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CHRIS MADSEN

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LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service,
and I'm here today at the home of Chris Madsen who
came from Denmark in 1924 when he was eighteen years
old. Today is April 22, 1993, and I'm here at
Mr. Madsen's home in St. Petersburg . . .

MADSEN: (he whispers) Penellis Park.

LEVINE: Penellis Park, Florida. Well, I'm delighted to be
here. I'm looking forward to hearing your story.

MADSEN: I'm glad to have you here.

LEVINE: Thank you. Okay. Why don't we start at the beginning, if you'll give me your birth date and the place where you were born.

MADSEN: Okay. I was born in Denmark, September 25, 1905, one of five children. I'm the second oldest. And in Denmark, when you go to school, you go for seven years. You start when you're seven, and then you're done when you're fourteen. And then you get Confirmed in the Danish Lutheran church. And then most Danes learn a trade by that time, but I never had that chance because my dad decided to go farming. And so I had to go along with it. I was about fourteen, fifteen at the time, and I had to help him with the building. We had to build the house on the, he bought some land, and then we had to build a house like you have on a farm in Denmark. So I hauled all the material, and after two years, my dad, he went broke, because it was right after the war and everything he bought he paid twice what it was worth, so he went back to the city and started working again, and I was left on a farm in Denmark.

LEVINE: Where in Denmark was that farm?

MADSEN: That was near Aalborg.

LEVINE: Could you spell Aalborg?

MADSEN: Yeah. That's A-A-L-B-O-R-G. And so I was left on a farm there, and then after two years I asked my dad who had four brothers and a sister out in Iowa, if he would write to my uncle, if he'd give me a hand or send me a ticket, I'd like to come to the United States.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you knew about the United States at that time?

MADSEN: Only that my dad had four brothers and a sister, and they were all in Iowa, farmers, and that's all I knew. Even in school in Denmark you didn't learn English, so all I knew was Danish, so it was pretty rough at first. But then the season, that is, you hire out in Denmark from the first of November to the first of November, so the second year, the first of November, I decided I won't, my dad told me that he had a ticket for me, I had a chance to go to the United States. So I went back to the city and I worked in a factory for a while, and then . . .

LEVINE: Was this Copenhagen?

MADSEN: No. This was, again, Aalborg. Copenhagen, that's the capital of Denmark, that's on an island. We come from the main part of Denmark, that's Jutland. And, let me see, now, where was I? Okay, yes.

LEVINE: Before we talk about you coming to the United States, just tell me a little bit. What, first of all, what was your mother's name?

MADSEN: Jensine.

LEVINE: Jensine.

MADSEN: The old names always S-I-N-E, but you put Jens-sine. We always had the old names. My dad's name was Anton, A-N-T-O-N.

LEVINE: And Jensine is J-E-N-S-I-N-A?

MADSEN: N-E, yeah, Jensine, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's maiden name?

MADSEN: Jacobsen.

LEVINE: Jacobsen. And your brothers and sisters?

MADSEN: Well, the oldest one was Peter, and then I'm second. And then my sister was Helga, and then the next one was Viggo, and the youngest one . . .

LEVINE: How do you spell that one?

MADSEN: V-I-G-G-O. And then the oldest one was Harry. And he's, Harry's the only one that's alive. There's only two of us left.

LEVINE: And he was the baby?

MADSEN: I remember when he was born, yes.

LEVINE: Was he born at home?

MADSEN: Oh, it was all by midwife.

LEVINE: Can you tell about that time, what your remember?

MADSEN: Well, we lived then, my dad had bought a house, and there was five kids and Mom and Dad, and we lived in a place, and there was only one great, big bedroom. And then we had two rooms, one was always closed off, you know, because that was only used for Christmas. And then there was a big kitchen, and a stove. We had no electricity.

LEVINE: What did you use for light?

MADSEN: Kerosene lamps, kerosene lamps. And at that time it was a small house because, I say it was a small house, but when I left and I came, as a kid you think it's a huge house, and a big garden. And I remember we even raised a pig that was butchered for Christmas. And we had some chickens, and I had rabbits. And so after we'd been here a number of years, and then I came back and I looked at it, it was so tiny. I drove down there with a car, I couldn't even turn the car around on the street.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, tell me what you remember about your mother having your youngest brother.

MADSEN: Well, the only thing I can remember was I was in there and the baby was put in some kind of a crib or something, and there was some kind of, the crib was not higher than I could sit on the edge of it. And I remember the midwife, she bawled the heck out of me for sitting there, you know, and I never forgot that. Which, I think, is quite strange, but.

LEVINE: Now, tell me what Christmas was like.

MADSEN: Well, Christmas was always, that's where, we had this room in the house that was only used for special occasions, and Christmas was one of them. And Dad, he would go in there and decorate the Christmas tree. The doors were locked and closed. And, of course, we had no electricity, so we had candle lights on the Christmas tree, which was very dangerous. But Dad, he had a place. And then, on Christmas Eve we all came in, including the only grandma that I can remember. She lived with us upstairs. And we went in there, we went in a circle around the tree and we were singing songs. And then, of course, Dad, he had to blow out the candles. He couldn't leave them on too long, because it would catch fire. But as far as Christmas presents, we were poor people, I don't ever remember getting presents. And . . .

LEVINE: Did you have a feast?

MADSEN: Oh, yes. But, then again, I remember going to my dad down to an open market. And he would look at, he liked eel, you know. But if you bought eel, you had to buy butter to fry it in, okay. So, but if you buy pork, you know, you don't need anything to fry it in. That was a savings right there. So he decided to get

a pork roast. I remember that. I was just a little kid. So that was what we had Christmas Eve. And, you know, we always had plenty to eat. Just like I told you, we butchered a pig at Christmas time. And then the first thing, well, we didn't have refrigerators. You know that. So it had to be, Dad, he would smoke the hindquarters in the chimney upstairs, you know. He had a hole in that, he had two hams in there. And that was all from the smoke from the stove in the kitchen. That's how he smoked the two hams. And then we had, not a basement, we had a little place we could go down, and there was a place down there where you could get brine in to put pork in so it would keep. But after the pig was butchered and we ate the blood sausage, that was the first thing we had, and it was very good. And I remember when they stuck the pig, Mom sees it out there stirring it and stirring it and stirring it, and then the sausage was made. So we ate the blood sausage as long as that was good.

LEVINE: Do you remember, did your mother make it?

MADSEN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember how she did it?

MADSEN: No.

LEVINE: Did you ever watch her?

MADSEN: No, no. You had to have, what do you call, intestines? What do you, just like you'd get sausage in here, you know.

LEVINE: The casing?

MADSEN: Yeah, the casing. You had to buy that, and they must have had a machine where you'd run it through and into these casings. Because I remember we had it, oh, yes, it was very good.

LEVINE: And then what else did you get from the pig?

MADSEN: Well, of course, the head was boiled, and then the meat was taken off there, and then you got your, oh, that was another dish that was made out of that. It was very good. I can't remember what you called it. And then the pork that, we had to eat so much, it was always done when it was cold, and what we couldn't handle while it was fresh, had to go in the brine down in that little basement we had that was just below the kitchen. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what did you grow that you ate in your garden?

MADSEN: Well, you know, (he laughs) lettuce, at that time, that was only for animals, you know. We didn't eat lettuce. But you did grow some, and then you'd feed it to the chickens, and I also had rabbits. And then, of course, we had carrots and we had peas, and potatoes. And then, and berries. There was some black berries and a little of that, and that was about it. But I thought it was a huge outfit. And then, of course, the rabbits, you know, I raised them rabbits, and we ate them, too. They were very good.

