

EI-449
MARGRETHE TEIEN HALVORSEN
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
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NORWAY, 1922
AGE 21

SHIP: "THE HELLIG OLAV"
PORT: OSLO
RESIDENCES:
NORWAY: HORTEN
US: GLEN COVE, BROOKLYN, NY;

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, March 31, 1994. I might also add we're in Holy Week, and it is Maundy Thursday. We are in Brooklyn at the Shore Drive Apartment Complex with Margrethe Halvorsen, and that's capital H-A-L-V-O-R-S-E-N. Mrs. Halvorsen came from Norway in October of 1922 when she was twenty-one years old. Anyway, thanks for letting Kevin and I come out. Mrs. Halvorsen, can we begin with you giving me your birth date?

HALVORSEN: 11/13.

SIGRIST: What year?

HALVORSEN: 1901.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me where in Norway you were born?

HALVORSEN: Horten.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

HALVORSEN: H-O-R-T-E-N.

SIGRIST: And where in Norway is that?

HALVORSEN: That's little outside Oslo.

SIGRIST: Oh, like a suburb of Oslo?

HALVORSEN: About an hour-and-a-half drive from Oslo.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what the town looked like when you were a kid growing up?

HALVORSEN: That's a beautiful small town, and it was also the base for the navy.

SIGRIST: Is it on the water?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes. Surrounded by water.

SIGRIST: What did the town look like?

HALVORSEN: Well, lots of beautiful homes. Very nice and quiet.

SIGRIST: Was the major industry in the town the shipping?

HALVORSEN: Yeah, the navy.

SIGRIST: Was the navy.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the navy being there when you were a child?

HALVORSEN: Oh, I really don't know. Lots of the officers and, not really much.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house that you grew up in?

HALVORSEN: Oh, my God, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe it for me.

HALVORSEN: We had a beautiful house, and a lovely garden. Lots of fruit trees and flowers. A lovely place.

SIGRIST: Who grew the, who grew the flowers? Was it your mother or your father?

HALVORSEN: Both of them. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: They both enjoyed gardening.

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

HALVORSEN: Wood.

SIGRIST: Wood?

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what color it was?

HALVORSEN: I think it was white, the window green.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how many rooms the house had?

HALVORSEN: (she laughs) Gee. (she counts) This is the first floor and the second floor. The first floor was four, (one, two --) and upstairs was three.

SIGRIST: And how did you keep the house warm?

HALVORSEN: Oh, we had a stove in the, a big stove in the dining room, and also a stove in the living room. And, of course, that time we had the wooden oven in the kitchen. There were no electricity that time, when I was small. That came later on.

SIGRIST: Now, did you burn coal in the stoves, or wood?

HALVORSEN: Both.

SIGRIST: Do you know how you got the wood?

HALVORSEN: That what?

SIGRIST: How did you get the wood to burn in the stoves?

HALVORSEN: Oh, we got that from the country.

SIGRIST: Now, did you have to go chop it?

HALVORSEN: No, no.

SIGRIST: No, you bought it.

HALVORSEN: Yeah, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did, um, what was your father's . . .

HALVORSEN: That's when I was a small girl.

SIGRIST: Right. Well, that's what we're talking about now, when you were little, a little girl.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

HALVORSEN: Johann.

SIGRIST: And can you describe to me what his personality was like as a person.

HALVORSEN: Gee, I don't know. He was very kind, always in a good mood.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: What was your maiden name? I should have asked you.

HALVORSEN: Teien.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

HALVORSEN: T-E-I-E-N.

SIGRIST: Teien.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So his name, your father's name was, was Johann Teien.

HALVORSEN: Teien, yes.

SIGRIST: What did he do for a living?

HALVORSEN: Well, he worked in the navy yard.

SIGRIST: Doing what?

HALVORSEN: And retired when he was sixty-five. But he was a very, very busy man. He had also conducted all the choir in the Methodist church for about fifty-five years.

