

EI-609

GEORGE MULLER

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INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 30, 1995

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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NORWAY, 1924

AGE 16

PASSAGE ON BERGENSFJORD

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Sunday, April 30, 1995. I'm in Greenfield Center in Upstate New York with George Muller. Mr. Muller came from Norway in 1924, when he was 16 years old.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: In fact, he turned 16 on the voyage to America.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I may also say for the sake of the tape that we're not very far from a wood stove and that may pick up some sounds. And also there are various family members in other rooms in the house and we may hear them on the recording also.

MULLER: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Mr. Muller, let me ask you what your birth date is. When were you born?

MULLER: I was born March 20th, 1908.

SIGRIST: And where in Norway were you born?

MULLER: That was, uh, that was a little difference from the village of Faywig?, uh, a little bit east or, or was that maybe, maybe, uh, three quarters of, of, of time walk from, from Faywig and over to where I was born.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the, the, the area where you were born?

MULLER: Yeah, Bokkerhaven, see, we...we called Bokkerhaven.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

MULLER: Am Bokker...B...Bokkerhaven, Bokkerhaven, B-O-K-K-E-R (Bokker) H-A-V-E-N.

SIGRIST: And what was your name when you were born? What, what is your name in Norwegian?

MULLER: Uh, Georg, Georg, yeah, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Is it spelled the same way as George?

MULLER: Yeh, there's no "e" on, on it over there and it's pronounced Georg. And here it's pro...pronounced George. Sees, I don't like George name, but I, but I like, uh,...but that, that's how I grew up – Georg.

SIGRIST: Do, do you have a middle name?

MULLER: Yeah, Lawrence.

SIGRIST: Can you...Lawrence.

MULLER: Lawrence.

SIGRIST: And is that how it was said in Norwegian – Lawrence?

MULLER: Lawrence ,yeah, uh-huh, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Yeah? Um, did your mother ever tell you anything about your birth?

MULLER: You know, I even had a sec..., second name, name. I was called, called after my uncle, and my name is also Stilo, well something with the German side.

SIGRIST: Stilo?

MULLER: Georg Lawrence Stilo.

SIGRIST: How do you spell Stilo?

MULLER: S-T-I-L-O.

SIGRIST: And that's named after an uncle?

MULLER: Yeah, my, my father's, yeah, my, my father's oldest brother, they went down with the boat in this, in them sailboat in, in coming from Norway to England.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting.

MULLER: And they, they went down. It's never, so no one ever saw, never found the boat then.

SIGRIST: Do, um, do all Norwegian men get three names when they're born, like you have?

MULLER: No, no.

SIGRIST: No.

MULLER: They, they, some, some, some has, you know, quite a few, has two names, for instance, Georg Lawrence, and that's it. But then somehow then my, my, my uncle at that time, they, they, he had Stilo also and then and that's how they gave it to me, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did anyone in your family ever tell you anything about when you were born?

MULLER: Oh, my, that would, that, that...hm, my, my,...my f..., no, my father?, yeah, my, my father had come home from America and, and then that's why, that's why it took five years between me and my brother, because my father had gone out to Montana to, to, to, they want, he wanted to take land there. And my mom, mom always didn't want to go to Montana, see, because she was scared of the Indians over there, there, so she didn't dare to go over that way, so they, they never went to Montana.

SIGRIST: Wh.., why did your father go to America in the first place?

MULLER: Lack of work, or, or, or, I suppose, and he was a seaman and he, he didn't, he didn't do what, you know, his two older brothers did. They, they, they, they had some rich relatives in Kristiansand, Norway, and they, they, they,

they, they said “You, you guys can come to, to, to, to, to Kristiansand and you can live with us the whole time that you study “ and that was about six years to learn to be a cabinetmaker, real cabinetmaker in them days. Huh.

SIGRIST: What, what year did your father first go to America?

MULLER: Oh, he probably first went when he, he was probably only about 19-20 years old. And then, and he was born 19... in 1880, so he was, he, he was about maybe 20 years old.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

MULLER: Fredrick.

SIGRIST: Fredrick.

MULLER: And that was all.

SIGRIST: And tell me a..., tell me a little bit about your father’s personality. What was he like as a person?

MULLER: Well, he was kind of, kind of strict, quite strict, uh-huh. My mother was a, a super lady. Why, her and I, when he went back to America, see, I was soon born. He went back to America and he, he went down Montana, I think. And, and, but my mom, mother didn’t want to go there. So, so then after about almost four or five years, he came back home and then my brother was born. That’s why there was such a jump, big jump between me and my brother.

SIGRIST: You said that your father was strict. Do, do you have a story about, that, that, that reflects how strict he was?

MULLER: Yeah, he could look at me pretty tough and, and, and, uh, maybe, maybe, I think it even happened that, that he, he, he thought...oh, yes, I remember it now. Some, some of his money had disappeared off that was on the corner shelf home. And then he had put some money there and then he thought I had taken it. So I said, I told him no, I haven't taken no. He went and found the money, most likely, because I didn't hear any more about it. Someone most likely found the money.

SIGRIST: And how did he punish you?

MULLER: Oh, yeah, I have a little bit on that. I, um, he, he could get pretty tough and he could take a piece of wood like this and bang my rear end. And, and I remember my mother saying some to him, and I, and, uh, I was probably 8-9 years old at that time, and she said "Du ma ikke sla gutten pa den morden." And that means "You must not hit the board, the boy that way." Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

MULLER: They, they come from approximately the, the same area and, um, uh, there was a little town over that way, east in, in, in Fairwig, but a little bit west and then. And then, then that's how it is with the young people, they, they, they get to be 18 years old or so, and then they go out a little bit with girls. And then, and then his father again, my, my father's father, he was a sailmaker. He made sails for the sailships in them days. And, and he, something, oh, yeah, he started, he started drinking, uh-hum.

SIGRIST: Your grandfather started drinking?

MULLER: Drinking, and that was towards the end of him.

SIGRIST: Do you, what do you know about your grandfather's business as a sailmaker?

MULLER: Oh, I guess he was A-1, A-1, good sail, good sailmaker.

SIGRIST: Do you know how they made sails back then?

MULLER: They, yeah, they w..., he, they had a great, great big, uh, house and all up, the second floor was all o..., all open like that, and that's where they were sitting on the, uh, on, on the floor and sewing with heavy, heavy thread, sewing then sails together for the boat.

SIGRIST: What kind of fabric did they use to make the sails?

MULLER: Some tough stuff. I don't know what it was, some tough stuff.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

MULLER: Olga Maria.

SIGRIST: Olga Maria.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name before she was married?

MULLER: Anonsen.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

MULLER: Oh, my. Called O, it's 2 a's together in them days, and then it was changed a little bit to, to an a with one thing like that. That also was produ...pronounced o. What, what was the question you asked?

SIGRIST: The question was your mother's name.

MULLER: Oh, yeah, that was Anonsen. Um, uh, you want me to spell it?

SIGRIST: Spell it, please.

MULLER: A, see, there was an o, when you fix it up like that, then it's pronounced "o." Anonsen. A-N-O-N-S-E-N. That's all.

SIGRIST: And, uh, what do you know about her background?

MULLER: Yeah, she...her father was a sailor all his life, and, uh, he was, um, ten years older than my...his wife, my grandmother. And, and they had quite, many, many children, maybe eight or maybe around there. And then, and then he was on the ocean all the time. And then, and, and he was, uh, he, then his brother, younger brother, he was the captain on the boat, but, uh, maybe he was lot smarter than my, my grandfather, I don't know.

SIGRIST: So...

MULLER: But then my, my, my grandfather was next in line after his bro...brother's cap..., being captain.

SIGRIST: So it was your grandfather's brother who was the captain of the ship?

MULLER: Yes, my, my grandfather's brother. My, my...

SIGRIST: And your grandfather was a sailor. He, he was a common sailor.

MULLER: Yeah, but, yeah, but he, he, he went down from Arendal, a city by name of Arendal to the east. That's where, where, I think he usually got his jobs. And there where, where we, we lived in Viering, between Arendal and Grimstad, I think quite, quite a few went to Grimstad and get jobs on this, on the boats.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

MULLER: Oh, A-1. I never forget her.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you remember about your mother from when you were a little boy?

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Something you'd like to tell us about your mother?

MULLER: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What?

MULLER: I, I remember when father was in America and, uh, and I called my, my mother the night we had such a super-duper good time. When I think of it, I didn't know that I had a, a special mother at that time, but, uh, I found it out in later years. But anyway, they, the time went, went on, of course, and then, and then, uh, there was no work, and it was the end, end, end of World, World War I, but anyway I came to make that, but, but then, but then...

SIGRIST: What, what kinds of things did you enjoy doing with your mother when you were a little boy?