LEVINE: What kind of dish do you remember having with them? Do you remember any particular dishes that your mother made that you liked?

MADSEN: Well, the Danes, they don't cook like they do here in the United States. She made different kinds of soups, and we didn't have refrigeration, and then you let milk sour so it would be solid. That would be one dish we would get, and then they used to throw some sugar on top of it, and then we would eat that. I remember that. Even, I was on a farm in Denmark, you know. And some places you sat, you only eat out of

the same bowl. Not at home, but we did on the farm, yeah. You're going to have to help me along, because . . .

LEVINE: Okay, fine. What else do you remember about the community there?

MADSEN: Well, okay. That brings back one thing that, when the youngest one was born, that was Harry, and it's, it's automatic, you get baptized. But we were a little bit slow getting him baptized. Believe it or not, we got a notice from the city that the child had not been baptized. And I thought, you know, I think about that today, that was very unusual.

LEVINE: How old was Harry then?

MADSEN: Well, he was not even a year old when he was baptized. It was before that. So, which I thought, you know, you think about today, that's very unusual. But . . .

LEVINE: And what did, what kind of social life did your parents have, or you . . .

MADSEN: Very little, very little. Mom, see, well, after all, you know, there was five kids. And we're all boys. We all had woolen socks on, and we would come in in

the evening and there would be holes in the heels, you know. And that was such a big job. My dad, he was sitting down there with my mom fixing the holes. And my dad, he got so good at it he was, it was just like woven. When he was done you couldn't even tell. And that was one thing he done every night. Of course, he got a newspaper, and then he had to read the newspaper, and I can't even remember that we didn't even have a radio in them days. They were not even out yet.

LEVINE: Can you remember, like, would you all be together at the evening meal?

MADSEN: Oh, yes, we all eat together. Yes, we did.

LEVINE: And what would be, what would be the kind of talk around the table?

MADSEN: Very little. We were always taught at that time that the kids, we would not speak unless spoken to. And that was, we were raised strictly, but my dad and my mom never spanked me. I can't remember that. He would correct me, yes, but never. I don't remember any of that, no.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with your grandmother?

MADSEN: Well, you see, like I said, that's the only grandmother I can remember. That was my mother's mother. And her husband had died, and then she had no place to live. So my dad, he made a room upstairs, so she could live there the rest of her days. And I remember she died from throat cancer, and she died, and then I remember they brought the casket in and brought it upstairs and placed her in it. And then they found out, after she was placed in it, they couldn't get it down the stairs when it was time to go to the cemetery. So they had to knock, they sent her out of a window at the end of the building, and then lower the casket down and take it to the cemetery where she was buried. Little things like that, I remember yet.

LEVINE: Well, now, in other words, the casket was placed in the room that she had lived in?

MADSEN: Well, there was . . .

LEVINE: That was her room?

MADSEN: Well, I remember they took it upstairs. They must

have taken it in there and took her out of the bed. See, in Denmark, people are not dressed up in the best clothes when they are buried. You know, they are dressed in a white gown or something like that. And, of course, at that time there was, you didn't know what cremation was. So she was buried in the church cemetery, and then after ten years then the grave was more or less, well, you dig them up, unless you keep paying and paying. They can't do that. So if you can't, the graves, forever, by a church, you know, they run out of land. So that's why today most Danes are cremated, and then they have special cemeteries for that.

LEVINE: Was there anything else about the funeral or a person's funeral in Denmark that was a little different from here?

MADSEN: No. The minister, he comes out to the cemetery, you know, says exactly the same as they do here. I don't think there was any difference.

LEVINE: How about other celebrations, like weddings? Was there anything the Danish . . .

MADSEN: Well, again, you must remember we're poor people.

When Lily and I, we got married. And I'm going to throw this in right now. This coming July, we've been married sixty-four years. And, so when we got married we went before, like, the Justice of the Peace, and got married at that was it.

LEVINE: You were married in Denmark?

MADSEN: Yeah, okay. Uh, I don't know if you want to bring this in now, or after we go to Ellis Island, but, see, I came back in '29, and we met in early June, and we were married in late July.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Well, we'll, let's talk about that a little later.

MADSEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Let's say, what about the schooling that you had between seven and fourteen.

MADSEN: Well, you see, there's more than one grade in a class, you know. I remember we had four teachers, and there was, Denmark is seven grades, not eight like here, but it's the same kind of an education you get. And it's the law now that you must go to school for seven years, and, just like I told you. So after, you learn

religion along with your schooling, and that's why, when you're done, then you're taken into the Danish church and you're confirmed, and then you're a member of the Danish church. That's the Lutheran Church, you know. Ninety-eight percent of the people in Denmark are Lutherans, you know.

LEVINE: Was your family religious?

MADSEN: I beg your pardon?

LEVINE: Was your family a religious family?

MADSEN: No. Danes are not very good church-goers. See, the ministers in Denmark, they're paid by the state. And you could have a huge church over there that could be room for two hundred people. You go in on a Sunday, I don't think you'll see fifty or a hundred. I know we had a little church out in the country out there where my dad, he builds the farm, and that church must be two hundred years old. And I'd been in there two or three times. Now, if you want me to go on for there, I got a little story I'm going to tell you about that.

LEVINE: About the church?

MADSEN: Yeah. So I had, we had a visiting minister, and I

went into that church a few times because the farm that I worked on was, oh, it was like not even a city block away. So I went up and I went to church that day. Then after I came out of church, then the fellow, he came and said, "Chris, will you take the minister to the next church?" He was a visiting minister. So we got a little wagon hooked up and a horse, and then he came, and the minister was talking to me, and he said, "Young man," he says, "did you go to church today?" I said, "Yes." "What was the sermon about?" (they laugh) And I happened to know.

LEVINE: How did you know?

MADSEN: Well, after all, in Denmark they preach the same, well, I listened. I was there, I listened to it, okay. And they preached the same sermon in all the churches in Denmark. (he laughs) But he was testing me out, so when I took him to the next town and let him out, he gave me a little tip, and I drove back with the horse. I just had to throw that in. I thought he was, he was something.

LEVINE: Let's see. How was life on the farm different from

life in your family before that?

MADSEN: Well, when I was on a farm there was the farm where there was two hired men, and there was two hired women. And the women, they slept in the house, and the hired, the menfolks, hired menfolks, we slept in the barn. There was a room made next to where the horses were, and there was two double beds in there. There was no heat, and we slept on a down comforter, I would say, instead of a mattress. And then we had one on top of us, so you could get warm. But in the winter time I seen ice on the walls, and actually, as far as a place to wash, we went out there and washed out there where the horses were drinking. That's all we had. But when it was time to eat, then we went in the house. And the hired help ate together, but the man and the wife that owned the farm didn't ever eat with us. But the two women in there, and, yeah, there was four, and we ate together. And we had pumpernickel bread with oleo on it, and then we had boiled milk. And that's about it. That's, we ate bread, and we had milk. And then if we wanted a cup of coffee, if you had come the night before, then we got the coffee that was warmed up, so we were not

treated too nice. Then at, at dinner time, we had a fairly good meal. We may have had, oh, you know, at that time, during the war, you learned to eat horsemeat, and horse burgers was very good, very good.

So sometimes we would have that, and that would be a good meal, and then other times you would have, it would be fried salt pork, the same cuts that you'd make bacon out of. And that would be fried along with potatoes and gravy. It was quite good if you knew how to handle it. And then, in Denmark when you got done eating, you know, then you usually have, on a farm you usually had an hour or less to yourself. You'd go and lay down and rest before you went back out in the field again. And then when it was time, then, of course, we had the biggest meal, we had at supper time. You know, it's sixty-nine years ago. It's pretty hard to remember exactly what was on the table.

