

EI-692

OLEVINE SORENSEN (STLISLAN) OLSEN

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NORWAY, 1914

AGE 16

PASSAGE ON "THE BERGENSFJORD"

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. And today is Wednesday, October 25, 1995. And I'm here in Brooklyn at the Norwegian Christian Home, and I'm here with Olevine Olsen.

OLSEN: That's right.

SIGRIST: And Mrs. Olsen came from Norway in 1914, and she was sixteen when she came.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's correct?

OLSEN: That's right.

SIGRIST: Can we begin, Mrs. Olsen, by you giving me your birth date?

OLSEN: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: When were you born?

OLSEN: The 2nd of July.

SIGRIST: What year?

OLSEN: Uh, 19 . . . Ha, ha. How is that, what year would that be?

SIGRIST: Let's see. I have it written down here. Let me look. Um . . .

OLSEN: 19 . . .

SIGRIST: 1898.

OLSEN: 18, 18!

SIGRIST: 1898.

OLSEN: Right. Not 19, 18.

SIGRIST: 1898 you were born.

OLSEN: Oh, yeah. 1898. That's right, yeah.

SIGRIST: July 2, 1898.

OLSEN: Right.

SIGRIST: And where in Norway were you born?

OLSEN: I was born in a place they call Bealland.

SIGRIST: Bealland?

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know how to spell Bealland.

OLSEN: Yeah. B-E-A-L, L-I-N-D.

SIGRIST: Yeah. B-J-E . . .

OLSEN: B-E.

SIGRIST: B-E.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: L-L.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: A-N-D.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, Bealland. Where in Norway is that?

OLSEN: Uh, oh, that's the, near, uh, not so far from, near, uh, not so far from (?).

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

OLSEN: (?) is, that's the closest city.

SIGRIST: I see. What do you remember about that town when you were a little girl growing up?

OLSEN: Oh, uh, it was kind of a nice town, I thought. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: What kind of buildings did they have in the town?

OLSEN: Buildings? They had houses, regular houses. Most of them were one-family houses. Uh, and they were made of that (?). Um,

SIGRIST: What colors were the houses?

OLSEN: Oh, some of them are red. Well, you painted them. You painted them. Mostly, mostly white.

SIGRIST: Mostly white. What color was your house?

OLSEN: Oh, it was white.

SIGRIST: And was it a different color trim?

OLSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No? The whole house was white.

OLSEN: Yeah, yeah. As far as I can remember.

SIGRIST: Did you live inside town or outside of the town?

OLSEN: I lived kind of a little outside of the town.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house for me that you lived in? Like, how big it was, and . . .

OLSEN: Well, it was two stories, like, two stories. And it had, it had the two, two big, uh, (?), what do you call it there? It was a living room. And that was in, in, uh, in the, between that there was a, like a, between that there was a long, there was a walk. Not, no.

SIGRIST: Like a hallway?

OLSEN: Yeah, there was a hallway. One (?) on one side of the hallway, and one (?) on the other side. And there wasn't a lot of room on the same side of the (?). Then there was a kitchen on the other side of the (?), that none of us are walking between there.

SIGRIST: But describe the kitchen for me. What do you remember about the kitchen in the house?

OLSEN: Oh, we had a big, uh, we had a big, uh, I don't know what you

call it. (?), had, made fire.

SIGRIST: A stove.

OLSEN: Right.

SIGRIST: A fireplace.

OLSEN: Fire, a fireplace.

SIGRIST: Open fire.

OLSEN: Open fire, yeah. And we had cooked all our meals there, and there was a big place there, you know. The fireplace was big. So we had big pots, and we had to (?) for the cattle. We had to heat the water for the cattle in the wintertime. They got, they got a little warm, they had to have something warm, you know, so, warm water. They had, you had to have it kind of lukewarm.

SIGRIST: So you had to heat the water in the fireplace.

OLSEN: Yeah, heat the water in the fireplace. And we cooked our food there.

SIGRIST: And you cooked in the fireplace, too.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me . . .

OLSEN: That's the, it was a big thing. It was like a, almost like a big sofa, and there was a, there was a, uh, you couldn't have fire, you know, in this place. (?) You know.

SIGRIST: It sort of stuck out a little bit.

OLSEN: Ah, it stuck out. And then we had pots, and we had, uh, we had,

uh, all kinds of things I know. And then we made bread.

SIGRIST: So there was an oven as part of this?

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah? So that you could bake the bread inside?

OLSEN: Right. Yeah. And, so we made bread there, too, in (?).

SIGRIST: Tell me about the furniture that you had in the house. What do you remember about . . .

