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GURLI IRENE LINNEA SVENSSON CARLSON
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PORT: GOTEBORG
RESIDENCE:

- **GOTEBORG**
- **THE US: WORCESTER, MA**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today with Gurli Carlson. We're at St. Spyridon's Church here in Worcester, Mass. Mrs. Carlson was gracious enough to come here for the interview. She came from Sweden in 1923 when she was eleven years old. I'm very happy that you were able to come and I'm able to hear your story.

CARLSON: I'm happy to come.

LEVINE: Why don't we start at the beginning. You tell me your birth date.

CARLSON: My birth date was January 3rd, 1913.

LEVINE; And where were you born?

CARLSON: I was born in Goteborg, G-O-T-E-B-O-R-G. We call in Goteborg. That's a coastal city in Sweden.

LEVINE: And Goteborg, did you live there the whole time until you came to America?

CARLSON: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: Describe it. What you remember about it.

CARLSON: Well, that's the shipping, all the ships come in to Goteborg. And it's a big city and we lived in a big, we lived in the middle of the city. We lived in an apartment house that probably had thirty families. And we had two rooms and there was five of us, my sister, my brother, my mother, my father, and I. And we had no inside plumbing. We went to the outhouse but the schools were fabulous. We had wonderful bathing facilities in the schools. The children would be put in a circle in a little tub and we washed the back of the person in front of you. And then we went into a pool and we got swimming lessons. So we learned to swim very early. And I started school when I was seven. We did not have kindergarten or things. Schools were very good. I knew how to spell and add and everything by the time I was eleven. The city, well, we did the same thing as you do in other cities. We went sliding and we had hop scotch and we had a big yard outside where all the children played together. So you had plenty of companions. And when my mother told me that we were coming to America, I felt very sorry and I cried with all my playmates and they said "Don't worry about it. You'll go to America. The streets are just gold and there's everything there." So I upped a little on that and accepted it, but it was very hard to leave home, my friends.

LEVINE; How was the school and the things that you played as a child different, once you got to America, compared with Sweden.

CARLSON: Well there was no difference, only I didn't know the English language. I didn't know what the children were saying. I didn't participate in playing. I didn't know. I couldn't converse with them and I missed it terribly. But we played the same games as they played in schoolyard when I went (she chuckles) to America. But I found out very quickly that there no gold streets (she laughs) and (pause) and everything was all right.

LEVINE: Well, let's talk mostly about Sweden in the beginning now.

CARLSON: All right. All right.

LEVINE: Was there anything else about the house you lived in? (Someone else interrupts the interview.)

We are resuming now after a slight interruption.

LEVINE: Okay, you were saying --

CARLSON: We had quite a few relatives and we would go visit my cousins and I was an only child until I was seven years old. So it was just fabulous to go to everybody's house. We would have holidays and Christmas and that. But the living was very poor, sort of. I remember going to my cousins house and we would, the adults would eat first and whatever was left over the children would eat and would eat at another table. And they were very, they would make a pea soup. And the pea soup was mainly broth or water and then there were some peas in it. And we would be counting the number of peas that we got. It might have been seven, eight peas. And, of course, we just

made a joke of all this stuff. And my father worked at the SKF ball bearing place. And he was an inspector there. And he was very into his job. He just was crazy about his job. And at that time, probably a couple of years before that, the Union Movement started. And the factories were not accepting the unions and they were fighting against the unions. So the labor and the factories were (interference on microphone) fighting about this thing. And my father was very much into the Union Movement. And I remember as a child in our house, the two rooms that we lived in, my father would have other young men there and they would be talking real loud while I was trying to sleep and that is what the subject was, about this union and would they like to belong, do they think it would do something, would it be good for the workers and this and that. So, suddenly my father gets the slip that he no longer had his job. It was very sad. My father struggled with this for seven years. He did any menial jobs that he could pick up. Just so that we would survive. And, he went to classes to take up American language so that, because he was thinking of this because it was told to him that you would get a much better job if you went to America. And that was the beginning of it. I wasn't too aware of this because I was too young. But my mother was a trained tailor and she sewed all the time, clothes and suits and pants and everything. She was into that. So my father finally decided to come to America. We had no --you don't want to hear about it --we had no relatives here. But anyway, my mother kept sewing and I kept helping her to take care of these little children so that she could sew and make enough money to come here. And it was a real struggle. Sweden at that time was changing a lot. They were changing, the Labor Movements and the religious things because they felt that royalty and churches were sort of draining them from being able to exist and so they were considering doing something about this, the people. And, it has changed, of course. But, anyway, they used to have, where we lived there was a big area where the people in the neighborhood would all get together and listen to speeches about the union movement and all this and my mother and father always dragged me along

and so all this shouting and that, just like we see on television in other countries. And, it was, you know, when I look back at it, it's very interesting to think how do you get people to change their way of thinking.

LEVINE: Would you say your father was a union organizer?

CARLSON: No, he was not an organizer but he was interested in that. He was interested in that. He thought the change would be good for them. Because they barely made enough money to exist. They were living in little tiny places and had no conveniences and so all the men, all the workers, were trying to find some other, there must be some other way. And so we lived not too far from the factory. I can remember the industry, the chimney going up there. My father would walk to work.

LEVINE: Did he see any gains for the union while he was there, that you know of?

CARLSON: Well, yes, they did make some gains but he wasn't there long enough. See, he left before there was any gains. It was --

LEVINE: So you had certain chores, since your mother was so busy making money.

CARLSON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: So you were taking care of your younger sister and brother.

CARLSON: I was like the little mother while my mother worked because my mother had to make enough money to be able to come here. I was almost like her big sister because now her husband had left and she was very worried and everything. And I can remember her stating to me that "He's not going to go America and leave me here with these three kids." This is what happened to, many of the men who went over here, they were young and handsome

and they had pretty girls here and they got involved with someone else and they left their wife and children there. And so they were well aware of that. What she wanted to do was make enough money to get here as quickly as she could because my father really was a handsome guy. He used sit for painters. (She laughs.) He had a nice face. So, (she laughs) my mother knew this. So she struggled and worked and worked and worked and worked. And at that time, very difficult for (clears her throat) people to be able to rent an apartment. Housing was very scarce and so the young couples would almost pay any amount of money to get an apartment, even though it was only two rooms (she laughs). And so the landlord told my mother that "I'm going to help you. Whatever you can get for that apartment, you're going to keep. I'm not going to take any of the money." My mother worked and worked and she wanted to make a thousand crowns. That's what it would take to come here. And she did. Three months after my father had left.

LEVINE: Tell me your father's name.

CARLSON: My father's name was Gustave Elof Swenson.

LEVINE: Your mother's name and her maiden name?

CARLSON: Her name was Gerda. We called her Gerda, G-E-R-D-A, Gerda Welin, W-E-L-I-N. Most of the Scandinavian names are sons but if you were in the army or in the service you could change your name and her father was in the military and so he changed his name to Welin. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Why was that, that you could do it in the military?

CARLSON: Well, I don't know. I don't know why they did that. But when you look in the telephone book in Sweden, it's so strange to see, everyone's a son of

somebody, you know. But these other names are different and that's because they've had the service connection. And, of course, you got certain things from being in the service. You could, they would give you somewhere to live and they would give you a piece of land and all this. And this was another reason why the men who did not serve in the military were upset. Because so many of the military people had the chance had the chance to gain land and have someplace to live. And it's even that way today, very difficult to buy land because it goes from one generation to another and they hang on to this land. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: So, in other words, someone who was in the military, how long would they have to be in for?

CARLSON: I don't know how long. I don't know how long he was in but that was, my grandfather's home was quite a way from Goteborg. And it was just a little red house. We call them stuga, S-T-U-G-A, and there's a lot of them in Sweden. They have these stugas. It was just one room and this is where my mother was brought up. And we used that as a summer place. So we would take the train over to this Vegby and we would stay there for the summer. And my father would come on Sundays and sometimes during the summer. They worked long hours. They only had like probably a few hours on Saturday and then Sunday off, otherwise they worked all the time in the industries. So my father didn't have the time, but we were there. Now that place has been sold.

