

EI-451

AGNES ERNSTSEN ANDERSEN

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NORWAY, 1921

AGE 19

PASSAGE ON "THE STAVANGERFJORD"

RESIDENCE: KVINNESTAD

US RESIDENCE: TARRYTOWN, NY

PORT: STAVANGER

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, March 31st, 1994, Maundy Thursday of Holy Week. We are in Brooklyn at the Shore Hill Community Senior Citizens Home with Agnes Andersen. Mrs. Andersen came from Norway in 1921 when she was nineteen years old. Mrs. Andersen, could you please give me your date of birth?

ANDERSEN: I was born May 23rd in 1902.

SIGRIST: And where in Norway were you born?

ANDERSEN: Well, I was born in Kvinnestad [PH] where my grandfather and grandfather lived. My...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that for me, please?

ANDERSEN: What?

SIGRIST: Kvinnestad?

ANDERSEN: Kvinnestad. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you want a pencil? Would that help?

ANDERSEN: I can write it easier than spelling. Yeah.

SIGRIST: All right. Yeah.

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Andersen's going to write it out and then we'll read it.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. (she writes) I always see with one eye, but I'm doing my best. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Okay. Could you just read off how you spelled it for

us?

ANDERSEN: K-"akel" V-I-N-N-A-L. Kvine-, no I spelled it wrong, now. Kvinnestad. Is it, (unintelligible) up in the country.

SIGRIST: Well, I'll tell you what. Where in Norway is it? Where in the country it is?

ANDERSEN: It's in, in the southern part of Norway. Yeah. Southern part.

SIGRIST: Is it on the water, or is it inland?

ANDERSEN: Well, I, I was growing up in the city. And that's Flekkefjord. And there's water all around. The boat came in there. Everybody had motor boat and row boat. And I grewed [sic] up in Flekkefjord, in the city.

SIGRIST: So you were born in this town...

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...and moved to...

ANDERSEN: Yeah. See, my, my father was on the, was on the, he was a seaman. And my mother spent some time with her parents. And that's where I was born. But we moved to Flekkefjord, and I spent my, all my years there. It's a city just like Lillehammer, but I don't know how many thousand at that time. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what that city looked like?

ANDERSEN: Oh, it's a beautiful city. Beautiful city. Water all around, and, and, I can't exactly, it's a nice little city. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What kind of buildings were there in...

ANDERSEN: Well, there are all private houses. There was a school. There, there was churches. Methodist, Free Church and regular, the, the state church. Yeah. And stores. Yeah. All kinds of stores.

SIGRIST: Is the state church a Lutheran Church?

ANDERSEN: What?

SIGRIST: What is the state church in Norway?

ANDERSEN: Lutheran.

SIGRIST: It's a Lutheran Church.

ANDERSEN: Oh, the Lutheran. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The Lutheran.

SIGRIST: Now, did you live right in town?

ANDERSEN: Yes. We, yes. We, we rented. We didn't have a house. We rented an apartment. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the apartment for me?

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) Oh, I don't know. It was like, I don't know, many, I can't remember, four or five rooms. It was nice.

SIGRIST: Was it on the first floor, or second...

ANDERSEN: On the first floor. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What was the first room that you walked in to?

ANDERSEN: When?

SIGRIST: When you came into the apartment, what was the first room?

ANDERSEN: Oh, living room, I guess. Yeah. And, and bedrooms, and kitchen, of course.

SIGRIST: So, your father is gone a lot of the time, if he's a seaman?

ANDERSEN: He was an engineer on the boat, and he was always out. And, and after a few years, then he got a, he got an engineer job on a small boat that goes to different small places around. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

ANDERSEN: Michael. Michael.

SIGRIST: Michael.

ANDERSEN: Michael. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And tell me what your father's personality was like.
What was his personality like?

ANDERSEN: His first?

SIGRIST: His personality?

ANDERSEN: Oh, he, he...

SIGRIST: His character.

ANDERSEN: Oh, he was full of fun. He was a good father. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he have any hobbies?

ANDERSEN: Hobbies?

SIGRIST: Hobbies.

ANDERSEN: Well, he, he was always making things. He could make
anything, you know. He was an engineer. He made

frames, and he made, he could make anything. Repair anything.

SIGRIST: And what was your mother's name?

ANDERSEN: Anna Kristina.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

ANDERSEN: An-, Andreasen. Andreasen.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

ANDERSEN: Well, I...(they laugh)

SIGRIST: An-, Andreasen.

ANDERSEN: Andreasen. Yeah. That was...

SIGRIST: A-N-D-R-...

