

EI-557

KIRSTEN HANSEN

BIRTHDATE: SEPTEMBER 28, 1928

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 11, 1994

RUNNING TIME: 45:50

INTERVIEWER: SEPH RODNEY

RECORDING ENGINEER:

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: KIMBERLY MAIER

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: ALECIA BARBOUR

DECEMBER 1951

AGE 23

SHIP: THE "ATLANTIQUE":

PORT: SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND

RESIDENCE: DENMARK

Mrs. Hansen was detained for 16 days upon entering the country for an extended visit to the United States.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist. Today is October 11, 1994, and I'm at the Ellis Island recording studio with Kirsten Hansen. And Mrs. Hansen came from Denmark, she was held at Ellis Island in December of 1951. She was 23 years old at that time. I'm doing this introduction to introduce Seph Rodney. And I will spell Seph. S-E-P-H. And Seph is a student intern with Long Island University. He's with us this fall at Ellis Island. And this is Seph's first interview.

RODNEY: Good afternoon. This is Seph Rodney for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, the 11th of October, and I'm at the Ellis Island

EI-557/HANSEN

recording studio interviewing Mrs. Kirsten Hansen of Denmark who was born on December 1951 and came over, came over to Ellis Island at age 23.

SIGRIST: Right. She came to Ellis Island in 1951. (laughing)

RODNEY: Excuse me. She came to Ellis Island in 1951. Okay. We can begin by talking about, by you giving me your full name and date of birth, please.

HANSEN: Ya. My name is Kirsten Hansen. And my birthday is the 28th of September, 1928.

RODNEY: Okay. And what was your maiden name.

HANSEN: Maiden name. That's a bit more difficult. M-A-R-C-U-S-S-E-N.

RODNEY: And how do you pronounce that?

HANSEN: Marcussen. (with a long u).

RODNEY: And where were you born?

HANSEN: Ah, in Denmark. And in a little place called Fullophia (ph).

RODNEY: That was the name of your town?

HANSEN: Yes.

RODNEY: Could you describe what the town looked like?

HANSEN: Well, it's a little, sleepy, not king-sized city. A village. I was not at the, I didn't live at the village, because my father and mother ran a boarding school. So we had the school situated outside this little village.

RODNEY: And what was your father's name?

HANSEN: Poul, P-O-U-L, (pronounced Paul) Marcussen.

RODNEY: And what did he do?

HANSEN: He was a teacher.

RODNEY: And did he teach in the town that you lived in?

HANSEN: No. He taught at the boarding school. Yes.

RODNEY: Which was near the town?

HANSEN: Ah, it was about two kilometers, which would make it about a mile outside the little village. So it was way out in the countryside.

RODNEY: Could you describe your father for me? What was his personality like? His temperament?

HANSEN: (laughing) Well, that is a difficult question. Well, he was trained an officer, and then he skipped the military and went to the university. To make political science. And then he met my mother. And he just took a job as a mathematics teacher. Math and arithmetic, French language.

RODNEY: And what are the ages of the children he taught at this boarding school?

HANSEN: They would be from, in the first years, from seven to fifteen. And later they skipped a year, the first grades. So they would be from ten, eleven and up to fifteen, sixteen. Both boys and girls.

RODNEY: What was your mother's name?

HANSEN: Elisabeth.

RODNEY: And what was her maiden name, if you know?

HANSEN: Jensen.

RODNEY: Could you spell that?

HANSEN: J-E-N-S-E-N.

RODNEY: And what did she do?

HANSEN: Well, what do you do when you're married to the ah, headmaster of a boarding school? A thousand little things. You know. She was in charge of the cooking and holding hands when children got sick and unhappy.

RODNEY: Could you describe what she looked like? What color her hair was? What was her personality?

HANSEN: (laughs) Oh, she was blonde. And she was tall and slim. And very well liked by the children. They always came to her, put their heads on her shoulder. Almost 24 hours a day. She was a very sweet person.

RODNEY: Is there any story that you associate with your mother? A special story from childhood?