LEVINE: What was the name of, was it a little town?

CARLSON: It was a little town. It was just a little country town. And my grandfather was given this because he was in the service. And so that's where he brought his family and that's where they were brought up. And they had two boys and a girl. There were three in that family.

LEVINE: And how do you spell the name of the little town?

CARLSON: Vegby, V-E-G-B-Y.

LEVINE: And do you remember experiences there with your grandmother and grandfather in the summer?

CARLSON: Well, I never saw my grandfather. My grandfather was murdered. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: When you were a child?

CARLSON: Before I was born. And so that left my grandmother alone with three children in this little house. And so when her oldest son left then he decided to have my mother learn something and she learned how to be a tailor. She trained for a year just sewing.

LEVINE: With a tailor, is that how she --?

CARLSON: With a tailor, yes, she used to tell me about sitting on the table with her legs crossed. And she would sit and sew a seam all day long. She'd do the same seam over and over again so that she would learn how to do this perfectly, you know. And she was a beautiful tailor. She decided to go to Goteborg. It was a big city and that's where she trained and that's where she met my father. And so that left my mother with just the youngest boy and so my mother and father decided that my grandmother should come to Goteborg also. So they lived just a block away from us. So I saw my grandmother a lot. But we still had that little stuga that we went to and visited. And the oldest boy's name was Uno, U-N-O and he settled in Orebro, O-R-E-B-R-O. And that's where he brought his family up. So that

was not too far from us but not enough that we only visited once a year. But it was a big struggle. I can only remember the poverty and the struggling and the work that the people were doing constantly.

LEVINE: How did your family fit in with most of the families around you? Were you kind of on the same economic level as the people around?

CARLSON: Yes, yes, we were, we were. And at that time, it's interesting when I look back at it because the women wanted to make some changes and they started cooperatives. And my mother was a very active person in that. And she worked in that. And the women seemed to get together. They would, they had a place where they would buy the groceries much more reasonable. And then they would get the price and it was way down so they got better food. The other thing that they were into was contraception. Up to a few years before that people had large families and women were struggling with six, seven, eight children, because they didn't know what to do not to have them. My mother became very active in contraception. They even had condoms at that time. And so the families became very small. And so most of the families, in the yard that I lived in, there was only two or three children. And that's really all they could afford. But I think it was women that really changed a lot of the life styles because people living in the countries and people living in smaller cities, they didn't get into that. But this was a big city and the women struggled with this stuff. It was also during the war and we were rationed. We did not get the milk or anything that we really needed. It was rationed. And my mother, my family were allowed one egg a week and my mother would give me the egg because she wanted me to be healthy. So they never shared this. The other things that they ate, mainly, was vegetables, and that was carrots, potatoes, not much meat because it was very expensive. And they also had a lot of apples. That's about the only kind of fruit we had.

LEVINE: Do you remember how the food was distributed?

CARLSON: Well, they had little books that they had to use. I think, I always feel anyway, probably the reason why my mother decided to have another baby was because when you had a baby you would be allowed more milk. And for the mother and for the baby. And that's another thing. They had wonderful child care. I mean this was many years ago! They had wonderful child care. The minute that a woman was pregnant, she had to go to a clinic and be examined and they took care of her through her pregnancy. They also took care of the child. They were allowed food for this child because they wanted children to be brought up healthy. A lot of control, health control, even at that time and that was many years ago.

LEVINE: Well it sounds as though your mother and father were progressive.

CARLSON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember things that you learned from them? I mean, did they try to instill any values or give you rules to live by that you can remember, based on the way they lived?

CARLSON: Well, of course, they always, my mother had the saying all through my life and I brought my children the same way; "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." And they were very honest people. This was taught in the schools too. And we were taught neatness. We could not throw things around everywhere. We were taught that very early in the schools and at home. And to keep clean and, of course, one of the things in Sweden at that time was tuberculosis was just raging. There was so much tuberculosis that it was sad.

LEVINE: What were they doing for it, do you know/

CARLSON: Well, they were trying to treat it. One of my cousins, the ones that we visited with mostly, she was nineteen and she died of tuberculosis of the neck. She had a great big tumor, sort of growth or whatever it was, and oh we were really disparate. And her father also had tuberculosis. And because of that he did most of his work at home. And, of course, a lot of the people were infected from these people and we were taught at that time that we do not do any hugging, kissing or sneezing; all this stuff. They were trying to control the spread of these germs from the mouth. So that might be the reason why Scandinavians are a little, they think they're cold because they don't do this hugging and kissing. And that's gone from one to the other. Well, my cousin died and two other people in the family developed tuberculosis. And now the treatment that they did for her was, they were trying to get her as much sun as they could because their summers are much shorter than ours. And she would have her head hanging out some of the time so that she would get air. And that was it.

LEVINE: It was fresh air and sunshine and that was about the only treatment they knew.

CARLSON: They had no medication at that time, no. I happen to be a student of tuberculosis so (she laughs) I know the history of it.

LEVINE: You mentioned around your, did you say yard, where you lived? How were the houses arranged?

CARLSON: Well, the house was sort of, it was a brick house and it was in a circle. Inside the circle was where the children would play. It was cement.

LEVINE: (In the background) Let me close this door. (There is a pause and then the sound of a door closing.) So there were a number of houses around the circle?

CARLSON: Well, most of the apartment houses, this was in the city, city living, most of the apartments were built in a circle and it was like two floors and it was like, probably fifteen families on each floor, two rooms each. And then the center was where the children played. And so it was nice for the parents because they also had a great big huge door that had to be opened when they went out. And they could put a lock on that so the kids couldn't get out. And so, on one side, was the outside toilet that we used and on the other side was a laundry. The women were allowed to go out and do the laundry once or twice a year in this laundry. That's because they had to share this laundry. And this was hot water, all the water they wanted, and soap and everything. And the other times, the women would wash the clothes, all they had was one little sink for the kitchen and they would have a basin in there and they would rinse out the clothes and they would hang the clothes up in their house to dry. And that's about what they had for laundry.

LEVINE: Was there running water in the sink?

CARLSON: Yeah, there was running water in the sink. It was not easy for women and, especially, if they had babies. Like I can remember when my brother was born, I was seven. Then my mother would have the diapers or whatever they were using all over the house drying, all they could do. They had kitchen stove and then we also had a beautiful fireplace in the other room that was in the corner. They used wood and coal. When my mother was, long cold winters, when my mother was changing the babies, she would sit in front of the fireplace. The fire would be arm length. It wouldn't be way down. It would up a little higher. And my mother would sit there and change them. The thing that I remember about changing babies was that they didn't change them that often during the day but they would make a bandage that was probably six inches wide of flannel and they would roll this up into a roll. And it was like a bandage for the baby. And they would start with the feet

and they would roll this up and the baby would be rolled into this thing so that the only thing that he would be able to move his arms, not his feet. And so then, as they progressed during the day, they would not be wet because this thing would keep them all in one place and they didn't move their legs or anything. And they were like a little papoose.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE I

BEGIN OF SIDE B, TAPE I

CARLSON: And so that kept them warm also and they were easy to handle. I mean, they couldn't kick or anything. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: How long would they be? For as long as they were in diapers, they would be rolled that way.

CARLSON: Yes, that's right. That's right. It was, I think it was because they, you know, they couldn't have hundreds of diapers. (She laughs.) It was controlling some of that and then the fact that it was cold and they had to keep warm and so they had these little bandage things.

