

EI-645

BURTT, EBBA

BIRTHDATE: 1909

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 22, 1995

RUNNING TIME: 1:40:00

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, Ph.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: EAST LEXINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: MELODY FEIST, 3/2004

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: GABRIEL MIDDLETON (4/2004) AND KIP CLARK

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Interview probably takes place near an open window; associated noises heard throughout the tape (i.e., birds, cars driving by, dogs barking, crickets, people talking, etc.). Clock ticking in the background throughout interview.

SWEDEN, 1926

AGE 15

PASSAGE ON "THE ? "

LEVINE: Okay, today is July 22nd, 1995, and I'm here in East Lexington visiting with Mrs. Ebba Burtt, who came from Sweden when she was fifteen years old in 1926. I've also interviewed Mrs. Burtt's brother, Herbert Melquist, and so he is in the oral history collection at Ellis Island. Today, Mrs. Burtt is eighty-five years old at the time of the interview, and I want to say that I'm looking forward because I know you have a good memory, so you probably remember everything. [Mrs. Burtt laughs] So, if you would say for the tape, Mrs. Burtt, your birth date and where in Sweden you were born.

BURTT: I [coughs], I was born Saturday night at seven o' clock

[laughs] 1909 in Lysekil, Sweden. Lysekil is a city that is in Bohuslän on the west coast of Sweden, near Gothenberg.

LEVINE: And did you live in Lysekil up until the time you left Sweden to come to this country?

BURTT: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, when you... What are your earliest memories?

BURTT: Just goin' to school, and I don't remember my father because he was here. So, we lived for eight years with my mother workin', and we were taking care of ourself. I had two brothers, August and Herb, and myself.

LEVINE: And he...

BURTT: And I had a grandmother. That was my father's mother. She lived next door, and she had her eyes on us while my mother was workin'. But my mother didn't go to work until we started the first grade at the age of six.

LEVINE: Now, how old were you in relation to your brothers? In other words...

BURTT: August was three years older than me because my mother had another baby between, and he died, and...Is this, is this good?

LEVINE: Yeah, this is good.

BURTT: Um, then she had me, and then she had Herb. And when Herb was fifteen months old, my father left for America, and he was here for eight years. Then he decided to come back, and he stayed in Sweden for two years, and my mother had another baby after eleven years. And that boy died in the second we're here in this country at twenty-one years old.

LEVINE: Mm. Mm-hmm. What did...

BURTT: Then he left again, my father. And then my mother said, "This is it." My brother was gettin' nineteen years old, August, and he had to go in the service in Sweden, so she sent them off to this country. And then she decided to sell the house and get a ticket, and we all came. The first of May, we left Sweden, 1926.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: And we landed, we landed in Ellis Island, I guess, ten days after or something like that. And...

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. Well, before we talk about the trip, do you remember your grandmother? When you think of your grandmother...

BURTT: Ooh, I had two grandmothers.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: But, I didn't think they were anything to do with, uh...

LEVINE: Well, it's just about your early life, the kinds of things you did within Sweden. I mean, did you do things with your grandmother?

BURTT: Yes. My grandmother lived just, like upgrade, like here from the next house.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: And I was five or six years old. And I was the only one that come in her house. She had a two-room, little red

house. And I was the only one that come in and sweep and dust.

LEVINE: And...

BURTT: And then, one day, I was... she had a little pot-bellied black stove that heated the room. And I lifted the cover and was gonna throw the dust from the dustpan into the stove, and my apron caught fire. And my grandmother grabbed me in her great big, old, long skirt and smothered it, so she saved me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: That's what I remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: But she was the only one that let me do anything in that room.

LEVINE: Huh.

BURTT: I could go up in the summer, and I'd tell, "Grandma, get out and sit on the rock, and I'll take out your linen

and clothes and pillows and every-, hang `em out and air them out, and rugs and everything," and I loved it. I loved keeping house. Cleaning! I love cleaning!

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Saturday, my mother went to the market to buy, spend what little money she had, and meet my aunts at the market, and when she was gone, I took all the rugs out and swept floor, and cleaned up the rooms, so we had... Well, we had two big rooms and then two little, small ones that, like halls. And, uh...

LEVINE: What was your mother doing for work while your father was in America?

BURTT: Well, the only thing... One time, she worked in the brewery to clean bottles.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: And that's nothing to put on, I suppose, but mostly from Lysekil, everybody worked in the herring place, pickled herring, canning factory, laying *inlagd sill*, they called it. Yeah, and then, she worked there. But, as I said,

she didn't go to work until three years after my father left, so she worked about five years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: But we were in school from eight to five, all day long.

LEVINE: Wow. So what was your mother's name?

BURTT: Anna.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

BURTT: Johansen also.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And how about your father's name?

BURTT: Well, that's another tricky thing. His father's name was Larson, and his first names were Johannes Larson.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: And when the children grew up, they couldn't use Larson. They had to go from his first name, so that made it Johansen.

LEVINE: I see.

BURTT: So, they were all Johansen.

LEVINE: So, you were baptized, Johansen.

BURTT: Johansen, yeah.

LEVINE: Then how did Melquist come into being?

BURTT: My father's brother wrote to the king and changed his name from Johansen to Melquist, and, automatically, the whole family got the name Melquist.

LEVINE: Huh. Well, that's interesting. Now, why did your uncle want to change it? Do you know? I mean...

BURTT: Well, they do that all the time, you know. You can change...

LEVINE: Huh.

BURTT: Every other person was Johansen, you know...

LEVINE: Oh, that's...a very common name.

BURTT: Every--and Petersen and Swenson, and that. So, and he was in business. My father's brother had a business in Lysekil, so he wanted to have a different name, I guess.

LEVINE: Well, now, did you know that uncle, the uncle that had the business?

BURTT: Oh, God, yes. I stayed with him for three months. My mother had appendix out, and it wouldn't heal. So we, three of us, had to be divided. I stayed with that uncle, and one was with grandmother, and one was another aunt.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Herb was with grandma, I guess.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what about the medical care? Do you remember anything about the medical care there?

BURTT: [laughing] Oh, we never had no... We had no dentist, we had no doctor, we had... We didn't need any because we helped ourselves.

LEVINE: Were there, what kind of cures? What did people do to take care of illness? Do you remember any particulars about, you know, how people did their own medicine?

BURTT: No. We had the right food.

LEVINE: Uh.

BURTT: We lived on fish and herring and mackerel and, you know. And my mother used to--every Sunday, in the wintertime--she got a piece of beef with the bone, and she made a big, big soup. Every Sunday, she had that, we had... They called it *köttssoppa* [laughs].

LEVINE: [laughs]

BURTT: And that was full of vegetables.

LEVINE: Can you spell "köttssoppa"?

BURTT: K- it's an 'Ö', you know...

LEVINE: The 'O' with the two dots.

BURTT: ...it's an 'O' with a dot, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: T-T-S-O-P-P-A.

LEVINE: And so, would you have that soup on Sunday, and would you have it later in the week, or...

BURTT: Well, if there was any left, yeah. But we had a lot of hamburg, and... And then, we had a lot of milk soups, my mother made from, you know, milk, from... In fact, macaroni went into it, a milk soup.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: That's the way they cooked it, there.

LEVINE: What else...

BURTT: Mama did.

LEVINE: What else would be in the milk soup besides macaroni? Anything else?

BURTT: Just milk and macaroni and flavoring and sometimes with

a little thickening to make a little body, you know, but, uh... We had a lot of oatmeal, of course, and a lot of pancakes, Swedish pancakes. We had them. And puddings and--rice puddings...

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: We had a lot of rice puddings. We had a lot of rice.

LEVINE: So, during the week, you'd mostly have fish?

BURTT: Yep, I guess, fish and hamburg and sometimes, I think we had some kind of a bologna. And, of course, we had pork chops, but it was, you know...

LEVINE: That was a special, a special...

BURTT: No, no...

LEVINE: ...kind of meal?