SIGRIST: Wow. Was your family Methodist?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Are there a lot of Methodists in Norway? I always think of the Lutherans.

HALVORSEN: I don't know.

SIGRIST: So he was very musical then?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Did he play an instrument?

HALVORSEN: He played the organ. (she laughs) As you know, I had to buy an organ.

SIGRIST: That's right, that's right. Was your mother musical, too?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

HALVORSEN: Trine. T-R-I-N-E.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

HALVORSEN: Olsen. O-L-S-E-N.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your mother?

HALVORSEN: (she laughs) Oh, what can I say? She was very lovely. She was a very, very good mother. I loved them both dearly.

SIGRIST: When you think back to your early childhood, is there a story about your parents, or an event that you remember going to with your parents? No? Did your mother do the cooking in the house?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite food when you were a kid?

HALVORSEN: Oh, my God, I don't know. I ate everything.

SIGRIST: What is typical Norwegian food?

HALVORSEN: Well, we had the same as -- we had meat, fish. Things like that.

SIGRIST: What kind of meat did you have?

HALVORSEN: Oh, we had pork, we had beef, we had lamb. We -- whatever.

SIGRIST: Did your mother, was there a grocery store where she went to buy things in the town?

HALVORSEN: Yes. Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you, did your parents grow any of their own vegetables?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No. Just flowers and things.

HALVORSEN: Flowers, and we had lots of fruit trees.

SIGRIST: What kind of fruit trees?

HALVORSEN: Oh, peaches, pears, apples. What else was it? Raspberries.

SIGRIST: Oh. So you had a good-sized . . .

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, beautiful.

SIGRIST: . . . backyard.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, if your mother was going to prepare a special meal, what would she make? What would be a special dinner, like maybe Christmas dinner, or Easter dinner.

HALVORSEN: Christmas dinner would be roast pork, ham. Roast ham.

SIGRIST: How did she prepare that?

HALVORSEN: Like we do, we roasted it.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

HALVORSEN: Yes. We were seven.

SIGRIST: Oh. Can you name everyone for me?

HALVORSEN: Name them all?

SIGRIST: Name them all, if you can.

HALVORSEN: Oh, my God. And I have to start with the oldest one. Anna, Gutvald.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

HALVORSEN: Gutvald.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

HALVORSEN: G-U-D-T-V-A-L-D. (she laughs) Tryge. Do you want me to spell it?

SIGRIST: Please.

HALVORSEN: T-R-Y-G-E. Erling. E-R-L-I-N-G. That's me. And Ruth, one elder sister. R-U-T-H.

SIGRIST: So you're the next to the youngest?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Next to the youngest. Were you closest to any one of your brothers and sisters?

HALVORSEN: No, not especially. I was close to all of them.

SIGRIST: Did they all get along?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you were growing up, an instance where somebody didn't get along, where there was a fight in the house?

HALVORSEN: Well (she laughs) we all had a little trouble, little fighting once in a while.

SIGRIST: Who . . .

HALVORSEN: But when I grow up, my older brother and sister, they were all married. They lived in other town.

SIGRIST: So they were out of the house?

HALVORSEN: So there was more or less only the three of us left home.

SIGRIST: I see. So it wasn't quite so . . .

HALVORSEN: The other one was married.

SIGRIST: Um, do you remember, you said your father conducted the choir in the Methodist Church. What else do you remember about your religious life when you were growing up in Norway?

HALVORSEN: (she laughs) We had to go to church every Sunday, Sunday school.

SIGRIST: Was there any way that you practiced your religion at home?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, my father did.

SIGRIST: Did you have to say prayers, or . . .

HALVORSEN: We always said prayers before we had our meals.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the prayers?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Could you . . .

HALVORSEN: No, I don't remember the prayers.

SIGRIST: Oh. I was going to say, if you remembered a prayer in Norwegian.

HALVORSEN: I know he said a prayers.