ANDERSEN: E-A-...

SIGRIST: E-...

ANDERSEN: ...A-S-E-N. Andreasen.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about your mother's background?
What was her family...

ANDERSEN: Well, they were, they were like an ordinary family.
They were three brothers and two sisters. And they,
they, my mother was the only one, she left and went to
the city. That's how she met my father. Yeah. But
my grandfather and, they had a big farm. They had
horses and pigs and chickens and everything.

SIGRIST: Did you enjoy visiting your grand...

ANDERSEN: Oh, every summer when the school was over we started
vacation. We, we, we went to, and stayed with my
grandparents.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what your grandparents were like as
people?

ANDERSEN: They were wonderful, wonderful, wonderful people, you
know. They lived a half a mile away to the nearest

doctor in a, in, in like a little place there. And they, they, they were smart, you know. I know my grandfather, he used to go out and chop wood, you know. Yeah. And somehow one of the branches hit his nose. It split his nose. And he came home. My uncle was home. And my uncle, he took a regular needle with a thread on, and he stitched it back and forth. (she laughs) You see, that's how that they had to do. They couldn't run to the doctors all the time. It was half, quarter of a mile away.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your grandparent's farm looked like?

ANDERSEN: Who?

SIGRIST: You. Do you remember what the farm looked like?

ANDERSEN: The farm?

SIGRIST: Where your grandparents lived.

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes. They had, he, they had, there was ground. And they had potatoes, and they had corn and all kinds

of vegetable. Most carrots and turnips and so on.
Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother like to cook?

ANDERSEN: Oh, well, they all cooked, you know.

SIGRIST: What is some, what is some typical Norwegian food?

ANDERSEN: Well, the regular ordinary food, the, the meatballs
and soup. Of course, we eat a lot of fish, you know.
Yeah. Always fish.

SIGRIST: Was there a certain food that was your favorite when
you were a young girl?

ANDERSEN: No. We ate everything that was served to us. There
was no such a thing that you don't want this and you
want that. We ate what, what was put in front of us.
Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Now, did you have brothers and sisters?

ANDERSEN: I have two brothers and four sisters.

SIGRIST: Can you name them for me? (she laughs) Do you remember their names?

ANDERSEN: Oh, of course, I remember. Yeah. My oldest brother, his name was Ernst. And, and then my, then my sister was, her name was Maggie. And then there was one that, one girl that died. But then I came after Maggie. And then Jenni. And Olivia, and Hilden, and then a young brother, Anfin.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

ANDERSEN: Anfin.

SIGRIST: Anfin?

ANDERSEN: Anfin. A-N-F-I-N. Anfin. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So that's a, a, a busy household. Lots...

ANDERSEN: Oh, yeah, yes, yes. We were, we were, we were a big family.

SIGRIST: Was there one, one brother or sister that you were closest to?

ANDERSEN: No, we all were singing. We was always singing. Singing, singing, singing. And, and, you know, there are long nights, winter nights. We were doing a lot of reading. People do a lot of reading in Norway. Yeah. And we, sewing and embroidery and...

SIGRIST: How did you learn how to embroider?

ANDERSEN: I wasn't too much to, to embroider. I did some. I was, I rather liked to cook and clean. (she laughs) But my two sister, they seemed, they learned to sew, when they became, they can sew.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you had a sister who died.

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did she die as an infant or later on?

ANDERSEN: No, as an infant. Yeah. (unintelligible) or whatever it was that...

SIGRIST: Before you were born she died?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Tell me a little bit about what your mother had to do around the apartment in the city. What kinds of chores were...

ANDERSEN: Well, we cooked. And, and then we went, went, always went out walking. Yeah, we went to the farms. We bought apples. And, and we always went out somewhere on Sundays. Yeah.

SIGRIST: As a family?

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You would all go as a family?

ANDERSEN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: You said that you cooked. What kind of a stove did you have in the apartment.

ANDERSEN: Regularly, they really regularly had a coal stove.

Yeah. Later years they had electric, you know. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about school. How old were you when you started school?

ANDERSEN: Oh, well, seven, I guess. I went through the public school. Yeah. And I was confirmed in Flekkefjord. Yeah. And I went to, to Bergen. I had an aunt in Bergen. I stayed with her. She had a little heart trouble. I was in Bergen for two years. And then I came home, and we're waiting to get the paper to immigrate to America.

SIGRIST: What games did you play as a child? Do you remember the games that you played as a child in Norway?

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) I, we, we, we had al-, we were always doing something. We had dominos. Yeah, dominos, and, and small, I don't know what you call those small. We were always doing something. Yeah. And we played the, played the, in, there was two playgrounds. We went to play there. Football was a very, very, we

were always doing something.