LEVINE: It would be interesting to know if Swedish babies walked late (they laugh) since their legs were --

CARLSON: Well, no, I don't think, I can't remember that, I think that they walked the same time and everything. And that was another thing. I think there probably was a lot of crooked legs and they felt that by putting them into this little papoose that their legs would be straight. I really don't know and I don't

know how long they kept on with this when they started with the medical caring for children, whether that was done away with, I don't know. But that's the way it was with both my brother and my sister. I was delighted with getting my brother because I had been an only child and I kept asking my mother, When are we going to have a baby" and all this. And one day my mother and father were going to the opera and they had put me to bed and my grandmother was with me. And I looked up at my mother as she was putting her clothes on and I said, "Your stomach is awfully big! There must be a baby in there." And my mother just pushed it off. She didn't say anything but that very night, I think that instead of going to the opera, she was headed for the hospital. But I wouldn't really know, you know (she laughs). Anyway, the next morning when I woke up my father came in and said that you have a baby brother. And I was just so delighted and I went to my neighbors. I played with some children next door. And so I was supposed to stay there with them. And they had bought a balloon, which was really something to have a balloon in that time. They brought a balloon. And so anyway, we were playing with this balloon back and forth, jiggling the balloon back and forth, and then (she clears her throat) because of the toilet situation, we had pots. And so here was a big pot with urine in it. And so the balloon landed in the pot (she laughs) and my, the woman of the house said, "You can't have that anymore. We'll just get rid of it." And I said, "Oh, no, no, no. Just put it in the sink and wash it (she's laughing) and we'll blow it up again.

LEVINE: Tell me, the two rooms, most people had two rooms of living space?

CARLSON: Yes, umhum.

LEVINE: Now one was what? A fireplace and a kind of a parlor?

CARLSON: Yes, that was the living room and the bedroom combined. And the way they had the furniture (she clears her throat) we called them soffa, like a couch, but it was wooden. And it had a wooden top and that top could be taken off and then the bed would be made inside the sofa. And so that was one sleeping place. I slept in a little wooden pull-out thing. It was very narrow and you could pull it out. When we were all through sleeping we would push that together. They did the same thing with the beds, my mother and father's bed was pushed together. So that that made the room like a living room, but then we also had a very nice sofa, soft, like ours here. We used for company and that. So it was like a living room but it turned into a bedroom when we had to go to bed.

LEVINE: Was it a large room?

CARLSON: Well, it was pretty large to get all these things in. Of course, there were no radios or anything like that. Well, we each had a chair. That's about it. And my grandfather used to come to visit me, my father's father would come to visit us and so then he would sleep in the sofa; we would pull it out. I used to think this was wonderful because my father would the top of the sofa and put it on the thing and it was a slide. (She laughs.) We'd go up to the top and slide down, so we had something to play with. And then there was a kitchen table and I guess that's the only chairs. We each had a chair.

LEVINE: That was in the other room.

CARLSON: That was the little kitchen and that's where they did the laundry or the cooking or anything else. I don't think they did really too much in like baking in the oven. I think most of that was bought. Maybe in the countryside where they had a lot of fire in the stove, they would have ovens. But I don't think they had too many ovens or things like that. They cooked on top of the stove.

LEVINE: Do you remember dishes that your mother made when you were little?

CARLSON: Well, one thing we always had was oatmeal. Of course, we had a little milk, but it was rationed. Everything was rationed. But we would have, my mother would go out and she would buy spinach and she would buy potatoes and carrots. Those are the things that I remember mostly, even for vegetables because we were not in the country. We were in the city. So we had to go and buy it. And there was no refrigeration. There was no place to put the food. They had to go and shop every day to buy whatever they needed.

LEVINE: And how about your grandfather? What was his name?

CARLSON: Uhm, well, that was a strange thing. I don't know if I want to go through the whole thing, but one thing about my father, my father was brought up in the middle of the city. And he was brought up with half sisters and brothers. He had, he was an illegitimate child. I didn't know anything about it when I was I little, but my cousin has looked up all this in genealogy, so I have the history of it and I remember it. So my grandmother, one of them, I had two grandmothers. The other one that I visited with occasionally, she was my father's mother. And she became a widow when she had seven small children. And she went out as a call girl, I guess you'd say, because that was the only way that she could exist and be able to support her children. And so she became pregnant, and that was my father. He was the youngest one in the group. The others were a little bit older. And I met some of them. Not all of them but some of them, because they were only half sisters and brothers. So my father was, so that was what my father's origin was. And he lived in the city. And they were so poor. He used to talk about it. They had nothing to eat. He would just, like we're seeing in New York, he would go out in the streets and pick up apple cores and anything that was edible

because they were so poor. So anyway, he found his real father, but they were never married, the father. And so I used to say to my father, "Why doesn't farmor --that's grandmother -- why doesn't she ever see farfar --that's father's father? Why don't they visit?" My father would never explain it. He didn't want me to know anything about this stuff and no one else did. And my mother never talked about it. But when my cousin was looking up genealogy, he wanted to know something about this man who was my far far. And my father was very good to his father. The strange thing about that was, he was a carpenter, and when he was fixing a ceiling or building a house, a board came down and it had nails in it and it hit his face and became blind, totally blind. And he was not that old. And so he was in a blind man's home. So my father, because he knew that he was his father, he would go to the blind man's home, trying to help him find out something about him, and he would bring him to out house every Sunday. And he was very nice to his blind father. I remember him very well because he was there all, my mother would sew the things and help him get clothed and she would wash some of his things and then he would go back to the -- and he made baskets. That's all he could do. I only knew him as farfar. And when we were looking up records, it was strange because my cousin wanted to know what his name was. (She laughs.) I didn't know his name because all this was kind of quiet, you know. When my father came here and it was his father's birthday, I don't remember exactly how many years old he was, but my father sent a telegram congratulating him on his birthday. And I had that telegram. And I looked it up. What my cousin wanted to know was, he could get the records of this man if he knew his full name and the area that he lived, because all records in Sweden are in churches. And if he knew exactly where it was he was, he could look up his record. And so I sent him this telegram, where he lived and that, and my cousin looked it up there and found it.

LEVINE: Did your father call his father, father?

CARLSON: Yes, yes and he was nice to his mother also. When my father made any money at all, he would go to visit his mother, who lived in the same house as his half-sister. And my father would contribute some money to her support. And so, that was a very nice thing to do because it was difficult. And so he was good to both his mother and his real father, even though there was no connection between them, my grandmother and my grandfather. I mean that was you know. It was an accident (she laughs).

LEVINE: I'm going to just turn (she turns off tape) Okay, we're resuming again. You were saying about your family. . . Well, is there anything else about your life in Sweden that influenced you? That you feel made a difference in your life after that?

CARLSON: Well, I learned a lot about living poor. And I think you learn about that. I mean you don't waste things or things like that. I think that being poor probably teaches you that. And we were taught respect, very much. Like with our grandparents and that, we were very respectful of them and we would never talk back to them or anything or to our elders or to our mother and father. We were taught that very early in life.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father ever tell you how they met?

CARLSON: No, but there were some things about my mother and father. My mother was really a real worker (she sighs) and she had all sorts of drive. My father also was but my father was musical and he loved music and operas and that. My mother couldn't even sing a song. So there was a little difference between them. But I don't think my father could have made it if it wasn't for my mother because she was a real worker and real -- She struggled all the time and she wanted to make a go of it. My mother died at --what was she? --forty-eight. My mother also, she had a heart condition. She had strep

throat and she had a leaky valve in her heart and she died very young. But she worked and she never complained. It didn't matter whether they had something to eat or not, she wouldn't complain, she made the best of it. She brought us up that way. You can't help but be a little like your parents. You know, you learn from them. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Were you interested in medical things? Were there any ways of treating illness in Sweden that you can recall from your childhood?

CARLSON: No, not really. Only we were given shots, as a young child, I know I went to the clinic to get different shots. I don't really know. My father got influenza at one time and he almost died with this high fever. And I can remember him being in the bed and my mother caring for him. She would give him everything to drink and eat and try to get over it, which he did. He got over it. He was one of the survivors. Many people lost their lives with that influenza that they had. I can't remember exactly what year it was. But it was during an influenza period. Other than that, my mother, even though she had this heart condition, she got very little special care or anything. And it's marvelous that she had these other two children. She had three of us and nothing happened. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: When the decision was made to come here, do you remember packing up?

CARLSON: Yes.

LEVINE: What did you take . . .?