SIGRIST: Um, did you like going to church as a kid?

HALVORSEN: Yes. Yes, I really did.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the church for me?

HALVORSEN: Oh, it was not a very, very big church. It was a beautiful church. The big organ of the -- upstairs, that my brother play-- played. My brother played the organ, my father had the choir.

SIGRIST: Isn't that interesting. Did you have an organ in the house, or a piano in your house?

HALVORSEN: We had the organ.

SIGRIST: You had an organ in the house.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you ever play any musical instruments?

HALVORSEN: Well, my father tried to teach me to play the organ.

SIGRIST: Was he successful?

HALVORSEN: Well, (she laughs) I do the best I can. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, um, what's a winter like in Norway? Can you describe what wintertime was like?

HALVORSEN: Well, we had quite a bit of snow.

SIGRIST: How would you get around when it snowed, if you had to go somewhere?

HALVORSEN: We had to walk.

SIGRIST: Did you own any horses, or anything like that? No. Because you lived right in town.

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe how you celebrated Christmas for me?

HALVORSEN: Oh, my mother and father had all the children, grandchildren, for dinner. And, of course, then you had a big Christmas tree all lit up, and all the gifts underneath the tree. And nobody was allowed to touch anything before we had our dinners. (she laughs) And that was the problem. (she laughs) So we had a lovely Christmas. My father played the organ, and we all were singing Christmas carols, and went around the Christmas tree.

SIGRIST: Do you remember one Christmas present that sticks out in your mind when you were growing up? Something that was really special to you?

HALVORSEN: Yes. I remember one thing. I had seen a pair of boots, high boots, beautiful fur around, and oh, I wanted them so badly, but they were quite expensive. And my mother told me I could not have them. They cost too much. I had decided I was not going to celebrate Christmas, and big surprise Christmas Eve, there were the boots. (she laughs) Never been so happy. (she laughs) Couldn't get them on fast enough to show all my friends.

SIGRIST: Um, now, what, Christmas Day, would you spend in church?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the, do you remember a Christmas carol in Norwegian?

HALVORSEN: Should I say it in Norwegian?

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the Christmas carols that you sang?

HALVORSEN: Well, of course.

SIGRIST: Could you sing one for us in Norwegian?

HALVORSEN: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: No? (they laugh) Oh. Well, maybe later. No? Oh. Tell me a little bit about school. Where was the school? Was it in town?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about going to school when you were a child?

HALVORSEN: Well, we had to get up early. We started when we were seven year old, and it lasted seven year. And if you want to, then you went into high school.

SIGRIST: And what kinds of subjects did they teach in those first seven years?

HALVORSEN: Oh, arithmetic, history.

SIGRIST: Were you a good student?

HALVORSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Were you a good student?

HALVORSEN: I think I was. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did they have sports for you to play?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No. And, um, would you go every day to school?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, except Saturday, of course.

SIGRIST: Were your parents very much in favor of the children being educated? Did they stress education with their children?

HALVORSEN: No, no.

SIGRIST: Could your mother read and write?

HALVORSEN: Oh, well, of course.

SIGRIST: Of course, your father certainly.

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever work outside of the house?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No, she stayed home.

HALVORSEN: She had plenty to do home.

SIGRIST: Talk to me a little bit about some of the chores that your mother did around the house that were different then than they are now.

HALVORSEN: Well, she took care of the home, did all the cooking, baking, cleaning the house.

SIGRIST: How would your mother do the laundry back then?

HALVORSEN: Oh, we had help for the laundry. We had somebody come in and do the laundry.

SIGRIST: Oh.

HALVORSEN: Because we had a lovely, a laundry built outside, outside.

SIGRIST: Oh, the laundry was done outside?

HALVORSEN: Yeah, no. It was not in the real house, it was in the other house. You know, they have a house for the woodshed, and outside toilet. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So you had an outside toilet there.