SIGRIST: Were girls allowed to played sports also?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you enjoy playing?

ANDERSEN: Some of it, yeah. And then in the winter we went skating on the ice, you know. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did, was education important to your parents? Was it important for them to have their children be educated?

ANDERSEN: All the time, yeah. Always, my mother always said you have to learn something. Yeah.. My, my two brother became engineers on the Norwegian boats, and my, two of sisters, three of my, yeah, two of my sisters, they learned how to sew. Made dresses, and, always, my mother always said you have to learn something.

SIGRIST: And your, your mother could read and write?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Obviously she was educated and your father...

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes. They went to regular school there in that, in the country.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an instance where maybe your brothers and sisters didn't get along, where...

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) Well, there was, all children, they had a little fight once in a while, and, but that, that's what they do all over. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How would your mother punish you if you did something wrong? Or your father?

ANDERSEN: Well, no. They, they never hit us. No. No. No. Never hit us. They made us probably stay in for a few hours, and we couldn't go out. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the chores you had to do in the house? Was there a chore that was specifically yours?

ANDERSEN: No. We were always helping. Either we, we washed the dishes, or we washed the floor. Just depend when we growed up, you know. Yes. There's no certain things. You always help wash the dishes and wash the kitchen floor or something.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in your apartment?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes, I guess so. Oh, yes. Yes. That was the city. Sure.

SIGRIST: Sure. This is a town, a city, as you say, so it's fairly sophisticated.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. Oh, yes. We had electric lights and...

SIGRIST: When your father was away for long periods of time, did he bring you presents when he came back?

ANDERSEN: I can't remember. I can't remember. Oh, I guess he always brought us something, whatever it was, a little doll or something like that.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me how you celebrated Christmas

in Norway?

ANDERSEN: Oh, Christmas was a wonderful time in Norway. We started to bake all the cookies. Yeah. That was a wonderful time. Made cookies, and fixed up the house, and get the Christmas tree, and we made our own trimmings, you know. We had, we had regular candles, you know. Yeah. And that was a wonderful time.

SIGRIST: And then did people exchange presents for Christmas?

ANDERSEN: We always had a little thing to give each other. Maybe a handkerchief or, or some writing paper or something like that.

SIGRIST: Something small?

ANDERSEN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what about church? Did you go to church at Christmas?

ANDERSEN: Oh, we went to all kinds, I went to all kinds of, there was Methodist Church, and there was Salvation

Army. There was Free Church, and Jehovah Witness.

Yeah. Any kind of a, like, Christmas party, we went to different one.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. So you, each of these organizations had like a social event that you could go to, a dance or something...

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes. Whenever the Christmas party, we all went there, or the Methodist church had, had it that night, and the Free church, and, and the Salvation Army. So there was always something. We went to church a lot. Yeah.

SIGRIST: That was important to your family?

ANDERSEN: Yeah. Well we went to Sunday school, of course. It was Sunday, we went to Sunday school.

SIGRIST: What about, was there a Christmas dinner that was prepared? A special dinner?

ANDERSEN: At home?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

ANDERSEN: Yes. We always had rice pudding. Cooked rice pudding and, and fish. Potatoes. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: How, what kind of fish would your mother make for Christmas?

ANDERSEN: Well, as a rule it was codfish that we had. But, codfish. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And how did she make rice pudding?

ANDERSEN: She used cooked rice and milk until it was cooked. And, and we served with sugar and cinnamon. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And that was a special treat for...

ANDERSEN: No...

SIGRIST: No?

ANDERSEN: ...that was only a, we had rice pudding all through the years. Yeah. But especially on Christmas we had

to have fish and that. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember, when you were a girl in Norway, do you a dress that sticks out in your mind?

ANDERSEN: What?

SIGRIST: A dress. A dress that you had that you remember when you were growing up in Norway.

ANDERSEN: Well, my mother sewed most of them [sic] dresses. They a sewed a lot home, you know. They made their own dresses. Yeah, bought material, and they were all handy to sew.

SIGRIST: Is there one dress that you remember that you had when you were growing up?

ANDERSEN: Well, there specially for, for Easter we had to have a new dress. Seventeen of May was different. We had to have something new. And, of course, Christmas we always had something. Just a plain dress. But they were, they, everybody could sew, you know, make their own dresses.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about World War One, and if it effected your family in any way?

ANDERSEN: When was that, 19'...

SIGRIST: 1914 to 1918.

ANDERSEN: Until 1918?

