something in America that was, you had never seen before? Was there anything here that you had never seen before?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. I wasn't, I wasn't impressed with it, but I didn't want to go back. (they laugh)

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Underwear.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. (he laughs) I never had, that's what, Mrs. Parker that I stayed with told Evelyn that she went down and bought me underwear because I didn't use underwear.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: In Denmark they didn't.

CHRISTIANSEN: We, well, I think in the cities they did, but not out in the country. But they had your shirts that went down that far, and you more or less pulled it in from, in the crotch, you know. But she . . .

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: He never had underwear until then.

CHRISTIANSEN: No. She went to a, down to Park Street and bought me some. But that was one piece.
(he laughs)

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Or a bath.

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, yeah. Well.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: He never had a bath in a tub.

CHRISTIANSEN: Nope.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Until he got to America.

CHRISTIANSEN: She told me to go and take a bath because they were going across the street, there was some birthday parties they were going to, so I was . . .

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: That was something, to sit in a bathtub.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you miss Denmark?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. Actually, like I say, I worked for, over in Denmark, for fifty crowns a month. The first month I was here I got sixty dollars and, heck, I went down to Hartford and I bought clothes for all I could for the sixty dollars. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you ever want to, I assume you were corresponding with your family in Denmark.

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, I did, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did any of them ever come to America?

CHRISTIANSEN: No. They never wanted to. I think that as long as he wanted to, she wouldn't like to.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: But they did come on a visit.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah, a few years ago.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. And . . .

CHRISTIANSEN: My older sister and my step-mother. See, my father, he married again while I was over here.

She was twenty-two years younger than him. So that was . . .

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: And she's still alive.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. She is up in the eighties, in the nineties.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Ninety-seven.

CHRISTIANSEN: But her and my older sister came over here on a visit. I don't know how many years ago.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Twenty-one years ago.

SIGRIST: Did they like America when they got here?

CHRISTIANSEN: Ah, they, not too well. We went down at the boat to pick them up, Evelyn and I. But they didn't, my step-mother, she could talk English. But she had lost her hearing in the flight. And they don't let them out. We could see, standing up on the second floor, we could see them running around down there, and we had a hell of a trouble to explain, they had a hell of a trouble to explain to anybody that we were there. I don't know how in hell, they finally came up.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: They flew over, honey.

CHRISTIANSEN: I know it, darling, but we couldn't go down where they were. We got off the boat, and they wouldn't let them in. I don't know why they wouldn't. They were mixed up there.

SIGRIST: How long did they stay in America on the visit?

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, they only stayed . . .

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Three weeks.

CHRISTIANSEN: Three weeks?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Uh-huh.

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

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh, I went back. I went back in, uh, '33, after seven years. But I told them to begin with, "I am not coming back before I am an American citizen." Either you can't be an American citizen before, well, they say five years it takes, but it took me six years before I ever got the citizenship. And, so I went back on a visit during the Depression.

SIGRIST: What had changed over in Denmark?

CHRISTIANSEN: Well, they were, my father, of course, he liked to have me come home on a visit. He made it out too glorious, but actually it wasn't. It was the Depression over there also, because I think we were worse off here than they were over there.

SIGRIST: It probably wasn't actually that much different for them. They lived a rather poor style of life.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Yes, they did.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you one final question, because I do need to get going. Was coming to this country the right thing for you to do in your life?

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. One way, I could, you know, where I come from, under Germany, there was a lot of big estates, big farm. One farm I worked on last year was there that was, they had, under German ownership they had thirty-five fellows working for them. But they then, the Danish went over to Denmark in 1920, and the Danes, they had to take over the estates from the Germans. But they

wanted, the hard, guys that worked on the farm, there was nothing else for the young fellows to do. They wanted them to have something of their own. And they pieced out all those big estates. And, like I say, the one I worked on the last year, or half a year I was there, they had at one time thirty-five guys working on that estate. But they took and pieced out, I think they got twelve acres of land each. And the United, the Danish government would build there, paid for building them up a farmstead, a house and a barn and so on. And they were only big enough, like I say, you could keep three or four cows and raise a few pigs. And that wasn't for me. I didn't want to get into a small thing like that. I wanted a big farm or none at all.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: And that's probably what would have happened to you if you had stayed there.

CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's interesting.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Though he did get a big farm in this country.

CHRISTIANSEN: In Bloomfield. I had a, oh, up to sixty cows there in Bloomfield, up in the woodland there.

SIGRIST: The little boy who didn't want to milk the cow. (they laugh)

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: You're right, Paul.

CHRISTIANSEN: "If you want to stay here, you've got to milk!"

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Christiansen, I want to thank you very much for letting me come out and pick your brain about your life. Mrs. Christiansen, I want to thank you. You and I should go into business together. (they laugh)

CHRISTIANSEN: I don't know if it was anything that, if that was satisfactory or anything.

SIGRIST: Well, we've talked for an hour-and-a-half, and the average interview runs about thirty-five minutes.

CHRISTIANSEN: Oh! (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Yes. We've done three interviews here. Anyway, this is Paul Sigrist, and I'm signing off with Mr. and Mrs. Christiansen in Bloomfield, Connecticut. And today is Monday, March 29, 1993.