MULLER: Oh, I, I can remember going to different, new neighborhood there, and, um, we, there was quite, quite a, many people from my grandmother and grandfather time, and then, and then, uh, and, and then we used to go visiting, maybe on Sunday afternoon, visiting. In those days, the old people had a cup of coffee maybe, and so forth. And then, then I, I, I can remember there saying to my mother “Kann, kann mich, kann mich go heim na, mama?” (“Can’t we go home now, mama?”) We, “Ja,” she said, yeah, I remember her saying “Ja, ja, just about in a few minutes more now, then we’re going to go home.” (Chuckles) Then I was happy! I liked home best, wherever I went, I liked to, liked to be home best, best of all, all.

SIGRIST: What kinds of chores did your mother do around the house?

MULLER: Oh, oh, all kinds of chores. Even outside, cleaning and so forth. My father was, uh, in America, yeah. And, uh, and she used to clean outside and she, I think maybe she had a little garden, too. I think so. And, and then, then of course there, I had two older sisters and they, they started to help her with the housework and so forth. Yeah, and my, my, my older sister was four years older and my, the next one, was two years. And the one two years one live over in a Norwegian home over here, west a little bit, yeah. And then my older sister died about a year ago.

SIGRIST: I see. Uh, tell me what kind of house you lived in when you lived in Norway.

MULLER: Uh, just a, a little house, a little bit of gable like that. Well, the house that we owned was lit., just a little bit of house, but big enough for us and, and

my mother. But then, then I remember, I remember when, when...yeah, that's right. When my father came home, and then he sold it, and then, and then they went to, to rent because they, they told me we was getting a little, little too small for the family. So they, they, they, they, they rented a place called Troll dalen. Troll is, uh, troll, yeah, troll, you know?

SIGRIST: Troll?

MULLER: Troll, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Uh, so they, they, they, they, that was up a little, seemed to be a little bit closer to the ocean. We lived there maybe one and a half years, and then I remember that, uh, their son was going to come home from America and we had to move, maybe after about one, one and a half. And then we moved from Troll dalen to a place, place called Eskedal. That was, that was much nearer Grimstad city, and but, but, uh, also way far out in the country. But, uh, we were, I was bored with it.

SIGRIST: What, what do they build houses out of? How do they make houses in Norway?

MULLER: Wood, uh, wood planks, planks, put planks one on top of another and they caulk, caulked them and so forth. And then they put maybe, if they could afford it, after, after a while they put paneling on, on the outside and so forth. And then they had, had this little stove, something much small, much smaller than that. But, uh, but they, um, that, that's how they kept warm.

SIGRIST: What kind of a floor do they have in the houses in Norway?

MULLER: Yeah, then, in them days, in that day, it was quite heavy floors, maybe only, maybe even a good inch or maybe inch and a quarter or so. Yeah, but there was only that one single.

SIGRIST: But they were wooden planks?

MULLER: Yeah, maybe about that wide...

SIGRIST: About nice inches?

MULLER: They was, yeah, and they were nailed to, you know, into the whatever, the beams.

SIGRIST: What kind of a roof did they have?

MULLER: Just like that, that's all.

SIGRIST: A, a pointed gable, but what was the roof made out of?

MULLER: Yeah, the tile. I mean, made out of wood, and then tiled. You know what I mean, tiled? They tiled, like, like this?

SIGRIST: Like a scooped tile?

MULLER: Yeah, yeah, and one after another, but maybe about that long and then, then like, like this, and they, one fit into the other and they lasted maybe 103 years.

SIGRIST: How did you light the inside of the house?

MULLER: Uh, maybe, uh, hm, uh, lamps, if you...yeah, most people had a lamp hanging from the ceiling. And then, then I can remember once my father, let's see, my father had come home, I think. And then, then, then, then it slipped through, through there. It was, was like that, it was this, uh, thing

there. And then it slipped through and banged down on the floor and broke the whole thing. And, let me see...

SIGRIST: What kind of a lamp is this?

MULLER: There, oil.

SIGRIST: Oil?

MULLER: Yeah, kerosene.

SIGRIST: Where did the oil come from?

MULLER: There came, well, from, there came from, uh, the warm countries, and then...

SIGRIST: You went and bought the kerosene?

MULLER: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: You bought it, that was...

MULLER: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: How did you keep the house warm?

MULLER: Well, we had a little stove, maybe half of that.

SIGRIST: Parlor stoves?

MULLER: Maybe half of that, little bit more than half maybe, and that kept nice and warm, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in your house?

MULLER: No, no.

SIGRIST: Where did the water come from?

MULLER: That came from a br..., a thing called a brun, a brun maybe made by hand dig and then stones. That was, but, but there was, uh, br..., brunmakers in them days.

SIGRIST: Can you spell brun for me?

MULLER: Brun? B-R-U-N. Uh, N, N.

SIGRIST: And that's a well, what we would call a well?

MULLER: Well. Yeah, and that maybe about, about like that. You could get a ladder down there if you... Once in a blue moon, they had to, um, clean it. Going I'm, I, I, I remember after I been in America and came home, I had to take out all the water and clean the bottoms and so forth. Yeah, once in a while, I did that. (Chuckles)

SIGRIST: Did you have a bathroom in your house?

MULLER: No, no, no bathroom. They had, the bathroom was outside, uh-huh. There was no, no such thing for ordinary people. It was only people in big Kristiansand, big, big, uh, um, in cities. They, they had, they maybe, I don't think I ever s....See, I didn't, hadn't seen a bathroom since before I

came to Oslo in 1924, when the other kid and I was going to go to America.

SIGRIST: So when you were in Oslo was the first time you saw a bathroom.

MULLER: That was Kristiania in them days.

SIGRIST: Kristiania.

MULLER: Kristiania.

SIGRIST: Did you have animals when you were growing up?

MULLER: Uh, my grandmother had a cow and a pig and, and chickens, but we, far as, we, we are, when we, when we moved to Eskedal, then we were allowed then to. We rented, yeah, and we, we were allowed to have...yeah, we had a pig there and some chickens, but no cow. That we nev..., that we never owned all on our own.

SIGRIST: But your grandmother had a cow.

MULLER: My grandmother had a cow.

SIGRIST: Is that your mother's parents or your father's parents?

MULLER: No, my mother's.

SIGRIST: Your mother's. What, what do you remember about your mother's parents? What sticks out in your mind about them?

MULLER: They were, he's the one that was the sailor.

SIGRIST: He was the sailor.

MULLER: And, uh, and uh, she was take, she took care of the cow, milking the cow and so forth. I can see her before me. And then, and then, of course, when we got, when we came to grandmother, there I suppose, once in a while, we could get a cup of milk; otherwise, we couldn't get milk. There was a very, very few cups of milk that I had when I was growing, growing up. And my sister said, said the same thing to me. See, me, her and I, we liked milk. My older sister didn't like milk, so that was alright with her. But we, we, but we couldn't get a cup of milk.

SIGRIST: Can you name all your brothers and sisters for me?

MULLER: Yeah, one thing, one thing.

SIGRIST: Yeah, go ahead.

MULLER: One thing. That we, we had one egg once a year for Easter, one egg.

SIGRIST: Why was, why was milk, why were milk and eggs so scarce?

MULLER: Because people in general, ordinary peop.... working people, didn't have the money for it. And used to, course, have a dozen kids. Couldn't, couldn't have it, huh-uh.

SIGRIST: What other kinds of food did you eat in Norway?

MULLER: Uh, once in a blue moon, my mother could be, um, have afford to, could send me to the store and, and buy a little bit of meat so we could make

kjoottkaker, we used to call it. That was meat cakes. We'd, we'd fry, whatever, but very, very good. And then she used to cook potatoes.

SIGRIST: What was the name in Norwegian of the meat cake?

MULLER: Kjoottkaker.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

MULLER: K. K-J. K-J. K. K-J-O-O-T-T-K-A-K-E-R. Kjoottkaker.

SIGRIST: And this is a, a, a meat, meat and flour, or...how did she make this?

MULLER: She made, she put a little bit of eggs, a little bit of, um, uh, meal...um, meal? Um, hmm, what do you make bread from?

SIGRIST: Flour.

MULLER: Flour? Little bit, little bit of that and, uh, and then she mixed it up and put something else, whatever, and then she fried them, but, uh...we had to wait for the time come to eat because she couldn't take them a minute ahead. Boy, when I think of it, when I think I came to America, my father said "Why don't you go now, don't you go now, and, um, uh, have us another cup of milk?" I thought, "Can I have another milk? And an, an egg?" "Yeah, you can eat all the eggs you want." "What? Can eat all the eggs I want, drink all the milk I want? What kind of a country is this?" Oh, I thought it was great here in America. Oh, I thought it was wonderful.

SIGRIST: Tell me what, um, religion your family was.

MULLER: Um, uh, sure. They, they were, um, they were the Protestants, and, and then they, and, uh, Protestant, and then they , uh, uh, Lutheran, Lutherans.

SIGRIST: Lutherans.

MULLER: Lutheran.

SIGRIST: Was there a church in your town?