HANSEN: (chuckles) Well, I have, there was a favorite story that in the, that was a big household. With, during the war, we had about-- household of about 90 people. With the staff included. So whenever they made anything it was in large portions. And she wanted to make pickles, you know? And she picked little... Do you know what that is?

RODNEY: No. I don't.

HANSEN: You take a lot of different vegetables, and, in a jar, and add spices to it. And this was not just for one little family but 90 people. So it was, they fixed the, you know, all kinds of cucumber and cauliflower and roots of different kinds, all on a big table. In little boxes. And then you have to add salt and leave it overnight to preserve it. And the next morning, you just throw out the salty water and add the spice. So she did. But instead of salt, he sent soda down. So of course it was all to go down the drain. Which was... So she called up the merchant and said, you sent me the wrong. I didn't get salt, but soda. Oh, he said, never mind. You don't have to pay for it. And I will send you some more salt, which was not a big help (laughing). That's one of her favorite stories.

EI-557/HANSEN

RODNEY: So I suppose your mother wasn't too happy about this.

HANSEN: No. She was mad. It was a big job. Wasted.

RODNEY: So do you have any brothers and sisters and could you name them for me?

HANSEN: Yes. I have a sister, Birget.

RODNEY: Could you spell that?

HANSEN: B-I-R-G-E-T

RODNEY: If you remember your house when you were growing up, could you describe it for me.

HANSEN: I have two brothers too, anyway.

RODNEY: Oh, well, could you tell me their names?

HANSEN: Yes. L-A-R-S, Lars. And O-L-E, Ole.

RODNEY: Okay. So if you could describe your house.

HANSEN: Just an ordinary villa, nothing much to it. We stayed, my parents and the children stayed in one house. So besides the boarding school. We had our own house.

RODNEY: Was it big? Did it have many rooms?

HANSEN: No. Just the necessary. One for each child, bedroom. Living and sitting room.

RODNEY: Were there any--Did you have any pets or animals?

HANSEN: No. Oh, I used to have a dog a long time ago.

RODNEY: What happened to him or her?

HANSEN: Oh, we had to kill it because it ate all the farmers' chickens. (chuckling)

RODNEY: I didn't know that dogs eat chickens.

HANSEN: No. They didn't either, my parents. But he did.

EI-557/HANSEN

RODNEY: Who did the cooking in the family? I suppose your mother did? You mentioned --

HANSEN: Ya, well we ate with the boarder--boarding school, the family.

RODNEY: So your mother cooked for the whole boarding school?

HANSEN: Well, she was in charge. She was in charge and she did the shopping and decided.

RODNEY: Do you remember a favorite food that you liked to eat?

HANSEN: No. I don't. Mind you, this was during the war. Partly during the war, when I stayed home.

RODNEY: Did you ever help your mother to cook.

HANSEN: No (softly). No, I didn't.

RODNEY: Did your sister?

HANSEN: Ya, my sister was fond of cooking. But, no. Not me.

RODNEY: Ok. Could you describe the kitchen and tell me what mealtime was like at your house?

HANSEN: Well, this was a big kitchen. Do you want the boarding school kitchen, which was of course a large one? Or private?

RODNEY: Your private.

HANSEN: Well, it's just like any other six family kitchen with a stove and sink and table and what-have-we. Nothing special.

RODNEY: Were there any other family members near by where you lived, like grandparents or cousins?

HANSEN: Yes. I had my mother's parents. They lived in this little village.

RODNEY: Did they visit? Did you see them often?

HANSEN: Oh, yes. A lot.

RODNEY: What did they do?

HANSEN: My grandfather was a shoemaker and she was a housewife with eleven children.

RODNEY: Eleven?!

HANSEN: Plus, all the helpers--his helpers had their daily meals.

RODNEY: That's a big family.

HANSEN: Mm. They used to have that in Denmark, you know.

RODNEY: Most of the families then had lots of children?

HANSEN: Yeah. In that period.

RODNEY: Could you tell me any interesting stories about other family members?
Your grandparents, perhaps?

HANSEN: Well, they're just quite ordinary people really. My father's parents came from Copenhagen. And he was a salesman. He sold wine and tobacco.