But it was nothing to brag about. No, you didn't, you didn't gain a lot of weight. I guarantee you that.

LEVINE: Now, was your father there with you?

MADSEN: No, no. That was, I was, that was after my dad, he had lost his farm, and I was hired out. He couldn't

take me back to the city. See, the oldest one was in the city, and the three youngest ones, they stayed with mom and dad on the farm. And then, when he went back to the city they had to go back with him, yeah. When they lived on the farm there was only one school with one room, and then my two brothers and sister, he went to that school for about year now, too. So, yeah.

LEVINE: Did your older brother learn a trade?

MADSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: What did he learn?

MADSEN: He learned, you know, everything is a trade in Denmark. He learned to wait on people in a grocery store. And then you had to work that for four years before you got the top wages. And while you were doing it, you didn't get much wages, and that goes for any apprenticeship in Denmark, you know. Even if you go, like the clerks down here you see in the stores, you go down to Sears Roebuck and all of that, you couldn't have a job in Denmark unless you had learned it for four years. You had young ones in there to help out, then after you learned the trade, then that

was it. And the same thing, being a tool maker or a mechanic or electrician, well, most Danes that came over here, I would say ninety or ninety-five percent over here learned a trade, but I wasn't that lucky because of what happened to my dad. I wanted to be a mechanic, and . . .

LEVINE: Was the apprenticeship usually four years?

MADSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: For each trade?

MADSEN: Yes. See, when you're out of school at fourteen, okay, then you start going into an apprenticeship. And then you go to technical school at night. I started that for about three or four months before dad, he decided, see, he was a farmer at heart, and then, then they moved, and then I had to go along with it, because I was the only one that could help him get a building up, so.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother work at all?

MADSEN: Oh, gosh, with five kids! In the old place, the women didn't work. She had enough to do in the house. Yeah, no, no, no. In, over there, you know, here, we

go and wash, once or twice a week. In Denmark, at that time I bet you they didn't wash more than twice a month. Even, they had a place set up where you can boil water, they actually boiled the clothes to get them white.

LEVINE: So you would go to this place where the laundry was done?

MADSEN: No, you had it at home. In the out, there's a little out building, you know, where we had the pig and the chickens and rabbits and all that. No, one end was set off for this, like, like we have here for laundry, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have running water in your house?

MADSEN: Oh, yes. That's one thing we had. We did have running water. And we had, well, we did have, we had an outhouse. But we did have running water, I remember that. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any attitudes of your mother and father that you kept with you with your own children?

MADSEN: No. I think it was a good relationship. See, we had, we had relatives that lived, maybe not in the same

town, but we would get together, that is, you know, it's not like here. Very, very seldom did we have company, very seldom. Actually, you didn't have a house big enough so you could entertain. But my dad, he was, he worked in a factory not too far from, he could walk down there, where he made, they made cement. That's where he worked. And he got in to help out with welfare. I remember people that are poorer than us would come to our home and ask for help. And, at that time, he had the money, and he would hand them some money. I remember that. But we were never allowed to talk to them, you know. So dad, he was, he was quite active in that. Yeah. But mom was strictly the house, sewing, washing, cleaning, oh, yes. And then in the evening, you know. With my grandmother, you sit out in the kitchen, the stove was, of course, in the winter time or in the fall or the spring, the stove was lit, you know. And you could sit there around the kitchen stove, and there was another stove in there. And there was no, there's no stove in the bedroom but in the living room there was a little stove in there.

LEVINE: What did the stove burn?

MADSEN: Wood. And I remember walking along the railroad tracks in Denmark and picking up pieces of coal that had fallen off the train and to bring that home so we had something besides wood. Okay. And I even, at that time I would pick up bones, iron, rags, and I'd go down and I'd sell them to get a few pennies. You know, that's how it was, yeah. And then when I started with the rabbits, then mom and dad told me, "If you want them, then it's up to you to feed them." So I had to go up and feed for them, too. And maybe that's why I, you know, you could sell bones and stuff like that. There was a scrapyard downtown, and you buy anything you brought in, even if you got just a few pennies, you know. And I remember doing that time and time again.

LEVINE: I don't understand about bones. What kind of bones?

MADSEN: Well, just like animal bones, you know, dried bones. You would find them out in the field. You know, an animal had died, or something like that, and the bones were laying there. And these dried bones, there was some value in it. Why, what they used them for, I don't know, but he would buy them, the same one that would buy iron and rags. Yeah. No.

LEVINE: Well, then, how was the decision made that you would come . . .

MADSEN: I made that decision myself, because I didn't have a chance to learn a trade. And I said, "This farming is not for me." I was making, I was hired out for a year, and I got equal to, oh, let's see. (he calculates, counting to himself) A hundred and fifty, a hundred dollars a year, maybe. Seven hundred crowns a year, I got. And at that time you could buy a dollar for three crowns, it's only three-and-a-half. And that was it. And, you know, I wasn't too happy about it. I was not a farmer, you know. I was raised in the city. Oh, I can remember back to when I was three or four years old.

LEVINE: You can?

MADSEN: Yes, I can.

LEVINE: What do you remember from then?

MADSEN: Oh, yes. That's, see, when, when I was born they lived out in the country, and I think Dad, he worked on a farm. And then, as a hired helper, you know. And then later on they started moving closer and

closer to the city. And I remember we lived in a place not too far from the factory where Dad, he worked. And then Mom would make his lunch. We'd bring them over, you know, in the summer time, you know, it's daylight over there. Even at night you can walk without having lights on, you know. So we were walking over, at that time how many were, there was Pete, me and, maybe there's only two of us, Pete and me. And then we walked along the road. We were going in to bring my dad's lunch. And a hobo came along the road and Mom, she was scared of him. And she told us to jump down in the ditch and crawl along in the ditch. I can remember that. And then we went in and Dad, he got his lunch. And that's one thing I remember, I know I was about only three or four years old. And something like that sticks with you, yeah.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Do you remember more now about this early life than you did, let's say, twenty years ago? Does more of it come back to mind, or not?

MADSEN: Well, there's some things that stick in your mind that

happened, more or less it scared you, you know. And that's, I've had that, I've had experiences too, you know, where I almost got killed in an accident over here in the United States, but that's, we'll come to that later.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. So what are your fondest memories of Denmark as a boy?

MADSEN: Well, there was always, we were not too far from a salt water river. And I remember in, the schoolteacher would take, would take us down. But I don't remember whether there was girls or boys together. It must have been just boys, because I don't remember having a bathing suit. They let us go on in, and that water, it was salt water, but it was crystal clear. And I remember, you know, when we had spare time, you know, we lived close to it, and we'd go down there when we had nothing else to do. And I remember going out there, and there was a guy out there, he had a seine that he was catching shrimp. And I went out there and walked behind him, and he would go so far, and he had a scooper, he'd scoop them up and put them in a bag, then he would give you one or two. And you'd could just chip off the head and

the tail and you would eat it right there. It was good! And that's, and then when the water was quiet, and I'd go out there sometimes by myself, and then there would be a flounder down there trying to bury itself in the sand. And you would put your foot on top of it and reach down and pick it up. Things like that, oh, yes. And then, it's like we didn't have a bathtub or shower in the house. And then the water that was discharged from the cement factory from my dad, he worked, was warm, you know. They would go in the deep ditch and go out to that salt water river. And us kids, we would go down there and take our clothes off and jump in that warm water.
(they laugh) Oh, yes. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: So you, you came to America yourself, alone?

MADSEN: Well, a cousin traveled with me. He was also, see, my dad and my mother and his dad and mother, that was two brothers and two sisters. And so he was actually my cousin. And that's something we'll get into a little later because he never, he almost didn't make Ellis Island. They almost sent him back.