SIGRIST: Yeah. What do you remember about World War One.

ANDERSEN: I know I was, I was at my grandmother's there. Was that in the summertime? Yeah. And, they really didn't understand much about it, except there was, there was a war. Yeah. We never really went into exactly why they were, what they were fighting for or anything like that. We were too young.

SIGRIST: What about your father? Was he involved in the war at all, or...

ANDERSEN: No. No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Father was...

ANDERSEN: No. He, he, my youngest brother was in the war. Oh, yeah. He was, oh, he, he, he had a terrible time, my youngest brother. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So he actually fought during the war...

ANDERSEN: Well, he was on the boat. And they were picked up by the Germans, suppose out in the North Sea or whatever. Yeah. Oh, yeah, he had, he had a terrible time.

SIGRIST: Was he a prisoner of war?

ANDERSEN: No, he, he was, the, the Germans shot the boat, and they all have to, had to go in life boats. And this was in the middle of February. They just took the little clothes they had. And they were on the row boat for two weeks before some English picked them up. And he was taken into England. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that an experience that he talked about, or did he not...

ANDERSEN: He never wanted to talk about it. No. No. No. No.
No. He never wanted to talk about that much.

SIGRIST: I see. Tell me a little bit about, did you ever get a
job outside of the home in Norway, ever, ever...

ANDERSEN: Well, we done small errands for people. You went to
the store and, and bought, bought things for people.
That's about all. But I really never had a steady job
until I came to this country.

SIGRIST: Did your mother work...

ANDERSEN: No.

SIGRIST: ...outside of the home?

ANDERSEN: No. No. No. No. No.

SIGRIST: If, if you wanted to take a little vacation, other
than going to your grandparent's farm, where would you
go?

ANDERSEN: There was always somewhere to go. We have, went, went

up to different farms, and we had a rowboat, went out for rowing and, and so on. Nothing specially. Of course, we had a lot of rain, too, in, Norway. There had to be a nice day.

SIGRIST: Yeah. The weather is...

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...is...

ANDERSEN: Yeah. A lot of rain.

SIGRIST: In the wintertime, like, when did snow start to fall in Norway?

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) Well, there, then we out on the, on the, on the, we went out, pulled snow boats (unintelligible) and, and, we always had, what do call "chelke [PH]," you know, what the kids go to the park, what do you call them?

SIGRIST: Like a sled?

ANDERSEN: I can't think of the name. I wasn't much for skiing in, in my place. I never learned how to ski. You had to go, be outside more, like, but we went, I went skating a lot because the sea was all around you. Yeah.

SIGRIST: It sounds like your family was very involved in outdoor activities...

ANDERSEN: Oh, you have to, yeah. Yes, you have to. We went out. Yeah, we never sat in. Always went somewhere. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have any friends or family members who were in America when you were growing up in Norway?

ANDERSEN: Well, there was always someone coming, coming back. Always someone visiting that was either friends, or, or, or neighbors. They were always coming back from America for a visit. And we thought they was so wonderful. The, the dress, they look so beautiful, all of them. (she laughs) And my father, he was always telling us about America. He spent a few months in San Diego. And, and he, he loved San Diego.

That was so much like Norway. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did he end up in San Diego? On a ship?

ANDERSEN: He was, well, he was waiting for a, for a new boat, for a new job, boat to come in there. Yeah. But he, my father was all over Europe, in every city that you could think of.

SIGRIST: Did he like to tell stories about the places he had been?

ANDERSEN: Well, at times. At times. There wasn't much to tell, of course. Well...

SIGRIST: Well, why did you want to come to America?

ANDERSEN: Why do I want to come to America. There was no reason why I should leave Norway. No. We had a nice home. We were, we had everything. But there was always someone that went to America. Yeah. And then my older sister, she went in 1920. Yeah. That started it, I guess. And then I came in twenty, in '21. And my other sister, Jenni, she came few years, we were

four sisters there. Yeah.

SIGRIST: The first sister who came, is that Maggie?

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When Maggie came to America, where did she go?

ANDERSEN: Well, the first thing, you have to look for work, a job. And (unintelligible) every, we have to work in a family, American family. And she got a place in, in, in, in American family. And I came there, I started, it was a wonderful family. We were four, four servants there.

SIGRIST: So when you came you got a job with the same family she was working for?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, was that in New York City?

ANDERSEN: No, that was in Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: Oh, in Brooklyn.

ANDERSEN: Yeah, Brooklyn. Clinton Street, near, near Long
Island College.

SIGRIST: So Maggie came in 1920?

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When you were still in Norway...