MULLER: There, there was small church, yeah, maybe even two. But one was Pentecostal, I think. And when I was home eight years, eight or nine years ago, I liked the Pentecostal church best, so I always used to go there. And once in a while, I send some little money home and they send, send “Say hello to, for, to George, Georg, from all of us,” they say. Oh, everybody in the church said hello to me.

SIGRIST: Who was more religious, your mother or your father?

MULLER: Well, my father used to come home from work and clean a little bit up and, and then go out preaching, so, so... and, but, um, my mother, my, um, was the most honest about religion, religion.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any prayers in Norwegian?

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you say a prayer for us on tape in Norwegian?

MULLER: Yeah, yeah, I can say it. (Recites The Lord’s Prayer in Norwegian.) My mother taught me that when I was three years old, three/four years old.

SIGRIST: And what does it mean?

MULLER: Oh, son, to transfer that all, all to English? Ah, Mir – My father was...
Mir..., in English?

SIGRIST: Well, no, you don't have to do the whole thing, but what, what, what are
you praying for?

MULLER: Oh, yeah. Can you changing it? My Father what, My, My, F...oh, yeah, I
change it, "My Father, who art in Heaven." "My Father who art in, up in
Heaven."

SIGRIST: Is that "The Lord's Prayer?"

MULLER: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Alright, okay.

MULLER: That it is. Hallowed be Thy name, and so...

SIGRIST: Right, right.

MULLER: And "Thy Kingdom come, so Thy will be done," exactly.

SIGRIST: And your mother taught you that as a child?

MULLER: Yes, she did, when I was a little bit of a kid.

SIGRIST: Were there any other ways that you practiced your religion at home?

MULLER: I could, I could stand by the window and look out there maybe in winter time and snow was snowing like crazy, and, but she used to tell me wonderful stories by the Bible, from the Bible. Oh, yes, very, very good Bi...Bible tell..., teller to me.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how they celebrate Christmas in Norway?

MULLER: Yeah. Then we, we went out in the woods when we were over our business, so we could go out in the woods and get a, get a tree. And then we take it home and my mother and my two older sisters, they used to make it look nice with the things that they put away for the next year again, you know, like that.

SIGRIST: Then, then did you have to go to church for Christmas?

MULLER: Um, no, in, in, in them, in them, them days, they...I can't, I think that they came to be a little more because...um, Eve, Christmas Eve, that was the, no, the peoples' families home that night, that evening. And we'd, we'd board persons, foreign and all the, so for so. And, um, and, um, and that was day and night home. The next day, early in the morning, then that was maybe a little bit ahead of me, that, that they got up early, early morning. It was, uh, uh, dark and they went to, uh, went to, to church early, um, the first day of Christmas.

SIGRIST: Is there a Christmas present that you received as a child that you remember?

MULLER: Oh, boy. Um, you know, we, there wasn't much money in our house, you know, for, for presents and then when it came to that, but, uh, we get...well, I remember all the month they make especially good, good, uh, cookies. Oh, were they ever good! Ay yay yay. And we were allowed

together a few eat, you see, and then the others were put, put away for, for Christmas time, you know.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what you remember of, of the World War I period, ...

MULLER: Oh...

SIGRIST: ...1914-1918?

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about that time?

MULLER: See, '14, and, uh, in 1914, yeah, I was, uh, six years old. You know, because, you know, we didn't take, take, pay so much attention to it, but then as, as we grow older and so forth, oh...

SIGRIST: How was your family affected by, by the war going on in Europe?

MULLER: That First World War?

SIGRIST: The First World War.

MULLER: Well, uh, I can never remember we, that we were so hungry that, that, um, that there wasn't something to eat. Well, and I used to go, be there was a brook running through ?landia and then into the ocean. And then they could, trout used to swim up there and I, way back when I was 6, 7 years old, I used to go and set, uh, lines, lines like this with a hook on there. And then, and, uh, I go find also underneath stones and I put it on the hook. And after a couple of hours you sleep, there was a, a trou... a trout hanging there. (Chuckles) I never forget it.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in Norway?

MULLER: Yes, yes, I went...

SIGRIST: How old are you when you start school?

MULLER: Seven years.

SIGRIST: And how, and how long do you go when...

MULLER: Seven years.

SIGRIST: You go for seven years.

MULLER: Gotta go seven years, and you know, we were so stupid, those kids, that we (repeats Norwegian saying). That, that was a saying between us, there all kids, boys. I can't, I can't remember say..., girls saying it, but we said (repeats Norwegian saying). You know, it, it, it wasn't slavery. I want, but I, I didn't care about anything, I wanted to be a carpenter. I had my, I had, mother had it printed into my mind that I was going to be a carpenter, and, and she bought me nails and an old, an old hammer or something. I used to, there was a wooden step outside and I used to bang that full of nails. And, and she showed me, I suppose. And then, but that was my life to be a cabinetmaker. So, so then, I could..., I couldn't get work, you know. When I got to fourteen, oh yeah, I got a little, I got a job in a bakery. Oh, that didn't give few crowns, nothing, nothing, next to nothing. And, and then, and then after, after about two years or almost two years, I said, working there, um, um, cutting the wood for the bakery, and delivering bread here and far away, up and down hills all over, but, um....

(End of Side A of Tape 1)

SIGRIST: Did you, um, do you remember some of the things that you built when you were learning to become a carpenter? What were some of the things that you built?

MULLER: Well, I was, I was getting pretty good at making, um, , uh, frames out of old cutout things, yeah.

SIGRIST: Like picture frames.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

MULLER: And, and, and they were all fancy, and I, I was sitting there with ever, ever I, I, I, uh, saw with, uh, that high, that high up and down and then over that, that much.

SIGRIST: Yeah, about two feet.

MULLER: Yeah, like that. And, and then I used to go and add more a little bit. I sit, sat on a thing and then here, yeah, and it goes like that, see?. Yeah.
(Chuckles)

SIGRIST: Now were you able to be apprenticed to a carpenter at some point?

MULLER: Oh, if I, I, I ...probably. May...maybe that was the reason that I came to America. And if I, if any, if somebody had, uh, had started, you know, some carpenter or carpenters had started something, and then they said to

me “If you’ll...we, we’ll teach you how to be carpenter, but you’ve, but you’ve got to keep this place clean. And when we and when you come in the morning, we, well, it got to be clean and so forth.” But that wasn’t anything, and these other kids and I, (unintelligible). What are they going to do? So my father had gone to America and almost all, all the other fathers in the village, they had gone to America and here was plenty work. And, and then heard this, this other kid, and he was almost a year older than me. He, he, oh, he had, uh, somebody build him a, um, toolbank, uh, in Norway and then, uh, and then he had a couple of things, maybe a ham or something. Well, so then, then, he says, just then, “Okay, let’s go to America then.” So then, he, he had the easy way to get money because he did day work, had more than us, and they, they could get money easily. It was \$125 to go to America that time by, on the boat. And, and then, uh, I, oh my, oh, my, I remember. I, I, it was eas..., it wasn’t easy for me, but, but anyway, so, so...

SIGRIST: What, what wasn’t easy for you?

MULLER: To get that \$125.

SIGRIST: How did you do it?

MULLER: Yeah. I, maybe...I suppose my mother wrote to America or, or me and told him it was so, so, yeah, he was going to borrow money from somebody he knew and send it home to me, so I could, uh, go with Erling, him, us two could go to America.

SIGRIST: Where was your father living in America?

MULLER: Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: He was living in Brooklyn and what was he doing for a living in Brooklyn?

MULLER: He, he, he was doing, working the shipyards. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Had he done that kind of work in Norway?

MULLER: Umm, no. He, he, he, he could have gone to, to these rich people in Kristiansand, like his two brothers. They done it for six years, but no, he didn't want to be a carpenter. So they say, "What do you want to be then?" they, they, they, the rich people said. They were maybe uncles and aunts to, to my father, and, uh, said then, they....Oh, he wanted to be a cook and they wanted him to be a cook, so they said he could, he could go out on the ocean and be on his own boat and just make food for, for the sailors on, on the boat. And, so they come out there. They told me the story. And then, of course, bad weather could set in on there, but they wasn't in a hurry to get, to, to do something about it. And if something bad could happen and sure enough, one day, well, they, uh, the boat go this way and go that way. And then they, all the pots and pans ran, came off and fell down, down on the deck or in, in the floor in there. And then, then, then after that, he got sick of that job. After going maybe six years to learn the trade, he got sick of it and came home, quit and came home, went to America.

SIGRIST: Huh. Um, when you were growing up in Norway, now of course you had a father and he was in America and he was back, he visited back when you were about five years old. Remember, your father came back from America to Norway?

MULLER: Yeah, that's correct.

SIGRIST: Right. But then, did he, he went back to America after that, yes or no?

MULLER: Yeah, yeah, yes, he, he did.

SIGRIST: He did?

MULLER: He, as far as I can remember, he didn't stay home and he worked in the shipyard for a while home, but...

SIGRIST: When you were in Norway, as a, you know, growing up, what did you know about America? How did you think about America?

