

EI-640

IDA BORGESEN

BIRTHDATE: JUNE 16, 1903

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 20, 1995

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 92

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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**INTERVIEW LOCATION: SWEDISH HOME, WEST NEWTON,
MASSACHUSETTS**

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

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SWEDEN, 1923

AGE: 20

SHIP: BERGENSFIORD

PORT: OSLO

RESIDENCES:

- **SWEDEN: GUNESGUG**
- **THE US: WALTHAM, AUBURNDALE, BROOKLINE, JAMAICA PLAIN, WEST ROXBURY, AND NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

LEVINE: Today is July 20th, 1995, and I'm here at the Swedish Home in West Newton, Massachusetts with Ida Borgesen, who came to this country from Sweden in 1923, when she was twenty years of age. Today Mrs. Borgesen is ninety-two years old.

BORGESEN: I will be in June.

LEVINE: Well this is July, so you just had a birthday in June?

BORGESEN: Yeah, mm-hm.

LEVINE: Right, you were ninety-two. And you look very healthy!

BORGESEN: Yeah, I feel pretty good, thank you.

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LEVINE: Good. Okay, Mrs. Borgesen, let's start at the beginning by you giving your birth date.

BORGESEN: Yeah, June 16th, 1903.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where in Sweden were you born?

BORGESEN: Gunesgug [Laughs].

LEVINE: Okay, Gunesgug, and that is in Varmland?

BORGESEN: Varmland.

LEVINE: Okay, tell me about Gunesgug. When you think back about that place, what are the things you remember?

BORGESEN: Well, we had nice neighbors, and we were happy.

LEVINE: Yeah. Was it a little town? Do you remember the house you lived in?

BORGESEN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Could you describe it?

BORGESEN: Well, it was a little red house, and we lived on a farm, so we had plenty of room to run around.

LEVINE: What kind of farm? What did--?

BORGESEN: Just a few cows, and a horse, and sheeps, and chickens, and pigs [Laughs].

LEVINE: So your father was a farmer?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

BORGESEN: Johannes.

LEVINE: Johannes. And your mother?

BORGESEN: Christina.

LEVINE: And your mother's maiden name?

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BORGESEN: Karlsen.

LEVINE: Karlsen. And did you have brothers and sisters when you were in Sweden?

BORGESEN: Oh yes, I had two brothers, and then my twin sister, and my older sister were home at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, so what was your twin's name?

BORGESEN: Marthe.

LEVINE: Martha?

BORGESEN: Mm-hm.

LEVINE: And were you identical twins?

BORGESEN: No, no.

LEVINE: No, you were the fraternal type. Uh-huh. Were you particularly close to any one of your sisters or brothers?

BORGESEN: Well, I think with my older sister, I was very close to her.

LEVINE: And what was her name?

BORGESEN: Hulda.

LEVINE: Hulda. And did she ever do things with you when you were a little girl?

BORGESEN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What would she do? Where would she take you?

BORGESEN: Oh, she teach how to dance! [Laughs]

LEVINE: She taught you how to dance?

BORGESEN: Yeah [Laughs].

LEVINE: Did she play an instrument, or did anyone in the family?

BORGESEN: No, no.

LEVINE: No, uh-huh. And how about your brothers?

BORGESEN: Well, two of the brothers were home that time, before they left there for this country.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with them when you were a little girl?

BORGESEN: No, they used to fight a lot, I know that [Laughs].

LEVINE: With each other?

BORGESEN: Yeah [Laughs].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how about your mother and father? Do you remember any things you did with them, maybe places you went with them?

BORGESEN: Yeah, we used to go—my mother used to go visit a lady; we always went with her. And then we had some relatives we went to see.

LEVINE: How about grandparents? Did you have them?

BORGESEN: Yeah, they lived next door to our house.

LEVINE: Oh, and did you ever do anything with your grandmother? Do you remember any experiences with her?

BORGESEN: No, she used to weave a lot.

LEVINE: Oh, would she make cloth, or she'd make things out of cloth?

BORGESEN: She made bedspreads.

LEVINE: And would this be right from the sheep's wool, that she'd weave?

BORGESEN: No, it was the cotton bedspreads.

LEVINE: And how about your grandfather? Do you have memories of him?

BORGESEN: Yes, he was very nice, and he used to work on different farms.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And then you'd go see relatives. Would that be like aunts and uncles, and cousins?

BORGESEN: Cousins, and an uncle, too.