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...and she was in, in New York, what was she telling
you? Was she writing back and forth to you?

ANDERSEN: Oh, well, she was still, there was, she was writing.
She always wrote, we always wrote to my parents, you
know. Yeah. But that's how we started, I guess, that
we, I came over.

SIGRIST: Did your parents, how did they feel about losing their
daughters one by one to America?

ANDERSEN: Well, I remember when I left, had to go into the city, and, and, and be on Stavangerfjord that time. And I was on the boat, and I saw my mother standing on the dock. Yeah. And, and even at that time, she must have felt, not bad, but one after another left, yeah. I her so well when she stood there on the, on the, on, and looking, looking out, and waved, you know. And she knew we will, we'll be all right. Yeah. I had a job to go to, and, and so on.

SIGRIST: She was happy and sad?

ANDERSEN: Well, one aft-, well, I guess she was happy. She knew that we will be all right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the process of getting your papers and your passport before you left?

ANDERSEN: Well, I had to wait. I can't, I really don't remember how long I had to wait to get my, but it was pretty close to a year. Yeah. Yeah. And, and not, it was Stavangerfjord. There was always boat at that time. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you?

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) Well, we, everybody had a little suitcase, you know. Things like that. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what you packed?

ANDERSEN: Well, I had on, well, and dresses, and, and so on. What I needed.

SIGRIST: Did they give you a little dinner or good-bye party before you left?

ANDERSEN: No. No. No. No. Everybody knew that I was going, and it was a small city, you know, then. No. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you take anything with you that you took as a remembrance of Norway? Some object that was yours?

ANDERSEN: Really, I don't think so. I don't think so. We, we, we, never forgot Norway no matter. We didn't have anything to remind us about it. We lo-, we, no, I don't think so.

SIGRIST: Did you have to go, where did you get the ship? Where did you pick up the ship?

ANDERSEN: In Stavanger.

SIGRIST: And so how did you get from your town to there?

ANDERSEN: Oh, well, how did I got? I don't know where, I think we had somebody, no, from Flekkefjord. I took the boat, The Stavanger. Yeah. That's it.

SIGRIST: So you took a small boat to there...

ANDERSEN: Well, boat, yeah. The boat goes into different places, you know.

SIGRIST: And then what was the name of the big ship that you go on?

ANDERSEN: Stavangerfjord.

SIGRIST: The Stavangerfjord.

ANDERSEN: I had that, yeah, I had that, three times I went back

to Norway. Oh, yes. Stavangerfjord I had.

SIGRIST: Can you, can you describe the ship for me?

ANDERSEN: Ship? We had a wonderful time. We had a wonderful time in, in, in, on the boat.

SIGRIST: Now are you travelling alone?

ANDERSEN: Yes. Except for these three girls that I knew from home. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Girls your own age?

ANDERSEN: Yeah, I guess so.

SIGRIST: And they were all coming for the same reason? They had people in America?

ANDERSEN: I really don't remember. I guess they all had family or some, there was one that stopped in Brooklyn, and one went to Chicago, and one went to Worcester, New, New York. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So you had fun on the ship?

ANDERSEN: Oh, we had wonderful time.

SIGRIST: What, what did you do on the ship?

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) Well, we, we played (unintelligible),
and then there was a lot of dancing with accordion.
We were dancing all the time.

SIGRIST: What, what class did you travel?

ANDERSEN: Regular, like you say third class.

SIGRIST: Third class.

ANDERSEN: I think there was only two classes, anyway.

SIGRIST: Can you describe where you slept for me?

ANDERSEN: Well, in a small cabin. That's all. I think we were
two, two, or four in that cabin. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So it, did all your friends stay in the same cabin,

all four of you stay in...

ANDERSEN: No, they had different (unintelligible) and stayed with someone I really didn't know.

SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

ANDERSEN: Never got sick sick [sic]. Never got seasick. But we were, every time I went home and back it was like, there was no sea, no nothing.

SIGRIST: It was very calm.

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

ANDERSEN: I never got seasick.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the dining room in the ship for me?

ANDERSEN: Oh, my goodness. There was like another dining room. There was plenty of good food. The table, all kinds of food. All you could eat. (she laughs) And then

had coffee in the afternoon, like all the Norwegian have. And then comes supper. And then in the evening we had another cup of coffee. (she laughs) Do a lot of eating in Norway.

SIGRIST: How long was the voyage? How long did it take?

ANDERSEN: Them days it took about eight, eight days.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: And what time of the year is this? What season is it?
What month did you leave in?

ANDERSEN: August.