MULLER: We were, you know, except for a great land, a great, great land, and maybe I, I, maybe I had somebody told me in America, you can drink, drink milk and you can eat eggs until so full. No, there wasn't, you couldn't, couldn't do things like that over there. Bread, piece of bread, I'm going to my mother, I'm hungry and she's making piece, but maybe homemade. If it was homemade, it was special good. But anyway, we, we, we lived mostly on, on bread, with a little bit of margarine on and then a little tiny, little bit of sugar on there. That was it.

SIGRIST: And you'd make a meal out of that.

MULLER: That was a meal.

SIGRIST: What was the name of your friend who went with you to America?

MULLER: Oh, Erling Samuelsen.

SIGRIST: Can you spell his name, please?

MULLER: Yeah, Erl...Erling, uh, E-R-L-I-N-G, or something just about like that. And then S, S-A-M, (Sam) U-E-L-S-E-N. Samuelsen, yeah.

SIGRIST: And, um, was he, why did he want to go to America?

MULLER: His father wants him going to America, but his father was a, a learned man, and he was, um, in the shipyard in them days when plenty work, during the war, First World War. Then he was a, a architect for the boats, so, so he had maybe twice as much m...pay as my father. So they were rather well-to-do compared to us, but they, he was laid off, too. Everybody was laid off, so they, they, just about all of them went to America.

SIGRIST: But you said before the whole town, all the fathers had gone to America.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, that's interesting. Uh, how did your mother feel about you going to America?

MULLER: Mm, mm. Somehow we must have gotten that into my head then, then he, this other kid and I, he was maybe almost a year older than me, that, that we were going over go to Amer...America. And sure enough, oh yeah...then, then, then, of course, he had gotten his money from his father. He had, I don't know his father had the money, but maybe he borrowed it and sent it home to him. And I was waiting, waiting, waiting and the day come closer and closer. Then the, then, then, uh, there was a call, one day or two days before we left, they had to go to Arendal and pay for the ticket, then they could go to Oslo and take the boat to America. Then, well then, then time went by and by, and no, no money. Couldn't go. So, so my, so Aunt Onine, she heard that, uh, that an el...ol...elderly lady

over there, her, her youngest boy had gone to America also, together with his brother. And then more, why, she had heard that that old lady had, uh, had gotten a big check from, uh, her youngest son that had gone to America. And just 500 crowns, that's all we needed. And, uh, Aunt Onine went over there to that lady and asked if she could borrow, so they could give it to me for the time being, and so, so that I could go to Arendal and pay for the tickets. Sure, yeah, here it is, here's the money. Also, so, the day after the money come, so it was the same day that I had gone to Arendal, the mailman come with the money. So I went, I went right, right back and gave to her and she gave to her. So right away we paid it.

SIGRIST: You paid her right off.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the aunt? You, you, you said, you Aunt Tor, your aunt who, who was talking to the old lady? You said her name twice and I just want to make sure I get the spelling right. Aunt Tor, Tor or something.

MULLER: Yeah, the, the one, was that the one that borrowed the money?

SIGRIST: The, the, the, the, the aunt who went over to ask the lady if she could borrow the money.

MULLER: Oh, yeah, there were tante, tante, aunt. Tante is aunt, see?

SIGRIST: Oh, you're saying tante?

MULLER: Yeah, Tante Onine.

SIGRIST: Well, Onine?

MULLER: She, she was, she was Uncle Christian, and Uncle Christian and my ?
Orensen, they were brother and sister. So, so, so Onine was Uncle
Christian's second wife. His first wife had died.

SIGRIST: And her name is spelled how? Onine? How do you spell Onine?

MULLER: O-N, O-N-I-N-E.

SIGRIST: And tanta would be T-A-N-T-A.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tanta Onine.

MULLER: E, e on the, e on the end.

SIGRIST: What did you pack to take to America?

MULLER: Oh, um, I only, I, I only had, my, my birthday was coming on, and, uh, it
did happen on the boat, was it two or four days before I landed, my boat?
So mother had, had, uh packed in a little present for me, but I wasn't
allowed to open that. But, of course, there was something hard in there in
this pack and then I was wondering, but I, but I couldn't open it. Uh, but,
uh, something soft, so of course when my birthday came, I was allowed to
open it up. And it was a slips, like you, you have there, that's a slips in
Norway.

SIGRIST: Like a, a necktie.

MULLER: Yeah, yeah, a strict, a strict, a strict, hm, very strictum.

SIGRIST: Straight?

MULLER: Yeah. Um, no, strict is, uh, with two sticks, like. Two points, points and they shaped like that, and then they make, they make a thing like.

SIGRIST: Like woven somehow?

MULLER: Woven, yeah, yeah, woven, yeah, uh-huh. And then...

SIGRIST: What, what, what about before you left, what did you pack to take with you to America?

MULLER: Um, I, I, I had, I had to have a new shirt, I remember. But then I had that nice tie to put on, so that could have, would look nice when I land. So we took a bath, this older kid and I. We took a bath before the next day when we went and then, then, then I don't, can't remember that we, but, but I, I never, never forget we came to Oslo. We were in Kristiania at that time, but anyway, so we got into a hotel and we got to stay there overnight. And I think we stayed there two nights, but anyway, compared to the poor, the poor, poor people out there where I come from, raised out on the...well, anyway. Then, uh...

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw the ship that were about to get on? Had you been on a big ship before?

MULLER: No.

SIGRIST: So what were you thinking when you saw the ship that had to, to board?

MULLER: Yeah, I don't...see, now. Yes, I think now, I think early in the night, the next day we went down to the ocean to dock in, in Oslo or Kristiania. And we saw the boat, I'm quite sure, and, and then, it wasn't so terribly big, not that boat. But it was rolling plenty and diving up and down like that.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

MULLER: Bergensfjord.

SIGRIST: And, and I should have asked you earlier. Do you remember saying goodbye to your mother?

MULLER: Yeah, I, yeah, you can be sure about that, but you know something? It was just like, uh, going away for a couple days. And, uh, and it took nine years before I saw her again, nine years. Uh, uh, I, when I come to America, so, so, well, I come to have a job. Job? My father didn't care so much. He just came. He just came over. Hold it. No, I came over to get a job. I, I got to have a job. So we went to some place down 14th Street and ? Avenue. There was a Norwegian and, and he bought a, they had a shop there and they do, did some shoe stores or whatever it was. Yeah, it was shoe stores. But anyway, so then, then, no, they, they, they had had two nephews working for them and they were sort of tough in their mouth and they, they answered back to the boss and so forth, so forth. I couldn't understand, and so they had quit and gone to Chicago. And sure enough, oh, I said, they guessed they said to my father, oh, I'd really try. So, so they, within two or three days in America, I had a job already.

SIGRIST: You were working at the shoe store? This was at the shoe store?

MULLER: Yeah, shoe store, where, where they built the stores for the big company. And then....

SIGRIST: How much did you get paid for your first job?

MULLER: (Chuckles) That's almost a joke, but I, I, I had to pay \$4 for the room, and for a little bitty room. My father, we had two beds, so forth, \$4 a piece. And then, and then, um, he gave, the boss gave me \$11 a week. And I had to pay for food, and I just barely squeezed by. Paid for the room and then food, but food was cheap in them days.

SIGRIST: Let me, um, let me get you back on the boat and get you over to America before we talk about this.

MULLER: (Chuckle) Yeah.

SIGRIST: You got the Bergensfjord, that was the ship. You picked that up in O, in Kristiania.

MULLER Boy, what a memory you got. Was amazing.:

SIGRIST: And, um, how long did it take to go from, from Oslo to New York?

MULLER: Yeah, I think it was twelve days.

SIGRIST: And did the ship stop anywhere else?

MULLER: It's, it's, it's, the first stop was, uh, well, way up in, uh, the, the, the, on the, on north, north of America there, belonged to, um, it be...it belonged, that was...Canada. Canada owned that city, but now I, I don't remember the name of it, but it was right out on the point there. That was just where them big boats used to come in, and then, see, no, we wasn't, we wasn't allowed to get off the boat. And then we went a little bit, from there on,

we went down to, I think it was, uh, Stavanger, or, or...and, and, and then we stopped there and that was Norway, of course. And then, and then we, we, they had to take off some stuff from America to put on land there, see? And I remember our boys that had come, they was going to America, they was, like us, and they must have had a little money. And they throw money out to the, to the boys on the dock there. Yeah, and they ran for a few pennies like that. I'll never forget it.

SIGRIST: What else sticks out in your mind about the ship? Did, were, do you have any stories that you like to tell about being on the ship?

MULLER: Yeah. Yeah, here's the rear end and here's the bow. Erling and I was...oh, oh, yeah, we used to go all the way in the back. And when, when the b...,bow went down in the...

SIGRIST: Keep talking, I'm just going to fix your microphone here.

MULLER: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: This is slipping down. Okay, so when...

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...when the bow went down...

