

**EI-302**

**SONYA ANNA THORNBLOM GILLICK**

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**SWEDEN, 1921**

**AGE 12**

**PORT: GOTEBOG**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **KALMAR**
- **THE US: BAY RIDGE, BROOKLYN, NY**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today --it's April 27th, 1993 --and I'm here in Fort Lauderdale, Florida with Sonya Thornblom Gillick, who came from Sweden in 1921, when she was twelve years old. Well, I'm very happy to be here,

GILLICK: Thank you.

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LEVINE: And I look forward to hearing your story. Maybe we can start right at the beginning; if you would give me your birth date.

GILLICK: April 28th, 1909.

LEVINE: And do you remember the town in Sweden where you were born?

GILLICK: Oh yes,

LEVINE: What was the --

GILLICK: Kalmar

LEVINE: Can you spell it, please?

GILLICK: K-A-L-M-A-R

LEVINE: And did you live in Kalmar the entire time before you left Sweden?

GILLICK: Yes, for twelve years.

LEVINE: Twelve years, okay. When you think of Kalmar, what is it that you recall about the town?

GILLICK: Well, I recall my school days --the good and the bad. The fun we had.

LEVINE: What did you do for fun?

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GILLICK: Well, for fun in the winter we had a, they made a big hill and froze it, and we could use it for sleigh riding. And during recess in school --we came by sleigh, everybody brought their sleigh --we went out there and for an hour or so, you know, to ride down the hill. Because at night the adults took it over.

LEVINE: To sleigh ride?

GILLICK: Yes, yes, to ride, belly whopping, we called it. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: You took your sleighs to school?

GILLICK: Yes, you'd hitch a ride behind some --well, I can't say automobile because they weren't there then -- (she coughs) hitch it to a wagon, you know, a horse and wagon would come along and they say "Hitch on, and we'll take you," you know, we ride. And it was fun.

LEVINE: Was it dangerous?

GILLICK: No, it was no traffic, it was no and the roads were, you know, shoveled.

LEVINE: Could you describe what your sleigh looked like?

GILLICK: My sleigh was red. I had a red sleigh. My brother made it for me. Yeah, it was very nice. I laid my whole body on it and my sister would sit on top of me sometimes. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: When you were in Sweden, it was just you and your sister Olga and your

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parents?

GILLICK: And two brothers, Harry and Gunnar. Both are deceased. And Harry, later on, came over to America with Gunnar, stayed with his family and he was ninety-two when he died, a year ago.

LEVINE: So which brother made you your red sleigh?

GILLICK: Gunnar. Gunnar.

LEVINE: He was the oldest?

GILLICK: Yes.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's name?

GILLICK: Anna Nilson was her maiden name. Anna Charlotte Nilson.

LEVINE: N-I-L-S-E-N?

GILLICK: S-O-N (Dog barks.)

LEVINE: S-O-N. (Dog barks.) And your --(Dog barks again, and again.) Wait, we'll pause here.

GILLICK: Can you turn it off?

LEVINE: Okay, we're now. Bauzer, the fattest dog in the world,

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GILLICK: Yes. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: has just come in, and we may hear a panting from time to time. Okay, so Gunnar made you the red sleigh.

GILLICK: And Harry and my sister had made me a doll house.

LEVINE: Oh, can you describe that?

GILLICK: Inside it was made out of cartons, you know, of orange boxes. We never had any oranges. We picked them up at the dumps, the boxes, you know, brought them home and they made me a doll house, papered it inside, put curtains on the windows, cute little furniture. Everything was made with things that we had in the house.

LEVINE: And did the doll house look like your house?

GILLICK: No, no. It looked just like a small, tiny little bit of a red cottage. It was very pretty.

LEVINE: And your brothers both made that for you?

GILLICK: No, my sister and Harry, my brother Harry and my sister. That was their project, while Gunnar made the sleigh. He'd bought an old sleigh, you know, with the slides, you know, what do you call it? You know, the runners, that they run on. He bought an old sleigh, but made a new top. It was red and it had my name on it. (She laughs.)

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LEVINE: Well it sounds like you were a very close family.

GILLICK: Yes, we were. Poverty stricken but, you know, respectful and loving family.

LEVINE: Uh-ha.

GILLICK: We all obeyed papa.

LEVINE; Papa was strict?

GILLICK: Oh yes.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of the ways in which he was strict?

GILLICK: Well, I sneaked out with a girl of eighteen at night to that hill where you go sleigh riding (she coughs)--Excuse me --I never told him. And, of course, we were there a couple of hours. And it was the first time he ever spanked me with a piece of wood. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: And did you all have chores to do around the house?

GILLICK: Well, yes, we did. My brothers worked and my father was like a farmer. He rented ground and, you know, planted on it. And, you know, you borrow a garden to work it for your own good. And we had vegetables and fruit and flowers and it was hard work, hard work for my mother. She worked very hard out in the fields.

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LEVINE: Now, did your father also sell what he grew?

GILLICK: Oh yes, oh sure, that's how he made his living.

LEVINE: What were his major crops?

GILLICK: Well, we had vegetables. We had carrots and rhubarb --I can see the fields in front of me, you know. We had beautiful strawberries, all kinds of berries on the bushes and, of course, the most magnificent pears you ever tasted in your life, and the were called, in Swedish, svarn nech, that means they were made like a swan's neck, long and graceful, but the most juiciest, the most delicious pears.

LEVINE: How do you spell that, swan neck?

GILLICK: I don't know what they call it, the real name for it was.

LEVINE: Do you know how to spell it?

GILLICK: Swan necht pears, that's their shape. Like they're, you know, long and round and then like a long neck on them. And I used to bring up cherries. Oh, we had the most magnificent cherry trees. One, especially, was very, very expensive and we were never allowed to eat it, but when cherry pickin' time came, my father would say to me, "Bring home five or six kids from school. I'll pay them to pick cherries." And, we'll say that maybe there were fifteen cherry trees. It was quite an orchard that they had. But my father would say, "You kids go up in the trees and you can eat as much as you want, but this tree I want everybody to whistle." Because

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those were the expensive cherries. They were different from the others. He said, "No eating up there. Everybody whistle and keep their mouths away from (they laugh), you know. Otherwise they could eat on the other trees.

LEVINE: Did you ever taste one of, a cherry from that tree?

GILLICK: Oh, of course, like Adam and Eve, of course I tasted them; forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: So then where would your father send those very special cherries?

GILLICK: Well, no, he took them to market. They went to market every Saturday, into town. And you laid out your wares on tables. And, ooh, they sold. They were very popular, you know, in demand.

LEVINE: Did you ever go to market with your father?

GILLICK: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: Describe what you would do on market day.

GILLICK: Well, on market day my brother Harry --we were the youngest, you know-- and I, we'd only think about going to the bakery and our mother to give us a penny to go in there and ask for the crumbs, you know, from what they have left over from broken cookies. Oh, and for a penny you could get a bag full of all these delicious tasting cookies. Who cared whether they were in small bits or not. They tasted delicious.

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LEVINE: So you would go to the bakery?

GILLICK: So we looked forward to that, you know. And then we played with other children there and, you know, that came with the farmers. And it was fun. It was fun.

LEVINE: Did you help your father?

GILLICK: No, weeding, we were helping. terrible, weeding, that's what we helped home. Oh, on your knees and weed (they laugh).

LEVINE: And your mother, she worked in the fields as well?

GILLICK: Oh, yes, yes, she planted potatoes and we used to take the potatoes in the ground and she made the groove, you know, what they call. Yeah, she worked very hard. She died very young and my father lived to be quite old. He was twenty years older than her. And she was his second wife and I the eleventh child, but she only bore, your know, second wife only bore my brothers and my sister and I. It was the first wife that had a lot of children, a lot of miscarriages.