RODNEY: So I suppose he had interesting stories to tell about places he'd go.

HANSEN: No. I don't know. I think he was rather bored. Just made it as a living.

RODNEY: What was your religious life like? Did the family often go to church?

HANSEN: No. Hardly ever. We were baptized. And I'm not even married in a church.

RODNEY: Do you know what denomination?

HANSEN: Ya. It would be the Lutheran. That's the state religion in Denmark. Where you pay your... Automatically you become a member of the church because it goes through the state.

RODNEY: So everyone was Lutheran.

HANSEN: Yes.

RODNEY: So did you experience, you didn't experience any sort of religious prejudice or anything like that.

HANSEN: No.

RODNEY: What were the holidays like in Denmark?

HANSEN: Do you mean time-wise or what we were doing?

RODNEY: What you did.

HANSEN: Well, we had a very long holiday. From the end of June until the middle of August. And in my family, my parents were busy maintaining the school buildings and doing, washing all the curtains and cleaning and so on. So the four children were sent to an aunt who had a summerhouse. So we would go there for a month and my parents usually took off one or two weeks, and took a holiday somewhere in Europe. Paris, preferable. So that was our only chance for a proper holiday.

RODNEY: Do you remember what it was called?

HANSEN: What?

RODNEY: The holiday.

HANSEN: It was called a summer vacation. Just a summer vacation. Ya. You have that too.

RODNEY: Right, but in America we have it for three months. In Denmark it was only one month?

HANSEN: One and a half. About six weeks.

RODNEY: How was school life for you? Did you go to school? Did you enjoy it?

HANSEN: Oh, yes. I loved it. I really did. And I was not scared to tell my pals that I liked to go to school. And I told my own children when they came along. No. I liked it.

RODNEY: Was it a big school? Was it crowded? Were there lots of other children?

HANSEN: Ah, we were approximately 100, between 80 and 200. We had quite a hard school day, because it was an old fashioned system. I was the last student with that program. Then it was altered because this was kind of too much. For instance, I had to get up before breakfast. I had to take chemistry – what you call it? And Swedish language. And Latin. Because that was not included. And we had four years to keep hold on, 'til we should pass our examination. Nowadays they only have the last year. But we had four years of study to keep track of.

RODNEY: And when did that start? At what age?

HANSEN: That was in the sixth grade. Six, seven, eight and nine.

RODNEY: So you were about how old?

HANSEN: I started young. I was 14 when I finished. When I passed the examination.

RODNEY: So you must have started at about six or seven.

HANSEN: Six, seven years.

RODNEY: Do you remember any specific teachers that you really liked to learn from?

HANSEN: (laughing a bit darkly) Ya. I remember one I liked and one I disliked.

RODNEY: Okay. Could you tell us about that?

HANSEN: You know, just how children are. Maybe because I didn't like the subject. And maybe I liked the other one because I liked the subject.

RODNEY: What were the subjects?

HANSEN: Well, I always liked mathematics, which I was taught by my father. But I also, well, I generally liked school. I liked schoolwork.

RODNEY: Okay. So when you got home, and you maybe took time to play with your friends. Do you remember what games you played, or what you did when you weren't in school?

HANSEN: I think we did the same thing as children all over the world. Take a ball, kick it. And well, go skiing in the winter. Go swimming in the summer. Take your boyfriend in hand and take a walk in the wood. What do we do?

RODNEY: So it was very warm in the summer in Denmark and very cold in the winter.

HANSEN: Well, that depends a lot. We had very many cold winters in the beginning of the '40's. And pretty nice... But you know how time goes by, you think that you had cold winters and warm summers. You know how it is. You forget.

RODNEY: This is true. So when you decided to come to America, who decided to take the trip? Did you know someone who was in America already? You had relatives here?

HANSEN: I had two very good friends who came over here as exchange students, I think. And they wanted me to come too. And they had it arranged so some of their friends would like to see me too. And I was in England at the time, when I got my permission to go to America.

RODNEY: Why were you in England?

HANSEN: I was sort of an au pair girl at a big sports school.

RODNEY: And an au pair is sort of like a nanny?