MULLER: The bow went down and the, the, the stern up. We, we used to like to go back there on the stern, because, you see, you know it go off, off the water and the propeller make a terrible lot of noise and, and shake in the back end of the boat. But, but we, we, we didn't think about anything wrong, go wrong, but, but so, I suppose something could've. But, and it was rolling and, and, uh, and so forth. I never forget it, that enormous shaking,

when the stern went up above the water, with the propeller going fast like that.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept on the ship?

MULLER: Yeah. We were, we were, I think, I think there was enough, was it eight? I think there was enough for eight guys in that little, little place. And mine was the first and another one here, and there was guys around on these three walls there, and...and then, was an old man. And he was even says he's a cousin to my mother. And he was, and I guess he, she said, said "Take good care of my boy" and so forth. But anyway...

SIGRIST:: There were eight men in this, in this room?

MULLER: Eight, but, uh...

SIGRIST: What kind of beds did you have?

MULLER: All was, you know, a piece of wood like here and then up a little bit like that, and so, and, uh, and, uh, more dropped.

SIGRIST: Sort of like stacked on top of each other?

MULLER: Yeah, one, one, one...two here, two there, two...so how could there be more than six, then? But, there was a door, but I don't know, I thought there was eight, but anyway. Maybe I made a mistake.

SIGRIST: Did you have a porthole in your bedroom?

MULLER: Yeah, it happened, happened in my, my, my, my room, my room, my bed there was one and I could open it and look out and I could see boats going fast along like that.

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you on the ship?

MULLER: Up in a nice dining room. A-1 food, much fancier than we ever had seen.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ?

MULLER: Milk, because just like we could drink all the milk, all the eggs, we wanted. And good food and good dinners, everything A-1. Amazing. And when we came to America, was same thing. The Norwegians, they had a, um, they had a long, long room, much longer than from here to there, and that...

SIGRIST: That's about twenty-five feet.

MULLER: Yeah, and then, there was the table maybe was that wide and, uh, we used to sit on both sides and, and, and, uh....

SIGRIST: Did they feed you any kind of food that you had never seen before?

MULLER: There was usually all Norwegian stuff, but very good and lots of it. Meat, we could hardly ever get meat. But we had meat and all kinds of cake and coffee and milk. It was like a king's place compared to the way we would grow up.

SIGRIST: You said you celebrated your 16th birthday on the ship.

MULLER: I sure did.

SIGRIST: How did you celebrate your birthday on the ship?

MULLER: Oh, I could, I opened the package that my mother ? had made.

SIGRIST: And that had the necktie.

MULLER: It had the necktie and what else?

SIGRIST: Um, a necktie and, um, you told me. Um, I've forgotten.

MULLER: A necktie and, uh, ...

SIGRIST: Socks? No. Cookies. Food?

MULLER: Candy.

SIGRIST: Candy.

MULLER: Some, some very good movies and candy, couple of things. And I, I hadn't opened the package.

SIGRIST: You were a good boy.

MULLER: Yeah, I, I, my, I wasn't allowed to and I didn't, didn't do it. But there wasn't a lot of candy. The candy was expens, expensive, but, uh, but anyway, I....

SIGRIST: What about Yerling, what's he doing on the ship?

MULLER: Erling.

SIGRIST: Erling.

MULLER: Didn't do any... Well, he didn't get seasick. And he, one day, I was seasick. I was up on the deck there, vomiting, you know, and so forth. And for a couple of days, and then one day, Erling came up. He, "Georg", he said, "We going to have swordfish for dinner." Swordfish was the best thing we could get in Norway. Swordfish and, and potatoes, of course, see? So, so then I had just been over on the side of the ship and vomited and he comes up with a big plate with swordfish and potatoes and, yeah. And, you know, oh, I said, it tasted so super duper, no more, no more, uh, no more seasickness. No more, it was all gone, and I, oh, I never forget that dinner that he, my, my friend, came up with for me. Yeah, I never forget it.

SIGRIST: Did you see the captain of the ship while you were on the ...?

MULLER: There was a, was that? No, no, that was after we got married and went home and came back, then there was a Captain's dinner for, for us. And, and, uh, he was there.

SIGRIST: So that's a different, that's a different voyage? That was a later voyage?

MULLER: That was going, go home, different, many years later, nine to ten, ten years later. But then, then he, we, we, he was there - the boss, I mean the, the Captain. I'm sure he was there, but he wasn't acting like a big shot or anything, but he was there. And...

SIGRIST: Someone had to be driving the boat, so he must have been there.

MULLER: Yeah, he was there, and, and,... nice people, they were so nice.

SIGRIST: Were they all Norwegians traveling? Were they mostly Norwegian people?

MULLER: Yeah, the rest they had been out earlier. They had those, some Norwegians and gone to Norway because they would, those boats were packed all the time, all the people going to America.

SIGRIST: And you said earlier how much the, the voyage cost. I just would like you to repeat that.

MULLER: \$125.

SIGRIST: And how many, how much in Norwegian money, how much is that?

MULLER: Yeah, that was, that was probably about almost 600.

SIGRIST: And, um, did you, how did you get your steamship ticket? Where did you have to go to get that?

MULLER: Arndal, the city of Arndal. To, we used to go by boat from our place along the coast, to go Arndal. And there, there you could buy it, you just drove there if you have the money and put it down there and they write out the ticket, like that. It's a funny thing. With money, if you got money, you can do a lot of things.

SIGRIST: Right, right. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came into New York Harbor?

MULLER: Yeah, yeah, we, we were told “There’s the Statue of Liberty.” Oh, Statue of Liberty, yeah, oh, yeah. Statue of Liberty, yeah, uh-huh. Yeah, we could...that was right there in where the boats go.

SIGRIST: Then tell me what happened to you...the, the ship came into New York Harbor.

MULLER: Yep.

SIGRIST: Yes. And it, how did you get to Ellis Island from the ship?

MULLER: Yeah, well, we came in on a Sunday. And then, and then, this, this little boat from the, from the, uh, place – what was the name?

SIGRIST: Like a little ferry boat or something?

MULLER: Yeah, from, what did we call...?

SIGRIST: Ellis Island.

MULLER: Ellis Island. That they, they didn’t work. That little boat didn’t work on Sundays, so we had an extra night on the boat. Then early, early next morning, early that boat came and we were there. And we came to, and a round thing like this, and there was somebody, maybe more than one, was standing there, yeah, with, um, writing paper and, and uh, “Do, do you have...?” We had to have somebody. From 100 feet away maybe, um, we could see him, though we looked good enough. That was my father. He was standing, waiting for me to, to get my papers okayed so they, I could go. And then they asked a question, “Where..? Do you have any...? Is there someone now waiting for you over there?” “Yeah.” And “Okay, oh, who is that?” Oh, yeah, and then I guess we had to point them

out and so forth. And, uh, sure enough, he says “Here, you, here’s your papers. You could go.” So we, we walked over there, and sure, there’s my father standing there, waiting for me. And then we got off and we, we got into South, uh, South, South Manhattan there, and we went due down a whole of stairs down to the subway. And, and then, and then we, we, we went on. The train came, subway train came, and, uh, then we went in (unintelligible) . We got ?, my father and I and started up again, and we going to go over to Brooklyn, underneath the water, deep underneath the water. “Well,” says my father, “we, we’re in the ocean now.” I couldn’t understand. How can, how can the thing go in the ocean? Did it have a place like, that we didn’t get wet, I don’t think. And could go. I didn’t know anything about under, and go all over New York today with the subways, I mean, yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, what, how did you feel when you saw your father, when you, when you recognized your father?

MULLER: It wasn’t, it wasn’t so long, you know, before, let’s see now, it’s ’24. He, he probably had been there maybe a good year or so.

SIGRIST: So you had seen him just....

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...not so long ago, when you were in Norway.

MULLER:: No, no, not too long ago.

SIGRIST: At Ellis Island, did you have to undergo any kind of medical examinations?

MULLER: Yeah, yes, there was. They, they looked at our hair so if we had any lice or anything. And so, that they did in, in Kristiansand, no, in, in, in, uh, Oslo, too. They had to look if they have hair, see if there was anything there, or someone ? good hair, they had to do the same thing. As far as I remember, at least, they didn't tell me that they saw anything in my hair. They didn't tell me that anyway. But there wasn't. I was always clean, I was hoping. .

SIGRIST: And, um...

MULLER: I think that was, yeah, that was when we came over. There was two, two, uh, men and a, a, a girl who were going to America. Somehow they had, they had gotten to one another and sure enough, they were got caught. Far as I know, they had to get married before they could come to America.

SIGRIST: They caught them at Ellis Island.

MULLER: They caught them at Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Ah-hah!

MULLER: (Chuckles)

SIGRIST: Um, we're going to pause for a second and I'm going to put another tape in the, um, machine, and then we'll begin your life in New York.

MULLER: Oh, yeah, okay.

Pause while tape is changed.

SIGRIST: Okay we're now beginning tape 2 with George Muller, who came from Norway in 1924...

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...when he was 16 years old.

MULLER: Right.