LEVINE: Did your mother have miscarriages as well?

GILLICK: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I know I took all the strength out of her, being her last child. She was only forty-nine when she passed away.

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LEVINE: Well how old was she when you were born?

GILLICK: Well, forty . . . (pause) (dog starts barking) I was ten years old when she died. (Dog has continued barking. Mrs. Gillick whispers that she doesn't know what's the matter and tells the dog, in a horse whisper to Shut Up.)

LEVINE: So she died while you were in Sweden?

GILLICK: Oh, yes, she died and my sister was a domestic and working up in Stockholm and had a very nice position. She came home to care for my mother who got tuberculosis. And my mother died home. She was in bed about a year. She died when I was ten. My father lived to be eighty-five, almost eighty-six, a few weeks before (she clears her throat.) And, you know, I went to (she clears her throat) I left Sweden with my sister, Olga, and my father and two brothers stayed, you know, by themselves. And in America I had two step-sisters and one of them came over from Sweden to get us, Sandra her name was. And she took us back with her and she was a U.S. citizen so she never had to go to Ellis Island. She just went right off from, went home.

LEVINE: Well let's, before we talk about America, let's talk a little bit more about --

GILLICK: About Sweden?

LEVINE: Sweden, yeah. Do you remember any foods that your mother cooked?

GILLICK: Rabbit. We had lots of rabbit.

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LEVINE: Did you raise rabbits?

GILLICK: Yes. (She laughs.) And chicken. I could never recall eating chicken and have it taste anything like it does over here. Not unless they've cooked it a different way.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the ways that she cooked things, your mother?

GILLICK: No, not really. I wasn't interested, you know (she laughs) at that time. Later on I would have loved to.

LEVINE: Do you remember your house? Could you describe where you lived in Sweden?

GILLICK: Oh, it was a very small house. It had only two bedrooms and my brothers had one of them. And another one, my father and my mother had the other one, and my sister and I slept in a bed, you know like a day-bed, in what we called the parlor. And it was quite crowded. And, of course, there was no running water, no electricity, no hygiene. It was all rough.

LEVINE: Do you remember, could you describe the parlor?

GILLICK: The what?

LEVINE: The parlor.

GILLICK: Oh, yes, it had a round table and four chairs and a big, family bible on it that my father read in every Sunday. We all had to sit down in there and,

you know, listen.

LEVINE: Would you go to church as well?

GILLICK: No, I went to Sunday School, Salvation Army Sunday School. Everybody went to the, you know, I had never heard of Catholics and I never heard of denominations like Baptist or anything. All I knew was, really, the Lutheran. The whole city must have been Lutheran ( she laughs) because I don't remember ever hearing anybody else, you know. But we had a big cathedral in the city, right in the market where we go on Saturday, beautiful, big --And on Christmas Eve, we get our presents Christmas Eve. And get up at six o'clock the next morning, Christmas Day and get in the sleigh. The horse, you know, all decked out for Christmas, and we drive into what, you would call it Mass, [at] six o'clock in the morning. Beautiful. And I can still feel, when they played that big organ, how it quivered through the whole cathedral and your body, when the first chords that they played, you know. It was thrilling, to ride in the snow, covers up to here, you know.

LEVINE: The whole family would be on a big, horse-driven sleigh?

GILLICK; Yes, yes, um humm. My father and my mother and my biggest brother would be up front and the other, Olga, us, we were in the back. It was fun. It was nice. Made you feel good.

LEVINE: What would happen Christmas Eve?

GILLICK: Christmas Eve was celebrted I guess all over the country more than

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Christmas Day. Christmas Eve was wonderful. Poor as we were, we had plenty of food, and the main food was a big piglet, a pig. And it was my job to put the apple in his mouth and the parsley in his ears to decorate him to eat. And I put out --you know, they don't believe in Santa Claus, it's gnomes that we are brought up to believe, and that they come. And so, I used to put out a dish of milk rice, something like rice pudding, out on the stoop, and after awhile somebody there in the family went and took it away, emptied it while I'd go out and say, "Oh, he was here and he ate it! (She coughs.) So that was wonderful belief. But when I came to America, I loved their Santa Claus much more. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: Now, was it the gnome who supposedly brought the presents?

GILLICK: Well, no, not really. Just good luck to your house. And then, of course, we had a Christmas tree, but we had real candles on it. And all the little on were made of martzapan and all kinds of cut-out papers, we learned in school how, you know, shimmering paper, like silver or gold. It was all very plain but it was beautiful when it was lit up with the real candles.

LEVINE: Did the whole family decorate the tree?

GILLICK: Well, yes, mostly it was put up for us, you know, for the children to do it. Yeap. But everybody added something to it, you know. It was a nice -- And the packages, I can still, you know, here we spend so much money on wrapping and ribbons and flowers, you know, decorations. We had brown paper and we had sealed with like a red wax that you heat and you drop it to where you want it sealed. And I can still smell it. It was the most wonderful smell. And you got those packages and everybody's

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package looked the same, except you wrote in long-hand who it was for. Very plain but very nice.

LEVINE: And can you remember any gifts? The kinds of gifts that you received or games?

GILLICK: Parchesi game, I know we got. That was a joint gift. We had a lot of fun with that. But I would get rubber boots, you'd get things that were good. Nothing really, you don't get a lot of toys. You get candy to eat, you know, and good food, but usually clothing, like a scarf or mittens, whatever you needed. Like on December 9th, was my Name's Day.

LEVINE: Oh, tell me about that.

GILLICK: Anna, Anna, my middle name is Anna, and they have Name's Days. And there I woke up and I have a package in bed, and guess what it was. It would be an orange and that was to me like a gold. We never got that. An orange! And it was delicious. And, I don't know, maybe a pair of cheap beads or something like that; I don't remember. I just looked forward to that orange.

LEVINE: You mean every Name Day, every year, you would get that?

GILLICK: Yes, yes. Yeop.

LEVINE: Now, your Name Day, what day was that?

GILLICK: December 9th. And it was my mother's name and my name, you know,

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Anna. So we had, you know, two celebrations.

LEVINE: And did you celebrate the Name Day in other way besides the oranges --

GILLICK: No, just the presents, you know, whatever it was, and knowing it, you know.

LEVINE: Now, was December 9th, in other words, Anna was what? A saint or just a name --?

GILLICK: No, just a name I guess. Is there a Saint Ann? I don't know. I never dwelt on that subject to see.

LEVINE: But each name had a day associated with it?

GILLICK: Yes, um hum, yeah.

LEVINE: Did your brothers have Name Days?

GILLICK: I don't think so. I don't think so. I never remember. I don't think they did. I just remember mother's and mine and I remember May 1st. That's another big thing.

LEVINE: What was that?

GILLICK: We have marching, you know, like a, patriotic things. You march, you know, with the children, through the town, and you carry the flag and you sing and you end up in a big castle, in the court yard of a castle would be

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the place where we ended up the meeting. And they would pray and we would sing and then we'd play and have fun. And in the winter, around this castle, I was taught how to ice skate on the ice around the castle. And at night my sister would take me and they had barn fires on the ice. Oh, it was beautiful. And people from Kalmar would ride over to the island where people lived, with a horse and a buggy, you know, on the ice, regular traffic there at night. It was real nice. That was exciting.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the songs that --

GILLICK: Oh, I have school books with me. The same books that I used at school, I have here with me that I often take out and sing through the songs that we used to sing in school.

LEVINE: Can you remember, could you sing a few bars of anything you remember from childhood? It doesn't matter if it sounds --

GILLICK: Well, I don't know the words without looking in the book, you know.

LEVINE: Well, maybe when we finish. It would be nice to have that on the tape.

GILLICK: Sure, sure.

LEVINE: Great. Okay, let's see, when did you start school in Sweden? What age were you?