OLSEN: Well, they were very plain. We had a sofa, probably. Most people had a sofa. We had a, we had two big rooms, and there was a hall in between, a big hall in between this (?). In one room was the kitchen, and one living room. And the other room was also a living room, and then another room, a little room, beside. And so there was one, two, we make a lot, four rooms, almost. And you had to walk in between. It had a walk in between there.

SIGRIST: How did the house, how was the house heated?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: How did you heat the house?

OLSEN: Wood.

SIGRIST: And what, how, though? What . . .

OLSEN: A wood stove, a stove. You put the wood in the stove, and the stove got nice and warm and heated the house where we lived.

SIGRIST: How many stoves did you have?

OLSEN: Well, we had one in a living room, and we had, like, two living

rooms, and we had a lot of side (?) called the (?). And there was stove there, too, and there was a bed and everything in that room. But they were smaller than this two, than the two, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Big rooms.

OLSEN: Big rooms, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you light the house? What kind of lighting did you have in the house?

OLSEN: Uh, we had oil, yeah, lamps. We had lamps, we had oil. And we had, uh, when we went out we had (?), we had all in this thing, in (?). It was a wire around it, around the glass. There was a wire around the glass. And in that glass we had oil and we had, in the glass, I mean, in the glass, that gave the light.

SIGRIST: I see. You would light that.

OLSEN: Yeah. And that was it. It was made so there was, protecting if it fall it wouldn't hit the glass. It hit that, uh, this wiring around it.

SIGRIST: Did that ever happen that you remember? Did you have any accidents with the, with the kerosene, with the oil and the lamps?

OLSEN: No, we didn't have it. You have to be really careful with that, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in your house?

OLSEN: Uh, no. Not in the house itself. But right near the house we had water, and we got running water from that spring, they called

it a spring, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Whose job was it to get the water?

OLSEN: Oh, whoever was available, yeah. (she laughs) And we also had, this was near the house, but we had a big well. We also had a big well. There was a little further away from the house. We always had a big well for the kettles and things like that, yeah.

SIGRIST: So you would, how would you, how would you get the water from the well into the house?

OLSEN: Oh, we had big, um, what you call it, uh, what do you call it in English? We called it a spun, you know. We had dig, thing in the well, and the well was built in the ground. It was, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Set down in the ground.

OLSEN: Wow. Right down in the ground, and there was stone around this. It was built pretty good. And the water came in on the bottom of the well, and filled it up. This was very big, but it was like six foot deep, this well. And we got all the water from that well for the kettle, and for the house (?).

SIGRIST: Did you have a bathroom in the house?

OLSEN: Uh, yes. We had a bathroom in the house, yeah.

SIGRIST: And it was inside the house?

OLSEN: This was inside the house. Well, it was kind of on the outside a little bit, but rather connected to the house.

SIGRIST: But it was connected to the house.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about when you were born? Did anyone ever tell you a story about when you were born?

OLSEN: No, really cannot remember.

SIGRIST: No.

OLSEN: No.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

OLSEN: Soren.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

OLSEN: S-O-R-E-N.

SIGRIST: Soren.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what did your father do for a living?

OLSEN: Farming.

SIGRIST: So is this a farm that you lived on?

OLSEN: Right.

SIGRIST: Oh, so . . .

OLSEN: We lived on a farm.

SIGRIST: Oh. So, did you keep animals on the farm?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah, yes. Cows and sheeps and pigs. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Had your father always been a farmer?

OLSEN: Right. He was brought up on a farm. And this, the farm (?), where I lived.

SIGRIST: What do you know about your father's family background?

OLSEN: Oh, they all, uh, farmer, he had one, two, let's see, one, two, he had three sisters, but I don't remember, he didn't have any brother. He was the only son. And they all had farms.

SIGRIST: What was your father like as a person? What was his personality like?

OLSEN: Oh, he was a, he was a very nice man. I'll say that, yeah. He was very nice and, uh, he was, he was good.

SIGRIST: Was there anything that he used to do with you when you were a child?

OLSEN: Oh, yes. We were brought up strict, yeah. We had to obey. And we had to be, uh, you know, uh, I don't know. I don't know what else you call it. Well, we have to, when we got, uh, big enough, we had to start to work. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And did you work on the farm?

OLSEN: Yeah!

SIGRIST: What did you have to do on the farm?

OLSEN: Oh, I liked to, um, I liked to, uh, plantings and grow things.

SIGRIST: What did you plant?

OLSEN: Oh, we plant, we had potatoes. That was one thing we had plenty

of. We had carrots, and we had turnips. I don't know what you call turnips here.

SIGRIST: Turnip.