BURTT: ...it wasn't. It was just what we had. I mean, we... When my mother, you know, when my mother bought anything, she bought what was there...

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: ...to buy.

LEVINE: Did you ever go with your mother to market on Saturday?

BURTT: Not very often.

LEVINE: 'Cause you...

BURTT: That was one day, her, she wanted to go by herself and see, visit my aunts 'cause they went down there, too. And then they meet, and they might go in and have a cup of coffee, and talk, you know. And that was one time she didn't want me around. But she did take me. I remember goin'. And there was all--booths all over the front of the hotel there, was an opening, you know, like a plaza, you know? And everybody came in from the country with their horse and wagon and set up the booths and sold butter and eggs and--everything from the country--vegetables and berries, and... Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now...

BURTT: And flowers.

LEVINE: ...were there farms around the town? The farms were around the town? Is that where the farmers were? There were no farms in, uh...

BURTT: No. No, no, they were a few miles outside, up in the country. Yeah. And they came in. And one winter--we had a fjord. It went long, quite a few miles. And one winter, the farmers came in on the horse and wagon on the ice. They froze so solid that they--I remember--one year, everybody was talking about, "Farmer came in today with a horse and wagon on the ice."

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: Yeah. And we lived right near the water, so we could go and swim in it every day of the summer.

LEVINE: What else did you do for fun, for recreation, besides swimming?

BURTT: Uh, we played house. I went to Sweden in '70, and I met

my girlfriend...

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: ...after all these years, and I visited her. And I been writin' to her, now, for all those twenty-five years, and she just died at Christmas. But her and I, we played house.

LEVINE: Did you have, like, a dollhouse, or you would just play with...

BURTT: No. My mother had a woodshed where we had wood, but we could never have, afford wood, so we swept it out and cleaned it, and we got a few little rugs, and we had the box or something, I suppose, for, uh, I really don't know what we played, anyway.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And how about in the...

BURTT: I only had one doll, and my mother made it. She has, you know, that little head, porcelain head, and she had black, curly hair--no hair, just porcelain.

LEVINE: Painted on?

BURTT: Yeah, right into the body of the porcelain head. And then my mother made a body and the legs and the arms, and, uh...

LEVINE: What did she make it out of, the body? What was...

BURTT: Cloth stuffed with cotton. And then she made me a little quilt about that size...

LEVINE: The size of a notebook, yeah.

BURTT: ...of all velvet colors, different, with velvet.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: And, of course, I had that for years.

LEVINE: Did you have clothing for the doll? Did you have different dresses, or...

BURTT: No.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: No, no. There was only one outfit, and that was it.
[laughs]

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Hm.

BURTT: Don't forget, we were very poor 'cause we only lived on what my mother made. During the war, we never got a cent from this country. Not one cent.

LEVINE: 'Cause you couldn't get through, right?

BURTT: No, they wouldn't let us come through. And there we were during the war, First World War. That was horrible. It was horrible because we had a German queen and she, every single thing that come in--fish or meat, when the--she shipped it off to Germany. That was an order from the queen, king. And, 'cause my mother went down to the wharf, and how I found that out, I remember, she asked one fisherman if she can have one fish, and he said, "No, that's going to Germany."

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: And then, during the bad times, my brother had to take a burlap bag and walk for miles up to the country and see if he could get a few potatoes or something.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BURTT: And another thing I can tell you that I'll never forget as long as I live... My mother had a stack of magazines that she had bought, and she saved them, you know--*Swedish Home Journal*--and that came every week--and I read it, my mother read it, and my grandmother read it, and then we saved it. And when the war started, she had that big stack, and she had to go up in the attic. And the opening--we had a black stove with four, uh, two burners, I guess it was, yeah, and the other was in the oven--and we opened that cover. We had no light, we had no candles, no gasoline--kerosene, rather--and we just ripped off one page at a time, and my mother put it in the stove, and the flames lit up the kitchen. Yeah, it was green. That's how we could read or anything, by that light comin' from the stove with the old journals, piece by piece. Nobody remembers that but me--I guess Mama remember, but she's gone [sighs].

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: Yeah, we had a tough time during the war. And then, of course, I said to Mama, "My God! How did we live through that?" She said, "You don't remember nothing," she said, "You were six years old when it first started." And then, after the war, we got one light in the kitchen, from the ceiling. Electricity came in. Well, my mother had a sister and a brother. Her mother married a second time, and they were a half-sister and half-brother. And they were just a year older than me and my brother, August. And they came. And they were, my mother had to go shoppin', and my brother and his uncle, but he was a year younger than him, you know, so anyway, they were talkin' about how you can get a shock, you know, that kind of stuff, and the electricity. And they were, they had been talkin', so they unscrewed the bulb, and thank God that he put the potato peeler with the wooden handle. He stuck it up there, and everybody were hidin' when mama come home. Everybody was hidin'. He said, "What's a matter with everybody?" And, of course, my little brother, he was only four or something, you know, Herb. He was the smallest, and he was the only one that didn't hide. Everybody was hidin' someplace. And, finally, he

looked--he couldn't help it--he looked, and my mother went to snap on the light, and there was nothing. But she was lucky. She ran down the street, and there was an electrician. And he came right up, and he said he blew a fuse. Thank God for that. He could've been killed, you know.

LEVINE: Yes.

BURTT: Yeah. But, little things like that, I remember, that--bad things and good things, and... Then we had a lot of, uh... Sometimes they would come from another place, and they were drunk and they were lookin' for people, and, uh...

LEVINE: During the war?

BURTT: They'd go in the wrong... Uh, no, this was later, when I was pretty, uh, I don't remember. I must've been... I was eleven when my father came home, and, uh... It was either before he came or after... there was a man, he came, and--Oh! That was before he came because he changed the house when he was there. He rebuilt it. And he... The door wasn't very good on the outside of the door, and he came and he shook it and he shook it and he shook

it, and my mother was thinkin' he was gonna break it down, you know? And, of course, we didn't know who it was. It was a stranger in there. So, he opened the kitchen door and pulled in the big key that was in the kitchen door and shut it. And then we went, her and I went, and we opened the window a little--we had a window that opened that way, you know--and we peeked down, and God! He was awful tall, and he had a dark hat on, and I said, "Thank God he didn't come in." No, that was in the late twenties, after the war, you know.

LEVINE: Then this was just a stranger?

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...who just...

BURTT: He was lookin' for another house...

LEVINE: Oh, wrong...

BURTT: ...but he went to the wrong house. And, of course, we were scared. But somebody said he was a looking for another house. It wasn't... My mother didn't have anybody, you know, know anybody. We...

LEVINE: What was it like for you when your father came home?

BURTT: Horrible.

LEVINE: How come?

BURTT: He didn't know anything about children. He didn't want children. I'm sorry to say it. He didn't know anything about children. And Herb was nine, and I was eleven. And my mother let us go out a few minutes at six or seven, you know, to coast. We didn't dare to ask him if we could go out and coast. We, one time we lied, and we said, "Can we go up and sit with Grandma for a little while?" And, of course, we put our winter clothes on and we took the sled, and we went down, just from here down to there, and--where the other kids were. Well [sighs], he happened to go down to the well and got some water, and he heard our voices, and did we get it! We never asked him what again.

LEVINE: Wow.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, he was very strict. He didn't have any...

BURTT: Oh, he was impossible. He was awful. One time, he beat me with a strap, and I never forgave him. I could never stand him afterwards, and... And I hadn't done anything. My brother was a cabin boy on a boat, and he went to Germany, and he bought an accordion. And he came home, and I said, "Can I do it?" you know. And a button fell off, one of the buttons. Well, it wasn't my fault. He said afterwards, he said that button was loose, after I had got the beating. [laughs]

LEVINE: This was your oldest brother who went off as a cabin...

BURTT: Yeah, August. He died a few years ago, up here in, he was here in Maine, too.

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: Yup. It's a sad thing, I'm telling you.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

BURTT: And it shouldn't be told.