SIGRIST: And, again, I'll say I'm in Greenfield Center, New York, and that we are in Mr. Muller's home and you're going to hear chiming clocks. There are several of them.

MULLER: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And there are family members that you may hear in the background.

MULLER: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: There's also a wood stove near us, which will probably crackle on the recording.

MULLER: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Um, your family has asked me to ask you about the fish in Norway. We, there was a good story that we kind of glossed over...

MULLER: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: ... so could you tell me about the fish in Norway?

MULLER: Yeah. My first fishing was the brook that was ran through our village and out into the ocean. And I used to, um, six years old maybe, and, uh, like the older boys, and with a line like that, with a hook there, and put a thing, create something with the stones there and put that on there, and, uh, put it away underneath some bushes or something, one here and one there. We, we would walk in the water right to here. So that was the beginning of my fishing, but after that, then, then, of course, then I used to go couple of times, and my father didn't like to go fishing at all, but I, I was crazy about it. But any, anyway, so then, then of course, by and by, I could rent myself, way, way out on the ocean. And of course, uh, let me see now, we had to borrow, we didn't have no boat in them days. It was, we didn't have a boat before I came home after my ten years in America.. Then I could buy my own boat and, uh, so forth and I sailed and I went way, way, out.

SIGRIST: Whose boat was it? Whose boat did you use?

MULLER: That was my boat that I bought when I came home.

SIGRIST: That was the boat you, when you came home.

MULLER: Yeah, otherwise, I, I, I remember one guy saying to me he had a boat, so if you'll bike down to Grimstad in his city and buy, that was the beginning of the lottery in Norway. So, if you'll do that for me, you can take my boat anytime you want to. But, um, I says, so I did. But I remember one thing, one time he came down and he wanted to go fishing and his boat wasn't there because I brought it, I had it out on the ocean. But anyway, I, he was, I was allowed to use his, his boat and I, I thought that was super. We were too poor to have a boat before I got so old that I, well, that was after I came back from America.

SIGRIST: What kind of fish did you catch?

MULLER: Cod. Codfish.

SIGRIST: Cod.

MULLER: That, that's what we liked the best, codfish.

SIGRIST: And how was the codfish prepared?

MULLER: Oh, cooked. Then my mother cooked it so much, not too much, but enough, enough. And then we had cooked, uh, uh, fish and, and a little bit of melted margarine for sauce, like, and then some potatoes. Oh, was that ever good! Oy ya ya.

SIGRIST: How did you catch the cod from the boat? What, what, what method did you use to catch the cod?

MULLER: Lines, long lines that could go down to the bottom, and we had a heavy thing on there, on the, on the, the line, maybe like this. Yeah, and yeah. And then we went to the bottom because that's where the fish is, near the bottom. So we. we pulled it up so, so, so much until maybe the boat, or the hook, got hooked something else. So we, so anyway, that's where we fished, right there. We could, we could see, sometimes we had some shiny, uh, quite big, uh, hooks, with, with, just like this and then it was, uh...

SIGRIST: Curved.

MULLER: Yeah, curved. And, and maybe we could sit like that a little bit and, and fool, and they looked like a shiny fish. The rest of the hook (unintelligible). .but anyway.

SIGRIST: So that would fool the cod into thinking it was a....

MULLER: Sure, he goes fast like that and then comes a, maybe cod with a big, big mouth, they have big mouth, and then they grab it. And then, of course, sometimes you get nice codfish like this – beautiful, beautiful.

SIGRIST: What's that, about two and a half feet?

MULLER: Beautiful, beautiful.

SIGRIST: How do you clean a cod when you catch it?

MULLER: Oh, that's it. You just take it home. Some, some, some little guys or maybe older people did it right there on the boat, with the ocean. Cut it open and there was the liver. (unintelligible) That was saved and cooked with the fish, liver. But anyway, uh, and I'll never forget we could have cooked fish and, and, and, uh, little bit of, not real butter, but...

SIGRIST: Margarine.

MULLER: I'd never, never in my life have I ever tasted, uh, real margarine, uh, real butter, never before I came to America.

SIGRIST: Well, we should probably get you back to, to America. We've digressed a bit about fishing and let me just recap. Uh, you come into New York, you, you went through the process at Ellis Island, you met your father at Ellis Island.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You had your first subway ride...

MULLER: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...into Brooklyn. How did you spend your first night in America?

MULLER: Oh, yeah. I came over in the afternoon, say, say about 1 or somewhere in the afternoon. Well, I suppose we went to someplace to eat, see? And then, there was...the next day, I think it was, or the same day, I don't know. We got to go to...we, we, my father said we have to go to the clothes seller because, uh, because you know, I had old country clothes, funny clothes.

SIGRIST: Well, let me ask you about that. What, what clothes were you wearing when you met your father at Ellis Island?

MULLER: Oh, just everyday clothes.

SIGRIST: How...

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Describe what that is for us.

MULLER: Well, them days, my feel real fortunate to have a, uh, a jacket that went down here.

SIGRIST: A jacket that's the length of your calf.

MULLER: Yeah. Yeah, and then a sweater maybe and a shirt and, um, and then, of course, if it got too cold out on the deck. We, Erling and I, we used to walk quite a lot and so forth. But, uh, then we went down and warm up and so forth, and we felt good. We were in good shape and so forth.

SIGRIST: So your father took you to buy new clothes.

MULLER: The next day.

SIGRIST: What did he buy for you?

MULLER: I was surprised because, for a while, I got clothes. No, no, no, you got to be like everybody else or, or they'll only look at you. And I could sit here, and there was a street there. And the boys used to play ball on the street and I could sit there and, boy, I, you know, wish, I wish I could go out. But I, I didn't know what they were saying, so I couldn't ask them. I couldn't even ask them. I wouldn't know what to say.

SIGRIST: Where did your father live in Brooklyn?

MULLER: Fifty five, for a while there, we were 555 55th Street and also 557 55th Street, where we lived.

SIGRIST: The first place where your father took you your first night in America. Can you tell me what kind of a, of a structure it was?

MULLER: He only had a something they call a whore home, a little bit of a room that was just about enough for, for a bed, maybe like that. But you know something? We, both of us, we slept on that bed that first night. But then after that, I guess the lady in the house had a bigger bed for us.

SIGRIST: So he's living in a boarding house.

MULLER: Course, I slept like a log, but I don't, I don't see how in the world my father could sleep.

SIGRIST: Well, you, you just heard that the bed was roughly between 3 ½ feet wide or so.

MULLER: Mmm.

SIGRIST: Smaller?

MULLER: Yeah, something.

SIGRIST: Yeah, well, barely three feet wide.

MULLER: Bare, barely.

SIGRIST: Barely.

MULLER: But look at me, I was, I was, uh, tired, I suppose, of the trip and, and I slept like a log. But then, but I couldn't understand my father because the next day, I'm sure that he talked to the lady and we got a better room.

SIGRIST: Got a bigger room.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Explain to me a little bit about what your relationship was like with your father when you first came here.

MULLER: Fine, uh-huh, it was okay. Uh-huh. But, I tell you something and my Elizabeth knows. But anyway, so, so the time went on and on and uh, everybody, everybody taking, all the men taking all their families – oh, not all, but most – had taken their families over to America. They borrowed money or made money or whatever, but then...I never forget. I never forget it, my father comes with his hand like that. “Why, what’s the matter?” “I, I got to have your money, going to take my family over to America.” My younger brother tells me the story while he was only a kid, he was only one month, one year old when I left the old country, so, so he was, they were, he was told he was going to get my... I saved \$2,000. So, I says “No, I’m not gonna, I’m not gonna pay for them.” Then, then my, my younger brother said to me (unintelligible) “Forget about them the old country, they don’t got the money. But I wasn’t going to give my money, because most likely I would have been supporter, even though I didn’t, wasn’t a regular carpenter at that time. I would have had to. My, my, my...I wouldn’t have been, been able to save anything. But, of course, I guess my mom, my mother had made arrangements, according to my younger brother, that they were going to go to America. Then ? word came from America “No, we can’t get...we haven’t got money.” And then they never got, they never got to America. My mother even like America. She was over here and she lived downtown Brooklyn. And in them days it was terrible hot and the houses close to one another, and she didn’t like it, and there was funny people there and so forth, so on. So she, after she was here a few years, then she went back home. She was glad to get back home. She wouldn’t have liked to come back to America. It would have been a waste of money.

SIGRIST: What year did she first come over?

MULLER: Oh, that must have been, let's see...my father went to America and then she came maybe a year, a year and a half after.

SIGRIST: So it's before you were born, when....

MULLER: Oh, long before.

SIGRIST: Yeah, long before you.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And she just didn't like it, so she went, she went back. She didn't want to go to Montana 'cause of the Indians and...

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...she was happier in Norway.

MULLER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the neighborhood that you lived in in Brooklyn. What kinds of people lived in the neighborhood?