HALVORSEN: Well, at that time, yes. But now all that has changed. They have all modernized.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl, did you have a chore that was yours to do in the house that you can remember?

HALVORSEN: Wash the dishes.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in the house?

HALVORSEN: No, we had a tank. No, not that time. We had to heat the water. Later on we had a big tank in the kitchen, when we got electricity.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you got electricity in the house?

HALVORSEN: That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Were you, well, were you a small child, or were you in school?

HALVORSEN: Oh, about twelve, fourteen, maybe.

SIGRIST: Now, before you had electricity, did you have nothing, or did you have gaslight in the house? What did you have before?

HALVORSEN: Gasoline. We had the lamp.

SIGRIST: You had gaslights.

HALVORSEN: Gaslights.

SIGRIST: And tell me what you remember about the house being converted to electricity? What do you remember about it?

HALVORSEN: That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: I just wondered . . .

HALVORSEN: I know we were very, very excited about it.

SIGRIST: Well, it was a big deal.

HALVORSEN: It was beautiful. But that, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: I see. I was wondering if maybe they had to tear the walls down to . . .

HALVORSEN: Oh, no, no, no, no. Nothing like that.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, tell me just a little bit about -- you mentioned you had grandparents, uh, because you said they came over for Christmas.

HALVORSEN: No, not my grandparents, all the children.

SIGRIST: Oh, the children. Did you have grandparents in the town?

HALVORSEN: Yes. I had one grandmother and one grandfather.

SIGRIST: Which side were they from?

HALVORSEN: One was from my, uh, father, and the other one from my mother.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your grandmother?

HALVORSEN: Well, I remember she were tall. (she laughs) Very strict.

SIGRIST: When you say strict, why? How was she strict?

HALVORSEN: Oh, you had to behave. If you went visiting, you had to sit and behave.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of her rules?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No. But you knew you had to be on your best behavior.

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And what about the grandfather? What do you remember . . .

HALVORSEN: Oh, he was wonderful. He, uh, every time we come out, we love to go to my grandfather. First, he always gave us a little money. (she laughs) And he was wonderful.

SIGRIST: What did he look like?

HALVORSEN: Oh, I don't know. He was short. He looked like my father, I think.

SIGRIST: This was your father's father?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Your grandfather?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Um, did he live in the town, too, or did you have to go . . .

HALVORSEN: No, no. He had a lovely house in town.

SIGRIST: And did you ever go and stay overnight there?

HALVORSEN: Uh, no, no.

SIGRIST: Well, when you were a little girl growing up in Norway, what did you know about America?

HALVORSEN: When I grew up I didn't know anything about America. But later on, of course, my friend would talk about America, and a couple of my friend went to America, and they thought it was wonderful.

SIGRIST: And you're a young woman at this point?

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did any of your family before you ever go to America?

HALVORSEN: Well, I had, I have one fam- have one family - they all passed away now. He was a minister in the Methodist Church in Sunset Park, uh, 45th Street and Seventh Avenue. That's where I came to.

SIGRIST: So you did know somebody who was here already.

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

SIGRIST: I see. Um, when, when your friends were talking about America, did they want to come to America, or were they just interested in knowing more about it.

HALVORSEN: They wanted to go.

SIGRIST: Um, you know, one thing I forgot to ask you was what do you remember about World War One? Of course, the navy was right, right there. Do you have any recollections of the war?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: Did your brothers have to serve, maybe, or?

HALVORSEN: Yeah. No, they were, yes, one brothers went in. He was on board a ship, one of the destroyers.

SIGRIST: But he was all right.

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, getting back to America.

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh, so you decided that you kind of would like to come to America?

HALVORSEN: Well, I heard all of how wonderful it was over here. And I wanted to go, and finally my parents gave the permission, and that was it.

SIGRIST: Did they not want you to go at first?

HALVORSEN: No, that's what was ridiculous. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, what did they think would happen?

