

EI-284

GERDA MADSEN SUTTLE

BIRTHDATE: MAY 13, 1907

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/18/1993

RUNNING TIME: 57:22

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 9/1995

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED By: IRV SILBERG

DENMARK, 1914

AGE 7

SHIP: A WHITE STAR LINE SHIP

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

? DENMARK: SKIVE

? US: DES MOINES, IA; LAWRENCE, NY; LARGO, FL

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Largo, Florida, with Gerda Madsen Suttle, who came from Denmark in 1914 when she was seven years old. Today is April 18th, 1993. And I'm very happy to be here. I look forward to talking with you and hearing about your experience. I'm glad that your granddaughter wanted you to do this. Okay, why don't we begin by your saying your birth date, and where you were born.

SUTTLE: I was born May 13, 1907, in a little town by the name of Skive. I think it was spelled S-K-I-V-E. And...

LEVINE: Maybe you could tell me a little bit about the town, what you remember...

SUTTLE: I don't remember anything about the town at all. And I don't really remember that my father left us and came to America. And we were moved to, I was left with an aunt. And my mother went back to her folks in a small town called Steenber [PH]. And I was staying with an aunt in a small town called Nesta [ph]. I don't know how to spell it. And my - - another sister stayed with another aunt. And my mother had, my brother was born after my father my left for Den-- for America. And she was born, he was born at her parent's home, who lived in Steenber. My grandfather owned a, a grocery store, general store there.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

SUTTLE: Marie Madsen. And her maiden name was Marie Jensen.

LEVINE: J-E-N-S-E-N?

SUTTLE: E-N, yes.

LEVINE: And, and her mother and father. Do you remember their names?

SUTTLE: Her, her mother and father was, I don't remember my gra-- because we always called her Grandmother, and we called her Bedstemoder. That was the name for, Danish for grandmother. And I don't remember their first names.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you remember any experiences with your grandparents that you had as a little girl in Denmark?

SUTTLE: No, I don't remember that so much. I remember mostly with my aunt. And I know that once a month I was, drove with the mailman from their my--thei--their town down to my grandfather to spend a day with my mother and my other sisters. The rest of the time I lived with my aunt. And that's the time I remember the most.

LEVINE: What, what was the mailman like in Denmark? Do you remember?

SUTTLE: Oh, I remember a little jolly old man. And I, I think I was quite a talker, and we talked all the way down. I remember I used to have a little green velvet coat, with a little velvet hat on. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Was that a hand made coat, do you think?

SUTTLE: That I, that I don't know. (she laughs) My aunt gave me everything. She spoiled me rotten.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, your aunt, was that your mother's sister?

SUTTLE: That was my mother sister-in-law.

LEVINE: And what was her name.

SUTTLE: Marie.

LEVINE: And do you remember her last name?

SUTTLE: Jensen, because she was married to my mother's brother.

LEVINE: Brother, right. Okay. And describe the house that you remember of your aunt's.

SUTTLE: Oh. The house? Downstairs it was a grocer store, general store. They sold, you know, grocery and materials. There wasn't many dresses those days. Everybody made their own. And we lived upstairs. And I remember there was two bedrooms, a dining room and a kitchen. And my grandmother, my aunt and her husband, they ran the store. And then they had a maid upstairs who took care of all of me, and all the work upstairs.

LEVINE: They had no children?

SUTTLE: They had no children. And they wanted to keep me, for me to stay there. But my mother said that if I really wanted to stay, I could stay. But she would prefer that we all went with her to America. But now of course being a young child I had to see America. You know, it was, it sounded exciting, so I came.

LEVINE: Well, can you remember what you thought about America when you were a little girl in Denmark?

SUTTLE: Well, it was a great change, because, I remember coming to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's get to that, first let's talk about Denmark.

SUTTLE: Oh. We came to Des Moines, Iowa, where my father was staying with his sister.

LEVINE: Well, before we leaving talking about Denmark, do you remember, did you go to school there?

SUTTLE: No. I hadn't started, because they knew I was coming over here, and they didn't start till they were almost seven, or.

LEVINE: And when your father was in Denmark, before he came here, what did he do?

SUTTLE: Well, this is kind of a sad story. My father was a business man, but he was a poor business man. And he went bankrupt. Now, you know, in those days bankrupt was something different than today. So my grandfather gave him a ticket to America.

LEVINE: What kind of business did he...

SUTTLE: He had a grocery sto-- no, he had a, first he had dry clean, laundry. That was it. Yeah, he had a laundry, and that went bankrupt.

LEVINE: So his father?

SUTTLE: My mother's father.

LEVINE: Your mother's father.

SUTTLE: He was the one that had the money.

LEVINE: Everybody seems to have been in the grocery business.

SUTTLE: No, just my grandfather and his son, Jensen, my mother's brother. They were in the grocery business.

LEVINE: Do you remember what their stores were like? Can you describe...

SUTTLE: Yeah, it just a plain—we'd go in some of these country stores like up in, well, I don't, can't think of any. Do you remember President Carter, what's that town he lived in? Like those stores look like?

LEVINE: Like a general store.

SUTTLE: Yeah, general. Wooden floors and just the one counter, and candy in barrels and things like that.

LEVINE: Can you think of anything else about the store that was particularly Danish, different from here?