CARLSON: My mother, she worked on it all the time. We had one trunk, not that large, and then we had probably two or three small suitcases, because I had to carry one or two. And, of course, there was three young children. And my sister was a year old. She had to have diapers and stuff. And my mother

knew it would be a struggle to come over here, although she never really said anything to me about that. She didn't want to get me nervous about it. In the yard, in the house there they had lots of parties where they were saying good-bye to us and they were wishing us luck and sometimes we would get little gifts and things like that. The family were nervous about it. I think that it was so difficult that I don't know how they did it! I don't know, if someone told me, "Go to Greece with your family of three small children," (she laughs) I don't know that I'd be able to say,"Yes." But they knew that they had to learn another language and all this. It was some decision. You had to be pretty strong to be doing that. (She laughs.) And then coming to like here, we had no one who was a particular friend and we had no relatives. A lot of people immigrated because they had relatives that would sort of help them, but we had no one. We just, my father and mother just took that chance.

LEVINE: Were they valued items that your mother packed up that you recall?

CARLSON: No, I don't think we had too much. She probably took her ring. Oh well, when we were boarding the ship in Goteborg there, my uncle came and he gave each one of us a spoon, a table spoon with our names engraved on the end, my sister, my brother and I. And he gave us those. Those were in the suitcase.

LEVINE: What were your sister and brother's names?

CARLSON: My sister's name was Birgit, B-I-R-G-I-T. My brother's name was Elof. His name was Folke. My brother's name was Folke Elof. And Folke, I didn't really say to much about this and for a long time I never really wanted to say about. But at the same time as the Swedes were struggling with trying to make a living, there was also this, that they wanted to convert their politics to Communism. And maybe that was a better way of living. And my father

became a little interested in that also. Should we change our type of government. And, of course, they heard all the wonderful things that were going on in Russia. So, you can see, it was an interest. And so my brother's name was Folke, Folk in Swedish means people and Folke would be like people. And so when my brother was born, I imagine that that's the height of my father's -- Now I never even wanted to say too much about this to my brother because I didn't want him to feel bad after we came here that we had this connection. It really didn't mean anything, but his name was Folke and my father's name was Elof, so it was Folke Elof. And, of course, we all had odd names (she laughs).

LEVINE: Elof, is that I or E?

CARLSON: Elof, and so, after he had gone to school here for a few years, he couldn't get on with this Folke because people couldn't even say it, so everyone called him Elof, and we call him that today, E-L-O-F. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Okay, so do you remember leaving the apartment?

CARLSON: Yes, of course, the thing that I remember mostly was that my schoolmates had all got together and they had bought chocolate bars for me and I had a big box of beautiful chocolate bars and candy, I mean, something that we didn't have very much of. And, (she sighs) I just thought I was the luckiest person in the world. So I went on board ship with that and, of course, our relatives, the grandmothers, were not there. They were too old. But the others came to say good-bye to us and, of course, hard, very difficult thing for everyone to say good-bye. Of course, everyone would say "We're going to see you again." And that was one of the things that the immigrants came here, saying all the time that they would see their relatives. And it didn't always turn out that way because my mother never had a chance to go back and see anybody.

LEVINE: Did your family expect to stay here, though,

CARLSON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Or were they planning that they would come here, make money, . . .

CARLSON: No, no, we were planning to come here and my father was getting a job, that was all planned, no. He was changing his whole life and they knew it, you know. But, I don't think they were too aware about what was going on in this country. My father went to these classes and he would get some information about America, and he'd come home and I could hear them talking about America and what it, some of the things. I think that it was being, perhaps they weren't honest in saying what was going on because I think that they felt that it was much better than it really was. And that their life would be much better. And, of course, it wasn't for my father because we just got here just at the Depression and it was impossible for him to get employment for a long time. So, I mean, that was not being honest. But some of the industries they were trying to get foreign help. These people, especially the ones who worked in industries, they were well trained and they needed them here to start their industries here and they were skilled. Like even in Worcester here, we had an awful lot of skilled Swedes working in industries because they had learned this from their country. Wire industry, steel industry, many things.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the ship you came on?

CARLSON: Yes, it was --Did I put it down? -- Gripsholm, I think. Yeah. And it was a beautiful ship. And they had dancing. The young people were dancing. I don't know if I had such a wonderful time because, in the first place, my mother got sea sick almost right away, when we started. And she was just

vomiting all the time. My sister was still nursing. She was laying there vomiting in the gutter. They have the gutters around the ship. And my sister would be there with her sucking. My mother was skin and bones because she had worked so hard. And so, of course, there was nothing but that I had to take care of my brother and he was three and he was into everything. And I was chasing him all the time. (She laughs.) He climbed up on the top of something and he fell down and he cut his head, so we had to have stitches there. He got his hand in the toilet door. Somebody shut the toilet door. He had to have a thing on his hand because he sort of wounded his fingers. And my mother she couldn't think of anything but (she laughs) just vomiting.

LEVINE: Did your brother get this medical treatment on the ship?

CARLSON: Oh, yes, right on the ship. But, apparently, they had nothing for sea sickness. There was no medication or anything. Everybody was in those gutters vomiting. That's all I can remember. I only did it once.

Levine: (Spoken very softly) This was on the deck?

CARLSON: Yes, it's up on the deck and it's like a gutter around the top. You had to go up on the top. And they were advised to go and sit on the top of the ship where the air was coming and it would be better for them. So most of the people did that. Some of them stayed in their rooms because they couldn't even make it up there. But my mother always went up with us and some of the people probably helped us a little bit. They knew the people who were responsible for little children, you know. So the other passengers would help a little. But it was an awful lot of vomiting. And they had very nice meals. And the tables had plates and that that could be bolted down when the ship was swaying, so that the plates wouldn't move off. And now they had all

male waiters. And the male waiters were just wonderful to me. I was eleven years old and I would help.

LEVINE: Let's pause right here because the tape is running out.

CARLSON: Yes, all right.

LEVINE: So this is the end of Tape One and we'll resume with Tape Two.

CARLSON: (She laughs.) Okay.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE A

LEVINE: We were talking about the ship.

CARLSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: You were not in steerage, is that right? Were you in a cabin?

CARLSON: We were in a cabin and my mother, they had to go the cheapest route that they could, so she got two beds, one on the bottom and one on the top. And my sister, who was a year, slept with my mother and I slept with my brother. They were very, very narrow. So before I even went to bed, I had to decide which side I was going to sleep on because there was no way that I could turn to the other side during the night. And so, that's the way, that's how small it was. And, of course, my mother had a tremendous problem because the time change. And it got so by the end of the journey, the kids were waking up around three or four in the morning. They couldn't change

the time (she's laughing) and I had to amuse my brother until the whole ship woke up. And it was really very difficult. (She's still laughing.) And then, of course, they couldn't even be awake to have the supper because they were already exhausted by three or four in the afternoon. Oh my mother had, I'll tell you, it was not fun to be my mother. (She's laughing.) And so then we had these tables with the food and the food was very good. A lot of the people would not even have a thing to eat because they were sea sick. They couldn't eat. So there probably would be one person sitting at the whole table. And I helped the waiters to put the dishes out. That was one of my jobs and I looked forward to that. So when we landed in New York, something happened to out ship and we had to land before to have this hole repaired in the ship. And when we did, the waiters and the people who work on the ship could leave into New York City and they were delighted to go. So, anyway, those fellows went to New York and when they came back one of them brought me a huge bag of all kinds of fruit because they knew I loved oranges and apples 'cause I spent, every penny I got a hold of I'd spend for an orange or an apple. So, I got this huge thing of fruit and this was unusual for Scandinavia because they could only raise apples and pears. That's about all they ever had. And so I looked at this one particular fruit and I felt of it and I said to mother, "What is this?" It was a peach. And it was furry. And I said, "What do you think it has inside?" (She's laughing.) And my mother said, "Well, bite into it?" So I bit into it and the juice went down my chin. And when I bit some more, here was a stone inside. And I was just amazed at that. And so I've loved peaches ever since, of course, all fruit anyway. But there were bananas, there were oranges, there were, I think there was even a pineapple in there. It was, I never forgot it. It was so wonderful. And then on the gangplank, where the men would go up and down to reach the land, I noticed a man coming up and I looked at him and he had a black face. And I said to my mother, "He has a black face. What is that? She said, "Some people have black faces." I had never seen a Negro (she's laughing) or black man.