HALVORSEN: They didn't know. They only said that, "You can voy-if you don't like it, let us know and you come home again."

SIGRIST: Well, so you must have been excited then, when they said you could finally go.

HALVORSEN: My God, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about getting ready to go to America?

HALVORSEN: All excited, getting clothes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the clothes that you bought to take with you?

HALVORSEN: No, no.

SIGRIST: But you did buy new stuff . . .

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, some.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the process was of getting your papers to come, or any of that?

HALVORSEN: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to Oslo to get your papers?

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes. I had to get a passport, of course. I had to go to Oslo for that.

SIGRIST: Did, um, did anyone give you a little goodbye dinner before you left, or . . .

HALVORSEN: Well, they had a little party in my home, with my sister and brother-in-law.

SIGRIST: Did they give you a little present?

HALVORSEN: No. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Who paid for your passage? Did you save up money to pay for your passage, or . . .

HALVORSEN: I didn't have any money. My mother and father.

SIGRIST: They did.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much it cost back then?

HALVORSEN: No, that I don't remember. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, where did you have to leave from? Did you leave from Oslo?

HALVORSEN: Yes. No, I left from my town. One of those tugboats, because the boat left Oslo, and I got off the tugboat in Göteborg.

SIGRIST: And do you . . .

HALVORSEN: No, I'm wrong. That wasn't that time. I went to Oslo to get the ship that time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship?

HALVORSEN: I think, it was a Danish ship, I think the name was Olav. I'm not sure now. It was a long time ago.

SIGRIST: Yes, it was, indeed. Do you remember saying goodbye to your mother and father? Did they go with you to Oslo to get the ship?

HALVORSEN: No. My brother and sister-in-law did.

SIGRIST: They did. Was it hard for you to say goodbye to your parents?

HALVORSEN: No, I don't think so.

SIGRIST: Were you . . .

HALVORSEN: I thought I'd be back again.

SIGRIST: That was your intention, that you would someday come back.

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Were you traveling by yourself, or were your girlfriends traveling with you?

HALVORSEN: No, I was all alone.

SIGRIST: You were all by yourself.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, did you stay overnight in Oslo before you got on the ship?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: You did. Was, you'd been Oslo before that though.

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

SIGRIST: That wasn't your first time. Well, tell me a little bit about what the ship looked like.

HALVORSEN: For me, it was beautiful.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

HALVORSEN: I had the second class. Because my mother and father had read so much about the Ellis Island, so they were very afraid of us going to get to Ellis Island, as I did anyway. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: But they were trying to protect you from that.

HALVORSEN: I had a lovely stateroom.

SIGRIST: Was anyone in there with you? Did, was there someone in the room with you?

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes. There was another lady with me.

SIGRIST: So this is October, right?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: October of 1922.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you did on the ship. What was there to do?

HALVORSEN: Well, they had quite a bit of entertainment. Movies, dancing at night.

SIGRIST: Did you like being on the ship?

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: You say that with pride. (they laugh)

HALVORSEN: Never been - never sick.

SIGRIST: So you were never seasick.

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: Um, do you remember the dining room in the ship, where you ate?

HALVORSEN: That was a beautiful, very big room. Lots of tables. I had lovely people at my table that I got really friendly with.

SIGRIST: Were they all Norwegians coming to America?

HALVORSEN: No, no, no, no. Mostly Danish.

SIGRIST: Mostly Danish.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So the ship must have gone from, like, Copenhagen up to Oslo.

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: And then across.

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the trip took?

HALVORSEN: That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: No?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember coming into New York Harbor?

HALVORSEN: Yes, that I do. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about that.

HALVORSEN: We come in early in the afternoon, and we go up on the deck, all excited. And we landed, and everybody went to shore. They examined by a doctor on the ship before they let you off. And the one they were coming to pick me up, my family, never showed up. And some of my friends I met on the ship, they tried desperate to get me ashore, and take a cab and take me up wherever I was going, but they would not let me off. So I had to stay on the ship overnight. And we had a lovely breakfast, and then (?) Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Well, that must have been very disappointing to you.