LEVINE: And did you go to school?

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BORGESEN: Yes.

LEVINE: And you started school about five or six?

BORGESEN: No, we were eight when we started.

LEVINE: You were eight? And how long did you keep going?

BORGESEN: 'Til seventh.

LEVINE: Seventh grade, uh-huh. And was that usual then, to stop?

BORGESEN: Yeah. Well, you could go to higher school, too, but then you had to live away from home, too.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Was this school a big school?

BORGESEN: No, all the classes—the small classes in one room, and then the other ones were in the other room

LEVINE: I see, and was it boys and girls together?

BORGESEN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about school? Was it strict? Was it-?

BORGESEN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Did you have, like, the same teacher, for three classes?

BORGESEN: Yes, we did.

LEVINE: So when you stopped school, what did you do after that?

BORGESEN: Well, I did some housework.

LEVINE: For someone else, or in your own--?

BORGESEN: Yeah, uh-huh.

LEVINE: In the same town?

BORGESEN: Yeah, I worked at the old people's home for a long time.

LEVINE: Oh. Did you like that?

BORGESEN: Yeah, it was all right [Laughs]. It was hard work [Laughs].

LEVINE: What did you do? What were your duties? What did you have to do when you worked there?

BORGESEN: Well, we had to help with the cooking, and serve the food, and take care of the dishes.

LEVINE: And what about your twin sister? Did she work also, after she finished school?

BORGESEN: Oh yes, she worked in the city for school [unclear]. He was a professor. He came from our [unclear]. She worked there for a long time.

LEVINE: She worked in his house?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what would she do—cook, and that kind of thing?

BORGESEN: Yeah. They lived in Gotenburg.

LEVINE: So did you ever visit her in Gotenburg?

BORGESEN: No.

LEVINE: No—let's see. Were you religious? Were you a religious family, or were you religious?

BORGESEN: Well, you know, everybody has [unclear], but then I went to Baptist church.

LEVINE: In Sweden?

BORGESEN: Mm-hm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was that a popular—in other words, a lot of people were Baptists, in Sweden?

BORGESEN: Yeah. Mm-hm.

LEVINE: Even in your little town?

BORGESEN: Oh yeah.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was there any difference that you could think of, going to the Baptist church, and going to the Lutheran church?

BORGESEN: Well, I guess so.

LEVINE: Let's see, what else? How about food? Do you remember any favorite kinds of Swedish food or dishes that your mother made, that you remember liking?

BORGESEN: Yeah, my mother used to make flasqponka.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

BORGESEN: F-L-A-S-Q-P-O-N-K-A.

LEVINE: And what was it, Flasqponka?

BORGESEN: oh, it was it—baked it, [unclear] bacon person, than to have [unclear], then they baked it in the oven. It was very good.

LEVINE: And so that was—what would that be, like a main, a main meal? A main dish?

BORGESEN: Yeah, mm-hm.

LEVINE: And anything else you remember, as far as food was concerned?

BORGESEN: Oh, she made good food, yeah.

LEVINE: What would be the most typical meal that you would have, when you were a little girl?

BORGESEN: Oh, they used fresh bacon, you know, and potatoes, and vegetables. That used to be the main course.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. And, let's see. Do you remember things that you did that were, like, recreation? Like maybe after school, things you would do with your friends?

BORGESEN: Yeah, I mean, we used to play together.

LEVINE: What kind of games—did you play games, or dolls?

BORGESEN: Yeah, we [unclear] played hide and seek, a little [Laughs].

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LEVINE: Yeah? And how about, like, in the winter time, when it was snow and ice?

BORGESEN: Well, we had to use the skis a lot.

LEVINE: Skis?

BORGESEN: Mm.

LEVINE: Would you use the skis to get from one place to another, or just for--?

BORGESEN: No, because we walk in the snow. We walked to school, too. It wasn't far to the school house. And we had to start at eight o'clock in the morning, [unclear].

LEVINE: And then did you have chores on the farm at all?

BORGESEN: Oh, yes, there was always work to do! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember any particular jobs that you had to do?

BORGESEN: Well, we had to feed the animals, milk the cows.

LEVINE: Did you have any idea, when you were a little girl, what you wanted to do when you got--?

BORGESEN: Yes, I wanted to be a nurse, but it cost so much money at that time.

LEVINE: So how was it decided that you would come to this country?