LEVINE: Oh, good. Okay. So do you remember leaving home to

get the ship to come?

MADSEN: Oh, yes. I had to go to Copenhagen. Once to the American, oh, I'm sorry, to the American Consulate to get permission, and the first thing they asked me what I was going to do over there, I said, "I'm going to go on the farm." They needed help on farms, so there was no problem there. I got okayed right away. So I came back home, and then we had to wait for, you know, I had to get a passport, you know. And then just waited till we got the call when the ship was sailing. And then I took a boat from where we lived in the northern part of Denmark over to Copenhagen, which was on an island, and then we got in there, and then we all got down and we got on the ship, and it turned out there was twelve hundred passengers, first, second and third class.

LEVINE: Was the quota system in then? Was there a quota system? Did you actually be a part of . . .

MADSEN: Well, I think it was so open you couldn't even fill it. Shortly after that, later on, in '24, I think they put a quota system on.

LEVINE: Okay. So was this your first time into Copenhagen?

MADSEN: Yes. I'd never been there before.

LEVINE: And how did you feel leaving?

MADSEN: Well, you know, I wasn't scared at all. No, no. This was something that had to be, of course, you said goodbye to the family, but it was just like an adventure, you know, going to the United States. That was a long ways off in the old days, you know. Today it's just like next door. So that didn't bother me at all, and there was a lot of young people doing the same as me, going out in the new world trying to make a living. And, of course, you got bored, and then this, a lot of young people, you know, the same age, and couples. And I remember when we got on the ship I was taken to a cabin where there was three double bunks. That means there was six of us in there. And, of course, the food on the ship was out of this world. Danish food, even on the ship. You know, they serve it like family-style. You put it down, you can help yourself. You can eat all you, well, of course, it got so that, you know, you got, after two weeks aboard the ship, you know, sometimes you didn't feel like eating. But they served three meals a day, and they

served coffee in the afternoon. They even made Danish pastry. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Now, the name of the ship?

MADSEN: That was Oscar II, yeah.

LEVINE: And it left from Copenhagen?

MADSEN: Yes. And then when we left Copenhagen then there was, well, a couple of days out a lot of people got sick. And, you know, in the cabin where I was in, I think I was the only one that didn't get sick. And I had a lower cabin, you know, lower bunk, and I had to change because, you know, they're puking all over the place.

And the dining room table that was set up for us, that was, you know when you lower the freight down in a ship and then there's a great big hole there that's covered with a canvas, and that's where our dining room table was set up, but it was closed in, you know.

And that was full when we started. The third day out there's only about four or five people eating, and I was one of them. I never got seasick, you know.

LEVINE: So did you eat with a lot of other people besides the people in your cabin?

MADSEN: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Every table was filled up. And, you know, there's a cabin here with six in it, and a cabin over there with six in it, and then I imagine they had some for man and wife. But I thought it was, it was an adventure. I enjoyed it. You get out on the deck, you know. Well, sometimes it got so rough that they wouldn't even let you out on the deck. You know, and you looked there and it's like the ship would go through an ocean, the water going right over. But it took fourteen days. We made a stop in Halifax. And I remember sailing down from Halifax to New York. And you saw quails swimming along the ship along with, oh, what do you call them?

LEVINE: Porpoises?

MADSEN: Yeah, dolphins, you know. Oh, yeah. There was ships, you know, it's strange, but you sail across the Atlantic Ocean. You know, there was birds with us all the time. I don't know where they came from. Maybe the, maybe they set down on the ship at night. But, you know . . .

LEVINE: Sea birds, do you think?

MADSEN: Yeah, seagulls. Oh, yes. And, you know, at that time

they could throw garbage overboard, you know. And all of that garbage, the bird, he just had a feast, you know, and so did some of the animals or the fish, I guess, I imagine. But I thought it's a beautiful, and the water was just as calm when we left Halifax down to New York. And I can still see that, you know, these, these mammals swimming down there. Oh, yeah. Then, of course, when we came into New York, than the first class passengers were let out first, and then second class, and then we came last. And all they looked at was our passport. And then we were taken from the ship and put on a ferry and ferried down to Ellis Island. And then we came into Ellis Island, there was a lot of booths or cubbyholes in there. We were told to sit down. They must have gotten our names because we were called, I believe the first thing they did we give us a physical, so when they called us we went in, and they must have had an interpreter there because I remember talking to them. And I had no trouble passing my physical. And then they started asking questions. You had to read and write your own language, then you had to show twenty-five dollars plus transportation to your destination, like a ticket on the railroad. And when it was all

over with, then I don't remember getting anything to eat over there. I don't think we did. Then he put a tag on you with a number on it. And then we were put back on the ferry. Now, that number told the ferry operator where we had to get off, and also there was a train waiting for us at that station. So everything went all right, and we got off. And then it didn't take too long, then we were on the train.

LEVINE: What about your cousin? Did he . . .

MADSEN: Well, he was, he passed, but I think he had a, some kind of a heart problem, I don't know. But he was, he was two years older than me, but they almost didn't pass him. And here's what happens. If they don't pass you, you have to be sent back home at ships's expense, you know. And I think that's why eventually we got out at Ellis Island. Everybody had to take a physical before they left Europe. So you want me to go on now?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MADSEN: Go on out. So we got on the train and finally the train took off, and the conductor came up and looked at us. He said, "You don't need that tag any more."

So he just pulled it off, and he wanted to see our ticket, where we're going. So everything went fine, and then there must have been some place where you could buy a sandwich, but I don't remember that. I remember we sat in the train, we fell asleep. And then we came in Harlem, we were supposed to change trains, and that was in Detroit. I almost lost my shoes at that time, but finally got them back on and rushed out of the train. And then they put us on another train. Maybe it's because when you come through Canada, and then you got to cross Detroit River. Maybe at that time they didn't take all the cars across, railroad cars. Maybe that's why we had to change, I don't know. But, anyhow, we started out again, and then the next stop was Chicago. And they took quite a while, so I do remember we came into Northwestern Station in Chicago on a Friday evening, an hour after the train had left that I was supposed to catch. So what do you do? So you stayed in Northwestern Station Friday night, and Saturday night we slept on benches. I remember that. And as far as eating, there's something that sticks in my mind. They had a place there where you could buy food, and I saw pies sitting in the back. And I think that's all

I'd eaten while I was there for two days, was pie. Okay. Then finally the train took off, and that had to be on a Sunday evening, maybe late. And then I don't remember the train ride from there up to Lone Rock, Iowa. Nothing special happened. When we got into Lone Rock, I remember getting off, and there was a little wooden railroad station with a wooden platform like you see in the movies today. And then there was somebody there to meet us, the name was Jensen. He was the assistant banker in town. And my uncle must have told him we were coming in, he could talk Danish. So then he took us up to the bank and, oh, yeah. This twenty-five dollars, you know, you had to have. You know, that was, I had a little spending money besides the twenty-five dollars. When I left Denmark, my dad didn't have a job, and he needed the money, so I asked Jensen to send that twenty-five dollars back to my dad. So I went out on a farm, you know, on my, I was broke, you know. But anyhow, he called my uncle, and I remember he came in with horse and wagon and my, his only son, Milton, he was a little shaver. He was with us, he drove us out to the farm.

LEVINE: Did he have a telephone?

MADSEN: Oh, yes. He had telephones. He had, Jensen had called him from the bank that we were in, and then he came in with a horse and buggy. He had a Buick touring car, but the roads were so muddy at that time, it was in the spring, said he couldn't drive the car into town, he had to take a horse and buggy. So we got out on the farm and, an old, big farmhouse. And, of course, my uncle, his name was also Christian, and his wife also, too, born in Denmark, you know.