LEVINE: What did you do with your candy bars? . . .

CARLSON: Oh, we had gone a couple of days and my mother was terribly sea sick. And when we got into our cabin all I could smell was that chocolate. It really made me nauseated. I thought, "I just can't stand that smell." And, of course, it bothered my mother and I knew it bothered my mother. She had to go and throw up into the container and all this stuff. And I thought, "Gosh, I can't do that." I probably had eaten one of them or something. But I said to my mother, "I don't know what to do with those." She says, "Throw them overboard." I threw them overboard. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: So, you were in a cabin with your brother, sister and your mother. Was there anybody else in that cabin?

CARLSON: Yes, there were another, there were a man and a wife. They each had one of the, I think it was a man and a wife, I'm not really sure. It could have been two women. But we were never in with them. Well! They were probably upset because we were young kids and they were trying to be in this little tiny cabin. No one stayed in their cabin unless they had a private cabin. They were up sitting on top of the deck. Oh, the music was wonderful. We enjoyed the music. And, of course, I had heard a lot of music through my father anyway. And, we would, the kids would run, my brother, he would run all over and busy himself with that and I'm chasing him. You know, very active kind of living when you are that old. But it was a beautiful ship. And we had one bad storm where the plates would be moving, so they put them down. And everyone, a lot of people were sea sick. Nobody came for a meal. And so that was one of the things about going by ship at that time, sea sickness.

LEVINE: Where was the music coming from? Who was . . .

CARLSON: I think they had a band. I think they had someone play. It probably was just an accordion and a piano or something. I mean it wasn't like it is today. Well, they might have had other littler entertainments but I really didn't get into that because I couldn't.

LEVINE: Well, now were you a third class passenger?

CARLSON: Yap.

LEVINE: Then were there first and second class accommodations on the same ship?

CARLSON: Yap. And the first class was up on the top and we were never allowed to go there but some of the third class passengers were way, way down on the ship. You know, they were

LEVINE: in the steerage.

CARLSON: So we were on one of the top ones, which wasn't too bad, but we had quite a few steps to go up and down to get down there. Well, I don't remember looking out. I just remember sitting on the deck and, of course, I remember the many days of not seeing anything but ocean and sky. That's an experience. I remember when we started seeing land and we started seeing the Statue of Liberty. I remember that very vividly. Everybody got up on the top there and they're all, you know, everybody's feeling great because we arrived. You don't know when your on a ship that you can (she laughs), you can drown. And so we arrived and there was music played and they played America. I think it was America they played. And then shortly after that we saw the Ellis Island thing and we knew we were going to go there. (Dr. Levine speaks in background.) Everybody was on that one side of the ship watching this stuff, you know. We were very happy about it.

LEVINE: What did you know about Ellis Island before you actually went? Do you remember?

CARLSON: (She sighs.) Well, the thing was, I asked my mother about what are we going to do and all this. And my mother said that they are going to examine us. And the one thing that I remember very clearly was that all the women -- and there were quite a few Finnish people coming across with us at the same time -- and we, (she clears her throat) the women sort of knew that they would be, the hair of the children, the heads of the children would be examined so they wanted to be sure that they had no lice. And so (she clears her throat) all the women were fine combing their kids. And my mother was fine combing me. I had long hair (she laughs) down to waste and she was fine combing me and that's the reason why I heard her say, you have to be careful not to have picked up any lice. So the women were really busy about that. They were all so busy washing their children (she clears her throat) and themselves, I imagine, so that they'd be clean because they knew that they would be looked at. And they wanted to pass.

LEVINE: So what were your impressions of Ellis Island? Do you remember what you . . .

CARLSON: Ellis Island (she clears her throat), we went on a boat, on a small boat, from where the ship was, where the ship had landed and we had the ride over to Ellis Island. Everybody was excited and everybody had the best clothes that they had with them, they put on so that they would look nice. The thing that I can remember about Ellis Island, and I have never visited there since then, was that it was a beautiful, beautiful building. And there was very many beams and carvings in the hall that we went in. We had a guide and we would just follow the guide. And they made us go up those long stairs there and, of course, my mother was carrying the baby and I'm carrying two

suitcases and my brother because my mother just couldn't manage everything. And so we trotted along up those stairs and, of course, I got to know later that they did have guides up and down watching this, and they wanted to look at the people to see if they had anything wrong with their legs and that and they were also looking could you breathe properly and that because the TB thing that they had. So, we made it. Of course, my mother was very young. So we made it up the stairs and then we, I'm not sure if it was before we went to the stairs or after, but we sat in a dining room and we had something to eat, which was wonderful We thought it was fabulous. We were starved. And so we had something to eat and I can't really remember, but I know we had milk, but I don't know what else; maybe a bun or something, I don't know. Anyway, then we sat at the examining table like this (indicating the long table they were seated at for the interview) a man and an interpreter there, asking us questions. And they would ask you about did you ever have TB? And something about the children and they kind of look at your hair a little bit. They probably could tell whether you were clean or not, you know. It wasn't a thorough, thorough thing. But when I sat downstairs before this event occurred, I looked at the --what do you call the veranda?

LEVINE: The balcony.

CARLSON: The balcony, and the people were walking there and I said to my mother, "Why are those people up there? Who are they?" And my mother said, "Well, if they don't pass, then they put them there." I said, "Mom, don't let them put me up there." That's all I could think of because --I didn't say about this but --when my mother was buying the tickets to go over seas I think that the man that was selling the tickets knew that there was a lot of poverty and things and my mother didn't have any money and that and he figured that maybe if they said I was ten years old instead of eleven I could go for half price ticket. And so I was put down as ten years old. And I knew about this

because my mother told me, "If anyone asks you how old you are, you say ten." And so I said, "Don't let them put me up there." Because I felt that now they could tell that I was eleven (she laughs) and they were going to take me and put me up there, all by myself. And not only that, I had lost my father for three months. I already was all nervous about my father leaving and I felt that maybe something happened they'd take my mother and I'd be there with no one, you know. And so I had that, just like children, you can see where kids who are taken away from their families have fears of all kinds. You certainly learn that when these things happen to you. Well, he just looked at the records and everything and then he said, "Okay."
(She laughs.) We were delighted.

LEVINE: So when did you meet up with your father?

CARLSON: Well, that was another horrible story (she laughs) because when we got on the, of course at Ellis Island we heard all kinds of languages. There was all sorts of nationalities there. We weren't the only ones. And so, we got on a little boat to go to the train station. And, we took all our things. My mother checked to see that the trunk was there. And so we got on that boat and then we landed and that's when we were supposed to meet my father. (She sneezes) He wasn't there. My mother was, she didn't say anything but I know that she must have been tremendously nervous. And she thought, "Well, I'm going to go anyway." And we packed into the train for Worcester and my mother couldn't figure out what happened to my father. We got to Worcester (she clears her throat), to the Union Station. I look at that station and I remember it. Have you seen it? (She inhales audibly.) Well it's, I mean, almost down to nothing. But anyway, it was the most beautiful building and it had lovely things inside. And they had, we went in there after we left the train and my mother didn't know what to do but someone came over and was bi-lingual and said that there's Travellers Aid room over here. We'll take you over there. And so we did. And fortunately, my father had