HANSEN: No. It was school for grown-ups, so I was merely in the kitchen area. And some cleaning. Half-time. And then I took part in the education in the other part. So I got my visa to American through the Danish embassy in London.

RODNEY: What did you think of America before you came here?

HANSEN: I didn't think. It was just completely open.

RODNEY: You had no idea what it would—what it would be like?

HANSEN: No. You know you have some ideas, but I couldn't ah, I couldn't really say what it would be like. I didn't know what to expect. My friends were very happy to come, to stay here. So I thought it couldn't be too bad.

RODNEY: How did your parents feel about your decision to leave?

HANSEN: Oh, they thought, I think they thought it was okay. I mean, try everything once.

RODNEY: So they weren't at all afraid for you that you were going to this huge, far-away country?

HANSEN: (sighs) You know, they had seen so many tough things in dealing with so many different people. Of course if they could have decided they might have decided for me to stay home. I don't know. I don't think so. I think they wanted me to have another experience in life.

RODNEY: So did they give you a good-bye party?

HANSEN: No. I was in England. I went directly from England to the States.

RODNEY: So did your parents know that you were going to the States before you went to England?

HANSEN: Oh, yes. Yes. They called me on the last... Some friends gave a party in London. And then my parents called.

RODNEY: What was the party like? Do you have any specific memories of it?

HANSEN: No. It's just a friend and his mother, and brother and I don't know. Just a, you know, little good-bye, hello.

RODNEY: So did you pack a lot of luggage with you when you went?

HANSEN: No. Couldn't bother.

RODNEY: So basically you just took one bag.

HANSEN: Ya.

RODNEY: Did you have any mementos, or special keepsakes with you when you went?

HANSEN: Key-what?

RODNEY: Keepsakes, well, mementos. Small things. A picture, a photograph.

HANSEN: No. No. Well, I had my diary.

RODNEY: Which you'd always written in, since you were...?

HANSEN: Yes. I always carry it with me when I'm abroad. No. I find it difficult enough to have to travel on my own, and then carry too much baggage would be just too much. So I thought maybe they had probably running water over there, so I could always do some washing. (they laugh)

RODNEY: What port did you leave from?

HANSEN: Southampton. In England.

RODNEY: Can you describe the journey to Southampton? Like what exactly happened when you left?

HANSEN: Well, nothing much happened because I took the boat train from London. Goodbye, friends. And then get on board in Southampton.

Very undramatic. And sailed over, you know, just pleasant. And some fun. Met some nice people.

RODNEY: Could you tell me the name of the ship?

HANSEN: No. I just... My husband and I were just talking about it. And I think it was called Atlantique. It was a French boat. French line.

RODNEY: Okay. And did you have anyone waiting for you, once you got to port? Your friends?

HANSEN: No. Not in New York.

RODNEY: Where did you stay when you got here?

HANSEN: Ellis Island.

RODNEY: You mentioned before that you had some problems with being detained here. Could you tell me more about that?

HANSEN: Well, it's quite obvious it must be a problem. To get a surprise on the boat, and the officer sort of picked me out of the line. And I didn't know what was going on. And he took me down in a boat and some friends I

met on the boat, tried to interfere and said we will guarantee. We will take her out of the State of New York. But ah, he had made his decision. So he just picked me and my luggage up, and put me on a boat and over to Ellis Island. So that was quite shocking.

RODNEY: So what happened once you got to Ellis Island?

HANSEN: Well, you get into an interview. And that was the absolutely worst thing in my whole stay in America. Because he took away my passport. I mean, anything else I could have lived with. I couldn't, I couldn't, I didn't know what to do without my passport.

RODNEY: Did he tell you why he took it from you?

HANSEN: No. He said he had to. I said, I'm not going to give you my passport. I want some support of some kind. Well, you know. He didn't have too much time.

RODNEY: So he took it from you.

HANSEN: He took my passport.

RODNEY: So you weren't planning on going into Ellis Island.

HANSEN: (laughing) No. Definitely not.

RODNEY: Where was the boat from Southampton headed?