SUTTLE: Well, I don't think I've been in a store like that over here, because, well, maybe those old country stores was like that. You know, there was not much to 'em. There was just a bench and some groceries on, most everything was in barrels. That could be prunes, potatoes and those things. But otherwise, and my fa-- my grandfather's store was near the North Sea, and he used to get a lot of the fishermens in there should shop. In fact, we were, I remember when I was in Denmark, we used to walk down to the North Sea and bathe when with my aunts.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything that you used to like to get from the grocery store, that you...

SUTTLE: No, because I lived with my aunt at that time. They had groceries, and of course if I went down and wanted a piece of candy I got it, you know. That's, I guess I was just a normal child. I'd play with the kids on the streets, and...

LEVINE: Can you remember any games that you played in Denmark?

SUTTLE: No, not particularly. Not really particularly. I remember that I wanted a pair of wooden shoes. And first my grandmother said, my aunt said, "You can't have them because you're going to leave for America, and you don't use them over there." And I had on my elbow a lot of warts. Well, she was the kind of aunt that said no, and then the next morning I found what I wanted on my pillow. So there was my wooden shoes one morning. And I put them on, and I went out, and I fell, and I knocked all those warts off. (she laughs) And, I don't, I don't remember whether I took the wooden shoes with me to America or not. I can't remember that.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything else about, like, can you remember, did anyone tell you stories when you were little, either read to you, or tell you stories?

SUTTLE: Oh, my aunt did all that, my aunt.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of the stories that you liked when you were a little girl?

SUTTLE: Oh, no, there were Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales, and things like that. And then she, of course, I remember her saying to me, "Don't go to America, and stay with me." But, they loved me very much as

a child. I had known, but, you know, as a kid you were told that America was so wonderful, and everything was so different. And, so of course you had to see it, you know.

LEVINE: Well, did you see much of your mother? Do you, do you...

SUTTLE: In Denmark?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SUTTLE: Well, I saw her about, I forgot whether it was every other week, or twice a month. I remember having plainly getting on that little wagon with all the mail and sitting in front with the mailman. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So, did, so you didn't see much of your brothers and, brother and sisters, either.

SUTTLE: No, not too much.

LEVINE: Because they were in different places.

SUTTLE: Yeah. Well, yeah, my sister was a different place, and the others stayed with my mother. No, not too much. Not the last six months, see. And we were, my father was only gone six months. Until then we were all together. Then, of course, then we came over here, was all together. Just while he was over here.

LEVINE: Tell me about your aunt. What was she like?

SUTTLE: Oh, of course, I loved her dearly. And she spoiled me rotten. And she loved me just like she was your own, you know, because she had no one else, you know. And they had money, and I got what I wanted.

LEVINE: Do you remember any food that she cooked that you particularly liked?

SUTTLE: Well, I remember in Denmark they have a pudding. It is called gloeh (ph). It's made out of different kinds of fruits and everything. You just take the juice, you sweeten it and then you put a little corn starch in it, thicken it and then you eat it with cream poured over it. And that was as famous as pie is over here. And, of course, I got that because I love that different flavor. Rhubarb, strawberries, anything.

LEVINE: Would you spell it? G-...

SUTTLE: What, gloeh?

LEVINE: G-...

SUTTLE: Yeah, it starts with a G, but I think, G-, I don't know the "oeh." Gloeh. You see in Denmark there's two letters, two a's with a

line over is "oh." And my brother's name was "Olgi" (ph). Over here they called him "Age," because it was spelled A-A-G-E. But in Denmark there's a line over it, with the two, and it's pronounce "oh."

LEVINE: What was your mother name.

SUTTLE: Marie.

LEVINE: Marie. And your father?

SUTTLE: Wait a minute. Oh, oh. (she pauses) Now, I can't think of his first name. Now, I should know it. Of course, we always called him Dad.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, if you think of it you can say.

SUTTLE: Because I can look it up, but, (she pauses), I don't know.

LEVINE: Maybe if you, if you can think about your brother and sisters' names.

SUTTLE: Oh, I remember all them.

LEVINE: What were they?

SUTTLE: Well, my brother name was Aage, my older sister's name was Karen (pronounces it "Karen").

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

SUTTLE: K-A-R-E-N. Here they pronounce it "Kar-ehn." And my next older sister and Esther. They're all dead. I'm the last one left.

LEVINE: Well, were you closest to any particular sister or brother?

SUTTLE: Was, what?

LEVINE: Were you close...

SUTTLE: Well, I was close a lot to my, to a younger sister, Esther and Ellen. And they lived here in Florida. We got together a lot. But they both, one of them dropped dead, and the other one died from cancer. And that was, she was the youngest of the family. She was born in America

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about Denmark?

SUTTLE: Not particularly. I just remember that little town. There was a railroad that went through there. And just a little town with old houses and grocery store and. I think my uncle's was the only grocery store there. And I was good friend of the watch maker's daughter. They made and repaired watches. And that's about all. It was just a small town. I don't think there was more than a couple hundred people in there, if I remember right. Two or three hundred people at that time.

LEVINE: Yet there was a train that went...

SUTTLE: There was a train that went right through the town.