LEVINE: What was your uncle's last name?

MADSEN: That was Madsen. Why, he's my dad's brother. But somehow when he got his citizen papers, they must have got crossed up because they go by the name of Madison. And that's the only one out of all the family got up there. And I had (?), maybe he got tired of correcting them so he, when he got his papers that was what was on them. But anyhow, when they got up there and the, it was so that you couldn't even walk from the house to the barn without having overshoes on.
(voices are heard off mike)

LEVINE: (referring to someone else in room) No, thanks.

You couldn't . . .

MADSEN: It was so muddy you couldn't walk, like me, I couldn't walk with my, the shoes I'd traveled in. I only had one pair of shoes, you know. And you had to borrow some galoshes or something to get out in the barn. And I remember Aunt Mary, she was very happy to see us, and we got some good food after we got there. She was a terrific cook.

LEVINE: What did she make? Do you remember any of the . . .

MADSEN: Well, I know she made soup that was oyster soup, and I saw this shrimp on the top, you know. They had oyster, you know, you take oysters, you know. Well, it was good, though. Oh, yeah. That was hearty meals, you know. Maybe chicken or beef or, no, they didn't, they didn't have refrigeration, so they would butcher a steer and a hog in the fall and then there was a busy time, because you left it out on the porch while it was cold, and then they kept boiling it down, you know, like canning it. And that beef that she had canned, that's the most delicious beef I'd ever eaten. It was delicious. And then plenty of eggs. You know, you could have all the eggs you wanted for

breakfast, along with bacon, because they had a couple of hundred chickens, you know. Oh, yes. And then they had a player piano, and I had a couple, or three days, and I got in there, and I got this thing going Barney Google, you know. It was fun! I had a lot of fun. And I never even thought of, you know, being lonesome or anything like that. That comes later, you know. So one day my uncle, he came and told me, he said, "Chris," he said, "Joe Crowley, he said that you could work for him for the season." Well, so I went out to Joe Crowley and there, Joe Crowley and his wife, and they had four or five kids, you know. And he was, he didn't own the farm. He was renting it. But he still needed, at that time the average farm was a hundred and sixty acres, but in order to farm it you had to have one hired man in the season. So that's where I came in, so, well, Joe, he could see that I had experience on a farm in Denmark, how to handle horses, you know, and stuff like that. And I think that's why my uncle, he sent me to Joe Crowley, because my cousin didn't have any farm experience. He went on a farm almost next door. But anyhow, on the farm, it didn't take long to pick up some English, you know, some words you shouldn't pick up, you know.

It's all part of the deal. And, of course, like on Friday, you know, at that time, Catholic, they didn't eat meat on Friday, but she was, she would fry bacon for me. And Joe, he would reach over, and she would kick him across the leg. (he laughs) "You're not supposed to eat meat on Friday." (he laughs) I remember that. Oh, yeah. But they were very good to me. And, of course, I got room and board, and she done the washing for me, and I got fifty dollars a month. And then, oh, there's one thing I skipped. When my uncle, he got the tickets. He borrowed the money from the banker in Lone Rock, and then we were to pay the banker, okay. So, fifty dollars a month, it didn't take me long, I had my ticket paid for. Because

LEVINE: Do you remember how much the ticket cost?

MADSEN: Well, it was not much over a hundred dollars, I'm sure of that. They all came because I had it paid off. Fifty dollars a month. I didn't spend any money. I smoked maybe a pack of cigarettes a month. When I got to Iowa you couldn't even buy cigarettes unless somebody else bought them for you, so I didn't spend any money. And we got up at five in the morning and

worked till maybe seven at night. You know, it's a long day. And I don't even, we had some, on Sunday you had a little time off, and then my cousin and I, we'd get together, we walked down on the farm. And we got down there, there was a lot of (?), it was opened.

So we went in in the kitchen and looked in the pantry, you know. We found something to eat. And then we would walk back home. That would be our Sunday, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember your initial impression of being in the United States?

MADSEN: Well, it was, it was huge, I was kind of disappointed, you know. The barns and the farm buildings in the United States don't come up to the farm buildings in Denmark, because in Denmark that's mostly stone buildings. Some of the walls are that thick. And they were wooden. Some of them, you could see right through it. And they, the barn itself was red. They're all painted red, and the house was painted white. It's an old house, and I had a room upstairs. And then I got a I wrote to the family where I was at, and then we started sending letters, you know, back and forth. And another thing, all the time I was

in Iowa the only thing that I bought was from Sears Roebuck through the catalog. You know, that's the book, I could sit there and pick stuff out if I needed underwear or I needed gloves or something like that, it came from Sears Roebuck. And it was so easy. I remember one time I didn't have a watch, so I bought a dollar wrist watch. It stopped on me. I sent it back, they sent me another one. Oh, yes. And then I don't remember so much when I worked for Joe Crowley, but later on when, of course, the, well, a little more I got to talk about in there, I got along pretty good with the Crowleys. And then we started putting in a crop. That was corn and oats. That's about the only two crops he had. And after he got the corn in we got an unexpected snowstorm, and we had about that much snow in the ground and you were worried about killing, the corn had already come up about that high. And it done a little bit of damage, but not too much. And every farmer's got a corn crib, and some of them, they store corn to wait for the price to go up, either up or down. And I remember one time Joe Crowley, he loaded up a couple of wagons with corn, and so we took two team of horses. I had one, and he drove first. We drove into Fenton, Iowa, and there's a grain

elevator in there. So Joe, he went down to talk to them. He didn't like the price. So we headed for home. We got about two blocks away and he decided to turn around. (he laughs) And he sold it, sold the corn. I can remember that. So we went to, well, maybe we bought some groceries and came back home. But that was, he needed some cash, you know. He had pay me, too, you know. So I had no problem getting my money. And the kids were, I learned a lot. But there was one thing that happened while I was at Joe Crowley's farm. I'd only been there two weeks, and Joe, he was talking to a farmer on the next hundred and sixty acres, talking across the fence. And I could see they were getting all excited, swinging their arms, and then I caught on. A gang of robbers had come into Lone Rock the night before and blew the bank. They blew the safe and took the money. They got all telegraph wires and everything. And I remember that, but I can't remember what gang it was. And then they didn't bother with the, the one they had, because that was all shot to pieces. Then he bought a solid steel wall that looked like it might have been used during the war. It was round, you know. It was one that you could drill holes and blow.

And the holes in the ceiling, you know, little holes, from where they blew, that was still there years later. It never got fixed. Eventually they must have fixed it. But that's one thing that happened while I was at Joe Crowley's, and I never will forget it.

LEVINE: So when did you leave Iowa?

MADSEN: Ah, I left Iowa, well, see, one of, in the fall, and it was time to pick corn, and Joe Crowley, he said that he didn't need me because corn pickers was coming at that time. I was planning on husking corn by the bushel, you know. So then my uncle, he called me up and told Joe Crowley that there's a farm close by where my uncle, he lived, he would be glad to take me for the winter months, you know. And I could pick corn down there, like that. So I went down to, his name was Pete Christianson, a second generation Dane. And he had about three hundred and forty acres or something like that. And then, so I got down there, and I got settled in, and then it was time to start picking corn. And I'd go out there and pick corn. The wagon was fixed up. I had a board in the back. I picked one of them. I wouldn't even look at it, I'd throw that corn up there. And the horses, they got so

they would move every time I got close to them. And then I would come home and I would eat, yes, I'd come home for dinner, and then I'd go back out again, and then I'd come home for supper. And by that time I would have maybe seventy, eighty bushels of corn at eight cents a bushel. So I was making a little money.