LEVINE: Well, it's the way life really was, still...

BURTT: But I didn't, we had a happy childhood, just the same--it wasn't that--because my mother never laid her hands on us.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: We could do exactly what we wanted. And I had my cousins to go to and play with and have a good time, and we went pickin' berries, and we went swimmin', and lived...

LEVINE: Where would you go swimming? Where would you go?

BURTT: Oh, God, down on the foot of the hill, there was the ocean.

LEVINE: Oh, you went swimming in the ocean?

BURTT: Oh, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: Yeah, ocean right out.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: We sat in the window, like that, and saw every boat comin' up and down the water.

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: That's why my mother liked Tenants Harbor so much.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: She really liked it up there.

LEVINE: So, did you ever go out on boats?

BURTT: Only once. Oh, oh, I was, yeah, my mother's uncle, he had a big cigar store. When you get off the train, you go right by his store, and, of course, all the farmers went in there, so he was well off, my mother's uncle. And he had a motorboat, big one, so he took us children and Mama on a picnic one time, and we rode up the fjord. Then my mother was born on an island, so every time we went to visit her mother, we had to go on a boat.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: But that wasn't privately owned, you know, that was someone had a boat to run that, so... And then only once, I went with my friends. Mira's brother had a boat and they took us out some months.

LEVINE: Do you remember going to the island to see your mother's family?

BURTT: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: What kind of a place was that?

BURTT: Well, it was... It was only one place. We couldn't go anywheres. There was water all around. I stayed with my mother's half-sister from, one summer, for a few days. She took me swimmin'. And then when I was very little, I almost got run down with a horse that got wild, and he came runnin'. And they got me out of the way. And, in fact [laughing], when I was, I ran under a horse, one time, comin' down the hill, and somebody got me out of the way. Twice I was... When I was three years old, my mother sat me on a rock in the water, and I fell in. She turned around, and I was layin' under the water. [laughs]

LEVINE: When you were...

BURTT: Little things like that.

LEVINE: Yeah, that you remember. What about, there were wild horses around, you say? There were wild?

BURTT: They were loose.

LEVINE: Oh, they were loose, uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah. And when they felt like running, they ran, you know.

LEVINE: What was the name of the island? Do you remember?

BURTT: Malmö. Same as, there was a city in uh, Skona, in Sweden, and that's Malmö, Malmö.

LEVINE: M-A-L?

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: M-U-R? No.

BURTT: No. Malmö, M-Ö.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: That's that dot again.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: And the island was Malmö, -ön. That's an island,
-ön is an island.

LEVINE: I see.

BURTT: Yeah. So, she was born there, but she came to Lysekil
when she was young, and she was a babysitter for a big
bakery man, and his wife had so many kids that, that she
was working for them...

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

BURTT: ...when she met my father years ago.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

LEVINE: What kind of bread did you have? Did you get your bread
from a bakery, or did, like, your mother make bread?

BURTT: My mother made rye bread every other week or week.

LEVINE: Would she make a lot of loaves, or...

BURTT: Yeah. And we wanted the white bread with wheat, you know. And we just didn't have the money. We begged and begged if we could go to the bakery and get a loaf, a round loaf of that. But it cost forty cents, and that forty cents would...

LEVINE: That was a lot for then.

BURTT: Yeah, it would give us the flour and the yeast and [laughing] everything that went into the whole--and she had a trough. Trough is that what you call it? Wooden...

LEVINE: Yeah, trough.

BURTT: Yeah, about that long and that wide, and there she, that's all that she did was make bread in there.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: And set it and covered it up and then baked the bread. But she made bread all the time, and she made bread up

here in Maine, but she made it with un-sifted rye flour. You can hardly get it today, but she got it, and everybody in this Tenants Harbor and Brockland and--she had many friends. My mother had many friends up here in Maine: Swedish and Norwegian and Finnish. All, they all liked my mother. She was a... She made that, and they said, "Oh, can we, you know, I hope we have sandwiches of Anna's bread."

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: They all loved that bread.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah. She made very good bread, but she wasn't a cake maker at all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about religion? Was your family religious at all? Did you go to church?

BURTT: I had to be religious. I was forced to it from the teacher in school

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: She kept a tab on us. My mother never went to church.
And here, of course, we never went to church.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: "No, I'm not goin' down there to them." What did she call
them...hypo- hypocris-

LEVINE: Hypocrites.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: [laughs] Uh-huh.

BURTT: 'Cause they come out of there and then they tore
everybody's down when they come out of church.

LEVINE: Do you remember any celebrations in Sweden, any kinds
of festivals or celebrations, or like, when somebody got
married, weddings, or...

BURTT: No. No weddings. All I remember is funerals. [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, what do you remember about them in Sweden?

BURTT: Well, they had, we had two rooms, like we had in the house. You set up a table, and you had men in one room and women in the other when they came back from--either before they went, or they come back...

LEVINE: From a cemetery?

BURTT: And they had coffee and cake and cookies and, yeah. And, of course my mother had that both for my grandmother and my father's sister. She died in a Spanish flu when she was twenty-nine years old. And they had--I remember her...

LEVINE: You remember that?

BURTT: Yeah. I remember her well. She was nice.

LEVINE: What did you...

BURTT: But she didn't bother with us either because she worked.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: And she spent money on beautiful clothes and...

LEVINE: Huh.

BURTT: ...and things like that, and... She lived with Grandma.
She never got married.

LEVINE: Did she live with the grandmother that you used to clean
the house for?

BURTT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, she lived there.

LEVINE: Yeah. So, did you ever go anyplace with her, or did you
ever do things with your aunt, your father's...

BURTT: No, I never went anyplace. I only went to the island with
my mother and then, one time... But my brother, he went
up to another state or city with my grandmother once.
They sent him up there for one summer. They had a farm,
so he went there, but Herb and I, we never went anyplace.
But we had a whole city and every place we wanna go.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: We had a beautiful, beautiful spa, like, where the rich
people came. The king came one year.

LEVINE: To your town?

BURTT: Yes. The king of Sweden was there one year, and they had special baths for them, you know. And then they had, uh, we had a park where they had a beautiful, beautiful orchestra all summer sittin' out there in the open. Anybody could come and listen to them, and, of course, they had these high-class opera music or what do you call it, you know. There was no jazz or... And there was, well...

LEVINE: An orchestra?

BURTT: Yeah, big orchestra, every summer, came to the park, and then they had a special one out near the spa where the rich people were sitting out in the... And, of course, they had the outdoors where you could, they can sit, and then they had a big hall where they had the big dinners and breakfast and... My aunt worked there and cooked one year...

LEVINE: Hm.

BURTT: ...for the summer people. There was all people that came

there.

LEVINE: What was it like living in a country where there was a king and a royal family?

BURTT: Mm, it didn't bother me. [laughs]

LEVINE: [laughs]

BURTT: No, but I tell ya, I was gonna tell you, uh... Well, it'll come to me.

LEVINE: Did it have to do with the spa? No.

BURTT: I'm trying to see what I was gonna say. It was really important. Yeah, in that park, where we could go that was open, there, they had fireworks, and, oh, they were beautiful when we... Oh, looking for fireworks.

LEVINE: When would they have the fireworks? On what occasions, do you know?

BURTT: Midsummer, I guess. Midsummer, in the middle, uh, end of June. And then they might have another, you know, for, draw people to come into that 'cause they had another

dining room and hall for people to come in 'cause we never saw it. We didn't have money for that. But the young people could go, you know, there, and--the ones that worked.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: The people...

LEVINE: Was there dancing and that kind of thing?

BURTT: Oh, God, dancing. Ugh! Three times a week. Yeah, I did go to a few dances.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what kind of...