HALVORSEN: Well . . . (she laughs) Being alone, and not know the language, it wasn't very easy.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what you remember about Ellis Island. What sticks out in your mind?

HALVORSEN: I remember we come in to a very large room with a lot of people. And there I was sitting, waiting and waiting for somebody to come. I figured what are they going to do with me? If they don't come, they'll probably send me back. That - I wouldn't - do.

SIGRIST: So how long did they keep you at Ellis Island?

HALVORSEN: Well, we had lunch there. There was a big room upstairs, outside the hall. And (she laughs) of course, I didn't know what they were going to serve. The only thing I remember was tomato soup. I didn't know what it was. (she laughs) And, uh, Italian bread. That's the only thing I remember. And they had the small packages, a white-- and I was wondering what's in there, and were lunch [not understood] . I was very curious. I never seen anything like that. So finally, in the - early in the afternoon, they come and got me. Thank God.

SIGRIST: This is the minister's family who was here?

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: So you were there for the afternoon. Do you remember what you were wearing? Do you remember what kind of luggage you had, or what you had for a suitcase, or . . .

HALVORSEN: Well, I had a large suitcase, very big suitcase.

SIGRIST: And what did you take with you?

HALVORSEN: And I had the -- tan winter coats with fur on. That I remember.

SIGRIST: Ten.

HALVORSEN: That I remember, because I got that when -- before I left Norway. That I was very proud of. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, it was a major investment. Probably it costs money.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, so at Ellis Island basically you were allowed to just sit and wait for the people to come.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When they finally came, where did you meet them? Do you remember?

HALVORSEN: Well, somebody came out and call out my name. And how I understood it was me is beyond me, because the way he said my name, but somebody told me there must be me, and I went out, and down to another room that he was standing waiting for me. And then was who--..

SIGRIST: Where did they take you?

HALVORSEN: Uh, 45th Street and 7th Avenue.

SIGRIST: That's in Brooklyn?

HALVORSEN: Here in Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: In Brooklyn.

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And tell me what your first night in America was like. What did you do that first night when you got to Brooklyn?

HALVORSEN: First night we just were talking about the family, had something to eat.

SIGRIST: And then you slept at their house?

HALVORSEN: Well, yes, of course.

SIGRIST: Um, how were they related to you again. The minister was from your town?

HALVORSEN: Uh, the Mrs. -- uh, the wife of the minister's, her sister married my brother.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. I see. Um, so did you have to get a job right away?

HALVORSEN: I didn't have to, but I stayed for a while with the Bachstrom.[ph] And then a friend of mine out in Glen Cove, Long Island, she come in, and she want to know if I like to have a job, and I would love to get out. So I said I went with her to Glen Cove, Long Island, and I got the job.

SIGRIST: What did you do?

HALVORSEN: The most beautiful job in the house. Kitchen maid.

SIGRIST: So what did you have to do?

HALVORSEN: Oh, my God, wash dishes, but (?) helped us. And I had to set the table. I had to wash all the dishes, and do something in the kitchen, helping the cook.

.....END OF SIDE ONE BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Were the people who hired you, were they a nice family?

HALVORSEN: They were lovely people.

SIGRIST: Did they make attempts to teach you how to learn English?

HALVORSEN: No. Not - no. I really didn't see much of the one there.

SIGRIST: Because you were off in the kitchen.

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything that you had never seen before, something that was new here in America that you had never seen before in Norway, or something in their house that you had never seen before? No. Of course, where you came from in Norway, was, you know, it was a town, and fairly sophisticated.

HALVORSEN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me how you did learn English.

HALVORSEN: Well, finally, I was working with people that only spoke English. There was a couple of Norwegian there in the house, and one Swedish girl. And, of course, at the table, they all spoke English, so I had to try to pick up what I could. Of course, it took a while.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first few words were, what were the first things that . . .