reported this to the Travellers Aid and he had whatever was to be done with us, in case anything happened, that he didn't come. So, anyway, they put us in a car, which we had never been in before a car, and we were driven to Quincigamen. And we came in with a family who were Swedes. And they put us up for the night. Oh, it was wonderful. I've never seen them again, it's funny. But they were so gracious to do this for immigrants. And so they put us in. My mother had a bed. I was on the floor and my brother was on the floor in another little bed. And for the first time, I didn't have to say, "I can't turn around." (She laughs.) I had a bed all by myself. A wonderful sleep, but during the night I could hear this talking and I woke up. And I could hear my mother talking to my father. And I woke up suddenly. I ran into their bed (she's laughing) and I'm hugging my father and I'm crying, I'm so thrilled to see my father because I didn't know what had happened to him. So I'm saying "What happened?" Well, the thing that happened was my father was working in some shop. And, of course, he wasn't that good at knowing the English language. And he didn't make himself understood exactly when we were to arrive or something. So they said, "You'll have to work until such and such a time." So he did just what they said and when he got on the train, he was an hour late. He didn't make it. We had already left an hour before. But he went down to New York to meet us. (She laughs.) So he had arranged to go to another family. This was a widow, a minister's widow and she had a house that she was trying to hold on to. And she had an upstairs and she rented this upstairs to my father and us. And it was on West Street. You don't know anything about West Street, but it's a different area. But, anyway, and she of course could talk Swedish so then my mother and she could get together on things. She was old and we lived there for awhile. The one thing that strikes me that's kind of funny was that she couldn't repair the ceilings, the roof, she didn't have any money. So there was a leak in the roof and during the night, one of the nights, my mother woke up and she had dripping to the bed (she laughs) where they slept. And my mother said, "It's leaking under the ceiling" and that and she got out

her umbrella and she put the umbrella over the them. Let it run into a pail. See, (she continues to laugh) my mother was very good at knowing what to do at the right time. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: Well, tell me about Worcester. Well, first of all, what were the things that struck you as real different when you first came.

CARLSON: When I came, now, I went to West Street School. Of course, I enrolled and my mother and father were very education oriented. They loved teaching and education. And, right off, I had to go to school. And so I did. I went to West Street. West Street, even today, it's a lot of blacks. So the school was sort of divided, black and white, which I wasn't used to at all. I didn't want to get near them (she laughs). I didn't want to accept them. So, anyway, I really should have been in the fifth grade, according to my age, and I was put into the fifth grade and I, even though I knew reading and all this stuff, there was nothing, I knew nothing. And I didn't know a word, they said. And I just sat there. And it's not much fun for a young child. And the teacher ignored me more or less because she was, I don't think she was so used to immigrants in that area. But about the first day that I went there, the singing, music. And the teacher had a stick and she's saying "again". And so then they sang again. And again. And again. And I opened the desk and I wrote it down like it would be in Swedish, again. That was the first word I learned. (She laughs.) I couldn't pick up any other word. I came home to my mother and I said I learned a word. (She laughs.) Again. It wasn't easy and we moved later, but we didn't stay there too long. My father found through people in the industry that he worked in that it was much better for us to go up and live on Belmont Hill because there were many Swedes up there. And that was really the right thing to do because we had to get involved with people who knew how to speak to each other. And so we moved to Belmont Hill.

LEVINE: Where was your father working at that point? Do you remember the name of the place?

CARLSON: No, I don't remember but the thing about my father was that he wanted to work at SKF and they had a branch in Hartford, Connecticut. And I think it's still there. But when he got there he was not given anything like what he was trained in and he was a little unhappy. And so he got along with two or three other guys and they were talking and they said, "You know, in Worcester they pay much more per hour than they do here in this, SKF." And so my father says, "Okay, I'll go there." So he went to Worcester. We thought that we would be living in Hartford because of that SKF thing, but he came to Worcester.

LEVINE: What's SKF mean?

CARLSON: That's the ball bearings. You know the ball bearings in cars and everything. I guess they still use them. I think it's still an industry. But anyway, that's why he came to Worcester and when he came to Worcester and when he came to Worcester, he never really made it. He never got anything and it was during the Depression and there was no work! He'd wake up five in the morning and go from one shop to another trying to get in and couldn't get in. There was nothing. And so it was, you know, I mean, here's a dream, you know I'm going to go there and have everything. (She laughs.) It was a dream that never was fulfilled. It never really was fulfilled in either my mother or father's life but the next generation, their children and the next generation, they profited by it. But they never really got to know that. But, anyway, it was very different. Anyway, I went to Belmont Hill and I went to Belmont Street School. Now they were more used to immigrants and they had Swedes and Finns and they also had a lot of blacks too at that time. But, anyway, they decided that I should not be in the fifth grade because I had this difficulty and they would put me into the third grade. That was two

grades below. So I did and I had a fabulous, wonderful teacher whose name was Miss Moroni and she knew several Swedish words and every day she'd say, "Come and sit with me." And she would say a Swedish word and then she'd say and this is how we say it." And she says, "Repeat it," and "repeat it." So I learned quite a few words. Outside of that I was really very unhappy because I would stand in the corner in the school yard and the kids would be playing all kinds of hop scotch and everything and no one would bother with me and I had no way to communicate with them. So, after I had done that for awhile Miss Moroni happened to be out in the school yard and she said, she went over to one of the girls and she said, "I want you to --"--by this time I could understand a few things --and she said, "I want you to let this little girl play with you. She knows how to play hop scotch." And so they took me in. That was the beginning of me wanting to, saying anything because even if I learned a word, I couldn't go along saying "again, again" all the time. (She laughs.) So I did that and then, but I was in the third grade, which was lower than what my capacity at that time. But anyway my father then decided to move further up on the hill because there were more Swedes up there and better housing. And so we did that. We moved many times up on Belmont Hill, from one to the other place because of more rooms or more this or, you know, he was always considering his family. My mother and father lived for their children because they had no one else. We were all together. And everything revolved with the family. So we moved. And the last place that we moved was up to Green Hill Park, near Green Hill Park. And it is a beautiful park and my brother and my sister and I still love everything about Green Hill Park because that's where we spent most of our time, spare time. But, anyway, then I went into another school and then I got involved with another teacher whose name was Miss Carol and she was beautiful and wonderful in every way. She wanted to help me so much that it was just perfect. And she knew that I was a good student and, once I got on my feet --I couldn't really pronounce all the words. For a year I never said anything, just Swedish. But then I started. And would pronounce the words.

In the English language there are so many silent letters. In Swedish you pronounce every letter. And so, I would, to myself, I would say the work like I might say it if it was Swedish, pronouncing everything. But when you come to ch, sh and all this, it's pretty hard (she laughs) but we had spelling bees. Well, I could spell the words and I could say the letters but I sometimes didn't pronounce them right. But I'd stand almost to the end, you know (she's laughing). They were kind of amazed at that, you know (laughing). And so, of course, more and more, I learned more and more and more. And when I, in the seventh grade, sixth grade, we had a little graduation at that time, and they picked out the top students and sent them to a prep school. Those were in preparation for college or higher education, and we took latin and french. This was seventh and eighth grade. And I was a candidate. I went to the prep school down at Belmont Street School and it was very nice.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE II

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE II

CARLSON: I mean I got the honor. The thing about that was that that was the sixth grade and my mother was supposed to come to this little graduation that they had and I didn't want my mother to go. I thought that my mother was so different from all the other mothers that I didn't want her to stick out like (she's laughing) something that wasn't right. I mean, she didn't dress the same or she didn't talk to the people or anything. I was embarrassed. How terrible you are at that age. I mean, it's really pathetic. And so I wouldn't let my mother come. And during the graduation the principal, Mr. Crowley, stood up there when it was time for my diploma and he spoke out about my accomplishments and how well I did in school and I had only been here two years or something like this. And I was really red in my face and all I could

think of was "My mother didn't hear any of it." (She laughs.) No one was there for me. So I went to prep school and had a wonderful time there, took french and latin and was (sighs) very nice. I attribute any of my success, and i think I've had a lot of it, to wonderful teachers. (pause) Well, that's it, wonderful teachers that give you a little push.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father, given that it was depression, did they ever think of going back or did you ever hear them talk about that?

CARLSON: Oh, they never had enough money to do any of that. And, my mother sold, she would do, my mother worked real, real hard. My father couldn't find a job. My mother went to work. My mother took a job at one point, I don't know --how long do you want this to go?

LEVINE: We'll go about fifteen more minutes.

CARLSON: Oh, well, anyway, my mother got a job in a blind person's home so she was gone twenty-four hours a day. I took over the family again. I had it all my life. (She clears her throat.) She worked at that, they had to make a living. We had no --

LEVINE: No one to turn to.