BURTT: Oh, yeah, there was one time, we were six girls, and my mother would not let me go because I belonged to the Good Templars. You know, Good Templars is people that don't drink.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: And we were invited out to an island of the same place as my mother came from, and so we hired this man. In fact, he came to this country, and he was a good friend of my mother's, him and his wife, after that. But we all gave him money, and I didn't give him money because I didn't have it. I got in just the same, in the car. And he took us to this place. It wasn't far. And we danced. We had a, there was, out on the island, and then, like a schoolhouse, you know. And I went there a few times, but... And, uh...

LEVINE: Was it the same kind of dancing that people do here?

BURTT: Waltz--no, it was waltz it was the most. And then the hambo, and, uh...

LEVINE: Is that a dance?

BURTT: I had a cousin--yeah--I had a cousin...

LEVINE: Hambo.

BURTT: She taught me how to do hambo when I was thirteen, and then there was schottis, and then there was, of course,

another one. Anyway, we somehow, we couldn't get back with him, or something, so...

LEVINE: From the island?

BURTT: Yeah. So, there were a lot of fishermen in that island, and they got us, and they took us home across the water that wasn't very long, but we were all there, sittin' on the boat, and I remember that. And we got home about, and we had a long way to run, from here to Lexington, to get up to the houses. So, that was excitement enough for a fifteen-year-old.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what kind of music would there be when you went to a dance?

BURTT: Accordion and violin, always.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BURTT: Accordion and violin.

LEVINE: Was your family musical in any way? Did anybody...

BURTT: They could've been if they had wanted to, but they, never seems to want to.

LEVINE: Well, now what do you remember about school, going to school, and what was school like for you there?

BURTT: If they had a school like that in this country, they could teach the children to read and write.

LEVINE: What was it like?

BURTT: You'd lined up, your class, twenty-eight children. You lined them up, and the teacher stood on the steps, and then when she says, "March," then you walked up the steps 'cause there were stairs to go up to the--underneath, there was rooms for cookin' for school, for children, feedin' children. And then there was classrooms for men to work with the wood.

LEVINE: Oh, huh.

BURTT: And then the girls had rooms where they got to be sewing.

So, they had to go up these stairs, and on one end of the building, there was the first or second grade, and on the other was the higher grades. And you marched right in, and you know the bench you were gonna sit in, and you know that the girl or, you were sitting next to, she goes on one side and I go on the other, and there we were, row after row. You never moved that chair. You never turned around and talked. You sat there, and you looked at the slate up there on the wall, or whatever you call it, and the teacher, she was sittin' up there. The last year I was there, I had a man teacher, and I hated him.

LEVINE: Why did you hate him?

BURTT: 'Cause he insulted me, and I couldn't say anything. And I never forget anybody insulting me, you know.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BURTT: I used to, when I think of something, I used to go like that, and, one day, he stood looking, and, of course, I was very close to him, I--you know, he was up there, and I was here, and he saw me...

LEVINE: Scratching your head.

BURTT: Yeah. And he said--I never told my mother this, I never told my anybody that--he says, "Ebba is disturbing the lice." That wasn't a nice thing to say because Mama kept us clean. I never forgot that. My cousin wanted me to come in and say hello to him when I was there. He was an old man now, you know. I said, "I never want to see that man again."

LEVINE: Was he your last teacher?

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Your last teacher you had?

BURTT: Yeah, yeah. I graduated from him. But his wife thought I was the best writer, penmanship...

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: ...in the class.

LEVINE: Was his wife also...

BURTT: No.

LEVINE: ...in the school.

BURTT: No. She lived, they lived there. They had an apartment, and she had a little baby boy. They had an apartment that you could walk in, not from the classroom, but from the steps.

LEVINE: So, it was attached to the school.

BURTT: Yeah. But you had one hour of, um, when you came in the morning, you sang a hymn. And then you had one hour of Bible class, or the Bible. And we had catechism and Bible history book. Two little different books. And we had one hour of that. Then the next hour was either reading, writing, or arithmetic. And then we go home for lunch, and we stay two hours. And then the next class that he had, the teacher
Had, they came in for two hours, from twelve to two.

LEVINE: While you were home for lunch.

BURTT: Yeah. And then they go out from two, and then we come back from two to five. But we had five--every other day was changed.

LEVINE: Oh, and then...

BURTT: One day, I went to school at eight in the morning, and the next I went at ten, ten to twelve. Eight to ten one day, ten to twelve the next, and then back in the afternoon, to five one day, and the other, from two to four. It altered and, because they had no room, so they had the classes come.

LEVINE: I see.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And the other children would do it the other way around?

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, did you have a lot of teachers?

BURTT: Only one.

LEVINE: So, he...

BURTT: Only one taught everything.

LEVINE: ...he taught everything.

BURTT: He taught everything. Even the women, we even learned electricity, about electricity, how it didn't mix with water. And, uh... And, of course, geography. I love geography. I know every city, every state in Europe. And we had to, when we studied one state, we had to draw a map of that state, and a line, the water, where the water come in, and where... Oh, we had really, really teaching. Yeah, teaching. And we had an hour at each thing we were doing.

LEVINE: So, you got a good education.

BURTT: [laughs] That's how I got my beautiful job in Raytheon. I was there for eleven years in the contract office, here in Bedford and Waltham.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: They got me in on my education from Sweden.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. Well, now, what grade did you graduate from? What was, like... You went to school when you were... Did you go, like, when you were five or six, or did you start...

BURTT: You start at six.

LEVINE: You start at six.

BURTT: And I ended at thirteen.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: And then we had to go to the minister and get confirmed.

LEVINE: That was the usual pattern.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: You went to school...

BURTT: Yeah. And after that, you started goin' to the minister. And God knows what we studied there. I don't remember a thing.

LEVINE: How long--did you go, like, all day? Would you go...

BURTT: Only once a week.

LEVINE: Once a week.

BURTT: Once a week to him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: But then we had to get all dressed up for confirmation. We had to go up to that church twice, one Sunday and then the following Sunday. And that stinkin' [laughs]--I shouldn't talk like that. That minister, I hated him, too.

LEVINE: Why did you...

BURTT: He said we have to have black dresses, black dresses in May! Because we were so poor...

LEVINE: [laughs] Oh, no.

BURTT: ...that we couldn't afford white. And all the other

classes, they had white dresses, white shoes and white dresses.

LEVINE: So, it was your whole class that he wanted to dress in black?

BURTT: Yeah. I was so young, I couldn't go with my class.

LEVINE: Oh, you finished younger.

BURTT: I was too--yeah--I was too young. He wouldn't take me. And my father was home, then. And he went up, and he was fightin' with the minister. And the minister says, "Never mind. She's too young."

LEVINE: So, you didn't get confirmed?

BURTT: Oh, yeah. I got confirmed, but I had to be home for a whole year! And that killed my father. It just about killed him that I couldn't get confirmed and go out and work at thirteen or fourteen.

LEVINE: Well, what was the usual thing? In other words, you go through school, you graduate, then you go once a week to the classes with the minister. And would people, would

the girls, like, work during that time, or they wouldn't work until after they were confirmed?

BURTT: No.

LEVINE: How did that work?

BURTT: You couldn't go, you couldn't get a job until you were past fourteen.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: Yeah. Yeah, you had to be confirmed before you...

LEVINE: Now, was everybody Lutheran, or were there other kinds of...

BURTT: Oh, no. There was Methodists. And then there was some that, the Salvation Army. I loved Salvation Army.

LEVINE: So, how come you liked them?

BURTT: Oh, I loved going there on a winter evening and listening. And they played and the singing, and I liked it. And, of course, it was someplace to go. [laughs] Not that I

went very often because we went here so soon...

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: ...right after, you know.

LEVINE: What about the--what do you call it--the prohibition, the group that was concerned with not drinking and not smoking? What did you call them before?

BURTT: Good Templars. That's what they call them in this country.

LEVINE: Temperates, temperacy.

BURTT: Temperates, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Were they active in Sweden when you were...

BURTT: Well, anybody that didn't want it. If you were drinking, you couldn't belong to that. It was like a lodge.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: Yeah. And you couldn't belong there. And they had parties and dances and picnics and all that kind of stuff.