HANSEN: To New York. To one of the piers. And I had, we had planned, some friends from, had their home in Los Angeles, in Hollywood, that we should get a hotel at the same place and spend one day in New York and then take away, over to California.

RODNEY: Could you tell me when exactly the ship departed? The month and day?

HANSEN: I can't remember the date. But it departed from Southampton in the end of November and it took about six days, I think, to come over to New York.

RODNEY: November, 1951.

HANSEN: So it's been around 7th, 6th, 7th of December.

RODNEY: And do you remember what the actual trip was like on the ship. With the accommodations? Was it first class or second class? Were you comfortable?

HANSEN: I went cabin class. So that was very okay. A bit rough. And I seemed to be getting seasick. So well, it was an enjoyable trip. Comfortable.

RODNEY: So you got over the seasickness?

HANSEN: Yes, because I had some Dramamine pills. (laughs)

RODNEY: Did you bring them with you, or did the ship...?

HANSEN: Yes.

RODNEY: So you knew that you should...?

HANSEN: Ya. I knew that.

RODNEY: So you were prepared. You didn't have any traveling companions.

HANSEN: No. I was by myself.

EI-557/HANSEN

RODNEY: Can you tell me any interesting stories or anecdotes about the voyage over?

HANSEN: No. You know – have you been on a cruise?

RODNEY: Never.

HANSEN: You know, that's, they make some kind of entertainment with little plays and games and cards. And good dinners. No.

RODNEY: But you were looking forward to coming here.

HANSEN: Yes. I took that as sort of have to, in order to. Get to the States.

RODNEY: So how long did the voyage last?

HANSEN: I think about a week. A little week. I don't know. I can't remember.

RODNEY: That' a long time.

HANSEN: Ya. Well, this was in 1951, you know.

RODNEY: Could you describe the first time you actually saw land, here, in America. What it was like for you?

HANSEN: Oh, yes. I can. Because when we got up in the morning, we came, I think, seven-ish, and seeing the skyline, skyline of Manhattan. You know, very excited. I love that.

RODNEY: Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you came in?

HANSEN: Yes.

RODNEY: And could you describe that for me?

HANSEN: Statue of Liberty out there? What do you mean?

RODNEY: Well, describe seeing it?

HANSEN: Short building with this lady standing.

RODNEY: Were you impressed by her, when you came in?

HANSEN: Oh, not really. Well, that's one thing I have learned about. Statue of Liberty. But, yeah, well. I suppose I was kind of impressed. But it

didn't... The skyline of Manhattan, I'll never forget. But I have to recall the Statue of Liberty.

RODNEY: Did other people seem to react well to the Statue of Liberty.

HANSEN: I don't know. I was all by myself. So, wouldn't know that.

RODNEY: So when you were detained by this officer, what happened after he took your passport?

HANSEN: Well, I was sitting down this big hall, that I remember so clearly. And the first, when I was settled in this--one of the dormitories up here, I had my luggage placed next to my bed. And I went down to the big hall, and there I saw a boy sitting. I never forget that. He sat with a lot of newspapers, and he sat, just staring out of the windows. And I said, well, that's what becomes of you in a few days.

RODNEY: He was just ripping the newspapers in half.

HANSEN: In little pieces.

RODNEY: And throwing them up at the window?

HANSEN: So I said to myself, oh, that's what happens when you stay here for a long time.

RODNEY: So, could you describe what the building was like? Was it dark, was it crowded? Were there a lot of people?

HANSEN: It was pretty crowded. I think, if I'm not very wrong, I think we were about a thousand people here at the time I was here. You know, people come and go. And one thing that really bothered me was that I couldn't use the telephone and inform my, my parents or my friends I was going to see, my relatives in Iowa, I wanted someone to know where I was, but I couldn't use the telephone. I was not to contact people outside Ellis Island. That was very embarrassing. I felt very insecure. So I did something I shouldn't have done, I suppose. Namely, I found a routine in the house. I said, there must be some kind of daily routine, somebody must be going out somewhere. So I found out a system where they had a bench. You know, sort of underneath a balcony. I found out there's where, people sitting here will probably be released. So I made a note to the Danish consulate and sneaked over and said could you please post it for me, because then I know somebody will know. I just had to rely on the person. But I remember. I did that.