GILLICK: Oh, it must have been, I had graduated, you know, before I left for America, I graduated the public school. I guess you start between six and

seven.

LEVINE: And did everyone go?

GILLICK: Yes. What do you mean, at their age? Yes, oh yes. Like my brothers didn't have to go anymore, you know, they had graduated. They didn't go into anything like high school or college. We couldn't afford that. They worked right after they finished school.

LEVINE: What did your brothers do right after they finished?

GILLICK; Well, it was, nearby there was a marble factory. It wasn't really a factory. It was a big outdoor thing. They sold grave stones and all different things in marble, and one brother worked there. And another one sold newspapers on the train. He traveled on the train and sold newspapers back and forth from certain cities, you know. They all did something. And Olga, of course, had gone to Stockholm to this domestic job that was very, very good for her. She had a wonderful lady that she worked for. But she had to come home to take care of my mother when my mother was dying. She came home for that one year. Olga was cooking and doing all the work.

LEVINE: Did you ever go to Stockholm?

GILLICK: Once we had to go there. In order to leave the country you had to go off to Stockholm and get certain papers. That was the only time, and I was scared to death. I had never seen a trolley. I had never seen an automobile. All I had seen was a motorcycle. My landlord's son had a

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motorcycle. And, of course, it was a quick visit and they left me with the lady where we were staying overnight and my two sisters, the one that came from America to get us and Olga, they went out on the town that one night and I stayed, I had to stay home. ( They laugh.) So I didn't see much of it, you know.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else about your little town that you recall? Did you have other relatives there?

GILLICK: Yes, my mother's brother was a mailman. Another relative there had the park where they had dancing and theater entertainment. They were caretakers there and they lived right in the park. Aunt Ida and Uncle Peter and they were wonderful people and when the (she clears her throat) when the summer came on (she coughs) and they had their May festivals and all kinds of festivals in the park, I would go there, you know. Eat my heart out. They had waffles made like hearts. I couldn't get enough of them. Oh, everybody bought me one. (They laugh.) You know, you're grateful for so little when you're poor. You don't think about, beyond other things. You don't wonder how other people live, you just know that you live under the best possible --

LEVINE: Did you feel you were poor at the time?

GILLICK: Yes, yes, oh yes. I used to hate the packages we got from America. It would be high pointed high shoes for me to wear. And the children in school laughed at me. Oh, I used to cry. I used to cry all the way to school and do anything to stub the toe and ruin it. Bump it into everything I could. (She laughs.)

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LEVINE: What would be the difference between the high pointed shoes and what you wore?

GILLICK: Well they didn't have it, you know. They were expensive shoes, I guess, you know, belonged to somebody; and clothing. But the only thing that fitted me, the dresses fitted my sister, but the shoes was the only thing that fitted me and I hated them.

LEVINE: What did you usually wear for shoes?

GILLICK: Well, it was like brouges, you know, nothing fancy. I call them brouges, the heavy made shoes like a man's shoe, thick soles, you know and good leather, I mean. In the winter time we wear boots. I used to put newspapers in my boots and stockings to keep them warm, you know, so you wouldn't get cold. So, that's it.

LEVINE: Do you remember what other, how else you dressed? Anything about your clothing when you were there?

GILLICK: No, I really don't recall what kind of clothes I had, except when my mother passed away. I had to wear black. I had a black pinafore-like I wore over a dress and a black hat that had a black crepe on it. And my brother took me to the park one night to see fire works and some kind of celebration and it poured. Oh, a terrible rainstorm came up and the black ran all over my face from the hat (she laughs) and I was afraid of the thunder. I mean those things, you know, good and funny and sad, some of them, but -- I remember when we buried my mother, you walked behind a hearse, the coffin is pulled by a horse and a carriage, you know. And you walked

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behind and along was our cat. He was crazy about my mother. The cat never left, went to the cemetery, sat while the burial took place, didn't come home with us, but later on came home, during the night, and that was the saddest day of my life. But it was also a childish anticipation to see all that candy that was marked and put in like a paper covering with her name, my mother's name and death and birth. You know, like you do. And had a piece of candy at the end of it, and I was thrilled to hand them out to my friends.

LEVINE: Was that typical to have that, the candy?

GILLICK: Yes, umhum. It's in this thing, you know, like you make a little pouch and the candy's at the bottom and at the top it says the name of the one, the person who died. I still have a old copy of it someplace.

LEVINE: So you would be, you were the person who gave --

GILLICK: I gave it to my friends. Well I shouldn't have. Well it wasn't meant to hand like. It was for people who came and paid respect or something. But I took some and gave my friends because it was candy in it.

LEVINE: So that was typical of a funeral in Sweden at that time?

GILLICK: Yes, yes, she was laid out home in one of our stalls that my father had for fruit, like, it was like a big bin, and we decorated it with flowers and leaves, and that's where the casket laid, you know, laid out until it was burial time.

LEVINE: Where was this --

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GILLICK: Right home, right next to our house, in the garden, you know, where we had all the fruit and vegetables, had all these bins. And the cat slept on top of the coffin the whole time. Never came in to eat.

LEVINE: What was the cat's name?

GILLICK: Murre. M-U-R-R-E. Murre. And when I came to America, my father would dip Murre's hand on an ink pad and stamp it on a paper and said, "Here he tells you he loves you and misses you." (She laughs.) Yeah.

LEVINE: Were there any other kinds of customs that you recall from Sweden that were not the same after you came here?

GILLICK: Oh, well, we had a bath house. Everybody bathed in the same, one family, I mean all the kids, we bathed in the same water because we had nothing. It had to be carried by hand, you know, the pails to fill the big -- And every family has a date to go to it, you know.

LEVINE: It was a separate structure in the town.

GILLICK: Yes, that's right. Right among the houses, you know. Besides our little house, there was, well three other houses and then the landlord's big house that had second floor! My goodness that seemed so high to me. (She laughs.) And they had this bath house and you really had to, you know, the women scrubbed their clothes there and had access to a big water. Well you carry pails and pails and pails of water to fill for bathing. That only took place once a week of course, has outdoor privies, you

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know. No sanitation whatsoever.

LEVINE: So would your mother do the laundry in the bath house?

GILLICK: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: So she would take her laundry to that place?

GILLICK: And then in town, not too far away from house, that she could walk, they had like a, I don't know if it was like a canal or a lake, but they had what they call wash houses. And the women went down there and dipped there clothes in that water, you know, and washed it and rinsed it. Certain things, I guess, bed sheets and things. We did big things there. Nothing easy for the woman that lived there, for my mother. It was nothing easy. Everything was hard to do.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE I

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE I

LEVINE: Where did your mother and other women in the town dry their clothes?

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GILLICK: On lines, each, as you know, like some people have here, clotheslines.

LEVINE: And that would be in your backyard or where would --

GILLICK: Well, yeah, the big lot was next to our garden, the little farm that we had, was a big lot and they had a, a lot of people, you know, hung their clothes there. You put up your own rope in your own spot and that was yours forever, you know.

LEVINE: Did your mother make any of your own clothing?

GILLICK: No.

LEVINE: Where did you get it?

GILLICK: Well, it was second-hand clothing. In the city there was the only Jewish person I have known or seen in Sweden and he had a pushcart and he went through and sold different things. And he would have --well, maybe she did make them and I don't know --but there were clothes there on the thing that they bought for me that fitted me. You know, that he had on his wagon.

LEVINE: Was this the same town where your father went to sell, to market?

GILLICK: Yes, Kalmar.

LEVINE: K-A-L-

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GILLICK: M-A-R. Beautiful city.

LEVINE: And there was just one Jewish person that you ever knew?

GILLICK: Yes. And he was very popular with all the things that he had, you know. And he had a daughter with the same name as me, Sonya. Sonnyah, they call it in Swedish, Soonyah.