MULLER: When I came to America? Nice, the streets was nice and there was a guy that come up with a thing and, with two wheels, and he, he swept along the sidewalks and kept it nice. But then maybe a few years, five years later, they had a machine was doing it, yeah, by itself like that. And then, then, of course, we had, uh, gas lights out there and a guy used to come, he had a long stick, at night he, he went up there and he turned something and he turned out the, the, the light, the light in the morning. And then, then

he came back before dark and he turned it on again. That's how it was done.

SIGRIST: Did you have glass lights in your apartment?

MULLER: I think, I think there was, but I don't know if there was gas lights in there, but there must have been because it wasn't too long after electricity, not too long.

SIGRIST: But you remember the gas lights on the street, the street lamps being still...

MULLER: Yeah, oh, yeah. That, this, this, this man, that was his job of go up and down the streets there, see, like that.

SIGRIST: What are some of the other things about the neighborhood that you, that stick out in your mind? Do you remember, like a store or something, that...

MULLER: Well, the, the, the, you know what? I was used to work hard, working hard, with delivering bread all over up and down, barefooted, in sandy roads, you know, up here there. So, so, um...what was I going to...?

SIGRIST: We were talking about the things that you saw in the neighborhood, like things that stick out in your mind that you remember, maybe a store that you used to go to or a restaurant that you used to go to that were right near where you lived.

MULLER: Yeah. I remember my father saying "Maybe today we're going down to, to the place on the corner there on 5th Avenue and 55th Street. They sell, um, men's clothing, so then they bought me a nice brown, brown, uh, set

of clothes. Poor guy, he didn't have an..any money, but (unintelligible).I was a kid. .

SIGRIST: Tell me about how you learned English.

MULLER: Yeah, uh-hum. Uh, within a year, I could understand anything people were telling me on the job, specially, you know, because it was mostly Norwegians on the job, but...and we talked in our own language. But anyway, I could understand everything, and...

SIGRIST: Was this the job that, the first job that you got building the shoe stores?

MULLER: Yeah, helping.

SIGRIST: Helping.

MULLER: And I had to, I had to clean the floors and so forth and to take care of all things. Yeah.

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

MULLER: Oh, maybe "yes." Maybe "yes" and "no." Maybe something like that.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you ever remember making a mistake, trying to say one word and saying something else, that sticks out in your mind?

MULLER: Off hand I can't remember, but, uh, I probably made, made mistakes like that, but I can't remem...really remember. And then, and then I got to, to work, work with the, the, the painter on the job. They used to paint what we made. They, he, uh, he, he, I remember then he, he sort of like an

older, what's his name, an older guy, but same name as me. And he, see, he liked us two kids for some reason, because we came from nice, family. But anyway, he told us about, he had such a nice girl, the daughter...that's it, maybe. She came to visit her father, maybe once in the shop there where he was fixing, doing the painting and so forth. But anyway, was a very nice guy and his parents, far as I remember, they were German. They came from Germany. And, uh, he liked us guys. We were good people from the old country. George was born in America, but of Norwegian parents, so he could talk Norwegian just as good as my wife. My wife was, um, my wife was of Norwegian parents. That's all they talked in the house. She could read and write and talk just as good as me, but I said to my daughter sitting there that I wished that Elizabeth, her mother, had talked Norwegian to her so she could learn the language just like I did, just like there was nothing to it. Yeah, and the English came, came by itself. And by and by, I make all kinds of mistakes even today when I write English, but I'm not so particular anymore.

SIGRIST: Um, did your father speak English?

MULLER: Yeah, so and so. Yeah, he could get, he could talk to people.

SIGRIST: 'Cause he, of course, had been here so much longer,...

MULLER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: ...back and forth and...

MULLER: And, and, and I, and I, I could, uh, within a year, I could get along okay.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you became a carpenter, how, how that whole process went.

MULLER: Yeah, yeah. So, so, so the next day, I guess it was. I don't think it was the same day. Well, "Dad, I gotta have a job." "What, what's the matter, after all, you, you just came. You, you just came yesterday. Take it easy, will you?" "No, I don't want to take it easy. I want a job." Sure enough, he takes me down to Hamilton and 14th Street because he knew Ula Oxenson, even from our village in the old country. Him and his brother had a shop there and they had, by that time, started to make shoe, shoe stores for some big company. Well, see, we went there and he didn't care much for me. I was 16 years old, didn't never had, had any experience, this and that. But he said, but somehow he said okay then. So, so, so he said okay, so the next day I went to work and, and got along fine. And the painter, he couldn't speak Norwegian. He, he was from German, uh, people, people. And then, then, uh, it was George Nicholaison. Yeah, he could speak Norwegian just as good as me and never been to Norway, but they had Norwegian parents, so forth. But we had a real good time, and we sat there talking lunch hour, half hour, you know, talk about things, and this and that. And (unintelligible) it wasn't very long, I could, I could understand all, all they were talking about, they sitting there, and like that. Very interesting. Nine years, then mom and I got married, got an oldest girl, were parents and she could speak Norwegian just as good as me.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

MULLER: Esther.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

MULLER: That, that was, um, Esther....

SIGRIST: Let me fix your microphone. You keep pulling it down here.

MULLER: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: That's okay.

MULLER: What in the world...Esther..? Hey, mom. Elizabeth?

SIGRIST: You can say Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Yes.

MULLER: Mom, what...?

SIGRIST: What was your name?

ELIZABETH: Trulsen.

MULLER: Trulsen.

SIGRIST: Trulsen. Can you spell that?

MULLER: T-R-U-L-S-E-N. Trulsen.

SIGRIST: And when you first met Esther, what was it about Esther that you liked?

MULLER: Well, let's see. Let's see now. She, we, we went to same church. Luigi went to the other, the Lutheran Free Church. And we came to there and her parents came there with their, their, their, their two little girls, Esther and the younger, the younger girl, two years younger. And they were good-looking and, and so forth, but, um, that was later. That was later in years.

SIGRIST: What was, where, what was your first date with Esther. Where did you go with her the very first time?

MULLER: I think there was different boys that had walked Esther home from church. 'Course, you know, things were not serious bad like it is today. So, so, there wasn't so...now, they write to me from Norway that it's just as bad as all over America. You could, we could not go out after dark. This is what my sister wrote to me now.

SIGRIST: But you used to walk with Esther...

MULLER: I used to walk her home all the time. All time. She came, she had a, they had a nice, uh, one, one-family home on 80th Street and between 10th and 11th Avenue. It was very, very nice, now, so, so, so one day, I, one day, I don't know, a week or two or whatever, then she said "George, I would like to take you in the house and meet my mother, mother and father." I felt a little bit funny, but I did go in and soon I got to know them. Beautiful, you know, the whole house like this, beautiful. Norwegian people are very particular, so, most of them.

SIGRIST: And her parents were born in Norway, but she was born in the United States.

MULLER: Yes, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Did you speak English with Esther or did you speak Norwegian with her?

MULLER: Well, at that time, by that time, I think that I had learned fairly good. I think that mom would rather speak English than Norwegian, but she could speak and read and write just as good as me.

SIGRIST: What year did you get married?

MULLER: Oh, 1933.

SIGRIST: 1933.

MULLER: Yeah, and one week later we went to Norway. And we stayed in Norway one year, no two years.

SIGRIST: Did you see your mother when you went in 1933?

MULLER: Oh, yeah, we lived there.

SIGRIST: Tell me what it was like. Was that the first time you had been back to Norway?

MULLER: Uh, how many months had...oh, yes, to go, being back, yeah. And then nine years...

SIGRIST: Tell me what it felt like to see your mother after that.

MULLER: Oh, my, it was super. Mom had come to America to visit us kids, and, and, and, uh, I'll never forget what my mother told, told me. She said...you, can you hear, Liz?

ELIZABETH: Yeah.

MULLER: Yeah, my, my mother said to this. The, the, the doctor in Norway said about, about her, about my mother. Mother, Fru Muller, Mrs. Muller, Fru Muller, der finst ikke morrow saft. Der finst ikke morrow saft. And that must mean probably that mom, my, my mother, yeah, my mom needed oil

for her stomach. Der fint is no, um, uh, um, uh, stomach. (unintelligible)
Saft is what do you make out of food, out of berries and things.

SIGRIST: Like a liquid?

MULLER: Liquid.

SIGRIST: Juice?

MULLER: Yeah. There is no li..., there is no, there is no (sp?), sp?, that's, that's uh, belly, ?. Der finst no – there is no ? safte in your, your...

SIGRIST: Stomach.

MULLER: Stomach. I never forget that. And then, and then, I'm, I, I wouldn't be surprised late that I had taken something like that because I got to take some, something that I take a little bit with food. This is also food, but it's got to mix it before, and it keeps my stomach nice.

SIGRIST: Did you ever consider moving back to Norway to live?

MULLER: Well, I tell you one thing. Um, I said, uh, who was it I said that to, Liz, to...was it yesterday or today? Yesterday, I think it was. But I know, now I can't remember who it was I said it to, but, uh, I said...oh, yeah, and I was sitting beside somebody in (unintelligible), why when I had to leave so bad? I could just as well have gone right home. I could have gone right home, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you, can you name the children that you had for me, please?