LEVINE: And then there was the grocery store, the watch maker's shop, and what other kinds of stores, or what else was there in the town?

SUTTLE: I don't think there was much of anything else. Just homes. In that grocery store you could buy anything you wanted. Clothes, food, shoes, anything that you needed. You've got to remember those days people made their own clothes and things. I think he was the only grocery store there, my uncle's.

LEVINE: What was your uncle's name?

SUTTLE: Chris.

LEVINE: Chris. And now he was your mother's brother.

SUTTLE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Right. Do you remember any experiences with him?'

SUTTLE: No. He's kind of a quiet man. It was my aunt, he loved me, but it was my aunt that was always fussing with me. He always had the store, you know.

LEVINE: Was there anything about their home where you were living that was different in any way from...

SUTTLE: No. The grocery store was something like my grandfather's. I said there was, it was a two-room grocery store. One was all the groceries and candies and those things, and the other room was materials and dry goods, you might say. Needles and thread and whatever they needed. And up, we lived upstairs. As I said, she had a bedroom, two bedrooms, and a dining room and a kitchen. Just, a nice home, but just plain, too.

LEVINE: What did your aunt cook on? What kind of a stove did she have in the kitchen?

SUTTLE: I don't remember that. I suppose what they used in those days. I don't remember. I don't know. I really don't what they had. I don't think they had gas or electric those days. I don't remember.

LEVINE: Did you...

SUTTLE: We had lamps.

LEVINE: Lamps.

SUTTLE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Electric or...

SUTTLE: No, they were just plain lamps that they, you know.

LEVINE: Like kerosene?

SUTTLE: Yeah. Like kerosene lamps.

LEVINE: How about water? What, what did, what was the water situation?

SUTTLE: I think they had a little pump in the sink that pumped water. You know, I didn't pay much attention to that as a child. You know, you don't, and she had a maid that did all the housecleaning and all the work. All I did was take care of myself and play. I had a, I had a good life in Denmark the six months I was there, I remember that.

LEVINE: And that was the last six months before you left for America.

SUTTLE: That's, yeah. Yeah the others I don't remember too much.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything of your father while you were in Denmark?

SUTTLE: No. I don't remember too much about him. I mean he was home until he left. I don't think I thought much about it at that time. I really didn't know the reason he left, you know.

LEVINE: So, your father went, your grandfather gave your father a ticket. He went to America...

SUTTLE: To his sister in Des Moines, Iowa.

LEVINE: And what did your father do when he got to...

SUTTLE: He got a farm. He bought, he, first he rented a farm. A pig farm. He rented. Because, while the people were also Danish, while they took a trip to Denmark. And when they came back we moved over to, into New York. We came from Chicago to New York, and my father bought a little place and he worked, oh, on different jobs. But then later on he bought a farm, oh, about twenty or thirty miles from that place.

LEVINE: Okay. So, when you were still in Denmark and your father came here, did he go to Iowa, or did he go to...

SUTTLE: He go to Des Moines, Iowa, to his sister.

LEVINE: His sister. And then, he stayed there for the six months?

SUTTLE: Yeah, he stayed there for the six months until he earned a different job and got money enough to send for his family.

LEVINE: I see. Was he farming? Is that how he was earning?

SUTTLE: I don't remember what he did, but that's what he did when we came over here.

LEVINE: Okay. So then, he, did he send you tickets,? Or did he send you, he just sent money, and...

SUTTLE: I don't -- that I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SUTTLE: But I know that he sent the money to order the tickets to get us over.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that your mother packed to take with her to America?

SUTTLE: That vase was, was the gift to my mother when I was born.

LEVINE: From whom?

SUTTLE: From Denmark.

LEVINE: Do you remember who gave it to her?

SUTTLE: No, I don't remember who gave it to her. So I'm very, it has a few cracks in it, but it's probably quite valuable today, I imagine. You know.

LEVINE: Maybe you could describe it for the tape, so somebody listening could, could say what it looks like.

SUTTLE: Well, it's an orange vase with sort of small green leaves, and the base of it is sort of olive green. And there's a blue flower. I don't know what the flower is. It's sort of blue with a white center. It's a really, not a vase. What would you call it?

LEVINE: It's kind of an ornamental plant pot.

SUTTLE: Yeah. I think that's what you'd call it.

LEVINE: It's about maybe even a foot across in diameter at the top.

SUTTLE: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you've had that with you all these years.

SUTTLE: yeah. Well, my mother had it. And then when she died, she always had it in her living room, when she died I got that. That was mine, and things like that.

LEVINE: Can you think of anything else your mother brought? Did she bring a lot of things?

SUTTLE: I don't, I really don't remember. Of course she brought our clothes. And we had beautiful clothes that was hand made all by her sister. She had four or five sisters, too. And they all sewed for us. Beautiful clothes we had, you know.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of the clothes, maybe what you wore when you came...

SUTTLE: Yeah, I remember I had on a little blue sailor dress with a white collar. And patent leather shoes. And I remember this green coat I had. Green velvet coat. I remember just as plain as, it had little buttons in the front, a little collar, and a little green turban, you know, like.

LEVINE: So, then, did you bring that to America, too?