SIGRIST: You left in August.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. I came here, I landed here the first of August.

SIGRIST: First of August. Do you remember arriving in New York? Do you remember coming into New York Harbor?

ANDERSEN: We came out here on the (unintelligible). The Stavangerfjord. And, and when I looked at all these small houses on here, on Shore Road, I thought that was so much like Norway, with trees, and I could see, even see the flowers, you know. They looked so nice. I don't remember if, the city didn't mean anything, you know. I grew up in the city. Maybe we had to look at the Statue of Liberty, but the city was a city. Yeah. But I remember some (unintelligible) beautiful rivers out here on Shore Road, with houses and trees and green.

SIGRIST: It looked like Norway?

ANDERSEN: Yeah. Reminded. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me about what happened once the ship docked. What...

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) Well, I have to tell it. Everybody had to go up on the, on the deck, you know, and look

around, you know. And I came up on the deck. It was so hot. It was a humid, terribly warm day. I didn't, didn't know it, but I said, "My goodness, I better go down. I have too warm clothes on me." Of course, August it started to get cold in Norway, yeah. So I went down in the cabin. I put thinner underwear and I put on the summer dress, and went up on the deck again. I said, "My goodness, it's just as hot. It didn't happy if I had taken everything off." (she laughs) But it was humid, you know. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then did they bring you, once the ship docked, then did you go to Ellis Island?

ANDERSEN: See, I, I do forget, you know. There was a small ferry that took us over to Staten, to Ellis Island. Yeah. And a friend of my mother, a girlfriend, she was going to me there. I don't remember too much. There were a lot of people around, you know, but we three girls, we were together. And you have to sit in a certain place, so you could hear, they call your name, my name and the one that was to meet me. So you have to sit there and, and listen to it. Yeah. But I spent, we spent there I think to five o'clock when

they call my name, and, and Ingebord was her name,
when she was there to meet me.

SIGRIST: Did you know what she looked like?

ANDERSEN: Who?

SIGRIST: The person who was supposed to meet you.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. She used to come home, visit her parents, you know. So I know who, she was the one that took my older sister over, too. But at that time was the time you have to have a guarantee for you, someone have to guaran-, put up the guarantee so they should-, we shouldn't be a burden to this country, you know, either a property or, or, or money. But I didn't have to put up a guarantee because I had a job to go to. They were, that's very important that you had, had, that what you were going to do when you get to America. Yeah. But I had a job.

SIGRIST: Why didn't Maggie come to meet you?

ANDERSEN: What?

SIGRIST: Why didn't Maggie come to meet you? Why, why did...

ANDERSEN: She, she had nothing to put guarantee for me. No, she, no, no, that is, no, no, Ingebord, she was, she, she was the one. She had been in this country many, many years, and, and, and, and she was a good friend of my mother. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did they feed you while you were at Ellis Island? Did you eat?

ANDERSEN: I don't, I, you could buy, I know there were a lot of "frucht" wagons around. I, I can't remember if we had that, whatever we had to eat to there. There were tray girls. We must have had something.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any kind of examinations when you were there? Medical examinations.

ANDERSEN: Oh, no. That was all taken care of from Norway.

SIGRIST: So you did all of that before you left?

ANDERSEN: All that in Norway. Yeah. And, and when we came on the boat they checked it all. Yeah. So there was no examination.

SIGRIST: So where did Ingebord take you? Where did she take you...

ANDERSEN: She took us off...

SIGRIST: ...when you left Ellis Island?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yeah, she, she, they, she lived in, in, in Clinton Street. She had, they had a house there. She had four children, yeah. She lived there and I stayed, stayed with her until I started the job.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your first night in America?

ANDERSEN: First night what?

SIGRIST: Yes. First night that you were in New York. What do you remember about that? Did anything interesting happen?

ANDERSEN: No, I don't think so. No, I don't think so.

SIGRIST: How long was it before you got your job? Or you had the job.

ANDERSEN: I had the job.

SIGRIST: When did you start working? Right away?

ANDERSEN: August. No. See that time they was away to the country. They didn't come back before in October. So I, I had, I got a job up there, my sister in Tarrytown. Yeah. You know, I, of course, I don't know how much that they paid me, but when I started my job I had seven dollars a month. Today they, they make seven dollars a minute. Huh? Yeah, seven dollars a month I started with.

SIGRIST: Now, where you living in with the family?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes. Oh...

SIGRIST: Tell me what your job, what your duties were. What

were your duties in the family.

ANDERSEN: My sister was waitress. And they had a cook. She was Norwegian. And I was laundry chamber, laundry chambermaid. I done the laundry. And then they had the furnace man. Very fine family.