LEVINE: And did he sell other things besides clothing?

GILLICK: Oh, yes, he had medicines and things, all different things, housewares and a regular little store in back of a wagon, you know, many things. Somebody, was always something for somebody there. He always made a sale.

LEVINE: And how about medicine or doctors or medical care?

GILLICK: Well, no, I never, I never knew of any. We had a dentist that came to school and examined everybody, the children's teeth and he gave each one a toothbrush. I came home. I was so thrilled with that toothbrush. You have no idea, "Look what I've got!" And my father said, "Let me see that!" Oh, he picked it up and said, "Oh, that's wonderful to clean my boots with." And he spit on it and he rubbed it on his boot.

LEVINE: How did you feel?

GILLICK: I cried for days. I hated him (she laughs), I was so mad at him.

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LEVINE: What kind of a temperament did your mother have?

GILLICK: Have a what?

LEVINE: What kind of temperament?

GILLICK: Oh, mild, mild as a lamb; a strong will but very mild, you know. She could express herself and flare up like everybody else but otherwise, I mean, she was just loving and caring all the time. She wanted everybody to be happy and everybody to be well and she was good mother, good mother.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular family member?

GILLICK: Well, being my mother was ill from the time I was ten years old, you know, I was the apple of my father's eye --just make a quote. And, of course, my brothers hated it because (she laughs) he took my part no matter what happened, you know, and I guess I wasn't the best sister. I'd get them in trouble and squeal on them, you know. "Oh, papa, Harry did this or Gunnar did this," you know. "Oh," and I say, "You wait 'til I get a hold of you." (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Could you describe yourself at, you know, ten, eleven, twelve years old?

GILLICK: Yes, I guess I --I don't know how I looked. I have no idea how I looked, I mean. I was always chubby, I know that. And I played with a little porcelain doll I had. And, otherwise, the cat was my baby. I'd doll him up in bonnet and some clothes and make him lay on his back in this homemade little carriage I had and he would scratch and claw to get out,

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you know, and I'd spank him. (She laughs.) My mother said, "Oh, you and Maure get along so well." I said, "Mama, he's tied down, otherwise he wouldn't be in there." (She laughs.)

LEVINE: What was the doll like? Can you describe --

GILLICK: Oh, a little porcelain thing with a painted face. I remember the day I dropped it because I was fighting with my brother Harry and I dropped the doll in the front and it was five different pieces. And I had those pieces so long, trying to make them stick together. I made flour and water paste, you know. But it was no good. (She laughs.) That was the only doll I ever remember having. Yeah, we really didn't have too much to play with, but you made out. You went on picnics and you went swimming and you didn't, nobody wore bathing suits. The women had their own place to go and they'd be in a sheet and walk down to the water and drop the sheet and go in the water. Us kids ran around like nymphs, you know, never thought anything about being naked when you're among your girls, you know. But I can feel in the water, it's nice to be without, I've had experience here going into a pool at night and taking off my bathsuit, and it reminds me just how it felt, you know, it's a great difference. Yes, that was fun. We had sandwiches with us, you know, and everybody be, beautiful weather, you know, you'd be outside all day long.

LEVINE: What would you be swimming in? A pond or ---?

GILLICK: I really don't know. It was quite large. You know, we were here, being that it was all women where I went, across where we were was an island and that's where the men were. And I figured out, without any trouble, that

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they met some of the women in the middle of the water. (They laugh.) They did. I know they did. There were squeals and, you know, you could tell.

LEVINE: What was the weather like when you were, it was a long winter?

GILLICK: Oh, yes, it was long winters and tough spring, I mean, very damp and wet and cold springs. And being my father was a farmer or gardener, whatever you call it, you know, he had to have good weather to replant things, you know. But they celebrated, like they have May Fest that I liked. And all the trees were being bloomed and all different things and you dance around the pole. And those that had, came to entertain would be, they had special costumes for the counties that they came from, you know. And, oh, I used to say, "Oh, I'd love to have one of those outfits," you know, it was so pretty. But they were paid entertainers, you know, that came. That was nice. There was always something of interest, you know. But mostly we were in early at night. We were never allowed out, you know, when it was real dark because there were not street lamps or anything. I just never thought beyond our family, that it was so different, you know. That when I came here to America I was just overwhelmed. I never wanted to leave, never!

LEVINE: Well, tell me, did you have boyfriends at this age?

GILLICK: Oh, I had a boyfriend, yes, the richest boy in town. No, his father owned a man's clothing store and that was something big. But he went to a private school. My girlfriend and I, I'd go to my girlfriend's house to be nearer his house. (She clears her throat.) And he'd come over, you know. And we'd

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talk and he'd walk me home, nothing physical really, you know. He was down at the dock when I left Kalar to go to Stockholm, he was down there to wish me good-bye and he brought me a flower. Yeah.

LEVINE: You mentioned that your father grew flowers as well.

GILLICK: Yes

LEVINE: What kinds of flowers did he grow?

GILLICK: Oh, all kinds of --well we had these at Easter (indicating).

LEVINE: Daffodils.

GILLICK: I never saw irises. Maybe, but daffodils I knew. Then there's another flower that comes after Easter, that they call an Easter flower, jonquils I think they're called. And daisies, pansies, roses. My father, Thornblom, means wild rose. And my father had a French name and they changed it. That's why there's so many Johnson, Peterson, yeah, they changed their name to fit their, how they make their living. So my father picked Thornblom. That was his favorite flower. And his French name was Bovenge, B-O-V-E-N-G-E, Bovenge. And he was never called that. It was Thornblom all the time. Thornblom (pronounces it in Swedish way), it had a thing over it.

LEVINE: Well, now, was your father French?

GILLICK: Yes.

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LEVINE: Had he actually come from France?

GILLICK: Well, no, we had lived most of his part in Germany because there was a revolution in France and people --I guess he came from a pretty good family --people were, middle class people were slaughtered in the market and to get away from children, they sent my brother, Gunnar and Harry to Germany, to a friend of my father's, who was the miller. He had, you know, made flour and the boys stayed there until they, well the both of them ran away because the man was so mean to them.

LEVINE: Now these are your brothers?

GILLICK: Yes.

LEVINE: Your father sent to Germany?

GILLICK: No, my father was sent to Germany.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. His mother and father were in France

GILLICK: In France, yes.

LEVINE: and they sent him and his brother, and he and his brother's names were the same as your brothers' names.

GILLICK: No, that was a mistake, no. He had only one son, but I don't know how often that my father's parents would send money and clothing for him. It

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was never given to him. He put it on his son and my father never saw the money, so he ran away when he was about fifteen.

LEVINE: How long had he been in Germany with this miller?

GILLICK: Oh, he had been there a long time to Miller's, yeah.

LEVINE: And your brother was there several years?

GILLICK: Oh yes, one was there longer than the other. One ran out, went to sea, ran away to get out of there and another one stayed a little bit later but ran away and joined a landscaping school that they had. He worked there and got his, you know, learned how to do landscaping.

LEVINE: And then your father, he--

GILLICK: My father came to Sweden and, I don't know what was the reason, but he met my mother there.

LEVINE: Your father and his brothers couldn't go back to France.

GILLICK: No.

LEVINE: And they separated and they never saw each other until, I guess, forty years later, when my mother came home she said to my father, "Thornblom, I just met a lady at the dock and there's a captain on the ship that has your name, Bovenge." And it was my father's brother and they reunited that way. She said, "I made it for tomorrow, you have to come

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with me to this woman's house, and she's going to have the captain there." Because, while he was in port, he roomed with Terry, you know. She had rooms for sailors. And, she said, "You'll meet him." And I remember my father came home with a green banana and gave me. (They laugh.) I didn't know what it was. "Ooh", I said, "that's awful." Oh, I learned to eat them. (She laughs.) When I came to America, as long as there was ice cream and bananas, I was staying. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: Well, now, your father's brother's name? The one that was on the ship. Do you remember?