OLSEN: Yeah. We had turnips, yeah, all, we had enough, we grow enough for the house. So we didn't have to go and buy anything.

SIGRIST: Did you sell any of the stuff that you grew?

OLSEN: No. We didn't sell vegetables and things. We sold butter.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Who made the butter?

OLSEN: Well, when we were kids, we did have to sit and turn and turn and turn. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: That's hard work.

OLSEN: Yeah, that was work. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Who milked the cows?

OLSEN: Oh, my mother. My father didn't want to milk cows. She milked all the cows.

SIGRIST: What other animals did you have?

OLSEN: We had horses and sheep, and (?).

SIGRIST: And what did you do with the sheep?

OLSEN: Well, the sheep, we cut the wool. We cut the wool, and we made thread out of it.

SIGRIST: Made thread out of the wool.

OLSEN: Right. You have to cord, they say.

SIGRIST: Cord the wool.

OLSEN: And then spin it on a, on a wheel, you know.

SIGRIST: On a spinning wheel.

OLSEN: Yeah, you spin it. This, this go round, the wheel go round when you spin it. But you have to make the wool so you can spin it. You have to have a really round, round long things, you know. Because (?), you had, this how you make the, so you could, the wool, so you could spin it, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have to wash the wool before you did this?

OLSEN: No!

SIGRIST: No?

OLSEN: We washed it after. We washed it after. Yeah, after. We wore socks, stockings. I used to wear stockings. We never . . .
(she laughs) A girl. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Who sheared the sheep?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Who sheared the sheep?

OLSEN: Oh, my mother did that.

SIGRIST: How did she do that? Can you describe it for me?

OLSEN: Oh, yes. She laid the thing on there, almost on her lap, and she had to sit down. And she, uh, and the sheep, she laid them on

the lap, and the she cut them with a scissor, yeah. And she got, that's how we got wool, and that's how we got clothes, stockings and different things.

SIGRIST: Did your mother weave cloth also at the home?

OLSEN: Right.

SIGRIST: How did she do that?

OLSEN: Oh, she had a big thing going. That we have to, that we have to, we usually had it upstairs, because the (?) a lot of room.

SIGRIST: This was like a big loom?

OLSEN: Yes, and has a big thing. And you weave it, and you have to weave it. You have to . . .

SIGRIST: You're going back and forth with your hands.

OLSEN: Back and forth, and yo have to get, put that on a thing. So the thing goes in, and, uh, back and forth, and as you weave, as you weave these things you put the thread close together. You have something there, because if you have a (?), you have a big thing there set up. And it's, that's the thing, when you put the, you have a spool.

SIGRIST: A spool?

OLSEN: Yeah. And you put that spool in between the two, the two, uh, thing there. And then you wave it like that.

SIGRIST: How often did your mother do that?

OLSEN: Oh, she only did it in wintertime. There was a (?) in the wintertime.

SIGRIST: Of course, you can't do much farm work in the winter, so.

OLSEN: No, you can't do any farm work, so she did that. And she make a, material out of that. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a dress that she made for you as a child?

OLSEN: Uh, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what it looked like?

OLSEN: Well, it was brownish, yeah. Next time I stretched it. We brought the material, and in the later years they all brought the material. Nobody need the material, but then every, even for underwear.

SIGRIST: So that would be wool, too, right, the underwear?

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: It's easier to buy the fabric than to make the fabric.

OLSEN: Oh, yeah. (they laugh) So in the later years that got kind of out of fashion, you know.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like? What was she like?

OLSEN: Well, that I cannot tell you, because I lost my mother, and there was a, I think I was three, three or four years old when I lost my mother. So I can't, I can't explain how very much. I don't hardly remember.

SIGRIST: Do you know how she died?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Do you know how your mother died?

OLSEN: She died of cancer.

SIGRIST: She died of cancer.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How old was she?

OLSEN: Oh, she was, she had five children, but I really don't know how old she was when she died.

SIGRIST: Did your father re-marry?

OLSEN: He, yeah, re-married. I had a stepmother.

SIGRIST: How old were you when your father remarried?

OLSEN: Oh, I was a, I was a school-age child. I was school-age. But I remember, I remember when he got married. That I remember. But, uh . . .

SIGRIST: So that's when, when you're talking about, you know, mother weaving . . .

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's really, it's your stepmother that you remember.

OLSEN: Yeah, my stepmother, yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, what was your father's name?

OLSEN: Soren.

SIGRIST: Oh, you asked, right, you told me that. And what was his last name?

OLSEN: Uh . . .

SIGRIST: Which would be your maiden name?

OLSEN: Where he lived, Stlislán, he lived in Stlislán, and they called him with that name where he lived. That name was Stlislán.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

OLSEN: Oh, that's a long name. S-T-L-I-S-A-N.