HALVORSEN: Thank you. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you miss Norway when you, those early months when you were first here?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: Were you writing to your parents?

HALVORSEN: Oh, my God, yes.

SIGRIST: What were you telling them about America?

HALVORSEN: Well, I told them what it was, that I had taken a job and I had told them all about it.

SIGRIST: Did you ever hope that they would want to come to America?

HALVORSEN: No, no. They were too old for that. My mother wasn't that well.

SIGRIST: Did you still keep in contact with the minister and his wife here in Brooklyn?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes. I was with them all the time. Every time we had the day off, I went to Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: How long was it before, when you first got here, how long was it before you got the job in Glen Cove?

HALVORSEN: About a week.

SIGRIST: Oh, very quick, then?

HALVORSEN: Yeah. (they laugh) I want to make money.

SIGRIST: Were you sending some of your money to your parents?

HALVORSEN: No. I sent gifts.

SIGRIST: What did you send them?

HALVORSEN: A scarf. I don't remember. You know, when Christmas come, we always had to send pa-- gifts.

SIGRIST: That's right, when you got here it wasn't, Christmas was soon.

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: After you got here.

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What about, do you remember celebrating that first Thanksgiving here in America, if that was something new for you?

HALVORSEN: No, that I don't remember.

SIGRIST: You don't remember. Tell me what, um, tell me what you did for fun that first year you got to America. What did you do for entertainment when you could.

HALVORSEN: Well, there wasn't much to do. I didn't know too many people. But then finally we went to church. Of course, when we went to Brooklyn to go to church. And there I met my husband.

SIGRIST: Oh. What year was that that you met him?

HALVORSEN: I think it was early '24.

SIGRIST: So you'd been here about a year-and-a-half or so.

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

HALVORSEN: Odvar.

SIGRIST: Can you spell it, please?

HALVORSEN: O-D-V-A-R.

SIGRIST: And, uh, was he from Norway?

HALVORSEN: Well, he came to this country in 1914.

SIGRIST: So he'd been here for a while.

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you meet him? You met him in church?

HALVORSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what attracted you to him? What did you like about him when you first met him.

HALVORSEN: Well, the first time I met him, I didn't think so much. I thought he was very conceited. (she laughs) As the men often are. (she laughs) With a question, he invited me out to New York for dinner and a movies. So it grew.

SIGRIST: Did he speak good English?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, very good.

SIGRIST: Were you ever conscious, self-conscious of maybe not speaking English as well as he could?

HALVORSEN: Oh, well, of course.

SIGRIST: So when did you get married?

HALVORSEN: Out there, a Methodist minister.

SIGRIST: Right. And it was, it was 1923?

HALVORSEN: We got married home. He came to the home.

SIGRIST: And what was the date?

HALVORSEN: The date of my - wedding?

SIGRIST: Uh, yes.

HALVORSEN: The first of June.

SIGRIST: Of 1924?

HALVORSEN: Six.

SIGRIST: 1926. Oh, so you were seeing him for a long time before you got married.

HALVORSEN: Sure, yes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the wedding? Do you remember what your dress was like?

HALVORSEN: Oh, dear, oh, the -- I had bought a dress down in Martin, when Martin had the store on Fulton Street? It was a beautiful, white and black, very pretty.

SIGRIST: And you got married at the minister's house, you say?

HALVORSEN: No. In my, uh, son-in-law, brother-in-law's house. And his mother has made, my mother-in-law was here, and his brothers. They were married.

SIGRIST: And, um, did you wish at that time that your parents could be there for that event?

HALVORSEN: Yes. But they had a little party in Norway the day I got married, but the bride wasn't there. (laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, they celebrated anyway, I guess.

HALVORSEN: (she laughs) Yes.

SIGRIST: That's very funny. Well, have you, you've gone back to Norway.