SIGRIST: How did you do the laundry for them in those days?

ANDERSEN: Oh, oh, oh, oh, them days had a tub then. You had to boil the clothes in a big boiler on the stove. We had no car-, we had no electric vacuum. I had the carpet sweeper. No, no Hoover or nothing. I used a big broom to sweep the rugs then.

SIGRIST: Did a lot of people, Scandinavian people, get work as domestic help like yourself?

ANDERSEN: That's the only thing, yeah, you couldn't understand the language. But it didn't take us so long. We went to movies a lot and, and, and, and it wasn't too long before you understood and could speak English. And then, I don't know, I was married when I became American citizen. We went for the papers, you know,

you wanted to become American citizen.

SIGRIST: When you were learning English, and you, did you just pick it up from listening to people around you?

ANDERSEN: Yeah. That's all. That's...

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first word was that you understood?

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) I don't, well, you get used to, you, you, you pick up pretty fast, you know. And they never made fun of you if you didn't understand it but you tried to talk, and, and it didn't take too long before you understood it. Then you started to talk.

SIGRIST: Do you, do you remember making a mistake once that was very funny?

ANDERSEN: Oh, well, yeah, of course. (she laughs) But they were used to, they were used to Scandinavian in the families. Yeah, they were used to it.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything in those, in that first year that

you were in America...

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...did you see anything that was new and different that you had never seen before?

ANDERSEN: Well, everything seems to be different. We all joined the Norwegian Seamen Church. That was in, in Clinton and First or Third Place. Yeah, we joined the choir there, because we could walk from, from where I worked down Clinton Street down to the church. Yeah, so we al-, al-, always, always go to the Norwegian. Then we joined the choir, the three of us. I was married from this Norwegian Seaman Church, too.

SIGRIST: How long after you were that your third sister came over?

ANDERSEN: Jenni. I think that was, Jenni came, Jenni and my cousin, the two of them came over. And I think, I, I don't remember who, who, who took care of Jenni. And my cousin, she had a family. I can't remember Jenni. But there wasn't, there was no guarantee at that

time. I know I met Jenni on the boat. The Stavangerfjord, it docked on 29th Street, Brooklyn, them days.

SIGRIST: And you went right to the dock to pick up Jenni.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: She didn't go to Ellis Island?

ANDERSEN: No. No. No. No. No. No.

SIGRIST: Was there something that you didn't like about America? Something that was really hard to adjust to?

ANDERSEN: We were so happy. No. We, we were happy, I was happy from the first day I came to this country. And it was a different time from today. Yeah. We could go out any time of the evening. I used to stay down Fort Hamilton, waiting for Court Street, twelve o'clock, you know. Nobody bothered. You don't have to, you didn't have to be afraid of anything. It was a different altogether comparing to today. Today it has changed. Changed.

SIGRIST: Tell me, how long were you here before you met your, your husband?

ANDERSEN: Well, the girl, the cook that he had, she knew the family Andersen. And that's how, how I met my husband, yeah. Mrs. Andersen, she had two girls and two boys.

SIGRIST: And what was your husband's first name?

ANDERSEN: Aarling. Aarling.

SIGRIST: Aarling.

ANDERSEN: A-A-R-L-I-N-G. Aarling.

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

ANDERSEN: Well, he was, he was, I had so, I had lots of boyfriend. You went out all the time, always someone, but he was the one that I liked.

SIGRIST: Was he Norwegian?

ANDERSEN: His parents were, but they were all born in this country, the children. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: And what year did you get married/

ANDERSEN: I think in '29, I think.

SIGRIST: So you'd been here for a while before that happened?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you ever try to get your parents to come over to America?

ANDERSEN: Well, later years when my father died, and it was just, just, my father and mother and died, I had one sister left. And we always wanted her and her husband to come over. Either as, they, they would have to, they went to, they would have to go to California. My sister was there, yeah. And my sister said, "If I knew that I would have it better in America than what I have it here, I'll come." Yeah. So, you know, we

had it good in Norway.

SIGRIST: Tell me what it was like to study to become a citizen.

ANDERSEN: To become a citizen?

SIGRIST: Yes. What, what was the process that you had to go through?

ANDERSEN: Well, you, you plan to stay in this country, you know, you should become a citizen. Of course, you never forget Norway. That's one thing. No. But everybody had to, to go for their papers. And we all went.

SIGRIST: Was there like a class that you attended, you know, a group of people?