LEVINE: I see. So, the only people who belonged to that were people who believed that you shouldn't drink and you shouldn't...

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...smoke, and you shouldn't...

BURTT: Yeah. And, of course, I was so young, that that was the only thing I could belong to. I couldn't belong to anything else because I was too young.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: So let's see. When you got to this country, and your mother was here, and you were here, when you used to talk about Sweden and the old days and all that, what were the kinds of things that you and your mother remembered and talked about that had to do with your life there?

BURTT: Only what I've been telling you now, I guess.

LEVINE: Yeah, mm-hmm.

BURTT: It was nothing good to talk about, only suffering [laughs]
for my mother.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, when your father...

BURTT: She was so sick when her Henry was born that they didn't
think she was going to... And I was in the next room,
and he was born the 27th of December. And I was thirteen.
And they carried him out and laid him on my arm, and I
was the first one that held him.

LEVINE: Aww.

BURTT: So, he was with me in this house for one year.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: Went to Lexington High, but then he went to the service
and never came back. He went in September and was dead

in December. That was hard on Mama.

LEVINE: Mm. Mm-hmm. So, when your father came back to Sweden, then, did you and your brothers and your mother, did you come back with your father...

BURTT: No.

LEVINE: ...or you came back first?

BURTT: Two years after.

LEVINE: Two years after. So...

BURTT: Yeah, two years. He, yeah, it was two years, and then we came.

LEVINE: Now, how come you left when you did?

BURTT: He wasn't gonna take us over here.

LEVINE: I see. So, your mother decided.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: What made her decide to come at that point?

BURTT: Well, my God, if you sit and suffer for eight years without a man, and then he comes home dressed up with six suits, silk shirts, beautiful clothes. He gave them all to his brother, and he took off to America again. So, you know, she woke up, probably. She said nothing doin'. We had a nice little house. She got four thousand dollars for it, and that covered our trip.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: So, that was my mother that brought me over here.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: It's an awful saying, hard feeling. I don't like to have it out in the open, but I suppose I'm getting it there, now.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, it's the truth, and that happened with families. The father often came first, and then families broke up, and, I mean, that was part of...

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...what happened to people.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, in other words, your father came back, and then your mother decided, and your mother sold the house.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how did you get from Lysekil...

BURTT: Yeah. Yeah, we took a boat to Gothenberg.

LEVINE: To Gothenberg.

BURTT: Yeah, and then we went on there, Stockholm in Gothenberg. And my mother was so miserable, sick, seasick, that she could hardly be--I don't think she was on the deck at all. And Herb and I, we had to watch Henry because he was only two years old. And, uh...

LEVINE: So, was your older brother with you?

BURTT: Oh, he went in March, that same year, but he went in March,

early.

LEVINE: Now, was he able to send money back to the family when he went? Or...

BURTT: Oh, no.

LEVINE: No.

BURTT: He had to get adjusted to be in this country, and he had to learn to speak English, and, uh... That, I tell you... They talk about these Spanish and people that won't learn to speak English. The Finnish people up there, they didn't want to learn English.

LEVINE: They wanted to keep the Finnish ways, and...

BURTT: Well, I tell you, it's a, it's a shame because you're here in this country, and you should be able to speak. I don't speak very good because now I got new teeth, and it makes it worse. [laughs]

LEVINE: [laughs] Well, you sound fine to me. Okay, so what did your brother do, your oldest brother, when he came before the...

BURTT: They all were paving cutters.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: And that's in a stone quarry. But they didn't work in a quarry. They're all over Maine. You've probably seen these big quarries. They got the block of granite on top of the ground, and they stand there by a big, round tub. You can see it today, if you want to, over at Clark Island, they still have it, yeah. And they all were, uh...

LEVINE: Paving cutters.

BURTT: But Herb didn't want to do that. So, he went and he worked in Snow's Shipyard. And...

LEVINE: Making ships? Building?

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: And he learned to do--he went to school up in Tenants Harbor for a year, you know, so he really learned the

English language and reading and writing. And he learned blueprint, so he got a job with Scott's Paper Company, and he was with them for years, Herb was. But he had to go way up to northern part of Maine, there, to work for them.

LEVINE: Where did he learn the blueprinting?

BURTT: On his own.

LEVINE: Blueprints. On his own?

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: You can teach yourself, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh.

BURTT: You can teach yourself, if you want to.

LEVINE: Now, what...

BURTT: That's how I have done it.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO
BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

LEVINE: Were the men working with paving, cutting paving stone in Sweden as well? Or...

BURTT: My father was, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: And it was so bad there, that's why he went to this country first.

LEVINE: I see. And did your father go to Maine? Is that where your father was...

BURTT: Well, he had been down in South Carolina or North Carolina and worked down there. My father made awful good money when he was here right after the First World War.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: He made good money, but I guess he knew how to spend it, too. He had a good time.

LEVINE: So...

BURTT: So, then we, uh, he came up to Maine to work in the Clark Island quarry. And then he found a house in Tenants Harbor for us.

LEVINE: Oh, so he was... When your mother decided to come, she let him know.

BURTT: Oh, God, yes.

LEVINE: And then he went to Maine?

BURTT: He went down to Ellis Island, nine o' clock in the morning of the 10th, 11th--I don't know which-- because we were up in Maine, the 14th of May. And that I know. And so, between where the boat landed in Ellis Island after nine days, they said it took, or something, they wouldn't let us off!

LEVINE: Why not?

BURTT: Well, that's the stupid people who worked there! That's the very stupid people that worked there! We were healthy and well, and they had tested us.

LEVINE: Did they test you before you got on the ship?

BURTT: Oh, God, you couldn't go if you were [laughs], you couldn't get on, leave Sweden, if there was something the matter with ya.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about those tests before you left?

BURTT: Well, we had to have the doctor--no--used to see the doctor, and he, you know, look at you, and then you go. But when you get to Ellis Island, they check you and pass you. And my mother and two brothers and me, three of us, we were on one side on the room, and my father was on the other side, in the same building, on the next room, from nine in the morning to two in the afternoon. Well, there he was with a wife and kids that couldn't speak English, and he had to go and find a place for us, and I guess he didn't have enough money to go to a hotel, so he went to a Swedish church, minister, and they put us up for the night. So, we got a Fall River boat the next morning to Boston.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: And then we had, we had, uh, we went from Fall River to Boston. Then we took the train to Maine, and my father took two men, and I met them here in, uh--after twenty years, I met one, and got real friendly, you know, with him and his wife--that he brought from Ellis Island to Boston.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BURTT: Two of them, I got real friendly when I--I didn't have anything to do with them, but we were friends, so I met them at dances, and I'd dance with them, and--after twenty years.

LEVINE: Huh. Well, what else do you remember about Ellis Island for those hours that you had to stay there?

BURTT: Nothin'! They wouldn't let us do nothin'.

LEVINE: Could you see that your father was there?

BURTT: No.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: But he told us afterwards. And finally, they let us out. But all the people, they kept them there. There was two girls. They were much older than me, you know. They were in twenties, I guess. And one of them got a cough on the boat on the way over. She got a little cold. They separated those two girls.

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: They separated--they let that one go and the other one. And, you know, that was terrible for two girls that couldn't talk English, and God knows what they... One was probably going to one neighbor or relation, and the other... So, finally, they... And, you know my mother had a little black suitcase, about that size. And the man come and crossed it, you know, that it was okay, I guess. And my little two-year-old brother, he...

END OF TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO

LEVINE: Okay, this is tape two, now, and I'm speaking with Ebba Burt on July 21st, 1995, and we, when we ran out of the tape one, you were talking about your little brother, Henry, who was two years old, at Ellis Island. So, maybe, could you just repeat that about the suitcase?

BURTT: Yeah. We were waitin' with the other people on Ellis Island, and we had been there from nine in the morning. And it was two o' clock in the afternoon before my father could come in and take us off. And my little brother, he ran over--he was two years old--he ran over and he wiped that chalk off my mother's suitcase three times...