I got room and board. And then when the corn was over and they said, "I'd like to keep you." "Well, that's okay. How much?" He said, "I'll give you a dollar a day." Well, that's thirty dollars a month, and I was doing chores, and I had to milk some cows, you know. He didn't, he didn't have too many cows to milk, because he was specializing in raising Polled Hereford cattle, and that's beef cattle. So he only had six or seven cows, so that's what I had to milk.

LEVINE: What is that word, Pullet? You said Pullet?

MADSEN: Polled Hereford cattle.

LEVINE: What is . . .

MADSEN: That's the white-faced cattle without horns. In Texas they have horns, but they managed to breed them so they didn't grow horns, so it was all beef. And then he had the, he had a man there that would take some of

his cattle and calves to the state fair, and he was hoping to make money to sell the bull calves and sell the beef too, you know. But they didn't do too good for him because by the time, by the time I left he was almost broke. The banker, his name was Cotton, and he told me not to worry about the money I was getting off of Pete Christianson. He said, "I'll see that you get it. I'll put it into your account." Of course, he was handling all the business for the farmer.

LEVINE: Now, were you, were you actually making more money with this Peter Christianson?

MADSEN: Well, you see, when I came in there I was to husk corn, and that was eight cents a bushel, and I was getting eighty, ninety bushels a day. That was good money in there, and I got room and board besides. So when the corn was over, and then he said, "I'll keep you for a dollar a day." And then when the springtime came along, then he gave me fifty dollars a month, like I got before. And so he also knew that I had experience as a farmer from Denmark in here, so I remember driving as many as four horses side by side out on the farm, pulling farm equipment. And . . .

LEVINE: I think we'll pause here. I need to change the tape.

MADSEN: Okay.

LEVINE: This is the end of Tape One.

MADSEN: Okay.

LEVINE: And we'll be continuing shortly with Tape Two. I'm talking with Chris Madsen.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and this is Tape Two of Chris Madsen. (an electronic gadget is heard playing a tune in the background) And we'll continue. You were saying that you were in Iowa for about two years.

MADSEN: Yeah. Well, down at Pete Christianson's place, of course, we got all the crops in and, again, that was mostly corn and oats, some barley. And when it was threshing time, Pete Christianson, he owned a threshing outfit and a tractor. So all the farmers, they got together, and we were going from farm to farm and haul in and thrash the grain, and then we would

stop and eat wherever we come. Well, we had two meals a day, we ate breakfast at home, and then we'd go to a farm and they had not any more than we could thrash in one day, so we ate dinner and supper there, and then the next day we'd go someplace else. But that's the way it was. That was another nice experience. And I learned then when you, when you go in and eat with the threshers, never sit at the end of the table. All the food is in the middle. (he laughs) That's one thing I learned about that.

LEVINE: Was the food passed around?

MADSEN: Oh, yes, but, you know, everybody's hungry. And the beauty part of it was we always got the best because if we were on one farm today, and just like I saw my aunt doing it, she would get on the telephone and talk to the people. (a telephone rings)

LEVINE: We're pausing here for a telephone call. (break in tape) Okay. We're resuming now.

MADSEN: Okay. We talked about threshing. Well, that was about it for threshing. And then later on in the fall at Pete Christianson's farm, we had started experimenting raising sugar beet, our own sugar beet.

And they had a Russian family that came in and took our, took care of the fields in the growing season. And then in the fall he would pull them and top them, and then Pete Christianson asked me if I would like the job of hauling them into town by the ton.

LEVINE: Wait, excuse me a second. (break in tape) We're resuming now after an interruption, and I'm not sure that the mike was picking up right before. So Mr. Madsen was talking about sugar beets.

MADSEN: Right. In 1925 in Iowa they were experimenting with growing sugar beets. So Pete Christianson, he signed up and he got in a few acres of sugar beets. And then he brought over a Russian family to take care of, yeah, to take care of the fields, tearing them out, keeping them clean, and then in the fall pulling them and topping them. Then Pete Christianson asked me if I would be interested hauling the sugar beets into town, so much a ton. I told him I would. So I was hauling sugar beets into town. And then by the time I was done I had ruptured a disc in my back, so I couldn't work any more. Then I decided to, it was time to go back to Denmark, and I wasn't too sure about what I wanted to do.

LEVINE: How did you haul those sugar beets into town?

MADSEN: In a wagon, with a scoop.

LEVINE: With a horse? With a horse and wagon?

MADSEN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It was quite heavy work. And I overdid it, I know that. But then I decided I was going to go back to Denmark. In the meantime, I didn't tell you, but earlier, you know, I had bought a brand new car, a two-door roadster, a brand new one. I think I paid three hundred and twenty-five dollars for it. It was the kind you crank, you know.

LEVINE: What did it look like? Tell me more about it.

MADSEN: No, a Ford, you know, two-door roadster, you know, canvas top. But it was a brand-new car. You cranked it, and that was good, good transportation, and I'd never had a car before, so I was all excited about it. So I had to sell my car, and make arrangements to go back to Denmark again. Again, I think that's where the bank Cotton and Jensen came in. They must have arranged everything for me, because they got me a ticket to go back to Denmark. And they even got me a re-enter permit in case I wanted to come back. And

then they made sure that I got the money coming from Pete Christianson, and something else they did for me.

There was a load of cattle going from Lone Rock to the stockyards in Chicago, and I got a pass to go with that load in the caboose. And so we left Lone Rock I think in the morning, and it must have taken a couple of days to get to the stockyards in Chicago, and I remember we stopped on the way, and we had to take on fuel and water for the freight train. And when I got into Chicago we stayed overnight in a hotel.

LEVINE: Was your cousin traveling with you?

MADSEN: No, no. He was staying behind. He had taken off. So, a man that I met in the caboose, we decided to bunk together in Chicago.

LEVINE: I just, as an aside, what became of your cousin?

MADSEN: Well, he didn't turn out too good. His dad ended up sending him money to come back home. So when we got back, then I got into New York. And then I found out, I got into New York, Internal Revenue, they wanted to see me, wanted to know if I made any money, just a clearance to get out of the country. And then I had a ticket on another Danish ship to go back to Denmark.

That was in time for Christmas. When I got back to Denmark, I wasn't too happy about it, but my back was healing up, you being young it heals up pretty fast. So my dad, he wasn't, his work wasn't too good, so he was looking for something different. And I used to go with him in the morning and look for a job. And after a few times out I said to my dad, I said, "This is not for me. I'm going back to the United States." He said, "Son, where are you going?" I says, "I don't know, but I'm going back." So I bought a ticket for New York.

LEVINE: What was the job situation like in Denmark?

MADSEN: It was not good at that time. That was 1925. So then I started back again, I would say, in about February. And on the boat I talked to a lot of people. Some was going to Indiana, some was going to Michigan, and talking about Henry Ford, and he paid five dollars a day. I said to myself, "That's for me. I'm going to Detroit." So I got a train ticket to Detroit, and when we got into Detroit, well, I just got off the train. I didn't know anybody. I had two suitcases, and I had fifty dollars in my pocket.

LEVINE: What was your English like at that time?

MADSEN: Well, it couldn't have been too bad, because I was getting along all right. Because I had, that man, the first man that I met on the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, I asked him, "Where is Henry Ford's place?" And he kind of looked, smiled and looked at me. So we talked a little bit, and he said, "You'd better come with me. So he took me back and arranged for room and board, which was good. It was not at his house. He came the next day and took me downtown to an employment office. And I got a job as a truck driver's helper. So I worked with that for a while, fifty, sixty cents an hour or something, fifty cents an hour. And then I was working for, no. We used to haul, go in through different yards and haul material out when you build houses, like cement blocks and lumber and stuff like that. And then we'd go out and help unload it, or get somebody else to unload it for us. And then when things got slack they put me in the yard to unload open railroad cars. That is, they had a crane with a bucket, and they told me to go on in there and shovel it out the corners, and one day I almost got hit by the bucket because the cable busted.