ANDERSEN: No. You could buy those small books that you could read, and, and all the questions that they would ask you, you know. And I had, I had one witness. My sister-in-law. She was a witness. Didn't take long.

SIGRIST: Were you already married by the time you became a

citizen?

ANDERSEN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Was that an exciting moment for you when you became a citizen?

ANDERSEN: Well, I was proud to be an American citizen. And everybody was, you should be. Being in this country and plan to stay there, you should become an American citizen. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the first time you went back to Norway.

ANDERSEN: Oh, oh, oh.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

ANDERSEN: Was that then the '25, and '50, and '60? I was there three times. But I know, you know, I do forget, you know. Can't help it.

SIGRIST: You had been in this country for several years before you went back?

ANDERSEN: Yeah. Oh, oh, yeah. I don't know if that was in '25.
When I went over in '50, and in the sixty, '69.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me about the first time you went back, and
what it felt like to be back in Norway.

ANDERSEN: It was the same. My sister was there, and my mother
and father was there, and it was always nice to go
back. Yes.

SIGRIST: Did you feel an emotional connection when you went
back? Or did you feel kind of removed from it?

ANDERSEN: Well, oh, they were all crying. They were all crying.
So glad to see each other. Sure.

SIGRIST: Did they look different to you, somehow older to you
maybe, or...

ANDERSEN: Well, my sister was grown up from the time I left, and
didn't take notice much about age. No. They were
there. There was my father and there was my mother
and that's about all. You never looked at age, so

what they looked like. They were all kind and good.

SIGRIST: So you got married in 1929. And you married Mr. Andersen.

ANDERSEN: Hmm-hmm.

SIGRIST: I never did ask you what your maiden name was. What was your maiden name?

ANDERSEN: Ernstsen.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

ANDERSEN: E-R-N-S-T-S-E-N.

SIGRIST: Great. And did you have any children?

ANDERSEN: I had a son. I have one son.

SIGRIST: And what is his name?

ANDERSEN: Aarling Judil [PH].

SIGRIST: And has he ever been to Norway?

ANDERSEN: No. No. No. No. No. We went to Cal-, California almost every second year, because my husband worked for the railroad. And when he got free, free tickets, so almost every second year we went to visit my sister in Oakland. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you still speak Norwegian?

ANDERSEN: Do I?

SIGRIST: Do you still speak a little Norwegian?

ANDERSEN: Oh, I'll never to, not to talk Norwegian. Never.

SIGRIST: I, I'd like it very much if we could get you on tape saying some Norwegian. Is there a prayer or a Christmas carol or something that you know in Norwegian that we could get on tape?

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What would you like to, or could you sing for us...

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) No...

SIGRIST: ...a Norwegian song?

ANDERSEN: Oh, I like to sing, but I don't have that voice.

Well, all I can say, that I liked America and I was happy from the first day I came here.

SIGRIST: Could you do the Lord's Prayer for us in Norwegian?

ANDERSEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Would you...

ANDERSEN: That I...

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

ANDERSEN: That I can, because when we go for the, to my son, grandson, you know, you always say prayer. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Would you say it for us now?

ANDERSEN: Certainly. Sure.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. You ready? (she laughs)

SIGRIST: We're ready. Yeah.

ANDERSEN: You have to fold your hands, too. (she laughs) (she recites in Norwegian)

SIGRIST: Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. You thank Lord that you can sit by the table, and, and, and give him the honor and the credit that you can go to the table and sit. That what it means.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's great.

ANDERSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you, do you remember any nursery rhymes in Norwegian?

ANDERSEN: Oh, gosh. That's all we did, was singing, singing, singing in Norway.

SIGRIST: Would you sing just a little bit for us?

ANDERSEN: (she laughs) Oh, no.

SIGRIST: Oh, please, just a little bit.

ANDERSEN: Let's see if I can think of, we used to always used to sing. Yeah..

SIGRIST: Or maybe a hymn?

ANDERSEN: No, we, I used to sing, we all used to sing. (she recites in Norwegian) That's one of the children songs.

SIGRIST: And what does that mean?

ANDERSEN: Well, you went fishing, and you, you got fish, and you named who they were for. But the one that really done the rowing and the fishing, he got two. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Oh, that's wonderful. I think that probably a good place to, to end. (she laughs) Mrs. Andersen, thank you very much for letting pose some questions.

ANDERSEN: Well, it was a lot, lot of questions that you ask, but...

SIGRIST: Yeah, it was a lot. (he laughs)

ANDERSEN: Yeah, but it was all right. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Good. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. It was all right. Yeah.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Agnes Andersen on March 31st, 1994 in Brooklyn. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. Yeah.