GILLICK: (pause) No, I only know the Bevenge. My father's name was Karl Frederick. I don't know what his brother was. I forget what his name was.

LEVINE: So spell it again, B-O-U --

GILLICK: B-O-V-E-G-N-E, Bovenge, something like that, he pronounced, but my father, of course, learned fluid, not fluid --

LEVINE: Fluent.

GILLICK: German, you know, to speak, and he spoke French too, but, I mean, he was in Germany and did all of his, most of his talking in German and then he came to Sweden, of course, and he learned that. He was not dopey. He was a smart man. You know, he knew three languages.

LEVINE: Well, he came to America too?

GILLICK: No.

LEVINE: No, he never came.

GILLICK: No, no. No.

LEVINE; How was it decided that you would come to America?

GILLICK: Well, my mother passed away and my sister, Sandra, had really come over to get my older sister, Olga. She never, you know, and when she saw that, she said, "I can't leave you alone with your father and two brothers." You know, a kid of eleven or whatever it was at that time. And that's why she sent for money from her husband to send more money so they could take me.

LEVINE: And Sandra was one of the children of you father's first marriage.

GILLICK: First marriage, yes. And Adele is the one I came to in the United States. I had never seen until the day at Ellis Island, where we stood on a pilot boat and saw them up on the pier and I saw her and I said, "I don't like you." Sandra told, "You wait 'til you Adele's. She's a very, very strict person. You'll toe the mark. None of your foolishness. Whatever she says, goes." And, believe me, she scared me to death because when I saw her, she has glasses that you pinched on to your nose and her hair was up in a little bun on the top of her head and she looked so strict. So I said, "I don't want to go with you." And she said to me, "Well, I don't want you either." But her husband was at her side and he said, "Sonya, you're coming home with us and you're going to love it." (She laughs.) So I loved him

from the start. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: So, Sandra came over and she was meaning to simply take Olga.

GILLICK: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, why was she going to bring Olga over?

GILLICK: Well, Olga was very independent and she said, "I've been a housekeeper for my father for over a year and I can't stand it. If you don't talk me, I'm going to run away anyway. I'm going back to Stockholm and try and get a job up there." She says, "but I'm not going to stay with them."

LEVINE: So they had been corresponding?

GILLICK: Yes, oh yes.

LEVINE: So did you know Sandra from before she went to America?

GILLICK: No, never seen her. But she had seen me. She was pregnant at the same time as my mother was from the son. So she had seen me.

LEVINE: And she knew Olga.

GILLICK: Yeah, oh yeah. Olga was like nine years older than me.

LEVINE: Okay, so she came and then she said that she was going to take you too.

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GILLICK: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Then how long, did it take a long time for the arrangements to be made?

GILLICK: Oh, no, only a couple of weeks.

LEVINE: Then you, Olga,

GILLICK: and Sandra went to Stockholm and got the necessary papers and then rode across country on a train to Gutenberg, where the ship was.

LEVINE: Well, before we talk about the ship, do you remember leaving? How did you feel about going?

GILLICK: Terrible. It was the saddest thing down at the pier, saying goodbyes. It was tears like you never saw. And my father couldn't go, he wouldn't go. He said, "Say goodbye to me here." He said, "I don't want to go down there."

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving your house?

GILLICK: Oh sure, I remember hugging my father and my brothers, you know, and my girlfriends. They were down there to see me off. And my friend, you know, the boyfriend, they were all down there. But, you know, it was sad in a way, but I was so excited. It was such a new thing to get on this boat, to go up to Stockholm, to me that was adventure that I dreamed about. That I didn't feel too bad. It was (she clears her throat) on the trip over here, on the big boat, that I got so homesick.

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LEVINE: I see. (Mrs. Gillick clears her throat.) Do you remember anything that you packed to take with you?

GILLICK: No, I guess my sister did all the packing. I took my school books. That's all I took.

LEVINE: Do you remember why you took your school books?

GILLICK: Oh, because I wanted, I don't know, because I loved them. There were songs in there, you know, it was like, it belonged to me, nobody else, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that Olga brought with her.

GILLICK: No, I don't.

LEVINE: Do you remember your luggage? What you carried?

GILLICK: Burlap bags. One big, it looked like a paper suitcase. It wasn't very strong, we had with us on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: When you left your house, what did you take? What transportation did you take?

GILLICK: Oh, we walked down to the pier. Right across town, it was a long walk. There was no way to ride.

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LEVINE: So you walked to the pier and then you took a boat --

GILLICK: up to Stockholm, going up the coast.

LEVINE: And that was the first time

GILLICK: I was ever on a boat.

LEVINE: And it was the first time in Stockholm?

GILLICK: Yes, oh sure.

LEVINE: So would you remember anything that struck you about the boat or Stockholm or --?

GILLICK: Well, Stockholm, I told you, trolley cars. I'd never seen and beautiful restaurants and window displays that I'd never seen. And where we were going, they had a toilet and I had never sat on one. And in that bathroom, my sister had to hold my hand because I was scarred. I thought I was going to go out with the water. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: And what were in the window displays, do you remember?

GILLICK: Well, the stores. I'd never seen mannequins. I'd never seen all the different fruits, although we had a lot of fruits. I was never without fruit when I was a youngster. I had never seen a lot of them. I had never seen a tomato. And, of course, the only banana I ever saw was the green one that I got, my father brought. And he said it has to be yellow, you know, to

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get ripe to eat. So I put it in my bureau drawer and my mother said, "Every night when I lay in bed I hear some noise, some noise. It must be a mouse someplace or a rat." And she saw little mounds of grain by the leg of this dresser where I had my, and it was mouse had gone in there and bitten it into pieces. So it was black, when I (she laughs) got rid of it. So it was strange, it's strange. I mean that an orange could mean so much and be so different in taste and a tomato, I thought you eat like an apple and you dive into it. And, oh boy, you're disappointed. I had to learn to eat tomatoes by sprinkling sugar on top. And then after that I, no longer sugar. I was used to them, you know.

LEVINE: That was in the United States, by then.

GILLICK: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay, so from Stockholm, how did you go?

GILLICK: Well, then you go on train to Gutenberg, right across the country. It's from one end to the other on a map, you know. And you come, and the boat is there, whatever. I had nothing to do with it, you know, my oldest sister took care of everything, our papers and stuff, and we get on the boat.

LEVINE: And was that your first train ride?

GILLICK: Um hum.

LEVINE: Do you remember any impressions of that?

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GILLICK: Not really my first train ride because for two summers my, when I was about eight I guess, before my mother became real sick, she had a friend that they owned a big farm, but it was quite a distance away, and you travelled on the train. And that's the same train my brother was selling papers on. (She laughs.) That's the first time, yeah.

LEVINE: So, then, when you got to Gutenberg, did you have any examinations

GILLICK: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: prior to leaving?

GILLICK: Oh yes, you were inoculated. Your hair had to be clean. You couldn't have any nits or bugs and they were very particular, you know. They looked you all over.

LEVINE: Where was this?

GILLICK: Right where the ship was docked, they had like a doctor's office, you know, and nurses in there. And everybody was inspected.

LEVINE: Was this just prior to getting aboard the ship?

GILLICK: Uhhum. Yeap.

LEVINE: Were people actually turned away?

GILLICK: Oh, sure, if they had anything wrong with them, like a strange skin disease

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or if they had bugs in their head, they were turned away, I know.

LEVINE: Okay, let's see, was it just you and Olga then?

GILLICK: Yes.

LEVINE: At that point,

GILLICK: Yes.

LEVINE: getting aboard the ship? And Sandra.