SUTTLE: Yeah. And then my aunt had made me a dress of -- a blue velvet dress. Not, a blue, not a velvet, just a blue dress. I forgot the material. But it was all embroidered on top with yellow, it was like yellow little flowers, and then the edge was scallop in yellow. She had done that all hand work herself. And I wore that a lot. In fact I have a picture of that one -- my aunt--here, somewhere.

LEVINE: Oh, good. Okay. Well, so you, did you bring any doll or anything that you had...

SUTTLE: No. No, I don't remember. No.

LEVINE: Do you remember your farewells before you actually left.

SUTTLE: Not really. Just a little crying and hugging and tears, and that's all.

LEVINE: Did you think you would be coming back, or did you think you were...

SUTTLE: I don't what I thought. I was too excited. We were going to come to America, and it was something new experience, and.

LEVINE: So, what happened? You left your aunt's house. Tell me about what you...

SUTTLE: Well I was sent down to my grandmother's house where my mother was, and stayed there a day or two, and then they took us to the boat.

LEVINE: How did you go to the boat? By what trans...

SUTTLE: By horse and wagon.

LEVINE: Horse and wagon. How, was it a long way to the boat?

SUTTLE: I think we took a train first, and then to the boat, if I remember right.

LEVINE: So, did you, you left...

SUTTLE: Because the boat is down in Copenhagen, you know.

LEVINE: Did you stay in Copenhagen?

SUTTLE: I don't think we did.

LEVINE: Do you remember any examinations before you left?

SUTTLE: No. I don't remember that.

LEVINE: And the name of the boat?

SUTTLE: I think it was the White Star line.

LEVINE: And how about the passengers?

SUTTLE: Well, they were all seasick as I, far as I can remember. We all got seasick. And a lot of them were seasick. We were on the third class, which was the poor class. And I remember, oh, we could walk up, but, and I would look in on the rich class with all their fruits and all their stuff. And I was jealous and envious to think that we couldn't have none of that stuff, because we had, oh, good food, but plain food. There was very much class distinction on the boat.

LEVINE: What...

SUTTLE: I don't even think that the ones on the first class had to go Ellis Island, if I remember right.

LEVINE: Right. You're right. That's correct.

SUTTLE: And it was just one and the third, maybe the second was tourist or something. I don't know, but we were down in the bottom.

LEVINE: Was there anything besides the food that showed this class distinction on this ship?

SUTTLE: Well, we really were not allowed up there, so I don't know. To just, you know, as a kid you sneak around. You try to get up the stairs, and up. And I was one of these I had to see everything, so every chance I could get and sneak away from the officer, up I ran. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So, were you actually in the hold of the ship, in the kind of dormitory?

SUTTLE: Oh, no, we had a room.

LEVINE: You had a room.

SUTTLE: With four bunk beds. Small, but there was bunk beds on top and bottom.

LEVINE: So did your three sisters, brother and mother...

SUTTLE: My brother was only three months old, so.

LEVINE: Oh. You were all in the same room.

SUTTLE: All in the same room.

LEVINE: And do you remember the food that you were served?

SUTTLE: No, I don't really remember the food. I think that they had a lot of fish, I remember. But we liked fish, so. It was just ordinary food.

LEVINE: Was there anything else about the boat, experience on the boat that you recall?

SUTTLE: No. No, I don't recall anything more than that.

LEVINE: Was there any music or dancing aboard ship, anything...

SUTTLE: Well, not on third class. I don't know about the other.

LEVINE: Well, was that, was that an eye opener for you? I mean to, this was really your first time out of a small town.

SUTTLE: Well, in a way it was, but my sisters were sick. One, first one and then the other, then my mother got sick, and trying not to, and we had to help. So it was kind of miserable trip in a way, because everybody was sick, and everybody, and the boat was sick.

LEVINE: Do you remember the boat coming into New York Harbor?

SUTTLE: I think so. I remember we saw the Statue of Liberty, and ran, and then my mother pushed us all together. It must have been hard on my mother, because she had us to watch. And at that time there was so much of this white slavery. And she was so afraid that my oldest sister, somebody might grab her. And she kept an eye on a, two two, and then herself with the baby in her arm, and we marched right in front of her. She was strict with us, that we had to do so and so. So, it was mostly staying with the family and orders to do so and so, you know. And then we came to Ellis Island, and that was...

LEVINE: Could you describe what, what that was like from your...

SUTTLE: Well, to me it was a great, big room with different booths. See, there was different booths, and benches. Surely nothing fancy. No chairs. Just plain benches. And a lot of people sat on the floor with their bundles, and talked all different kind of language. And then they took in, I think we were almost there a day or so, because we were waiting for a train to go to Chicago. And, but my mother's brother met

us at Ellis Island. He lived in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. And I don't, he didn't stay with us too long, maybe not even a day. But he came to meet us there. I think he came to help us to get on the train to Chicago. But we were there almost a day, if not longer. And I remember that, there was a place we could go and eat, and they served corn, we wouldn't eat corn. And they had pie. We'd never seen pie, and, so we didn't like the food very well.

LEVINE: What about the people's baggage? Do you remember...