CARLSON: No one to turn to. We had to shift for ourselves. My father would keep the house sometimes and would be running for jobs all the time. He struggled and I don't imagine that he was very happy about what went on in his life. And my mother never complained but my mother worked all the time. And I did too. I started working when I was fourteen. My mother was working for a dentist. She was washing the bibs that you had. She got a penny a piece for washing a bib. And then she cleaned the floors. And that dentist said, "If my mother wanted me to work, I could get a job at his place." So, she

said, "Sure." I was fourteen, I went to prep and I got off at one o'clock in the afternoon. So every afternoon I went to the dentist and worked there. Cleaned the instruments, put the bib on, all this stuff. I didn't know too much about anything but it was the beginning of my work period, and that was the reason that I felt, after I had been there awhile, that I wanted to go into nursing and I had to do that. I did that for two or three years and then I decided I wanted to go into nursing. The strange part about that was that I, in order to go into nursing at eighteen --I was just seventeen and a half. I had only done a year and a half of high school because I was two years behind my age (she clears her throat). And so I only had a year and a half of high school and I quit high school and a friend of ours who was a nurse, we went everywhere making applications for nurses schools. And no one would take me because I only had a year and a half of high school. At that time they were taking students at Worcester State. And Worcester State Mental. And I applied there and it was really a wonderful thing because I was making -what was it? -- ten dollars, a little over ten dollars a week working there. We were like cheap labor but we also got a wonderful training. (She clears her throat.) And so I immediately went there, but I only had a year and a half of high school, which was all right because I did very well in training. We started with sixty students and when we graduated there was only eleven left because it's really hard work. And two thousand to three thousand patients. And so it was a big place and everything but I folded in very well and did all right. Sometimes I would come home to my mother and say, "I can't stand it. I got to get home. I can't be here anymore." And my mother said, "Sit down. We'll have a little supper and then you sleep and maybe you'll feel better in the morning." And that's what happened every time it happened, (she laughs) I felt better morning and I went right back.

LEVINE: This was Worcester Mental, you said?

CARLSON: Worcester state Hospital. I don't know if you know where it is but of course it's in existence still. And it's not as big. It's where University of Massachusetts Medical School is. It's right up on the hill there. And they owned all that land. I was there at that time, when they owned all that land and they had farms and all this stuff. It was a very interesting thing and I learned an awful lot there. But, anyway, (she clears her throat) I graduated from there and I got the highest score. And so the alumni offered me a scholarship to go into teaching, take a course into teaching. But I was too shy. I couldn't stand teaching. And so I decided I wanted to go into surgery. One of the things was, I had an awful lot of acne. I also had little dental things that, teeth that weren't that great so I never was proud of myself, my looks. You know at that age, you want to look good. So,(she coughs) in surgery you put mask on. You don't see the face. So I got into that and I got very involved with the supervisor there. And I loved surgery so I wanted to go to Johns Hopkins and take a course in surgery there. That's what I wanted to specialize in. And so, when I applied there, they would not accept me because I only had a year and a half of high school, even though I was (she laughs) on top of my class. And so I decided to go back to get my high school. I went to North Eastern University nights, while I was working nights for a year and a half to get my high school diploma, which I did. And when I did that and applied to Johns Hopkins, they accepted me. So I took a course there. I was mainly interested in that because they gave some brain surgery. That's what I wanted to be in at Worcester State. I wanted to go back to Worcester State. I wanted to go back to Worcester state and give them some of my labor there. So we were just setting up brain surgery for lobotomies and stuff, which I got in after I got through my course. And so I did that for, I don't know how long it was. Awhile, I was a supervisor there. The supervisor that I was very friendly with died of pneumonia. She got pneumonia. There was no drugs. She died. She was only thirty years old. So then I became the supervisor there and set up the, helped the surgeons set up the instruments and things for that and did that for awhile. And we

also had all kinds of surgery. When you get two or three thousand people, you have all kinds of surgeries, you know. So we were a busy surgery and we had a lot of clinic. We were working very hard with syphilis. We had a big syphilis clinic with spinals and blood work and all this stuff. So it was a wonderful experience and I loved it. So then, I just want to make this quickly I guess, so then I got through with that and, of course, I fell in love and got married and had three children, three sons.

LEVINE: Who did you marry?

CARLSON: Well, his name was Carl O. Carlson, Carl Oskar Carlson. (She clears her throat.) And so, we --

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

CARLSON: I met my husband at a dance.

LEVINE: Was he also Swedish?

CARLSON: Yeah, that's the reason why we connected because he asked me to dance. And when he asked me my name and I told him, he said, "You're a Swede?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm a Swede." And he didn't look like a Swede because he had kind of brownish eyes and kind of darkish hair. And I was kind of blonde. And so, he said, "You're a Swede?" And I said, "Yeah." And so he said, "I am too." And I said, "You are (she laughs)? And so then he says, "Oh," he says, "Can I take you home?" "Well," I said, "I have a girlfriend with me." "Oh, we'll take her home, and then I'll take you home." And I got out in his car and I was, my father never had a car, we never rode in a car. I knew nothing about cars (she laughs). It was always street cars, you know. And so, then, I got into this car and it was an Auburn, a grey Auburn with red trimmings. And I got in there and it was immaculately clean. And I was so

taken up by this. Here's a guy that looks so nice, you know, suit, tie. And I had been trying to get someone to go to a dance because I was kind of active in my profession, we had dances and I never could find anyone that had a suit or that wanted to go to dance. And so I said, "We're having a dance, would you like to go to this dance at the Bancroft Hotel." And he says, "Sure!" (She laughs.) And so that was how we began. And, of course, now, when I got to his house, his people were just as excited as mine were about two Swedes getting together. (She's laughing.) It was the Swedes that did it. And so I have three sons and they are a hundred per cent Swedes because both the mother and father were Swedes.

LEVINE: And what are their names, your children?

CARLSON: The oldest one is Roger Emil, from his grandfather; and the next one is Paul Gustav, and Gustav was my father's name; and the next one is Dennis Allen. And so anyway, we got settled. And even before we got married, we were sort of engaged and I was supposed to go to Johns Hopkins and my husband said, my husband-to-be said, "You go. You've been wanting to do this all your life. You go" And so I did. I left him and went and took that. And I'm glad I did. And so when --

LEVINE: How long were you gone?

CARLSON: Oh, I was gone like four months or something like that. Of course, that's a long time when you're in love, you know. (She laughs.) So, now my children, my sons, the oldest one especially, was getting very good marks in school, all A's and everything and I kind of thought that he would want to go into college. He had it. And so when my youngest one, Denny, was five years old, I decided to, my neighbor asked me if I'd like to go up to Worcester County Hospital and do a night job there, relieving nurses who wanted a night off. And I said, "Well, I haven't done anything for ten years. I

don't know." And she said, "Oh, I'll show you and you'll be all right." I went up there and did some night work, now and then, and left my family. And so, then, after I had been there a little while, there was opening in the surgery and they found out that I (laughs) was specialized in surgery, so now I went into TB nursing and TB surgery; and there was an opening in the surgery. And I worked there until I was sixty years old. And I was delighted with my job. And, there again, I had done brain surgery, now we were doing lung surgery and tuberculosis. And we were resecting lungs, taking portions of lungs or lobes of lungs where there was TB. Wonderful, wonderful surgeon who came from this area. And very active, very active work. Then suddenly we found that there was medication for TB, INH. And so the surgery was quieted down. We didn't have very much so they were sort of thinking about not having the surgery. So I went into clinic work and that was skin testing and that kind of clinic work that you do in TB. I guess it's starting all over again but, at that time, it was quite active. And I enjoyed that. I had to meet a lot of people and a lot of tests and x-rays and stuff like this. So I really specialized in both brain and lungs and, you know, it helped me a lot in my life.

LEVINE: What are you most proud of that you've achieved or accomplished in your life?