BORGESEN: See, my nephew—my sister was home, and then she had to back here to this country in a hurry. So I said I'll bring him over later on. So that's what I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So do you remember any things that your sister told you about this country?

BORGESEN: No, not that I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought, when you realized you were coming here, what you expected?

BORGESEN: Well, I had two brothers over here, too, and then my two sisters. So—

LEVINE: Oh, so both of your sisters were here?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, so you were the only child in the family who wasn't here?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. So, when you decided to come, what did you have to do?

BORGESEN: Well, I had to get the passport, and be examined by the doctor.

LEVINE: You were examined in Sweden?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: By your own doctor, or by a doctor connected with the ship?

BORGESEN: No, they had a doctor in the city we went to.

LEVINE: And, in other words, you did that on your own, or you had to do it, go have an examination?

BORGESEN: I guess we had to do it.

LEVINE: And then, do you remember leaving?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: How did you feel?

BORGESEN: Well, my sister that had the boy, took care of the boy, she went with us, [unclear]. She felt bad [Laughs].

LEVINE: Yeah. Well now, this sister that—did you have a sister that was in Sweden when you left?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Which sister was that?

BORGESEN: Esther.

LEVINE: Now, was Esther the mother of your nephew?

BORGESEN: No, her that was the mother of the boy.

LEVINE: Okay, and Esther wasn't your twin sister? That was another sister?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see, so she was still there.

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did she ever come to this country?

BORGESEN: No.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh, yeah. Did you expect, when you left, that you might return to Sweden?

BORGESEN: Well, for [unclear].

LEVINE: But when you left, you thought this was—this was where you were going to spend the rest of your life, pretty much?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember anything she took with you, anything she packed? Any things you have now that you brought from Sweden?

BORGESEN: No, really, I don't.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. So after, when you were leaving, you said goodbye to your sister. Well, you said goodbye to your mother and father, too?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. How did they feel about you going?

BORGESEN: Oh, they felt bad [Laughs].

LEVINE: Yeah. And then you left your town. How did you leave the town? What kind of transportation did you have?

BORGESEN: We had a bus into [unclear], that was close to Norway. Then we took the train into Oslo.

LEVINE: And then after that?

BORGESEN: We went on a boat.

LEVINE: And what was the name of the boat?

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BORGESEN: Bergensfiord.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you go right on to the ship, or did you stay around the port for a few days before you actually--?

BORGESEN: No, we went the same day.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, how old was your nephew, that you were traveling with?

BORGESEN: Maybe four or five; I can't say exactly.

LEVINE: And what was your nephew's name?

BORGESEN: Leonard.

LEVINE: Leonard, uh-huh. And did anything happen during the voyage? Can you describe anything that happened during that--?

BORGESEN: We had pretty good weather.

LEVINE: Good weather? And were you in the Steerage? Were you in the—did you have a cabin? Were you--?

BORGESEN: Four in the cabin.

LEVINE: And you and your nephew, and two people you didn't know?

BORGESEN: No, I know the ones that—I know them from home.

LEVINE: Oh, were they from your--?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you know they were going to be on the same ship?

BORGESEN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, so did you plan it?

BORGESEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Ah, okay, so who were these people?

BORGESEN: They were neighbors from home, and she lived in Chicago, and she was going back to Chicago. And she had two children.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, do you remember when the ship came into New York?

BORGESEN: Mm-hm.

LEVINE: What—was there anything that struck you when the ship first came into the harbor?

BORGESEN: Yeah, the Statue of Liberty [Laughs].

LEVINE: Did you know what that was?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah?

BORGESEN: Mm-hm.

LEVINE: And were there a lot of people on the boat from Sweden?

BORGESEN: Oh, yes, yeah.

LEVINE: And did they—was there any reaction on the deck to seeing the Statue?

BORGESEN: No, I wouldn't say.

LEVINE: Yeah. So then you came to Ellis Island?

BORGESEN: Mm-hm.

LEVINE: Can you describe your impressions, or anything about Ellis Island?

BORGESEN: Well, I stayed there overnight.

LEVINE: Oh!

BORGESEN: Mm-hm. It was nice and clean. But we were locked up at night [Laughs]. It was about eighteen beds on one room [Laughs].

LEVINE: And the door was locked?

BORGESEN: Oh, yeah. And then we went down for breakfast in the morning, and they come around [unclear] you can take eggs, if you want.

LEVINE: Were you examined at Ellis Island? Do you remember that?