GILLICK: Yes, oh yes, but she, you know, didn't go through anything, she just showed her papers and being a citizen helped her, you know. But she was with us and we were, she and I and Olga and two other girls were in the cabin, steerage, down where the machinery was. Sandra and I never left our births or went up to the dining room until the last day. We were sea sick the whole time.

LEVINE: How long?

GILLICK: Well, thirteen days. And we went through a terrific storm. They dashed in, the guys came, dashed in and nailed up the windows and says, "It's going to be rocky weather." Oh brother, did that ship toss and turn. Uhm.

LEVINE: And the name of the ship?

GILLICK: Stockholm. And one day, well my first day, I went to the dining room but,

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of the whole siege, when we were going to get ready to, the last day they were going to have dinner on the ship there, I went there. And, oh my goodness, it was still rocky. The dishes had little fences set up on the table so they couldn't fall on the floor. You know, everything was rocking. I didn't enjoy eating and I didn't keep it down very long either. I was dehydrated. My sister Olga never went near the cabin except to change clothes. She slept in a deck chair upstairs. She danced all night long. She ate all the fruits that the ship had and comes down in the dark and sticks something in my mouth. I said, "Oohh, it has hair on it!" It was a peach. (She laughs.) I never heard of peaches. So a lot of frightening, we were so mad at her because she was feeling so good and had such a good time. And Sandra wouldn't change her watch. Now they're doing this in Sweden, now we're doing that, you know. She wishes, she wanted to stay, even though she had a husband and a son in America, she wanted to stay. But Olga and I wanted to get away.

LEVINE: Okay, now, do you remember the ship coming into the New York Harbor?

GILLICK: No, I don't remember that at all, but I remember when the ship first started, became, how do you say it? Still, without going.

LEVINE: Put down anchor?

GILLICK: Yeah, at New Foundland they stopped and it was something like, they sent in the mail to the shore or something, you know, to the mainland. And they had baskets, somehow, connected, and it's the first time I ever tasted ice cream. In these baskets they had slices of ice cream --orange, chocolate and vanilla. And you don't know, after being [de]hydrated, how

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good that tasted! Oh, my goodness! And being a child, I don't know how many grown-ups that I didn't even know, bought me one. I ate that day until my sister says, "You're going to die before you get on shore in New York." But that was a remembrance. Oh, that alone, bananas and that, if that is, that's my country; that's for me. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: So you didn't remember the Statue of Liberty from aboard ship?

GILLICK: Oh yes, I remember that when we were going to Ellis Island. You practically get up there and it was beautiful. I call her the green lady. In the sunshine, she looked green, you know, pretty. Yes, but, you know, your young, you're twelve years old and what sticks in your mind is not always the things that were the best, you know. And your interests were, well it was so great to know that you were going to come to a new life that you didn't look past anything. You just took what each day brought, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember your initial impressions of Ellis Island? (pause) When you first got there?

GILLICK: Well I have a good description of it here on the paper.

LEVINE; Can you say it?

GILLICK: Oh sure, I can say it. (The rustling of paper is heard.) Well when Olga and I landed on Ellis Island in August, 1921, of course there were hundreds of immigrants were there, all talking different languages. And then there's a part here that you may not want me to include about what happened about

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the lunch at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Sure, go ahead.

GILLICK: Well, you know, we couldn't talk English. Olga and I, we didn't have Sandra with us there. But in all different languages they call out, so we got the idea that it was eating time, lunch. And Olga said to me, "You go and I'll mind the, our bags." Well, I went into this great big room and there were lines of people. Oh, there were hundreds of people lined up. And I got as far as I could inside the door and I saw down at, they had these big, long tables. And men and women were serving big pieces of bread and then each one had been given a bowl and they filled it with red stuff. And I go back and I told my sister, "Olga, they're serving bread and blood." I'd never seen tomato soup in my life. (Dr. Levine laughs.) "Ooh", she says, "please, we'll eat tonight when we go back on the boat." Because our T was the last in alphabetically and was the second day we had to go there, you know. "Oh, we'll eat when we get to the boat," she said. We never went near it. (They laugh.) (in low voice) Isn't that awful. (Dr. Levine keeps laughing.)

LEVINE: Okay, I think we'll pause here because I want to change the tape.

GILLICK: Yes, uhm hum.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine. This is the end of Tape I. I'm speaking with Sonya Gillick and we'll be starting Tape II.

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END OF SIDE B, TAPE I

BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE II

GILLICK: I think we were meeting my people on the pier, my American family.

LEVINE: We're going to resume now. This is tape two, and I'm speaking with Sonya Gillick and we were talking about Ellis Island and arriving there and meeting your family. Okay, so after you turned down the bread and blood --

GILLICK: Yes.

LEVINE: Then what happened?

GILLICK: Well, we sat there and we were told we had to come back the next day because ran out of, they went alphabetically and we were T and we had to go back. So we went back and stayed on the ship, thank goodness. You know, and came back the following morning. And that's when I met my American family.

LEVINE: You mentioned earlier that this someone you'd been warned against.

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GILLICK: Oh, yes, yes, yes . . . Well, sure, it was the second day at Ellis Island, I was introduced to our family in America, Adele and her husband, a sweet looking man, named Nils Brovall. This couple was sponsoring us.

LEVINE: How do you spell Brovall?

GILLICK: B-R-O-V-A-L-L, Brovall. Adele Brovall was not as pleasant, as she was very strict looking, with pinch-on-the-nose glasses. And at her house on 73rd Street in Brooklyn, where I was to call home, that it was. I was welcome. Adele had a son ten years old, Elmer, a shy sort of lad whom I later on taught how to read English. He had a learning problem and received many a cuff on the head by his mother. Elmer turned out to be an A-1 student once he was in evening high school. And had a good job at Pratts. He married, but died at an early age of a hemorrhage of the brain. Then there was a young man at Adele's house, son of Nils Brovall. He was a great person and he played the organ and the piano. And he'd play for all the movie theaters before talkies came in. I adored Kai and he helped me a lot and he was the person who brought me to school, my very first day. He spoke Swedish fluently and it was for him that I started piano lessons, but found out it was not for me.

LEVINE: What was his name?

GILLICK: Kai, K-A-I.

LEVINE: Okay, tell me about the first day of school and Kai taking you there.

GILLICK: Oh, yes. Kai, first my sister, it was an Italian neighborhood. On the corner

of our street was Our Lady of Guadalupe, a big Catholic church. And in back of that, in the next street, was the public school, number 112. And, of course, he took me into the principal's office and, you know, they expected me because the government was after children. We got a notice without writing in that I got to go to school. So, of course, after he got all the learning, gave all the information to the woman in the office, he had to leave me in the schoolyard with all these children. I didn't know, naturally, a word of English, except I had practiced my address in Sweden, but nobody ever asked me. So I was so disappointed. Anyway, these children, like children are, I was something to look at for them and they were something to me. They talked so fast, I thought, "I'll never learn that." But in no time at all we got to understand each other, you know. And, it was good. It was a little difficult in school. I had never done arithmetic. I could do it the long way, the way I was taught in school. And, of course, history was new to me. And most of all grammar, like parsing a sentence, you know, verb and adjective, that was very difficult for me. But, eventually, I made it through school (she laughs).

LEVINE: What grade were you put in?

GILLICK: They put me in the fourth grade, and then they put me in the fifth grade, skipped over 4B, and then I went from 5th grade to . . . into 7th, and from 7th I went to full term, you know, 7B. But I was the oldest one in the class, you know.

LEVINE: Well, how was this school different from the school you had been in in Sweden?

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GILLICK: The language and the learning things, those are difficulties, you know. It was the same, restrictions, you know, on behaving yourselves. I don't know, I got along well with everybody.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of immigrant children in the school?

GILLICK: We were about, you mean in each class?