RODNEY: Okay. We're going to have to pause in the interview now, while we turn over the tape.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

HANSEN: ... just difficult.

RODNEY: We're continuing the interview with Mrs. Kirsten Hansen from Denmark, who was detained at Ellis Island for 16 days. My name is Seph Rodney, and we're at the Ellis Island recording studio.

So you were telling me about being detained.

HANSEN: Well, I was telling you about how I sneaked out a letter just to make sure. And we're about, as far as I recall it, somewhere between a thousand and fourteen hundred people. And I think a lot of the people were sitting here because of x-ray failures. I mean, maybe their picture

didn't come out correctly. Because I talked to several Scandinavians and I said, why are you here? And they said that it seems to be because of their x-ray. I had my x-ray proof, which was okay. So the reason I was sitting was of course because the McCarthy period. The Communist fear, and you want me to tell you, I came to an interview by the sort of end I was here. The daily routine was just a daily routine. With you know, meals. And I met some Scandinavians and we sat, playing canasta and we had various games, and we changed books and so on and so forth.

RODNEY: Well, before we talk about the interview that you had, I wanted to find out who you mailed the letter to? The one that you sneaked out?

HANSEN: I didn't put an address on it, because I didn't have any address. And I wasn't quite sure whether it should go to the Danish consulate or to the Danish embassy. So I told this lady, would you do me a favor? Of course, we're in the same boat. So of course you would do that. So actually, I don't know where she sent it. But the consequence of the letter was that the people receiving my letter contacted the Danish ah, priest of the Danish church in New York. So he came over to see me. And that was a relief, because we had sort of a private room where we could talk. And of course I gave him some telephone numbers. Please

EI-557/HANSEN

call my, my cousin in Iowa. So I felt a little better after. You know, just someone knowing where I was.

RODNEY: Right. Could you describe what it was like where you slept, and what you ate when you were detained at Ellis Island?

HANSEN: Well, to me as far as I remember, I had absolutely nothing but noodles. (laughing) It seems like they didn't know how to cook anything but noodles. I never had it since. (they laugh) Noodle and tomato sauce.

RODNEY: And where did you sleep?

HANSEN: I slept in one of the dormitories. Are we on the second floor?

RODNEY: The third floor.

HANSEN: Ya. Just above the big hall?

RODNEY: Mm, hm.

HANSEN: Ya. I slept up here in the dormitory.

RODNEY: And what were the beds like? Were they just cots?

HANSEN: I can't remember but I think we had, what do you call it when you have beds over each other?

RODNEY: Bunk beds.

HANSEN: Bunk beds, yes. I think we were about eight or ten in the room.

RODNEY: And you said that you were entertained by playing canasta with some Scandinavians that you met?

HANSEN: Yes.

RODNEY: Did that tend to help you pass the time?

HANSEN: Yes. And I also, there seems to be a lot of people from Hawaii and Haiti. And ah, somehow I had the feeling they had something to fear, which I didn't feel I had. Because I could always be sent home. I could always go back to Denmark, anyway. But these people were more sort of immigrants than I was. I was just unfortunate. So, and they had a lot of children with them. And I used to be a teacher. So I sort of tried to make some games with this group of children to relieve their parents, because they were so worried and so upset. And you know, that's how

children also gets upset, when their parents are not feeling well. So I tried to make little sort of games.

RODNEY: And after you met the priest from Denmark, how long was it until you were finally released?

HANSEN: Oh, I can't remember. I think maybe half-way through my stay.

RODNEY: So about eight days later.

HANSEN: Yes. Something like that.

RODNEY: And how did you leave? Did you take a boat, or did someone....

HANSEN: Well, I was followed. I think it must have been some kind of a police boat or some military boat. It was not a ferryboat, an ordinary ferryboat. And the same boat, same type of boat, took me back to New York where I was met by friends I made on the ship coming over. They stayed here to make sure I came out in good shape.

RODNEY: Which reminds me, I forgot to talk about the interview, the actual interview. What was that like?