CARLSON: Well, I guess, well I was proud of what I did. My brother also, he came home telling my mother that he had a scholarship to Clark University and my mother said, "What does that mean?" She didn't know anything about it. That's how, you know, she didn't understand what went on in education and so she said, "You might as well do it because there aren't any jobs." This was during the Depression. So my brother graduated from Clark University on a scholarship and he went into the service as a, he was in the Coast Guard as a lieutenant and he went into Wayne State University and was the Assistant Admission Officer there for many years and retired from there. So

he accomplished something. I was proud of what I did. My mother and father, they, I'll tell you any graduation that I had after that one experience, my mother and father were there because by that time I had gotten mature enough to know, so when I graduated from training and I got an award, my mother and father were just gloating (she laughs) over me. And I am proud of my accomplishments. I think I worked very hard. I didn't really date very much through this thing until I was all through training and I had a job. So I had my feet on the ground. I wish the same for my granddaughters, but it's hard. (She laughs.) But then I was very proud of my sons also. My oldest son (she sighs), he graduated from Worcester Tech and he's design engineer and he started his own company. He has a lot of problems right now but he did that and I'm proud of that.

LEVINE: Did you get over feeling insecure about, you mentioned when you went into surgery so you could cover your face . . . ?

CARLSON: Yeah, I know. Well I was a very shy person anyway and I think in all this experience of not being able to communicate and all this stuff, didn't do me any good because I was really a blushing --you know how blonds can get, my whole face would get red and everybody wanted to use that. So that they'd always be doing something (she's laughing) to me watch me blush. That's not a nice thing to do but, anyway, after I was married and had my children and that, I became quite outgoing, as you can hear. I mean I had more confidence or, well as I went on in my employment, one thing about that being shy and all that. It almost seemed as though I had two personalities because when I'd go visit somebody, I would be very shy. I would not participate in the conversation or anything, but when I was professionally, I was like another person. I could talk very freely and I talked to the physicians and, you know, I felt confident then. So it was almost like (she laughs) being two different people.

LEVINE: What about this phase of your life? How do you feel about your life at this point in time?

CARLSON: Well my life now is the saddest that I've had my whole life because of the loss of my husband and I live alone and my sons are all married. They're very good to me but they all have their own problems and activities and I, one thing that I probably miss, that some people have, they have church connections where they were very active. I did not have that in my life. Neither my husband nor I ever attended. We never belonged to a church even though I sent my children. My mother also sent me to Confirmation and said, "I want you to have this knowledge. You can do whatever you want in your life. I'm not saying that you do or you don't. You do whatever you wish." And I brought up my children the same way, my sons. You can do anything you want. If you want to go to church, if you don't, it's perfectly all right with me. You don't have to please me in any way. And so I, right now, I am connected to the people's church. They have a group there and we take little trips and that. And I did go with my brother and his wife to Scandinavia and I crossed the country with them from Detroit to California. He lives in California six months and Canada, six months. So they cross a lot. He wanted me to see the country. He knows that I'm (she laughs) interested in this stuff, so we went everywhere and visited Indians and everything, all the way across. So, you know, I've had a little travelling, and not only that, my husband and I took a trip to Scandinavia for seven weeks, and bought a Volvo and we travelled all over the countries there and visited all our relatives and all this. And we went many places and, of course, I miss all that. But I mainly miss my husband. He was seventy-nine, which, you know, a good age. And he had been sick for about ten years with a heart condition and I took care of him, oxygen, running to the hospital, bringing him up there. He had like five or six coronaries. It was difficult but he was there! But now, he's not there. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Well, when did you go on the Elderhostel?

CARLSON: A year ago June, last June, a year ago. We went for the three weeks with the Elderhostel, then we back to Sweden and we visited with my cousin and we went to the car and we drove everywhere. And my brother did very, very well. He's, he was seventy-two. Of course, I'm eighty now and he's going to be seventy-three. But we did very well. And the traffic there, in the country there is, the cities is just as difficult as it is here. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Well, tell me, before we close, tell me about the fact of starting out in Sweden and then living most of your life here. What effect do you think it's had on you and your life, being Swedish and starting out in Sweden and then becoming American?

CARLSON: (She clears her throat.) Well, I'm proud of being Swedish. I think that my mother and father's children, my brother, my sister and I, had many more opportunities than we would have had if we lived in Sweden. Although when we visited there, they have a wonderful education and wonderful heath caring and education. They're into education real, much more than we are. And so, I don't know whether we would have been as well off. But I think that we're all happy that we had that opportunity, so maybe it was a wise choice for us. But it was not, for my mother and father. It was too difficult for them. So, you know, it almost takes a lifetime to be able to do that. I mean I'm not unhappy that I'm here and I'm sure my kids would, or my children, my grandchildren, that they would say, "Oh, now, I'd never want to go to Sweden. I'd never (she's laughing) want to live there.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of regarding here that you want to say?

CARLSON: Well, the other thing that I didn't mention is, and I've mentioned it very few times in my life, was that when we came here, up to Belmont Hill, my folks

were still very lonely and that. And they had formed a group, the Communist Party was active on Belmont Hill and they were, they had rented a hall, and they also bought land out in the country, in Auburn, because they wanted to form this Communist Party. When I look back at that, it was not really anything that had to do with Communism. It was more a social thing and it was that these Scandinavians --there were a lot of Finns in there too. It was more or less for them to be together. And they worked very hard doing this. And they would have dinners and my mother would always be in the kitchen and she'd always be making donuts. And they'd always be selling these things. And everybody looked forward to the meetings that they had and the activity that they had. Now, because we were not church members or church oriented, we didn't have anything like that. So that was a very good thing for that particular time. When I went into training, at that time they all had, already we were talking so much about anti-Communism. And that seemed to be a real topic and my mother and father were a little bit afraid that it would hamper our learning or our education and all that, so they decided to stop going. And they did and it didn't take too long after that that the whole thing dissolved. But they would in this Woodland Park, in Auburn, where they put up a dance hall and a picnic area, where the kids would be going in the summertime for picnics and things. They had a wonderful time dancing, every Saturday night. And that was the thing. I mean there wasn't that much Communists or what the Communists were doing. And so it didn't, but still, if you lived in an area where most of the Scandinavians were going to church because they had come here many years ago and they were very religious, which they are, even today. Then, you felt sort of on the outside and you could not associate with them.

LEVINE: That served that purpose.

CARLSON: That served the purpose of having friends and getting together and having fun. That's really all I can think of at Woodland Park is having fun. And my

mother and father did. I mean they would have missed it terribly if they had not had it. But once we got going and my father got more active in some job or something and my mother, she was working up to the end almost anyway. Then, you know, they could take that, that they didn't have to go. And then it just kind of dissolved. That's kind of interesting.

LEVINE: Let's see, when was that, as far as the McCarthy era?

CARLSON: I can't remember, I can't connect it with that? But, let's see, it was, when I went into training and so I was like eighteen years old. And see, I was eighteen years old. I was born in thirteen. Eight, nine, ten, eleven.

LEVINE: Thirty-two.

CARLSON: Well, it was like thirty, 1930, because I was not doing this, I never went once I went in training. I was too busy. I just never-- And they didn't go that much either. Then it was never -- Anyway it wasn't existing. They did have dances a long time after but I don't think they had any kind of connection or any kind of club. That was, you know, the Finns and Swedes. And, it's funny, the Finns and the Swedes, the Finns would sit on one side and the Swedes would sit on the other. You know, as if they were different. Now when I went (she clears her throat) on my trip and I heard the history about Finland, I didn't even want to say I was a Swede because when I heard what the Swedes did to the Finns, trying to get their land and creating this war that they had, I, it's shameful. Not only that, then the Finns had Russia. Russia did the same thing. They wanted the land, so they were trying to steal the land. So they had another Civil War over that. And the Finns did nothing but war and work and work. And Finland was the most beautiful country. And now, I had Finnish friends also, when I grew up. But the Swedes and the Finns were separate. Maybe because of this Civil War. But, anyway -- (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Okay, well, the tape is about to run out and I want to say this has been just delightful. (Mrs. Carlson is laughing.) Thank you so much for a most --

CARLSON: I don't know who's going to hear this. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Well, I'll tell you, but let me just say I've been speaking with Gurli Carlson and she came from Sweden in 1923 at the age of eleven and has been Worcester.

END OF INTERVIEW