SUTTLE: Yeah, I remember. They had great, big bundles. And one lady had, there was hardly no place to sit. And you know, as a kid it's hard to sit a whole day and do nothing, especially with me. And so, I got up and I sat on this one lady's big bundle. And she came over and shook her hands (she gestures), and for me to get, and I got up, and as I did I kicked the bundle. I was so mad -- I broke it. (she laughs) And, oh, a lot of baloney and stuff. I thought she would have killed me, but if it hadn't been for my mother. She saved me. But then my mother gave it to me afterwards for not behaving myself. (she laughs) So, she had, she said she had to most trouble with me because I had to go and see everything.

LEVINE: So you were the child that was the one that was the inquisitive one...

SUTTLE: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and hard to control.

SUTTLE: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SUTTLE: Yeah. We always -- I tell you, you're brought up in Europe, you're brought up strict and brought to mind. If your parents tell you to do so and so, you do it. Not like today. The parents let it go, and say you're going to be punished later, but, we got one -- one of 'm that was slap on the behind.

LEVINE: Was that, what other kind of punishment? Was it usually a slap that you got for a punishment?

SUTTLE: Yeah. Yeah. On the behind. Never in the face or anything. Make us straighten ourself out. Well, I think they should have some of that today.

LEVINE: So you were probably getting more slaps than your sisters?

SUTTLE: Well, I think I did on the trip anyway. (she laughs)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Was there anything else, anything about the examination that you recall?

SUTTLE: No, I don't remember myself. They just let -- I'm fine. But I remember that I had two sisters who was both born hard of hearing. My oldest sister. But in Denmark that time we were quite well off. And she had a private tutor, and she could read and write English before we came over here. She was about thirteen, fourteen. And she, so she could write a lot of things. But they were very concerned what her hearing came from, and whether there was any disease, or anything like that. And my mother was worried stiff. But she was just born that way, you know. And the other one, Ellen, she was about, she must have been about four or five. And, I don't know, she couldn't hear either. But I don't remember they did too much about her. I think Karen, Ellen was the one my mother was worried about. But they was just born deaf. Why, I don't know.

LEVINE: So they questioned your mother about that?

SUTTLE: Yeah. Yeah. And she was worried that maybe they'd be sent back or something, you know. But everything went, turned out all right in the end. You know. It was account of their deafness, you know. But they came over here. And the oldest one, she lived to be eighty-nine years old. And she lived in California. And she was, read everything. She was a well reader. She was well educated. Although she didn't get that much school, she educated herself because she could read. But the other one, she, we were poor that time here in America. And she didn't have the opportunity that my oldest sister did. So she was always kind of back, in school they didn't bother too much with her. So we helped her as a child. And she grew up, and got married and had two wonderful children. And they all got beautiful jobs today.

LEVINE: So, so for your family, actually economically anyway, things were worse here than they had...

SUTTLE: When we were children, they were worse. But as we got older and got older in America, we were all well off.

LEVINE: So, what happened now? Your uncle, do you remember his name, the uncle who met you?

SUTTLE: I think it was Jens. I'm not just sure. The one that I lived with?

LEVINE: The one that met you at Ellis Island.

SUTTLE: Yeah, I think his name was Jens.

LEVINE: Y-E...

SUTTLE: J-E-N.

LEVINE: J-E-N.

SUTTLE: I think so, but I'm not sure.

LEVINE: Okay. So then he met you and he got you to the train.

SUTTLE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Then do you remember, do you remember leaving Ellis Island, getting to the train...

SUTTLE: Well, I remember we're in the train, and then we went to Chicago, and then my father met us there.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the train ride?

SUTTLE: Not particularly.

LEVINE: And what was it like seeing your father.

SUTTLE: Oh, I think we were all quite excited. He loved us all, and he was good to us, you know, and. So, we were quite excited to see him.

LEVINE: So then you met your...

SUTTLE: Then we, then we all, from there, he took us to his sister's place first in Chicago.

LEVINE: I see. So, actually, you had several relatives here.

SUTTLE: Well he just had his sister, who had her husband and three or four children. And in fact, one of her, my brother's, my father's sister's son, he's the one that first discovered the Eskimo Pie. Remember when the Eskimo Pie first came out, they put the chocolate over? He was in that, and he made millions on it. That was my uncle, or my cousin. Yeah. My cousin.

LEVINE: So, you stayed with your father's sister...

SUTTLE: For a while, until we got, then we got a little house of our own.

LEVINE: In Chicago?

SUTTLE: No, in Des Moines, Iowa.

LEVINE: So, you stayed in Chicago a few nights, or you went right on to Iowa.

SUTTLE: I don't remember. I think we went right on -- on the next train to Des Moines, Iowa.

LEVINE: Can you, do you remember what struck you about Iowa, or about where, your new surroundings?

SUTTLE: Oh, not really. I, they were -- you see, I had a lot of cousins, and they had, my father's sister had, I think it was three,

three girls, or four girls and two boys. And they were our - our age. And, of course, we had a lot of fun with them over there, you know, playing, and.

LEVINE: Did you know any English when you came?

SUTTLE: I didn't know a word.

LEVINE: Was your sister able to sort of help as you, for you to get to your destination?

SUTTLE: Well, she helped my mother because she could speak it. But I guess, you know, when teach in school it's not pronounced the same way, see. They had a little hard time to understand her, but then she could write it. See, she knew English quite well. She'd taken it in school. And she could read Danish, too, you know. She had been to school.