LEVINE: [laughs]

BURTT: ...before the man told Mama, "Watch him, so he don't take it off anymore."

LEVINE: [laughs]

BURTT: Yeah, and then we came to Boston, and we got a train.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the Swedish church, was it--that you stayed at that first night? Did you...

BURTT: No, I don't remember anything about that. I was so confused. But I know we went someplace, and they put us up for the night.

LEVINE: Do you know, by any chance... There's a Swedish Seaman's Home on Water Street...

BURTT: That's probably where, that's probably where we...

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Bet you that's where he took us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: 'Cause he would never take us to a hotel.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: But you can't remember anything about that night?

BURTT: Not a thing!

LEVINE: Okay.

BURTT: I only remember we got on a, on the boat, from, uh...

LEVINE: From New York to...

BURTT: From New York to Fall River.

LEVINE: ...Fall River. And then, when you landed in, then you went right to Tenants Harbor?

BURTT: Yes.

LEVINE: And...

BURTT: He had rented the house.

LEVINE: Do you know why he went to Tenants Harbor? Was there...

BURTT: Yeah, he was working--he couldn't--there was thousand men in that quarry at that time. He couldn't find a place for us. So, he rented this awful, awful, miserable place up there in Tenants Harbor. I guess the house is still standing. It's next to the Oddfellows Hall.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: And then they bought the little house next to that, you know. And that's not really anything you want to hear about.

LEVINE: Okay.

BURTT: We were there, and my mother was pregnant twice there.

LEVINE: Was there a large Swedish community there when you first arrived?

BURTT: Well, as I told you, there was thousand men...

LEVINE: Were they Swedish?

BURTT: ...and half of them were Swedish.

LEVINE: Oh, half of them were Swedish.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what else was...

BURTT: I couldn't go out with them because they were in the twenties and twenty-six, and I was just sixteen.

LEVINE: So, what did you do?

BURTT: So... Well, I, um... My father got me a job right away, and let's not talk about that.

LEVINE: Okay.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

BURTT: I got a, uh, as a maid for a doctor's widow in Rockland, and she was very strict. I couldn't go out. I could go to a movie at seven and be back at nine, and...

LEVINE: You lived there, then, with...

BURTT: Yeah, I had to live there with her. That's, I couldn't be out... Then I could, um, I could go to Tenants Harbor Saturday night, if I could get a ride. There was a Finnish dance on Main Street, and I can go to that, but I couldn't

go back to her house, twelve o' clock, 'cause she was asleep.

LEVINE: Well now, in 1926, there were Swedish people, Finnish people. What other groups were coming from Europe, at that time, to Tenants Harbor? Do you remember? Was it, like, thousands?

BURTT: I don't think there was many Finns. They were all here.

LEVINE: They were already here.

BURTT: They were all Finnish people, yeah. And the Norwegian were here. And we were the last family that came, I guess, from Sweden. Only this John and Viola, they came just about the same time. But Viola still lives up in the nursing home in Rockland, though.

LEVINE: Oh, yes, I met her. Yeah.

BURTT: Oh, you did?

LEVINE: Yes, uh-huh.

BURTT: She was the best friend of my mother.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: Yeah. She was nice, but they didn't like my father. None of them liked my father.

LEVINE: Was there an Italian group of people in Tenants Harbor in the quarries at that time?

BURTT: No, not that I know of.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: No, mostly Finns and... There were some English.

LEVINE: How were you received as somebody who had just immigrated to this country? How did the townspeople act? Were they nice to you? Did they call you greenhorns, or how were they?

BURTT: Yeah, they'd just as soon sit there and laugh at you,

but I didn't pay any attention. When I came back the first summer, I had a bathing suit, and I put a coat on me, and I walked down to the, you know, where Norma Lowell lived there?

LEVINE: By the, with the...

BURTT: Natalie's sister-in-law on that road.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: And did you ever hear of Whitney Wheeler?

LEVINE: Yes.

BURTT: Yeah. He came and picked up groceries for my mother for years.

LEVINE: Really?

BURTT: Yeah. Yeah. But, of course, they were so high and mighty...

LEVINE: You know...

BURTT: ...because I couldn't talk to them then, you know.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: I had to come down to Boston to learn to read and write.

LEVINE: Really? What did you do? How did you...

BURTT: I met two Norwegian girls, and they worked in the same place as me. We worked here in Belmont Hill School, private school, all of us.

LEVINE: So, you three came down from Maine...

BURTT: No.

LEVINE: No?

BURTT: No, they were born here, in Mattapan

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: ...the Norwegian girls, and I met them, and... But they were my age, and they both... Every night when we didn't have anything to do, we went out for a walk and things,

but they taught me how to read and write.

LEVINE: Wow. So, how did you happen to leave Maine and come down this way?

BURTT: My God! Working for five dollars a week!

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: At least, down here, I got room and board and twelve dollars. And then, of course, I was only here two years and I got married.

LEVINE: Oh. In Massachusetts were you, when you got married?

BURTT: Yeah, eighteen years old.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: Yeah. Stupid.

LEVINE: And did you marry someone from Sweden?

BURTT: [chuckles] No. He was born in Connecticut from Canadian people.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: And the other one was born in New Hampshire from, half-Scotch and half-English people.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: I never married no Swede.

LEVINE: Swede, uh-huh. Now, how do you feel about yourself? Do you feel like you're half-Swedish and half-American, or how do you see your heritage and your, and who you are, as far as your...

BURTT: Well, I'm proud that I'm Swedish.

LEVINE: What makes you proud?

BURTT: I never--well, it's just something in you! You're proud to be an American, aren't you?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah, it comes naturally, you know. You just, I can't

help it, but, uh...being proud of being a Swede. I, uh...well, that's it. That's it. I'm Swedish, and I'm it, and I'm proud of it.

LEVINE: [laughs] Uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you think Swedish people have certain qualities? In other words, when you say somebody's a Swede, what does that usually...

BURTT: They're no different any other race.

LEVINE: Anybody is... You don't think that there're certain characteristics...

BURTT: Yeah, they can lie, they can cheat, they can make you feel rotten [laughing], if you know what that means. I shouldn't say that, I suppose, but... They can be insulting. But, you see, I lived so long now that I lost all my girlfriends.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: There isn't anyone left. I had Swedish girlfriends. And one of them, we were widows at the same time, so we went around, we had, you know, well, never mind that...

LEVINE: Well, now, how is this time in your life, this time of what I guess we call "old age," at this point? What...

BURTT: Well, I like it where I am. I wanna stay where I am, and I don't want anybody comin' in and doin' anything for--I wanna work in there as much as I can. I wanna do for myself. But I have to get ready because somebody is gonna pick me up tomorrow morning at nine. And it takes me so long to figure out what I gotta take with me. My son--I'm going up Owl's Head...

LEVINE: Oh, nice.

BURTT: ...so I'll be going down to Tenants Harbor.

LEVINE: Oh, great.

BURTT: Yeah. And they gonna pick me up, nine, tomorrow morning.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BURTT: And I don't have anything to do with any neighbors around here at all.

LEVINE: Why is that?

BURTT: And... I just don't have anything in common with them, you know.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: I have a family over here in the back. They have six children. And them kids will come over here and do anything for me.

LEVINE: Oh, that's nice.

BURTT: Yeah, the mother isn't very well, so she--but the whole family was over here one winter and shoveled snow.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: She wasn't a... and all of them came.

LEVINE: That must've made you feel good.

BURTT: So, you have to stick--yeah, my God! I went out the back, and I looked, and there was six, family, so, uh... No, I'm, uh... My oldest son is up now with Tommy, and he lives in Florida in the winter. So, I...

LEVINE: Now, how many children do you have?

BURTT: I have two boys.

LEVINE: Wait! Careful, you've got the mic on. Just wait till we finish, and then...

BURTT: Yeah, they are right there.

LEVINE: Well, so what...