I quit right there, and that was it. But I went back to the same employment office downtown, and I wanted a job. And he said, "Well, Packard Motor Company, they're looking for metal finishers." That sounded fancy to me. I didn't know what it was. I went up to Packard Motor Company and I got a job out there at sixty cents an hour, and I learned a little bit about automobiles, how to finish metal. And I worked there about maybe a year, a year-and-a-half. Then they closed down to change models. And at that time there was no unemployment and that could take a month or more, so I got restless and I went down to Bridge Manufacturing Company and hired in as a metal finisher at sixty-five cents an hour.

LEVINE: What did you do as a metal finisher?

MADSEN: Well, that is to take bumps out of metal and file it off, or grind it off, just like bump shops, you know. Metal, it does get damaged, you know, in production. So it ended up that I worked for the Bridge Manufacturing Company hired in, and then eventually they asked me to be a supervisor. Of course, I jumped at the chance. And it turns out that I was a supervisor at the time that Chrysler Corporation

bought out Bridge Manufacturing Company, and I went along with the deal. So I ended up working for Bridge and Chrysler for thirty-seven years just, okay. And then after thirty-seven years I decided that's enough, so I retired when I was sixty years old, and that's about it.

LEVINE: How did, when did you meet your wife and where?

MADSEN: I met her in, I went back to Denmark in 1929 for just a vacation, you know. I had provision from Bridge Manufacturing Company that I could go. And then when I got to Denmark I met my wife. Oh, that's another thing. I had bought a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and I drove that from Detroit to New York, and I got it on the ship, and the ship that owed for twenty-five dollars. Well, I got into Copenhagen, I got the motorcycle off, and got on it and took off. I didn't see any, uh, immigration. They just looked at my passport, and I took off. And I drove up to Aalborg. And my parents didn't know I was coming. When I knocked on the door, you should have seen my dad's face. "My Christianson, my goodness, what are you doing here?!" Okay. So here I was home in Denmark, and then I would go out at night, and I would go to a

show or a cafe or something like that. And then I met a young man at one cafe and he said, "I'd like to have you meet my sister." "Well," I said, "that sounds good!" That turned out to be Lily. So we had a date, and we were to meet, I was to come on a motorcycle, and she'd meet me at a certain place, and I showed up, and we made a date to go out that evening. In the meantime, I was anxious to go back, take the motorcycle, go out in the country where I used to work on a farm. Now, on the return trip just outside of Aalborg, there was a guy riding on a bicycle, and a dog jumped out of a ditch and bit him in the leg, and he knocked me off my motorcycle. My motorcycle went down, and I slid along the highway and got up. I had taken all the meat off my right kneecap. So I was taken into a doctor in town, and he poured some iodine in it and bandaged me up. The motorcycle wasn't damaged that bad. I rode it into town, and I had a date to meet Lily that night, and I was determined to keep it.

LEVINE: This was your first date?

MADSEN: Yeah. And so we went out, and I didn't tell her what happened to me. I felt terrible. I was sitting in

there. I had one cocktail, she had one, and I said, I told her what had happened. So I said, "I got to go home." So we got out, we got in a taxi, and I got home. So I was bedridden for two weeks. My knee was like this, (he gestures) you know. Then I had a doctor come to the house. Then eventually Lily would come and see me every day, and then eventually I started riding my motorcycle in Aalborg. I told you, I got out of Copenhagen without any customs seeing my motorcycle. Here comes the policeman. He rode up to me on a bicycle, and I was riding a motorcycle real slow. And he said, "Excuse me, I think there's a warrant out for your arrest." "Oh." "Will you come down to the station?" I said, "Sure, I'll follow you." So I went down to the police station, and found out what it was. I didn't have, pay import duty on my motorcycle. I got that straightened out. And that was it. So then, like I met Lily. That was on the second of June. It happened to be her birthday. She was twenty-one years old that day. And, yeah, that was it. Later on we got engaged, and then we got married on July the 29th, 19 . . . Yes. July 29, 1929.

LEVINE: So that was, what was that, a year after you first met?

MADSEN: No, no. We only, I only knew her two months.

LEVINE: Oh, you married . . .

MADSEN: We got married, and I took off again. I had to. At that time, I was not a citizen. You can't, it takes five years to become a citizen. So the reason I didn't become a citizen when I first came to Detroit because they told me I had to bring witnesses in from Iowa the two years I was out there. That would be too expensive. So I decided to wait till I had five years in Detroit to become a citizen, so I waited.

LEVINE: By this time had you decided that you definitely were going to stay in the United States?

MADSEN: Yes. You know, that's all it takes. You go back to Denmark, then you see how well you're off in the United States. That's why the United States is my home. I got, I got two children, I got a girl, a daughter, I should say. She was born in 19, '29, '39, she was born in 1930 or '31. And then we got a son, he was born in 1935. And believe it or not, they're

both living in Florida now. My son-in-law, he retired from Chrysler Corporation, and my son, he retired from General Motors, so I got my family down here. I got six grandchildren living in Michigan, most of them, and I got ten great-grandchildren. That's the story.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, now, how did Lily feel about coming to the United States?

MADSEN: Well, just like I felt, you know, not too happy about it, you know. You know, I lived in a rooming house, and my brother Pete, he came over, I helped him come over. And we were renting a room together. And then when she came over then, of course, I went out and rented a furnished apartment, you know. And her not being able to talk English, the same thing. She had learned it, so. But it went on, and a little better. It got a little better and a little better. And then we bought a, we rented a house and we bought a house, and we sold the house. Then we bought another one, and that's where I stayed. But during that time we were in Michigan, we had a cottage for twenty-seven years on Lake, on, yeah, Lake Huron. And so we had a pretty good life.

LEVINE: If you were to think about the part of you that's Danish and the part of you that's American, what would you say? What part of you is Danish?

MADSEN: Well, Denmark is still home, you know. But I wouldn't trade it, I wouldn't leave the United States for Denmark. I know I could go back to Denmark and get much better care. As a senior citizen they take care of you from the day you're born till the day you're gone. If you go into a nursing home in Denmark, you don't have to worry about them taking you home. I worry about that here, but that's the only thing I worry about. But, you know, we are, we are middle class, I should say, you know. I made sure that when I retired everything we had was paid for, and I had some investments, and I had some Chrysler stock, which I didn't make too good on. And so when we retired then, just like I said, we, I made up my mind when I retired I wasn't going to shovel snow any more. We headed for Florida. And we've been here for going on twenty-eight years.

LEVINE: And how, what would you say about this period in your life?