LEVINE: Do you remember starting school?

SUTTLE: Over here? Yeah, I remember. The kids weren't very nice.

LEVINE: What did they do?

SUTTLE: Oh, they made fun of us. And we couldn't talk to them. And I remember one time in school -- it was horrid. I guess I wish I had stayed in Denmark. And I had a lot of paper on my desk, and the teacher told me to go and put it in the waste paper basket. I did not know what a waste paper basket was. Boy, she yanked me out of that seat, and she showed me what a waste paper basket was. And, of course, all the kids laughed. It was very embarrassing to me, you know. In fact I don't, I think it was cruel. But that's what we went through that time, then we learned English, and.

LEVINE: Do you remember learning English? How...

SUTTLE: Well, we learned it in school. And then the trouble is, when we came back, my father used to say, you have to speak English in school, at home, so that your mother could learn it. But we couldn't make her understand so then we'd switch right back to Danish again. But she learned, she spoke brokenly, even to the day she died. You know. And then she went to Denmark years later on a trip. And her sister, her mother had died, but she saw her father again. And her sister said to her, "You know, Marie," she said, "You can't speak English, you can't speak Danish anymore." It was kind of mixed (she laughs). So, but the rest of us, of course, we went to school, and we learned and we were educated, and, I was, I became an R.N.

LEVINE: Well, in Des Moines, Iowa, were there other Danish people?

SUTTLE: Oh, we lived all among Danish people. That was the sad part for my mother sake, you know. And then when we came to New York, we bought the farm, and there was all Danish people all around us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, how long did you stay in Iowa?

SUTTLE: About a year, I think. A year, year and a half.

LEVINE: And your father was working on a farm?

SUTTLE: Yeah. He's rented this farm.

LEVINE: What kind of farm?

SUTTLE: It was a pig farm.

LEVINE: Did you have duties or chores that you had to do?

SUTTLE: Yes. We had to kind of go out and help and feed the pigs. There were thousands of pigs, I think it was. But this other couple, they had taken a trip to Denmark. That's why we were renting, take care of it, you know, and. And then we had to go out and pick berries and things. And my mother used to can them, and.

LEVINE: Was the farm where you were in Iowa, was that like the area that you had lived in in Denmark? Was it similar?

SUTTLE: Oh, no, no. That was out in the country. Denmark we lived in the city. Nothing, nothing like it.

LEVINE: And so, the couple came back from Denmark...

SUTTLE: Denmark. And then my uncle, my father's sister's husband had bought a place out here, east, in a town called Lawrence, which is in New York State up in the Catskills.

LEVINE: Lawrence?

SUTTLE: Yeah, Lawrence, New York. And so he told my father that he go, and take him and his family, and go and live with him until they got ready to come out. They wanted to come out west and come east. So we did. So we went there and then my father got odd jobs. But then in the meantime we had to look for a place, because when they came we had to have our own place. And then we went to a, he bought a farm. I don't where he got the money. Maybe from work, and things like, I don't think there was much down payment on it. We bought a big farm, four hundred acre farm. And we, we were brought there. And we really were brought up on that farm. And we had to work on that farm.

LEVINE: Was this a pig farm also?

SUTTLE: No. That was a dairy farm.

LEVINE: Dairy farm.

SUTTLE: But they didn't get mu-- farmers were poor in those days, because farmers didn't get much for their milk and their products and everything. I remember we used to get a cent and a half for milk, and

the feed was high, and. So it was, and we had to go and get the cows, and, and help. It was, we worked hard as children.

LEVINE: Can you...

SUTTLE: But we had a good home, you know what I mean? We had a family home.

LEVINE: Can you remember kind of a typical day? Like, what, school day, what you would have to do as far as the farm work...

SUTTLE: Well, I remember that we had to go, we went to school. We'd come back, we had to milk the cows, and get the cows in the summertime.

LEVINE: And did all your, all your sisters...

SUTTLE: All of us, we all had to...

LEVINE: ...and your brothers all helped?

SUTTLE: ...all those who were able had to help. He should have bought a farm with boys instead of girls. We were all girls, except my brother. And he was, he was a baby, and he had asthma. He was not well. As he got older he went to California. He felt very well there. And he got married out there, and. Of course he died when he was about fifty-two years old from a heart attack. I think it was from the asthma, but he didn't have much asthma out there. He came back east a couple of times. And when he hit New York, the east coast here -- he got asthma again. But out there he was pretty well, but, you see that damage your heart someways. But he got married and left three daughters. And they're all well off.

LEVINE: What was school like in New York, when you went there in Lawrence?

SUTTLE: Well, the first school, I got - forgot to tell, my cousin, the oldest was teaching. She was a teacher where we went to. And I don't remember too much about that as far as I'm concerned. But I remember my older sister, she hated it, because she had to more or less start from the first grade, you know, to get in. And she didn't like that because she felt that she knew English pretty well, but that's where she put her. But then we went there, you know, just for the winter and the spring, and when school was out we all moved out east. And that's where I remember the kids used to laugh at us, and it happened with the waste paper basket and things like that. (she laughs) But.

LEVINE: So, there were a lot of Danish people in the community at large?

SUTTLE: Yes. A lot. We went to a Danish church.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you a religious family?

SUTTLE: Hmm?