LEVINE: Well say in your class, were there a lot of other children who had come someplace else?

GILLICK: No, no, I never known anyone. I was the only one that, you know, came from any other country.

LEVINE: Do you remember other things that struck you as different in America, in those early days here?

GILLICK: Yes, the things were a lot of difference. Of course, you know, it was the cars and the running water, the electricity. I mean it's so overwhelming that you can't swallow it all in one --. You just wondered what's going to be next, you know. You're full of surprises. Like Kai, my sister's step-son, took me on a fifth avenue bus, on the top of the bus, for a ride one day. And I was very quiet the whole time. He said, "What's the matter?" He says, "Don't you like the ride?" "Oh, yes," I said. This was in Swedish. "Yes," I said, "I enjoy it, but I said, "Why do they have to advertise in almost every doorway?" He said, "What do you mean?" "Well," I says, "it says 'To Let' 'To Let' 'To Let, all over the place. Do they have to advertise they got them? It means toilet in Swedish. (She laughs.) (pause)

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Learning to say th "the" was very hard. I spit all over. You know, "think" "th", "th", that's right. I used to envy Kai when he talked to the other children in our house. My sister had a tenant in her house. And I said, "Oh, I'm so jealous of them because he could talk to them and we were looking at a rabbit they had there. That reminded me of home, Sweden. And then he kept saying, "Don't do that. Don't do that." And I remember he was saying this to the little boy that was with us. I remember that, I remember that night I laid and I say, "Don't do that. Don't do that." (She laughs.) You know, trying to practice.

LEVINE: How did you say it, naturally, with a Swedish accent? How would you have said **that**.

GILLICK: **Ger in di dit**, They don't do that. Ger in di dit. A lot of things, you know, what you do and not do in certain things. "Don't do that." "Don't do that."

LEVINE: So, is that how you practiced?

GILLICK: Yeah, but I caught on real fast in reading, very good. Like I said I was teaching my sister's ten year old son. He was so, oh, he hated school. He hated to learn, you know, and he did have a problem. But, you know, you point to a word C-A-T and the guy says "dog", (she laughs) and you know you are on a bad street, you know, you got to really work on him. But he gets

LEVINE: What happened to Olga?

GILLICK: Olga became a maid as soon as she was over here through the church,

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we joined the Lutheran Church, with my sister that I lived with, you know she was a staunch Lutheran in that that church. And Olga joined there and she got a job with two school teachers that wanted a housekeeper. One of them had a daughter and she got a nice job there. She worked for them for years.

LEVINE: Was she nearby? Did you see her?

GILLICK: Oh, on her day off we saw her, you know. Everything was to go on trolleys, that's the only way to go --either trolleys or walk, and of course she went to church and she came over for dinner to Adele's house many a Sunday when she wasn't needed where she was working. Oh yeah, we saw a lot of her.

LEVINE: And how did it work out living with Adele?

GILLICK: It was good. I was not an easy person to accept new things, you know, in a hurry. I was kind of slow in that part. But she was very good to me, very good. She forgave me, for wetting the bed, the first night I slept there. I was afraid to get up; and go to the bathroom. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: How about Adele's husband?

GILLICK; Oh, he was the sweetest man that God ever put on this earth. He was adorable. Of course I got to learn to call him pop. (Dog barking in background.) As years grow by, I was even allowed to smoke in the house, after my sister had told me no. He said, "Let it go. Let her --" (She laughs.) But then I was going on seventeen, you know, real smart. I

went to school, high school, only six months. And she said to me, "You're sixteen now, you got to get a job and pay back your ticket." So I got a job through Kai. He had a girlfriend that managed an office and I was in there as an office girl. Took care of the mail and all the nitty-gritty things and then learned how to type. When the girls went for lunch, I'd go to their typewriters. Although it wasn't the touch system, I could type just as fast as they could. And then I went to night school and took up shorthand, but I never finished it. It was just meeting people and getting out at night that attracted (she chuckles) me and going to night school, of course I already had my job, you know, and it was good. I worked there a long time. But with it all comes something bad. It seems I had contracted a germ from my mother, a tubercular germ, and the change of climate brought out pimples on my ankles, little white-head like, and one day I picked it and it had a lot of puss in it. And, of course, you were apt to squeeze and the more I squeezed, the more it came out. Well, in a month's time I had both legs, I had ulcers on them and they grew from the size of a pin hole to the size of dime and up to, as big as a nickel. And ache. It ached me. It didn't touch the bone. I had heavy legs and the doctor said it saved me. It would have gone into the bone, you know, and that can't be replaced. But I went to Bellevue Clinic for three years and received gold injections. And all my teenage years, my legs were wrapped up, both of them. And I would get up six in the morning and take care of my legs. I had to drop sulfur powder, because there was no penicillin in those days, into each sore and it was just like the nerve was exposed in all of them. And then wrap up all the wrappings that it took and the stocking above that and by the time I started out to go to working, I had to take a trolley to get to the subway, my stockings were all wet. So I had a terrible teenage time with that. Terrible. Terrible pain and terrible looking and overhearing that,

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overhearing two doctors at Bellevue Clinic saying that I wouldn't have my legs until I'd be twenty-five, I'd be legless, you know, have to have them taken off. It sent me into hysterics so bad, they had to give me a shot and call my sister in Brooklyn to come and get me. But luckily, and all the years, and I met my husband (she clears her throat) even though, you know, I told him about my legs and he said, "Well, let's find somebody to cure it." And he said, "It's not your legs I'm going to marry, it's you."

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

GILLICK: Well, in an office. I worked in an office and the office was run like a bank. It was a Provident Loan. You could go in there and hock silver or diamonds or anything. It was run like a bank. And I was the one that wrote up all the tickets, sitting in a cage --it was like in a bank --with a money girl there. And he was an auditor. And this one day, he came to audit in our office, you know, all the packages in the vault, all the stuff that they do. It takes hours. And I said to this girl Irene that was in the cash, you know, she was the cashier. "Oh boy," I said, "I could go for him." She said, "You and six thousand others." "But," I said, "no, I'm going to have a date with him." And it turned out, I did.

LEVINE; How did he come to ask you out?

GILLICK: Well, he was very nice to me when he first met me. When he was finished with her, counting all her cash, he'd stand behind me, you know, and talk and try not to make it obvious to the other people in the office. And we made a date. And I gave party over Thanksgiving when my sister and her husband and her son went to Connecticut. I gave a party out in Brooklyn.

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And, of course, very few men or boys had cars in those days, you know. I said, "Can you bring some boys over and I'll have some girls over." And I said, "Yeah," he said, "this Red has a car." He lived in Jersey City and I lived in Brooklyn, so it wasn't very close. And we had a terrific party there.

LEVINE: Now, you worked in Manhattan and lived in Brooklyn?

GILLICK: Yeah, yeah, for seven years I traveled a subway with my bandaged legs. On rainy days when people had umbrellas and they'd bump me, ooh, it used to be terrible. Awful. And my sister said, she couldn't get over it, how I could stand it. She said, "Sonya," she said, "you've already had your hell, I'm sure you'll go to heaven."

LEVINE: So what was it you liked about your husband?

GILLICK: Pardon?

LEVINE: What was it you liked about your --

GILLICK: Ooh, his personality. He was an Irish decent guy and he was all different. And the Swedish seemed so dopey and slow to me. He was exciting to be with. He was also a, I didn't know it, he was an alcoholic. He became an alcoholic through the years, you know. I guess I met and we went together for about three years before we got married. And, of course, my sister Adele was all against it, all against it. First, it was his religion. I was taking lessons in the Catholic, you know, religion. And we had a rough time putting up with a lot of hate things that came out, you know, out of it. How could I, after singing in the choir for so many years and going to that

church, to lay aside that so easily. Oh, it was all a debate, the whole thing. (Truck sounds in background.) And I really did it to please his parents. He had wonderful parents and very strict Catholics. And most of it, I wanted to please them. So it wasn't entirely the right reason to change.