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BORGESEN: Before you leave Ellis Island, they look in your hair, if you have [several words unclear]. That's about all.

LEVINE: Why was it that you had to stay overnight?

BORGESEN: I don't know. Maybe we came in late. I can't say. But I was nice and clean.

LEVINE: And so you were able to stay in the same room with your nephew?

BORGESEN: Yeah. And we had washstands in the same room, so you can wash up, and—

LEVINE: And how was the food?

BORGESEN: Well, I only had—I don't remember if I had supper. But they had breakfast there, eggs and coffee and toast.

LEVINE: And how was your nephew? Was he a good traveling companion?

BORGESEN: Oh yeah, he was very good.

LEVINE: And let's see. So you stayed overnight, and then did someone meet you?

BORGESEN: Yeah, the boy's mother, my sister.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. And were you—how were you feeling when you were just getting to this country?

BORGESEN: Oh, I felt pretty good! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah. Were you looking forward to being here?

BORGESEN: Yeah. It was a better time here, at that time, than in Sweden. You could get work easier, too.

LEVINE: So when you met your sister, how long had it been between the time your sister had been visiting in Sweden, until you came?

BORGESEN: Maybe a couple of years—I can't say exactly, but I think so.

LEVINE: And what was it like for Leonard to see his mother?

BORGESEN: [Laughs] He didn't like it! [Laughs] He wanted to [unclear], but not [unclear]. But it didn't take him long!

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then, when you and your sister and your nephew got off of Ellis Island, where did you go?

BORGESEN: We took a train [pause]. I don't know. We took the train to South Station, I believe.

LEVINE: Was there anything that struck you as new and different about this country those first few days, when--?

BORGESEN: Well, I didn't like the darkness in the evening, like you know, getting dark very early, because home, it's hardly any darkness during the summer, only a few hours.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, you came—when did you arrive here? What was the month, do you remember?

BORGESEN: I think it was the first part of August.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, I see. So you didn't like—it was getting dark. Was there anything else that was different that you noticed?

BORGESEN: Well, everything is different.

LEVINE: Everything is different?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Anything that struck you in particular, that you either liked or didn't like?

BORGESEN: No.

LEVINE: How about foods? Were there foods that were different?

BORGESEN: Well, my sister cooked about the same as we did home.

LEVINE: So you went to your sister's? Was it an apartment?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: In Boston?

BORGESEN: In Waltham.

LEVINE: In where?

BORGESEN: Waltham.

LEVINE: Waltham, uh-huh. And did you look for work immediately?

BORGESEN: No, not right off. But later on I worked for a family in Auburndale.

LEVINE: Well, now your sister—was your brother-in-law also there?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and was your sister working?

BORGESEN: No.

LEVINE: So how did you come to get the job in Auburn?

BORGESEN: Well, my sister knew somebody that needed help, so that's why.

LEVINE: Could you just describe yourself, what you were like, when you were twenty years old, and you just came to this country?

BORGESEN: [Laughs] It's hard to describe yourself!

LEVINE: Were you a shy young woman, or were you a--?

BORGESEN: Yeah, mm-hm.

LEVINE: And so you took this job as—what were your duties?

BORGESEN: Housework.

LEVINE: Housework, uh-huh. And was the family nice to you?

BORGESEN: Oh, very nice.

LEVINE: And did you meet other people? Did you have any kind of a social group?

BORGESEN: Well, I usually [unclear] my sisters, and the relatives over there.

LEVINE: How about any Swedish clubs, or Swedish societies? Was there such a thing around where you were?

BORGESEN: No.

LEVINE: There was no place to go and meet other people?

BORGESEN: Oh, yes. My sister went, but I didn't go until later on.

LEVINE: Oh, you didn't go right away?

BORGESEN: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So how long did you work with that family, for that family, that you started working for?

BORGESEN: I guess two years.

LEVINE: And then why did you leave?

BORGESEN: Well, my other sister lost her son, so I went over there to stay with her.

LEVINE: Oh. So, this wasn't Leonard?

BORGESEN: No.

LEVINE: It was another son, uh-huh. And so you went to stay just because she was so upset?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So how long did you stay with her?

BORGESEN: Not, maybe a month or so.

LEVINE: And then did you look for more work?

BORGESEN: Yeah, I went to Employment Office. So I worked for a family in Brookline that was very nice.

LEVINE: And so did you do housework, is that [unclear]?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then did you stay with them for a while?

BORGESEN: I stayed until I got married.