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

SUTTLE: We went to church every Sunday. Brought up that way.

LEVINE: And what church?

SUTTLE: Lutheran.

LEVINE: So, you were, you went to the Lutheran church in Denmark, and then you went to the Lutheran church in...

SUTTLE: Yeah, I guess so. Yeah. Went to the Lutheran church here. We were all baptized in the Lutheran church.

LEVINE: Then, how did you meet your husband?

SUTTLE: Well, I was, at that time I was a county nurse.

LEVINE: Well, you went through high school, did you?

SUTTLE: Yeah, I went through high school. And then I went in training in New York City at Lenox Hill Hospital. I have my picture right up there. (she indicates a photograph) And I had a three year course. And I became a, passed the state board, and I became an R.N. And then I got, I've -- I did some private duty and, and then I got a job up near home as a county nurse. Where you visit the schools. You know, today they have the school nurse. But those days they didn't. And one of the teachers there introduced me to my husband. Went out on a blind date, you might say.

LEVINE: Was he also Danish?

SUTTLE: No, he's American. He was a chiropractor. And he had his own business. And we went together about a year or so and then we got married.

LEVINE: Did your family want you to married a Danish man?

SUTTLE: No, they like my husband very much. They didn't, they didn't say I, I don't think they could expect that, you know. Because by that time we were all speaking English, and had been educated over here, that Denmark was in the background.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father have the attitude of your becoming American, or did they want you to hold to some of your Danish ways?

SUTTLE: Oh, no. No. They were, we lived in America, we had to do, we had to be Americans. Very much. We were American. Became American citizens, and this was our country now.

LEVINE: Your mother and father became citizens as well?

SUTTLE: Oh, yes. Definitely.

LEVINE: Were there any customs that they held on to that you remember in this country?

SUTTLE: Well, I think Christmas. I don't remember any other of the, no Danish, none of us celebrated no Danish th-- but we had a certain Christmas which they don't have over here. On Christmas Eve that was our Christmas. Christmas Eve, we would have our big dinner, and we would never trim the tree until Christmas Eve. And I remember there we had a living room and dining room. There were sort of sliding doors. And after dinner the door was closed and my father and my brother, who was about -- maybe in his teens at that time (unintelligible), they would trim the tree while we did the dishes and put the food away and everything.

And we had these candles. We did not have electricity. We had candles. Can you imagine? There was always a pail of water nearby, but nothing ever happened. And then after we got, he got through, he was through by the time we was through with the dishes, because everything was there to put on. Then he'd open the door. It was beautiful to see that tree. And then we would all take our hands, and we would walk around, sing Christmas hymns around the tree. And then my father would sit down and read a short piece in the Bible, not too long. Then we would have our gift. We each had one gift for everybody. Most of it was just made, you know, hand made.

We didn't have much money. But we made maybe an apron, or whatever we could make, you know, was made. And we each had a game. And my mother and father usually bought games for us at the ten cent store. You remember you could buy five and ten? That's where we bought them a present, from the five and ten cent store. So we would get about seven, eight gifts a piece, you know. And we would be busy with our gifts, and play our games. And then after a while, my mother would go out and make hot chocolate and she made a lot of Danish pastries. And Danish cookies. And we would have them. Then, of course, it got late and we had to go to bed and get up in the morning and milk the cows.

But I, see, they don't celebrate Christmas like that today. But here, with my own daughter and them, we come and we have Christmas dinner Christmas Eve. And we have all our presents Christmas Eve. We keep that up, but see, there are so few, we don't have, dance around and sing Christmas hymns like we did. But they come - they come home every Christmas Eve. And all my sisters, we all carry that out. And then on Christmas day, after I got married -- on Christmas day we used to go to his folks, my husband's folks, because they celebrated on Christmas day. But up home, when I was a child, we played with our toys, and had the leftovers, and it was a nice day. But everything as far as Christmas, you know, was, you see, they didn't do that over here. That's one thing we've always kept up.

LEVINE: Right. Okay, when you look back on your life now, [pause] do you think your coming to this country, starting out in Denmark, do you think that had a big influence on you throughout your life?

SUTTLE: My life would have been altogether different, because my aunt and them, they were considered well off. Here we were poor, had to work, and hand down clothes. You know, and I mean I got my sister, there I would have had everything new. I don't know what I would have been in Denmark. Here I worked and went in train--. I worked hard. We all worked hard as a child. And, of course, then you got married. In those days, I remember I worked for five dollars for eight hours, and seven dollars for twelve hours. That's not even a dollar an hour. But, of course, things were cheaper. And I remember when I first got married my husband gave me one dollar a day for groceries. And we had people in for dinner and everything, and I had plenty. Today you can't, a hundred dollar bill is nothing.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name.

SUTTLE: Len. He died about six years ago.

LEVINE: And you have one child.

SUTTLE: Yeah. I have one child, Joan.

LEVINE: And what's her last name?

SUTTLE: Higley.

LEVINE: H-I-G...

SUTTLE: G-L-E-Y.

LEVINE: And grandchildren?

SUTTLE: Jennifer. She's in the middle over there. (she indicates a photograph) And she was just eighteen, and she'll be graduating from high school, now, I think the first of June which I plan to go down to.