MULLER: Oh, yes. Fredrick is still, was the oldest over all. And Liz?

ELIZABETH: Yeah, you're right.

MULLER: Yeah, does he, did I say this right now?

ELIZABETH: You did.

MULLER: Freddy was the oldest, George was the next, right?

SIGRIST: Frederick, George.

MULLER: Who's the third, Liz?

ELIZABETH: David

MULLER: David, right. Fifty-some years old, um, David. Who came then, Liz?

ELIZABETH: Robert.

SIGRIST: Robert.

MULLER: Robert, yeah, uh-hum. He's an anesthetist.

ELIZABETH: Daniel.

MULLER: Daniel.

ELIZABETH: Leonard.

MULLER: Leonard.

ELIZABETH: Glenn.

MULLER: Glenn.

ELIZABETH: Then me.

MULLER: Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Then John.

MULLER: And John.

ELIZABETH: And Peter.

MULLER: And Peter. That was ten.

SIGRIST: That's a big family.

MULLER: Big family. How God provided us with food down through the years, I (unintelligible). In order to keep food in the house, I had to, I had to put in twice as much time as...but I, you know, I stayed pretty healthy, didn't I, Liz?

ELIZABETH: Sure did.

MULLER: Yeah, I stayed healthy. .

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that Mr. Muller is referring to Elizabeth, which is fine, which is okay, just for the transcriber's sake, so they'll know to put Elizabeth, instead of "voice off mic."

MULLER: Oh, I see, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, um, I want you to talk a little bit before we end, and we do have to end soon.

MULLER: Oh.

SIGRIST: A little bit about your, your profession as a carpenter in your later years.

MULLER: Oh, my, yeah.

SIGRIST: How that happened and what kinds of things you made.

MULLER: Yeah. I, uh, I, I got a job in, in, uh Ohl Oxenson, see? Edmund Oxenson, his brother, was the foreman in shop.

SIGRIST: And this was in Brooklyn?

MULLER: This, this was in Brooklyn, yeah.

SIGRIST: This was in Brooklyn.

MULLER: Yeah. And then me, they didn't know if I had, uh, (unintelligible), and they send (unintelligible) to, to, uh, to learn the trade. But I, I was so interested in being, in learning the carpenter trade, that was everything. And sure enough, I started, I got a job and of course, I could stay maybe a little late sometimes and make something for myself. And of course, he must have said "There is a guy who is going to do, go far." And I did. One, \$11 per week and another dollar and another dollar and pretty soon, we didn't, four years or so, I was right up there, full pay. And how old

was I then? Just 20 years old, about 20, 21. I, oh, I loved my, I loved to go to work in the morning at my trade.

SIGRIST: And what...

MULLER: Always did.

SIGRIST: ...kinds of things were you making?

MULLER: We were making anything for a store, for all...

SIGRIST: Like cabinetry of stores?

MULLER: Yeah, cabinets, shelves that, that wide and already put together in the shop, taking them - they had a truck - taking out on the job and there was other guys who used to set it up. Yeah, and I'd also order things. And I can remember, though, in the beginning there that I had to ask Edmund maybe about things. But he was nice to me and he told me how to do it that way and then he said it ain't that particular or something like that.

SIGRIST: How did you buy your tools? Where did you get your tools?

MULLER: Oh, hardware store in Brooklyn. Yeah, yeah. Oh, I used to like to work with them tools, oh, nice planes and hammers and chisels and files and everything that I needed.

SIGRIST: Now did you always, your whole life, make store fixtures, or did you open your own carpentry shop?

MULLER: Oh, when, after I, we came back home from Norway, we were settled in Brooklyn and, uh, didn't, didn't - yeah that was four months time. But

anyway, I, sometime I worked for the bank, too, but I think that was through a contractor and so forth. But I was always working, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, and as I come up to your home today, just outside of Saratoga, you have a big shop out there, that big....

MULLER: The whole thing was a shop, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so when, later in years, you were still doing this, I assume.

MULLER: Yeah, but you know, you know what the trouble is now? I haven't got the strength, see? See it comes time today, 87, 87 years old, I know very well, but I very rarely did I pull along without it.

SIGRIST: Have you ever taught anyone how to be a carpenter?

MULLER: None of my, none of my kids, uh, has ever shown that they, they, or told me that they want to be carpenter, like me. Oh, if I'd had brothers that could have, or my, my father could have showed me... My father didn't know anything about carpenter work.

SIGRIST: What is your favorite wood to work with?

MULLER: Oh, well, there's, uh, see that there, see that?

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that is? Remember this is just an audio tape.

MULLER: That, that, that is a, that, that, that is a, uh, what do you call that, Liz?

ELIZABETH: Cedar hope chest.

MULLER: Cedar hope chest.

SIGRIST: It's a, it's a large chest...

MULLER: Large one.

SIGRIST: ...with an open lid.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: It's dove-tailed...

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...and doweled.

MULLER: Yes, yes. You, and the lady, let me see, now, oh yeah, I build one like that for a lady and I got, I think it was, too, 550 bucks for it. Lot of work.

SIGRIST: What is the one thing that you've made in your life that you were the most proud of, the one object that you made with your hands?

MULLER: What in the world could that be? Well, you see, you see now, um, well, this, this, this for, this, this, this material came up, I paid eight dollar, \$800, for that, for this.

SIGRIST: Are you, are you referring to a large...

MULLER: Yeah, the whole....

SIGRIST: ...grandfather's clock, one of the clocks we've been...

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...hearing through the interview.

MULLER: Yeah, and then I, then I, uh, I put it together only, put the dowels that, yeah? I wouldn't suggest anybody unless they're A-1 carpe...cabinetmaker to put one of those together because if they glue something and it, it, it could ruin the whole thing, if they don't...You got to be exactly right, smack on.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you a couple of final questions. .One question is "Do you consider yourself Norwegian or American?"

MULLER: Well, see, look.

SIGRIST: We're looking at some Norwegian books that Mr. Muller is showing me. Yeah, this is a Norwegian bible that Mr. Muller is showing me.

MULLER: Yeah, I like them best. I'm much, best, instead of English, I use my own.

SIGRIST: But you, yourself, do you consider yourself Norwegian or American?

MULLER: Well, I, I am, I, I, far as I know, that well, 'course, you know, we have to go through things in order to, to be, become American citizens.

SIGRIST: Oh, tell me a little bit about the process of becoming a citizen. What did you have to do to become an American citizen?

MULLER: Um, we had to, we, we, we had to put in an application and then, oh, I remember one funny thing. That, uh, so I came before somebody. I was,

they want to ask me some questions. So the, so, so they asked me a question. So they, so, so I, I, so (unintelligible) not much to the question, but, uh, I didn't know what to say. And he, and the guy that got the gun, he maybe got a little tired of me, I don't know, but it was something like that. But anyway, he said to me...oh, yeah, he said, did he say... he said "Why didn't you tell me that?" "Because I didn't think it was a decent answer." But he said "What is the biggest law in America?" What would you say? And me a foreigner. But this, this is what he said to me, "What is the biggest law in America?" Can you imagine that? But anyway, so I thought, "I don't, I don't know." "Haven't you ever heard about...?" Now that left my brain. "Haven't you ever heard about..." the, the (unintelligible), in the Washington there, the big, big, uh..."Haven't you ever heard?" "Of course," I said. "Well, why didn't you tell, tell me that?" So I, we, I was okay because I said that. I was okay. He didn't ask me anymore.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when you became a citizen?

MULLER: Uh, great. Be an American citizen then was a good thing, I had no doubt about it. And, and, not only that, think of how, think of how good this great land has been to me down twenty years with work. But I had to know my business.

SIGRIST: What advice do you have for young people who might be listening to this interview? What advice would you give a young person about how to lead their life?

MULLER: Yeah, well, if they, if they, if they like to, to handle tools – saws, planes, chisels, any, anything - well, then go for it. If that, oh my, oh my, I could buy and save up enough money so I could have another plane or just some

kind of different kind of a plane or just so that one isn't.... Oh, boy, oh, boy, I liked my, I liked my trade if anybody ever did. I did. Oy...

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Muller, I want to thank you very much. Uh, you've been, you've been a wonderful interviewee and we've been talking for an hour and thirty-five minutes.

MULLER: Oh, yeah, my.

SIGRIST: I appreciate you letting me answer, ask some questions.

MULLER: You know, I'm also thanking you for your kindness in coming here and do this here.

SIGRIST: Oh, I'm happy I did.

MULLER: Very, very nice.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist, signing off with George Muller on Sunday, April 30, 1995, here in Greenfield Center, New York, with his daughter Elizabeth in attendance throughout the entire interview.

MULLER: Uh-huh. Sure.

SIGRIST: And a lot of clocks which we've been listening to.

MULLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Thank you very much.

MULLER: Uh-huh. And you.

End of Interview.