LEVINE: Oh, so you changed religions? You became Catholic?

GILLICK: I did, yeah. Yeah, but I didn't stick with it very long. I couldn't take it. I couldn't learn it. I didn't believe it. I went to confession and my sister-in-law would be outside waiting for me. She said, "What are you doing in there? You've been there twenty minutes." "Oh," I said, "I had a lot to tell him." (They laugh.) I said, "He had a lot to tell me and I had more to tell him." And he said to me, "Why did you change when your other religion was so deep and within you. We don't want Catholics that way," he said, "believers," which was true. I went back to my old religion after awhile, but I had promised to bring up my children Catholic. And they went to Catholic school and had very good grades.

LEVINE: And what was your husband's name?

GILLICK: Thomas Patrick Gillick.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

GILLICK: My first born was Carol Ann. My second was, Carol Ann died at thirty-six years old of lung cancer. My second child was Patricia Mary. She lives, she's an R.N. She lives down here now. She was in California hospital, in

the emergency room for years.

LEVINE: What is her, does she have a married name? Last name?

GILLICK: Yeah, Todaro. Patty's, she divorced but her marriage name was Todaro.

LEVINE: T-

GILLICK: T-O-D-A-R-O.

LEVINE: And how about your first daughter who died, was she married?

GILLICK: No, no. And Linda Kathleen, the one I live with now --

LEVINE: Her married name?

GILLICK: Goepfert, it's spelled G-O-E-P-F-E-R-T and you pronounce it and leave out the O. Most of the people call it Go-ferd or Go-for-it (she laughs) and people get it so mixed up, and it's pronounced Gepfert, without the O. There's a picture of her family there on the, over there, and her husband and her kids. So, I have a wonderful home here with them.

LEVINE: And that's what you had, three daughters?

GILLICK: Yes, three daughters.

LEVINE: And do you have grandchildren?

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GILLICK: No, I'm going to have one, in, my, Linda's son, Sean, his wife is pregnant and she's going to have a baby in November the doctor told her.

LEVINE: So that will be your great granddaughter.

GILLICK: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: How many grandchildren do you have?

GILLICK: Well, I have a lot, what does grandchildren mean?

LEVINE: Let's see, your children's children. Right.

GILLICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Like Linda has children,

GILLICK: Yes, but Patty has not. No children, Patty. Carol wasn't married. She never had.

LEVINE: So Linda has how many children?

GILLICK: Two boys.

LEVINE: And their names?

GILLICK: Sean and Don.

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LEVINE: All, right, let's see, is there anything else? What did your husband do?

GILLICK: My husband was an auditor and CPA. He was a very clever man, very good only drinking spoiled his chances of very good jobs.

LEVINE: So where did you live after you got married?

GILLICK: After I got married, I lived in Jersey City where he came from. With my leg trouble, I went to the Medical Center in Jersey City, where I found a doctor that healed my legs. After all those years, I'd been going to private doctors and to Bellevue.

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

GILLICK: Well, I was proud of, because I was a good mother and I was a good father, if you know what I mean, because I separated three different times from my husband. (pause) And, after my, after Linda got married, I had no more responsibilities, you know, because Pat was married and Linda was married and Carol was her own independent self in New York, as a boss of big companies. She was a secretary to one of the men. I got a job for a very wealthy lady in Palm Beach who wanted a housekeeper and a live-in maid and I took it and I was with her for twelve years. In the summer we went to Springfield, New Jersey, where she had a home. In the winter we went to Palm Beach where she had a beautiful apartment. And I lived in the lap of luxury. When she found out I could type, I became her secretary. I became her travel agent. She took me places that I never would have seen in my whole life. She loved me. She called me her gem and we got along, although we had many misunderstandings sometimes.

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But for twelve years I was with her and I loved her dearly. And she died. She was a nice lady, a widow of a rich man. The money they had and how unhappy they all were.

LEVINE: What do think about your life, having started out in Sweden and coming to this country, what does that mean to you?

GILLICK: (She sighs.) My days in Sweden to me are like a dream. Like it was never real. It seems that I aborted all that happiness that I had in Sweden and took happiness over here. That's how much I changed. And when people say, my sister used to say to me, "Come home to Sweden with us this summer. I'll pay half of your fare." "Olga," I said, "you wouldn't get me on a boat to go to Sweden, after I laid for thirteen days and was seasick." I have never been near a boat since. And I wouldn't go. I said, "I'll fly." "Oh, she says, "you'd never get me on a plane." So I never went and they went every three years. And I just corresponded with my brother, the one that was left over there, and he had three sons. And they learned English in school and I could write some of my letters in English and really tell them what my life was like. And, like I said, Gunnar lived to be ninety-two. He was a gardener and a landscaper, just like his father. And he had gotten the poison of the spray on the flowers of the stuff, [he] had inhaled and it affected his blood; so he was in the hospital, I think, every three months, he had to go in for new blood. But he lived to be ninety- two.

LEVINE: And how about your father, do you --

GILLICK: My father, I was sixteen over here, sixteen years old when he died in

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Sweden. All I did was write to him. (pause)

LEVINE: Well, how is this phase of your life?

GILLICK: My life, besides my work with Mrs. Mc Auliffe, the wealthy lady,

LEVINE: How do you spell her name?

GILLICK: Mc Auliffe, M-C capital A-U-L-I-F-F-E. I came to Linda when I retired, on account of sickness. I had stomach ulcers. My doctor it Mc Auliffitis. It was a very tough job to be with her and please her and take care of her parties and make and all her --oh, it was a hard job but I enjoyed it though, most of the time. But she died. She was very sick. And I came with Linda and this has been the best years of my whole life. Being with Linda, watching my grandsons grow up from little boys to beautiful men that they are today. And one of them is going to, is married and is going to be a daddy. And he said, "Nana, I'm having, we're having this baby just for you." She said, "We want to give you a great grandchild." Great great, isn't it? Yeah.

LEVINE: Great, uh huh.

GILLICK: Yeap. So in this house is loving, everything is loving and caring and respecting. It's what a house should be. A wonderful husband, my daughter has. She has a wonderful job herself. She works for a, she's a para legal and she loves it. And if it wasn't for me she could never have kept house and work and go to college like she did, and got her marks, you know. "I could never have done it without you, mother." And I could

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never have done without her in a family.

LEVINE: Well, I think maybe this is a good place to end.

GILLICK: Yes.

LEVINE: And I want to thank you very much. This has been most enjoyable.

GILLICK: You've been a wonderful person yourself.

LEVINE: Ohh, thank you.

GILLICK: And, thank you.

LEVINE: I want to say that I've been speaking with Sonya Thornblom Gillick and I'm here at her home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and it's April 27th, one day before Sonya turns eighty-four years old.

GILLICK: Yes, that's it.

LEVINE: And I want to thank you very much. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

Tape is turned off and then resumed.

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming again because we had in mind that Sonya would sing some of the songs. Now, Sonya's explained to me that you had a

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thyroid operation, so your voice is not as good as it once was.

GILLICK: No, no.

LEVINE: But these are songs that you knew from Sweden.

GILLICK: Yes, oh sure.

LEVINE: And sang many times since then, in this country. Okay.

GILLICK: All right now. (She clears her throat.) Sings  
Nar Sadesfalten Boger Sig Far Vinden -i.e. When the Crops Bend to the  
Wind.

Oh, I can't do anymore. Well that was the song of a person that's left  
Sweden and thinking about his childhood home.

LEVINE: (Sound of airplane) Unfortunately, this airplane --

GILLICK: Oh, that's all right. It needed something. It wasn't good anyway.

LEVINE: I think it was and I thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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