MADSEN: Retiring?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MADSEN: I never been, I never regretted the day in my life that I retired. You know, I was a supervisor and I got, I did pretty well as a supervisor. I was a supervisor most of the time when I worked for Chrysler. And, but production was getting to you. You see, I had a big responsibility. I was the general foreman when I retired, and so if a foreman is off you have to take his place. If the superintendent, he's off, you have to take his place. And then when you're running a line, then you got to get along with people. So, and then the unions, they came in, you know. And then you have stewards and chief stewards and, oh, yeah. It was getting to me. So I said to my son-in-law, he was, at that time, personnel manager of Chrysler, and he was in on negotiating, negotiating the new contract. They do that every four years. So I said to George one day, I said, "It would be nice if Chrysler would come out with a pension. Then I'd get out." So he came home one night. He had, he took, it was in the night hours, he had settled with the union, and he said,

"Alice, you can tell your dad he got what he wanted, a pension." So, you know, you had to wait till the kitty is built up, you know. So that was in 19, 1964 when he signed, no, '63, or 2 or 3, something like that, when it was built up. Then I told him that I was going to retire. Well, I didn't belong to the union, so I figured if you can give it to the union, you can give it to me. He said, "Don't count on me. I want to get out." And I was sixty years old, and at that time you had to have ninety points, that is your age, your seniority. That had to, yeah, that had to come on, ninety points. I was sixty, and I had thirty-seven years, so I had ninety-seven points, so he said, "Okay." So I retired the first of October 1965. I left a month before that. I had some time coming. That's how much I hated the place in there. I could have stayed in there and made quite a bit of money, but I didn't want to. No, I retired, and I got out, and I'm happy about it. Chances are, you know, I see people that retire and they hate it, you know. They sit in a rocking chair and then in a year you're gone. And I've been here more than twenty-eight years.

LEVINE: What are the joys of your old age?

MADSEN: Well, you know, down here, you know, uh . . .

(dishes are heard clanging in the background)

(break in tape) Well, you've got to have some hobbies, you know. And one of the hobbies I've had down here is making canes. I make canes out of rosin from palm trees, believe it or not. And that, you know, I made lots of them, for years and years. Now I haven't made any for a couple of years. And then I got the garage out here, and I can go and mess around.

I got a bicycle, I can still ride a bicycle, even at my age. I love to ride a bicycle. And then (he coughs) every summer since we came to Florida, see, the first five years we had our own cottage, and we would go up there in May and come back in late September. And then in 1970 I sold it, and I said, "That was a mistake." But then, at that time, we were going to Denmark quite often, every other year. See, we've been in Denmark, at least I have, I've been over there nine times. And so then we'd go to Denmark and then we come back and we'd spend some time with the kids. And then the kids, when I sold the cottage the kids didn't want it. Believe it or not, they went up

north, up to Grayling, and they saw a cottage for sale next to some people you were visiting, and they ended up buying it. It was actually a dump and there was a lot of work to be done on it, so my son-in-law and my daughter, she said, "Why don't you . . ." See, we had rented a place, a mobile home, that we used in the summer time, we lived in. "Dad, he said, "why don't you stay in our cottage when we're not there, and then you can do some fixing up for me, okay?" So I said, "Okay." If it's okay with George. I said, "I don't want to do it unless, you know, two families being together." Well, he said, "When we come up there, then you come down to Stoney Height and you take care of our house while we're gone." So it worked out fine. So up there, and then five or six years ago another cottage was for sale, and now she said, "Why don't you buy it?" I said, "Okay." I did. So we got our own place again.

LEVINE: Oh, nice.

MADSEN: The last, that's been the last six years. And so we go up there, and we've been leaving every summer at least three or four months. So you have, you have Florida and you have Michigan, so it worked out fine,

oh, yes.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything that you'd like to say that would be advice to younger people based on your life?

MADSEN: You know, years ago you would have a different opinion than you have today. Today is hard times. Even for young people, they get married. It's pretty hard to get started. So I really don't know. Yes, I would say, for goodness sakes, get an education, something I didn't get. All I got was seven years. But what I done in my years in the United States, I got to be a supervisor with a seventh grade education. See, I was a good worker and I got a good supervisor. They liked that. But today if you don't have a college degree you can't hold that job. So that's my advice to youngsters. Get an education.

LEVINE: Are there any ways that you raised your children that were like your parents raised you, or did you treat them different, as a parents?

MADSEN: (he laughs) Oh, no. It's something, you know. My kids didn't get to go to college. I had it all arranged for my daughter to go, but then she married when she was eighteen or nineteen, so that was the end

of that. But she married a college, a man that had a college degree. And Alice, she's always been pretty smart, even today. And she's a correspondent for The Danish Pioneer.

LEVINE: Yes, I know.

MADSEN: Oh, you found that out. Okay. And she's president of the Danish Club. So she carries on the Danish tradition, okay. But Neil, our son, he didn't like the school. He didn't like to go to school. He skipped school. Mom knew about it, but I didn't. So one day he came home and he said to his mom, he said, "I want to quit, and I want to go out and make some money." So finally he came in and he spilled the beans to me. And I talked to him, I said, "Is that the way you feel?" I said, "I'll let you quit on one condition." I said, "That you're going in the armed forces." "Okay, Dad. That's a deal." So he shopped around and shopped around. Then he decided on the air force. So he was shipped all over, and went to school. And the mechanic part, I wanted to be a mechanic. He turned out to be a crackerjack mechanic. So that's what he was, he was training for in school. So he came, he was one of the top ten in the class.

And, believe it or not, they sent him to Korea. He was, they sent him even before he was eighteen years old. So he got over to Korea, and then the kid knew that he should do something, so he started studying to finish high school, so he could get a degree, at least in high school. And he was working on airplanes and overhauling, and then one day he had to overhaul one, and then the pilot, he come, he said, "Okay, kid. We're going for a ride." He said, "Why?" "Well," he said, "if we go down, you're going with me."

(Dr. Levine laughs) That's to teach him how to do a good job. So he done a terrific job over there. He was named the Airman of the Month. And, believe it or not, he was in the air force for four years, and he came home as a flight engineer. And then he got into General Motors on his own, and he started pumping gas. That's the only job he had. Later on they laid him off, and then he said, "Why are you laying me off?" He said, "You need mechanics." And he said, "Are you a mechanic." "Sure," he said. "Call the VA. He'll tell you." He called, and he said, "Okay, you're a mechanic." And that started him. And, you know, before he got done at General Motors he was a junior executive. And he was very active in the unions

before he got to be there. He was big in the union. He signed a contract for all the skilled trades at General Motors, at one time. And then after that he quit the union, and then the company said, "We'd like to have you as a supervisor." They found out he was fair and square. He could work both sides. And so he retired after twenty-five years at General Motors. Yeah, he was a junior executive. And, you know, he was only fifty-one or fifty-two, and he was worried about it. He had a home in Rochester, Michigan, worth about a hundred and twenty thousand dollars. And General Motors offered him sixty thousand dollars cash plus his pension to retire. They wanted to get some executives out. And he took it. Then he sold his house. You know, the first year in Florida he had to pay twenty-seven thousand in taxes because he was not fifty-five. So he regretted that, but he was struggling down in Florida. A couple of his kids came down. But they are in the landscaping business. You've got to do something. He's fifty-seven now.

LEVINE: When you look back now on your life growing up in Denmark and coming here, is there anything you'd like to say in closing about having been an immigrant to

this country and having made this country your home?

MADSEN: Well, it's, you know, I left Denmark without fear looking for a better chance to make a living, since I hadn't learned a trade. And United States has been good to me. And I was, you know, when I look back now for what I did, it scares me when I think about what I did, you know, traveling and getting off the train, didn't know anybody. It takes a lot of guts. And, really, I don't know, except to say I am very happy in United States, and United States has been good to me, and so has the Chrysler Corporation.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, that sounds like a good place to stop. I want to thank you very much.

MADSEN: You know, Iacocca, you know, he wanted to save Chrysler.

LEVINE: Yes, yes. And influential in Ellis Island, as well.

MADSEN: Oh, yes, yeah.

LEVINE: So thank you very much. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here with Chris Madsen and we're here in his home in Penellis Park, Florida, and it's April, I think it's the 23rd, 1993 and I'm

signing off.

MADSEN: No, it's the 22nd.

LEVINE: It is the 22nd. Okay, sorry, it's the 22nd.