BURTT: I have two boys, and they have three children each: two boys and a girl, and one boy and two girls, the oldest. And now they, they're having children. So, I'm a great-grandmother. And I have the new one. He's only three, four days old. And that grandson graduated from M.I.T. So, he's really... And the other one graduated from a college--the other grandson--he graduated from Chico College in California. And he stayed out there for twelve years. And he got in with a company that--he is

a salesman for them, and he makes millions of dollars at each sale. He's way beyond me. I can't even figure him out. He's in Scotland now, today.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Taking care of the business in Scotland.

LEVINE: Wow.

BURTT: When he comes home, I won't see him. He goes right to California, and--but he has an office here in Burlington.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: I been to his office. It's a little [laughing] cubby hole, about this big, and insulated--you know, you press a button to get in there.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah, and everything is automatic. But, uh...

LEVINE: Well, how do you think your life would've been different if you'd never left Sweden?

BURTT: Well, I would have never have got to work in an office, and taking care of contracts, and knowin' English, and knowin'--with my memory is what got me that job.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But if you had stayed in Sweden, you probably would've, what, worked for families, or...

BURTT: I would've got nothin'.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Nothin'. Because there was nobody behind me there, to, uh...

LEVINE: Who was behind you here? What helped you here? In other words...

BURTT: I lost my husband when I was thirty-eight.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: I had two boys in this house, and then I had sense enough to go out and start, and see where I was. I had a car. I could drive a car. I went down here, and I just, uh,

like, I went into one place down there that was making jewelry, and I said, "I hear you're hirin'." I didn't know one from the other. I never heard that they were hirin'. He said, "Yeah. Go on in to see Bill." So, after I was there, I was packing jewelry, and, of course, I couldn't go for too much because I had been sitting here with two kids for all those years. And then I had a car. And then they were going in to send the jewelry down to Provincetown to have it gold-plated. So, then I said, "Can I do that?" So, they gave me eight cents a mile taking that in to the Provincetown Street down in Boston. So, I went down--I broke a tooth, and I went to a laboratory in Summerville, and I said to this Mrs. Delaney--her name was Anderson, Nee Anderson. She used to be a Swede from Buchta. Anyway, I said, "Oh, I like this work," I said, "Do you know where I can get a job in a dental lab," you know. She said, "No, but I know a dentist that wants an assistant, in Auburndale. And no, you don't need any, uh, I mean, experience.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: So, I drove out to Auburndale, and I met Dr. Ansley. He says, "Come right in." I went to Parkson Snow's in Watertown and bought myself some uniforms and some white

shoes. And I stayed there for almost a year and a half. And then he was gonna take off for Maine for a month, and they wanted me to sit there. I had just got over bein' a widow, you know, and get my mind set and all this. So, I had adjusted myself to what I wanted to do and what I can do. But this is not interesting to you.

LEVINE: Well, it's interesting because you really started over again, you might as well say...

BURTT: I did.

LEVINE: ...on your own.

BURTT: I did. I started over because I didn't wanna lose this house.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

BURTT: So, anyway, he, uh, I stayed there, and then I gave him a notice. Oh, he was so mad. Oh, that man was so mad to me. He never said goodbye to me. He was going to Maine for a month, and I told him I didn't want to sit in that office all by myself, in his big house. Then I had a chance to drive a girl down--a Swedish girl came visitin'--and

I had a chance to go and, takin' her for a ride down to Washington and Pennsylvania and New York and she had an uncle lived in Billerica. He was eighty years old. And he said, "Would you take her around and show her a little bit of America?" Well, and she say, "Yeah." And she was my age, so Anna Lisa and I, we sat in the front seat and he sat in the back. And I took off for New York. And we landed in one of the hotels down near Eighth Street one night when we got there. So, we got in, and the old man paid everything, and we got a room. And I walked right into Jimmy Durante [laughs].

LEVINE: [laughs]

BURTT: And I said, "Look, look!" "What? What?" she said, "What?" she did. She never seen the guy. I said, "There's Jimmy Durante." He was just coming out of the hotel. Well, we drove down to Atlantic City. We drove down to Philadelphia. We went down to Washington, and my son, Gordon, had just come out of the service, and--he blind, you know. My oldest son is blind.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: And he had told me to go and see this man. And so I called

him up, and I said, "I'm down here visiting in Washington, and Gordon told me to call you up." He said, "I'll pick you right up and take you all over the place." The only place we missed was the mint. He didn't, he took us everywhere, but... And we had lunch, and he says, uh, and then he told me the next day to know what to do. So, we went all around Washington. Then we went and drove to Philadelphia. This is me driving all this, over. And I landed up in a hotel up on the hill in Philadelphia. And we went down to the shopping center. And Anna Lisa spotted--she could speak English, you know--so she spotted this place. She said, "There is a place you can hire a car and go for sightseeing." So, we went in, and we hired him. So, I said, "Come and pick us up at the hotel up there." And so he was talking and telling us where we were going. So, I said to him, "You better speak louder," I said, "because she can understand English, but she's from Sweden, and that's, it takes a little longer." "Girls come on up and sit beside me," he says. So, both of us went up. Remember now, I was in my, just forty [laughs]. And so he said, "I'm gonna take you down to the first Swedish church in this country. It's not my territory," he says, "but I'm gonna take you." So, he took us down to that church, right down on the waterfront in Philadelphia. Well, you should've seen the

people comin', jumpin' out of the houses around there. A big limousine comin' down, you know. [laughs] I said, "My God!" I said, "It must be a poor place down here, when a limousine attracts..." So, this man, he was a very nice man. He was older than us, but he came right in the church with us. And the minister took us all through the church and told us all about everything. And I bought some, a couple of pieces from the church, you know. Then we went back, and then from there, I, uh--the heck did I go? I guess that was the end of the trip. [laughs]

LEVINE: Then, when did you start working in Raytheon?

BURTT: Oh, yeah, I was gonna tell ya, after we came home, and then I went, I heard somebody, a dentist wanted an assistant that didn't need anything. And he was an awful man. Oh, my God. He wouldn't sterilize the tools, and it bothered me, you know, because I was so clean and everything neat, and, well, that's a lucky thing to go with a Swede, so... He hired me right off, and, of course, I had the clothes, so I went to work. That was in Medford. And I worked for him there for a few months, I guess. I got there because in August, he says, I'm going on vacation, and I said, "What about me?" And he said, "I'm closing up the place." And I said, uh, he said, "Go and

get unemployment insurance." Good God, I didn't even know what unemployment insurance [laughing] was. But I did. And then... I don't know, I don't quite remember if I saw a notice in Raytheon or not, but anyway, I had dressed up in a nice blue suit. And, in fact, I had a fur cap, and I had that with me. And I drove into Boston. No, I didn't. I called her up. I said, "Are you gonna meet me for lunch, like we planned," you know, there was this girl. And she said, "Oh, my gosh, I gotta work," she said. "I can't go." So, I got in the car and I drove over to Waltham and went up and, I called the receptionist there that I want to see, Anne Myrick. And I said to her, "I," uh, "lookin' for a job." I don't know whether I said... uh, I know I didn't say, "Are you hiring?" like I did down here. I know I didn't. And I told her I had been working for a dentist. And she said, "Are you good at filing?" And, of course, filing was the best [laughing] thing I could do. In the meantime I had taken ten months of typing down at high school in Arlington. So, anyway, she said, "Can you come and work tomorrow?" I was there Wednesday, and so you see, I fell into everything.

LEVINE: And then you worked your way up.

BURTT: I said, "No, but I'll come the next day," I said. I didn't

have any clothes to go work in an office. I had dress clothes. I had good dress clothes.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: But then I had that, been working with that white uniforms for almost two years. So, there--and, oh, was she nice, Anne Myrick. Her and I--I don't know why she--she really took to me. I don't know why, but... She gave me everything I asked for. They sent me out to Wayland for eight months in the office. And a Swedish girl called me up. She worked, she was high up with the big shots. And, of course, she was born here, you know. And she said, "They're hiring a person for that job in Bedford." And, of course, Bedford was, I had been working there, one time. And, so when Anne came up, I said, "Anne, I hear you have an opening in Bedford office." And she said, "Yes. I'll go right back to the office and talk to Marie and see if she'll take the Wayland job, and you take the Bedford." I got it.