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: When was the first time you went back?

HALVORSEN: Uh, '32.

SIGRIST: So you'd been here for ten years before you went back.

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: And tell me what it was like to go back that first time, what your impressions of it all were?

HALVORSEN: Well, what I can remember most of all, when we landed in Oslo, I went by the ship that time, the Stavangersfjord, I remember I saw my father, and my brother's up in the alt-- like upstairs, waving and waving. And I thought, oh, they're awfully good-looking, both of them. (she laughs) My father was a very good-looking man.

SIGRIST: What, um, what was it like to, were your parents still living in the same house as they had been when you lived there?

HALVORSEN: What?

SIGRIST: Were your parents still living in the same house?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did it all seem different to you somehow, having been away for so long?

HALVORSEN: No, no.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay?

HALVORSEN: I stayed for a month, forty-five days. Something like that. Three weeks, a month.

SIGRIST: Did your parents seem older to you, having . . .

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No?

HALVORSEN: No. To me they looked the same.

SIGRIST: Did your husband go with you?

HALVORSEN: No, not that time.

SIGRIST: Not that time. And so you stayed about a month, and then you came back. Were you looking forward to coming back, or it didn't really matter?

HALVORSEN: Yes, I think I was. I think so.

SIGRIST: When you first got here to America, did you really want to Americanize, to become American?

HALVORSEN: I never thought of it.

SIGRIST: You never thought of it.

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: And you sort of, you sort of stayed in the company of Norwegian people, correct? Your friends were Norwegian, your husband's Norwegian?

HALVORSEN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: I assume they probably all spoke Norwegian, like when you were with your friends?

HALVORSEN: Yes, they did.

SIGRIST: Did you have any children?

HALVORSEN: One daughter.

SIGRIST: And her name?

HALVORSEN: Karen.

SIGRIST: Karen? K-A-R-E-N?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Karen. And, as you said before, she lives right around here.

HALVORSEN: Right around the corner. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: In Brooklyn. Um, well, let me ask you just a couple final questions. Um, are you happy that you came to this country?

HALVORSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you'd stayed in Norway?

HALVORSEN: I don't know.

SIGRIST: Well, like, what happened to one of your sisters who stayed in Norway? What was her life like?

HALVORSEN: Oh, the same as (?), same thing. I thought it was kind of boring (she laughs) after I'd been here.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever come over to America, even to visit?

HALVORSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No, never?

HALVORSEN: No, no. But one of my brother came over, the youngest brother. He came over, and he stayed here for about maybe five, six years. But then he got homesick, so he left.

SIGRIST: Oh.

HALVORSEN: Went home.

SIGRIST: Well, before we end the interview, I'd love to get you, you do speak a little Norwegian still, don't you?

HALVORSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: I'd love to get you speaking some Norwegian on tape. Could you say a prayer or something in Norwegian for us? Is there something you could say to us? (Mrs. Halvorsen laughs) A poem, maybe? Do you know a poem in Norwegian? No? A Christmas carol?

HALVORSEN: No. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Nothing? A little, a nursery rhyme? No?

HALVORSEN: (she whispers) I don't remember.

SIGRIST: No? Okay. All right.

HALVORSEN: I am going to talk Norwegian now. (she speaks in Norwegian) . . . to go by myself. (she whispers) I don't remember.

SIGRIST: And what did that mean?

HALVORSEN: I'm very lucky to have my daughter living here, and she take me out every week to do my shopping, because I can't manage to go by myself, I have such arthritis in my knees. So when I walk once in a while it click, and I'm afraid to take a fall.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Halvorsen, thank you so much for letting us come out here.

HALVORSEN: Getting old, everything goes kaput.

SIGRIST: Uh, this is Paul Sigrist signing off with Margrethe Halvorsen, uh, here in Brooklyn, on March 31, 1994, on Maundy Thursday. Thank you so much.

EI-449/HALVORSEN