HANSEN: That was interesting, because what he didn't know was, it was a very nice kind of a fellow. Ah, and he had his formula, so he had to ask certain questions. And he said, what did you vote at the last election? And I said, I never had a chance to vote. And he said, why not? I said, because I'm not 25, and that was the age. And he was very embarrassed. He said, I should have known that. And somehow I said, yes, you should, shouldn't you have tried to just looking to small details. So, and he said, where did you leave all your..? Where do you have all your things? My, you know, kind of, clothes and chairs and spoons. I said, some in England and some in Denmark because I intended to go back to England. So I leave some of my luggage there. But he was, I think it, it's kind of funny. And he said, what did your parents vote? Which party were your parents? I said, I don't know because we're not, we're more interested in what do you call it? Pedagogique?

RODNEY: Pedagogy.

HANSEN: Than in politics. That's a whole set-up in my surroundings.

RODNEY: You mean it was more important for your parents to be teachers than politicians.

HANSEN: Yes. Definitely.

RODNEY: So you left Ellis Island and you met friends. Where did you go from there with them?

HANSEN: Oh, we just went to, I had to leave the state of New York within 24 hours, for some funny reason. So these friends, they took me out to dinner at a Greece restaurant...

RODNEY: Greek?

HANSEN: Greek restaurant, with, and met with one of their friends was, he was a journalist. And he wanted to type my story. But I figured out that I would much rather save that for when I am safely out again of America. I had had sort of trouble enough. So I was not, I didn't want to get myself into more mess. And then I left on the Greyhound bus.

RODNEY: And where did you go?

HANSEN: I went to Iowa. Where I stayed over Christmas with a cousin and his friends. Had a wonderful time.

RODNEY: And how long did you stay with your cousin?

EI-557/HANSEN

HANSEN: Oh, I stayed well two weeks, I think. And then off to California.

RODNEY: And how did you get to California?

HANSEN: On Greyhound.

RODNEY: Could you describe the trip for me? Did you see anything on the bus that you'd never seen before?

HANSEN: Ya. I'd never seen desert. When we passed Wyoming – is that a desert district? Area?

RODNEY: I'm not sure.

HANSEN: Nevada?

RODNEY: Nevada, yes. Nevada is desert.

HANSEN: Yeah. Okay. I'd never seen a desert before and I got stuck in snow up in the mountains between Nevada and California. What's the stripe of rocks?

RODNEY: The Rockies? No. I think that's, I'm not sure.

HANSEN: I don't know. But I got stuck. I had to stay over there for a day or two.

The roads were closed because of snow.

RODNEY: And what did you do for the day that you were stuck there? You just played games or what did people do?

HANSEN: I went for a long walk. I like snow.

RODNEY: I suppose there was a lot of snow?

HANSEN: But they had sort of cleared around the, I lived in a hostel. Or a motel like, cheap.

RODNEY: When you got to your destination in California, who were you staying with then?

HANSEN: Well, I was staying with the two boyfriends I had. My friends, two boys. They lived in San Joachim Valley.

RODNEY: San Joachim Valley.

HANSEN: Valley.

RODNEY: Right.

HANSEN: That's the valley that goes between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Near a town called Fresno. And I stayed there for, I don't know, two weeks. And then I went up to nanny three kids, in San Raphael, north of San Francisco. I stayed with a family to get my, you know, food and, and I helped her with the children.

RODNEY: Was it an apartment or a house?

HANSEN: No. It's a big house.

RODNEY: And how many rooms were there? Did a lot of people live there? How large was the family?

HANSEN: Well, it's father and mother, and three children and myself.

RODNEY: Could you describe the neighborhood?

HANSEN: Well, it was typical north of San Francisco area, with great lawns and big houses, wealthy people.

RODNEY: Did you like living there?

HANSEN: No. I didn't.

RODNEY: Why?

HANSEN: Because I didn't agree with the mother of the children. We, ah, we had different ideas of how to work with the kids. So I didn't like it.

RODNEY: So how long did you stay with that family.

HANSEN: Six months, I promised to do that, so I did.

RODNEY: And what did you do when you left?