LEVINE: Now, what job was that? That was the filing? No.

BURTT: That was filing the contracts...

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

BURTT: ...and the memos and taking in the mail and typing in the mail and, uh--oh, that was a really big job because that was a contract by the air force. The air force contract and all them folders and I had to remember memos. I had to put them, filing incoming letters, outgoing letters. Any man come and asks for, "I want a letter that came in that day from so-and-so." I had to know where they were. So, that was a responsible job, and you said, you're file clerk, and all that, but I had lot more to do [laughing] than being a file clerk.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: But that's how I started. That's how I got in there. I sat in the office in Watertown, Waltham for three weeks before they let the woman that was taking care of that filing--they had air force and navy and army, you know, three contracts. And them days, they were big contracts.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, did you stay there until you retired?

BURTT: Stayed there for eleven years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did...

BURTT: And I married in the mean time, remember, well now...

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: ...with this "Burtt."

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: And I lived on Fallen Road, down there, for twelve years, with him. Then he had a heart attack, and he died. But he had a good job. He worked on a railroad, and when I was fifty-five, I said, "What am I working for?" I had this house. I got the rent from this house. And whatever income we had, he wanted me to pay the tax on. So, I quit.
[chuckles]

LEVINE: Hmm.

BURTT: I quit work when I was fifty-five.

LEVINE: Hmm. When you think back over your life, what do you think of the...

BURTT: I made a mistake getting married so early.

LEVINE: Ah. Mm-hmm.

BURTT: Yeah. I made a big mistake. Like, I met this Elaine, down the pool, here. I knew her father and mother. Their name was Stiller. His name was Stiller, Al Stiller. He married a Swedish girlfriend of mine. And I met her down to the swimming pool down there. And I told her, I said, uh--she had the [washter PH] man that she knew and I knew her for, years ago. And she had gone up to, you know, this--shut that off because this is nothing.

LEVINE: Yeah, we're turning this off. One thing is, did you ever have, like, heroes in your life? In other words, either somebody you knew and you looked up to that encouraged you?

BURTT: No.

LEVINE: No.

BURTT: No, nobody encouraged me because I had my own will, and my boys knows it, too. I do what I want. I am my own boss.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm, yeah. And how about how you've changed over... Can you, when you think back over your life, do you think you've changed much?

BURTT: Well, I hope I got a little smarter [laughs]...

LEVINE: [laughs]

BURTT: ...than I was when I was married to, [?] sat here for eighteen years. And he didn't make much money. Then I said I was awful stupid. The boys were seven and eleven, and they were going to school. And I could've gone out and tried, but I didn't have that push.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

BURTT: And we could've been better off. I bought this house.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: We were living in a flat in Cambridge.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: And this was not like it at all. I have done it all...

LEVINE: A lot of work on it.

BURTT: Yeah, and then the back of the house...

LEVINE: It's very nice, very nice.

BURTT: Well...

LEVINE: Well, and what is your...

BURTT: This is twenty years old, now. This was open when I bought it. I crawled in that window, there, to see the house, one Sunday. We were a couple, and my husband and I said, "We are going to buy a house."

LEVINE: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. You're strong-willed.

BURTT: I was twenty-seven years old.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: Yeah. Oh, he had no will against me.

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: Only he did his thing, and I know what he did, but it didn't bother me.

LEVINE: Well, what do you feel most proud of, or what do you feel like...

BURTT: I'm proud of the way I survived. And I'm proud of my boys. My Tommy is, uh, grad- uh... They both graduated from Boston University the same day.

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: They were three years apart, but they were in the service. Tommy was in Korea. And I was all alone 'cause Gordon was down in, he was workin' in Walter Reed Hospital when he got blind, when he started to get blind. He was gonna

be a technician down there. He wanted to be a doctor.
And he would've been a beautiful doctor.

LEVINE: Mm. Mm.

BURTT: Well, anyway, I didn't have a thing to do with--just had them born and tried to get them... They went through university on their own. They came out, and Gordon, the blind one, he went to Springfield College and got his master's degree. Then he went to work for the state of Massachusetts. And he was a regional director--I can hardly say it--for the rehabilitation in Massachusetts. But he had an office in Worcester for twenty years.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BURTT: He worked there for twenty years.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. Well, is there anything else you can think of that has to do with...

BURTT: [sighs]

LEVINE: You think that the fact that you came here when you were young, when you...

BURTT: I just thank my God my mother saw fit to bring us here. I think she is the--I told my father that. "You didn't bring us here."

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: "Mama brought us here." And thank God that she woke up after all, sitting there for eight years.

LEVINE: Now, do you think you raised your boys in any ways that were similar to the way your mother raised you?

BURTT: No. I was strict with my boys.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: She wasn't a bit strict.

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: But I was hard on them boys. Yeah, [voice softens] I was hard on them boys.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. Okay...

BURTT: Yeah, they weren't... They were happy. They were... But they done their thing, and they turned out beautiful.

LEVINE: Great.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you want to say before we close?

BURTT: No, I just say again that I just thank God my mother brought me here...

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: ...'cause in Sweden, I wouldn't have had no, nothing. But, in time, I must've realized, you know, that I could make something of my life. But, it would been too late, then.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, I've been speaking with Ebba Burtt, and Ebba came from Sweden in 1926, when she was fifteen. And I want to thank you very much for most interesting--I have the feeling you could fill up ten tapes easily with all you remember.

BURTT: Well, I'm gonna tell you that I had people, educated people, talk to me. And they had said, "Why don't you write a book?"

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, you certainly have a lot to...

BURTT: Well, if I had the backing, and I had somebody to help me, I would...

LEVINE: You would do it.

BURTT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: Yeah, I would because I have such a good memory.

LEVINE: Yes, and an interesting life.

BURTT: Yes. Yes, I can say that.

LEVINE: Yes.

BURTT: Because I have, uh... I had a boyfriend after my second husband died. He was a Swedish man.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: But I had nothing to do with him, only traveled with him because I know he was not, uh, that he cared for me, and--you know what I mean--he had, he liked a companion that dressed nice, and was going places. And that's all he was interested in.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: He lived in Woodbine, and he was Swedish. He was born here. And we traveled everywhere.

LEVINE: How nice.

BURTT: And I paid my way. But when I bought that little car out there, he didn't want to drive his big car. He said, "Oh, I love that car," so he drove it a little bit, but...

We got along fine.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

BURTT: But then he got sick.

LEVINE: Oh.

BURTT: Yeah. He got a tumor on the brain, and he got the, he had a broken hip, and...

LEVINE: Mm.

BURTT: He was older than me so, uh... he died, of course. But, as I said, I traveled with him for--and the kids liked him. Yeah.

LEVINE: How nice.

BURTT: We went to Florida, and we went to...

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BURTT: ...went up to Canada, and then we--I didn't go to Sweden with him, and I didn't go to Alaska with him. His sister

went to Sweden with him.

LEVINE: Did you have any interest in going back to Sweden?

BURTT: I was there twice in '70.

LEVINE: Oh, mm-hmm.

BURTT: And I made big mistake...

LEVINE: Oh, wait...yeah.

BURTT: ...because I went--to save the trouble of getting a passport, I went the second year after, the year after, you know. I was there. After two years, I went again. And that was--and six weeks I stayed there. And it get boring.

LEVINE: You were happy to come back here?

BURTT: Oh, God, yes. I was glad that--I mean, I should never have gone so soon.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURTT: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, we're gonna close here, and I want to thank you again. Most interesting and dear.

BURTT: Well, I hope you get something out of it. [laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, your story will be on-file at Ellis Island, now.

BURTT: Well, good.

LEVINE: [laughs]