LEVINE: And she's the one that got this form...

SUTTLE: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and wanted you to be interviewed. Great. Well, how are you enjoying this part of your life?

SUTTLE: This part now?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SUTTLE: Well, I have friends, but I'm lonesome. I miss my family. Miss my husband. You have to live with it. And I'm not too well, myself. I've got a heart condition. And I keep my own house. I try to keep it clean. And...

LEVINE: It's very clean.

SUTTLE: And, but I can only do a little bit at a time. After all I'm going to be eighty-six next month.

LEVINE: Do you find yourself reflecting on your life.

SUTTLE: Yes. I think a lot, especially when I go to bed, I think of my childhood and my sisters and all them, and many time I cry myself to sleep. But I'm not one to go out and sit and cry and make other people miserable. I try to, what's in store for me has to be. You know. My greatest worry I think is that I hope I don't lay long and have to be a burden. My husband laid for two years. And I had a hospitable bed and I took care of him. I said I would not put him in a nursing home. And that really, that's when I got these tachycardia here, and it really put me in hell. But I would do it again. You know. And I think now when you're all alone you just want to, my daughter wants me to come down there, but I don't want to go and live with my children, not as long as I am able to take care of myself. You know. I play cards and bingo. I'm glad I live here in a mobile home. Because up here, they -- they're like a big family in a way. But though we have so many new people and they're all from Canada, and I really don't know them. There's very few of them left. We used to, last night I had three ladies over here and we played cards till quarter of twelve.

LEVINE: Wow.

SUTTLE: And I served, we went up on the corner for dinner, and then we had, I had made a blueberry pie and ice cream. We had that late and we kept on playing. And then, the next week, Tuesday, I am going down to the senior citizen club, I don't have a car anymore because I don't dare to drive. My children forbid me to drive because of my heart condition, because I get these spells and I almost black out, and something could happen. But anyway, she comes and picks me up. She lives right over on Imperial Palm, right across. She lives on Keen Road right across the street. And we go to the senior citizen club and we play canasta. That's on Tuesday, in the evening I go up here to the hall and play Bingo.

And then on this coming Wednesday I'm going over to another lady that lives in that park. And I might take a taxi. It's only two or three dollars. I hate to have them come and pick me up all the time. You know how you feel. And she says, "We'll pick you up." And I said, "No, Goldie." I says, "I'll take a taxi." And she, "Then we'll fight about that Tuesday," so that's the way it was left. They can take me home. One lady has a car. But I don't like to be a burden, you know. And we're going to this ladies house and play canasta. And then on, well, last week, Wednesday here we had, once a month we have pot luck for everybody in the park to go to. And I went last week. And every Friday night we play cards up in the hall. We play pinochle, you know. So, you have things here in the park that you can do, you know.

LEVINE: What are you most proud of or most grateful for in your life?

SUTTLE: Well, I think what I'm most grateful for, I think God's been good to us all. We have all made out well. We're not rich, but we're

comfortable. Let's put it that way. We're comfortable. And it wasn't like a childhood we didn't know where the next meal was coming from. And we've all done well, all our children, my children, my daughter's a school teacher, and she teaches the extra brilliant children. And my son-in-law was in the service. He was a lieutenant colonel, and then at twenty years he left and he became a lawyer. And he, law, and he's in business with himself, and, him and another man have a partnership, and business own, and they got a big business. And they got a beautiful home down in Orlando. And he's just as good to me as she is. And the grandmo, they come, they're coming, my birthday is the thirteenth, but they'll come up the weekend before because they both work. And I says, "Oh, Joanie, you don't have to come, because you're coming the end of the month to pick me up to go to," "Oh, no, we're coming. We're coming." I still got the flowers they sent me for Easter. They're kind of dying down off, but, they are. And he is just as good, and, so I'm, we're very lucky that way.

And my sisters, too, and their children. They're just so lucky. And on my eighty-fifth birthday my sisters are all dead and gone. But their children from New York and South Carolina came down here for a surprise party to my eighty-fifth birthday. My daughter and her husband, my granddaughter, they came. And my daughter said to me, "Now, Mom, I want you to go and put on the nicest dress you've got. We're going to a real swell place for dinner to take you out." And I says, "Okay." And she says, "In fact," she says, "They are so they even come and pick their customers up." I said, "Well, gee, that's something." So I didn't say anymore. So we wait. And finally this big, white limousine drives right up here in the front, where your car is right there. (she indicates) And I thought to myself, well, that's an awful big limousine for just the four of us. And when the door opened out walked my nieces and nephews from South Carolina and New York. And there was about twelve of us all together. Can you imagine them coming down here and staying in that hotel for their old aunt's birthday? That's...

LEVINE: They must really care for you.

SUTTLE: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Okay. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to say before we close?

SUTTLE: Well, I think American, coming to America, I don't know what it would have been if it stayed in Denmark. But coming to America it was hard, we were poor, but there was love in the family. And I think America has been good to all of us. There has been none of us gone wrong, or, you can say you've been shamed, there was no crime and no anything like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SUTTLE: Because we were brought up strict. We had to obey.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much. A most interesting talk. I've been talking with Gerda Suttle. And we're here

in her home in Largo, Florida. And it's April 18th, 1993, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.  
EI-284/SUTTLE