HANSEN: Well, then I went down to see my friends down in Fresno. And then I went for two weeks to Hollywood to see the friends that stayed in New York to see me well off of Ellis Island. I kept contact with them, and they wanted me to stay there for a period in peace.

RODNEY: So your friends came from New York to California?

HANSEN: They lived, they had their home in California. She was a teacher at LA.

RODNEY: So you stayed with them.

HANSEN: Ya. I stayed with them in their house.

RODNEY: Did you like living there?

HANSEN: Yes. I loved it!

RODNEY: And why is that?

HANSEN: Because they were so nice people and they just seemed to know everybody and we went to so many interesting places. She being, she taught art so she had a lot of contacts. Had a beautiful time.

RODNEY: She taught art at the university?

HANSEN: At the University of LA. Yes. And he was in film business. Fritz. Was his name. And Ulla.

RODNEY: Do you remember their last names?

HANSEN: Ya. Long. L-O-N-G.

RODNEY: Did you get a chance to meet a lot your neighbors in the neighborhood?

HANSEN: Not neighbors exactly, but friends of theirs. And ah, I, what I cared much for was that she took me out to see so many interesting museums and art collections. Very interesting. So we did that almost every day.

RODNEY: Were you working at the time?

HANSEN: No. I had, I had a year's leave from my teaching job to go to England and to the States. So I had a little extra in both ends.

RODNEY: So, did you go to school to learn English, or how did you...?

HANSEN: Well, it's compulsory in Danish schools.

RODNEY: Oh.

HANSEN: I had it for five years.

RODNEY: So by the time you got to America you already spoke English very well.

HANSEN: Yes. Because I'd been in England for half a year before I came over.

RODNEY: Okay. Well, what did you do after that year was up and you, did you continue to live with the Longs? Or did you move on?

HANSEN: No. I had to get back to Europe. So I took the Greyhound again, back to (pauses) – What does one do to..? Detroit, and a boat train over to Canada because I sailed back from Quebec to Southampton.

RODNEY: And what did you do then?

HANSEN: In England?

RODNEY: Yes.

HANSEN: Ya, well, I stayed there on a vacation for about two weeks and then back to Denmark, and back teaching. And that was it.

RODNEY: So that was the only time that you were in America.

HANSEN: Yes. Until now.

RODNEY: And when did you come back?

HANSEN: Come back what?

RODNEY: Come back to America.

HANSEN: This time? A week ago. We're just here on a holiday.

RODNEY: So you didn't experience any bigotry or persecution when you were here? Did anyone look at you funny, or think your accent was odd or strange?

HANSEN: You mean, now or when I was detained?

RODNEY: At any point when you were here before?

HANSEN: No. No. I mean, it's such a, there are so many different people in America, so I think you should really be something very special to be noticed language wise, or appearance wise. Don't you think so?

RODNEY: I suppose so. I suppose.

HANSEN: It's a melting pot.

RODNEY: Are there any special stories you remember of your trip here that you would like to share? Anything that really sticks out in your mind that happened?

HANSEN: You mean when I was detained?

RODNEY: No. After you were detained.

HANSEN: After I was detained. No. I mean I lived just a very ordinary life, got married and got children and lived happily.

RODNEY: So you got married when you went back to Denmark.

HANSEN: Yes. Married a Dane.

RODNEY: And your husband's name is?

HANSEN: [Moes]. M-O-G-E-N-S.

RODNEY: And his last name, I assume is Hansen?

HANSEN: Right.

RODNEY: And do you have any children?

HANSEN: Ya. We had two. A girl and a boy.

RODNEY: And their names are?

HANSEN: L-E-N-E and L-A-R-S.

RODNEY: Lene and Lars. And do they have children?

HANSEN: Ya. My daughter has a daughter.

RODNEY: And her name is?

HANSEN: Stene. Good Danish name.

RODNEY: Well, that's about the end of the interview. I want to thank you very much for taking the time to do this interview with us and speak about your emigrant experience. Again, this is Seph Rodney signing off for the National Park Service at the Ellis Island Studio, on October 11, 1994, for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.

END INTERVIEW

EI-557/HANSEN