LEVINE: Oh, and how did you meet your husband?

BORGESEN: We went to evening high school to learn English [Laughs].

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LEVINE: Well, now, were you learning English all along, while you were working?

BORGESEN: Oh, yes, mm-hm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how long did it take to go to this—how long was this course in the evening high school?

BORGESEN: Oh, I don't know. It lasted a few weeks.

LEVINE: And you were both in the same class?

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what did you like about him?

BORGESEN: He was nice looking and clean looking [Laughs]! And then his friend had a car, so we went together home. And then I happened to meet him later on [Laughs].

LEVINE: Now, was he also from Sweden?

BORGESEN: Norway.

LEVINE: From Norway, right. And let's see [pause], right. And had he come over about the same time you had?

BORGESEN: Yeah, he went out west to his sister's, so I don't know what year he came over. But then the other sister was here in Boston, so she sent him a ticket to come to Boston.

LEVINE: So did you see each other for quite a while before you got married?

BORGESEN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And then you—and you continued to work for this family?

BORGESEN: Mm-hm.

LEVINE: And then after you got married, did you keep working, or did you stop?

BORGESEN: No, I went there a few days a week to work.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Where did you settle with your husband?

BORGESEN: We stayed in Jamaica Plain for a while, and then we went to West Roxbury, and then to Newton.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, so you were living around Newton?

BORGESEN: Yeah, Newton Upper Falls.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you have children?

BORGESEN: Yes, I have two boys and a girl.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

BORGESEN: The oldest one is Rob, and the other boy is Stephen, and my girl is Nancy.

LEVINE: And do they have children?

BORGESEN: Oh yes.

LEVINE: So you have grandchildren?

BORGESEN: I have seven grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wonderful, wonderful. And are any of the grandchildren married?

BORGESEN: Yeah, I have two great-grandsons! [Laughs]

LEVINE: What are your great-grandsons' names?

BORGESEN: Cole.

LEVINE: Cole? Uh-huh.

BORGESEN: And the other one is Melody.

LEVINE: Melody?

BORGESEN: Yeah

LEVINE: Oh, wow! When you look back on your life, do you think that you've retained some qualities that are what you would call Swedish?

BORGESEN: Yes, I think so.

LEVINE: You have ways about you that--?

BORGESEN: We learn things as we go along.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. That's a Swedish quality?

BORGESEN: [Laughs] No!

LEVINE: Do you think you have any Swedish characteristics?

BORGESEN: I don't know [Laughs].

LEVINE: Do you consider yourself Swedish, or American, or some of each?

BORGESEN: Well, you can never give up the Swedish. But I like America.

LEVINE: And you've been back to Sweden?

BORGESEN: Oh, a few times, yeah.

LEVINE: And what do you feel very proud of, that you've done? What makes you feel good and satisfied, that you've done in your life?

BORGESEN: Well, I took care of my sister when she was sick, so she died in the house. So I took care of her.

LEVINE: This was the sister--?

BORGESEN: That was the mother of Leonard.

LEVINE: Oh, the mother of Leonard, uh-huh.

BORGESEN: And I took care of my husband as long as I could.

LEVINE: Yeah, well that takes a lot.

BORGESEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you ever in your life have, like, a hero, or a heroine? Somebody you looked up to, either a person you knew, or somebody who maybe was famous or something? Anybody that made you feel like, oh, you thought that was just--?

BORGESEN: Well, I don't know [Laughs].

LEVINE: Okay, let's see. What else? How about this time in your life, your old age? Here you are in Newton, in the Swedish Home. How is this time for you?

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BORGESEN: Pretty good, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you feel like you're in a good place?

BORGESEN: Oh yes, we're well taken care of.

LEVINE: Good. Let's see. Is there anything else? Do you think the fact that you started out for twenty years and lived in Sweden, and then you came here—do you think the fact that you changed countries as a young woman, do you think that made a difference in the rest of your life?

BORGESEN: No, I don't think so.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. Is there anything else you can think of that has to do with the fact of coming here from Sweden, and living out your life here?

BORGESEN: Well, if I wasn't going to bring the boy over, I don't think I would be here [Laughs].

LEVINE: Really? Oh, uh-huh. So that was kind of an accident, that that happened that way.

BORGESEN: Mm-hm.

LEVINE: Well, do you think—what do you think would be different if you had stayed in Sweden, as compared with coming here?

BORGESEN: [Pause]

[End of Interview]