SIGRIST: What was your name before you were married? Before you were Olsen, what was your last name?

OLSEN: I went for, uh, for Stlislán.

SIGRIST: You took that name.

OLSEN: Yeah, I took that name. My father used that name, and we used the name.

SIGRIST: You used it, too.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you said it was S-T . . .

OLSEN: L.

SIGRIST: I. (in unison) S-L-A-N.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Say it one more time?

OLSEN: Stlislán.

SIGRIST: Stlislán.

OLSEN: Stlislán.

SIGRIST: Okay. I just wanted to make sure I've got it right.

OLSEN: Stlis, remember Stlis, lan.

SIGRIST: Okay, great. Um, tell me what some of the chores that the children were expected to do on the farm.

OLSEN: Oh, well, there was a lot of . . . Children. Well, we have to learn, you know. And, uh, oh, we, uh . . .

SIGRIST: You said you planted. You liked to plant things.

OLSEN: Oh, yeah, plant things. We did. Like, uh, oh, everything we planted, yeah. And, uh, we liked to plant and, uh, there was a lot of wood where I lived, a lot of wood in my part. My father had a big farm. He had a big farm, and there were a lot of woods. Big, big timber grow there, and this was a big, oh, you could get lost there. I remember that. You could get lost. (she laughs) You get out in the woods, you could, like, get lost. He had a big wood where we, uh, and in summertime the cows, we let the cows go out in the wood there and, uh, and eat, you know. We didn't have to feed them. They went in there and got the grass there from the wood where it was all, our place was all, uh, fenced. It was all fenced in. The whole thing, it was all fenced in. It was a big place. You could have get lost there.

SIGRIST: So the cows could just wander off into the woods.

OLSEN: And the (?). The (?), yeah. In the wilderness, like, almost. I'll call it wilderness. It was a wilderness, because that

belongs to the farm.

SIGRIST: Right. But there's this forest.

OLSEN: It was very long, a very big place. And that's where the cows went in the summertime. We let them go loose in this thing. It was all fenced in, the whole place.

SIGRIST: What about the horses? Could they go loose, too?

OLSEN: Uh, we never did, no. They had (?) horses. We had to keep them on the farm, the horses.

SIGRIST: And what did you use the horses for?

OLSEN: Oh, for the farm! There's plowing and all kinds of things, bringing wood to the house and, uh, all kinds of things. You couldn't live without the horse. You had to have a horse.

SIGRIST: Did you ride the horses?

OLSEN: Uh, no. I didn't, but the boys did. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did the, did you have a carriage? Did the family have a carriage?

OLSEN: Oh, we had sleighs and we had carriage and we had all kinds of things there for the horse, there for the horse did the draw, you know. And, uh, we have different things, you know, we had to use on the farm.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what it was like to ride in a horse-drawn open sleigh in the winter?

OLSEN: Lovely. (she laughs) It was lovely, but it was cold. We had to dress warm, because we had cold winters there. And we rode on

the sleigh when there was snow, but, you know, there was snow all the time. Then we used the wheels, so we had a sleigh, then we had a, a wheel, you know. Wagon, wagon, they call it, wagon, yeah.

SIGRIST: When you were in a sleigh and, how many horses drew the sleigh?

OLSEN: Oh, we only had one horse.

SIGRIST: One horse draws the sleigh.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How does the sleigh keep from sinking in the snow?

OLSEN: Oh, not, us, you see, what you call it, when the children went on.

SIGRIST: The runners, you're talking about?

OLSEN: Yeah. This we had.

SIGRIST: You're gesturing like . . .

OLSEN: Big, big thing. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How many people could fit in the sleigh?

OLSEN: Oh, I would say about maybe six. It depends on how many seats there was in this thing. We had something on the sleigh that had seats in. So we sat in these seats in the wintertime, but this was only in the wintertime. And, uh, and in the summertimes we used the wheel.

SIGRIST: The wagon.

OLSEN: Right, the wagon.

SIGRIST: Did you have any other family members that lived in this town, other than your own immediate family? Grandparents, or uncles and aunts, or?

OLSEN: Ah, well, I think my, uh, I think my grandparents, they lived, they lived there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember them?

OLSEN: I don't remember them, no. No, I don't remember them.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that there were five children, or six children? You said you had five . . .

OLSEN: Well, we were six.

SIGRIST: Six.

OLSEN: Yeah. Well, my mother died, we were five children when my mother died. And no, no, uh, we were all underage. I mean, not even fifteen years old.

SIGRIST: Can you name the five children?

OLSEN: Yeah. Uh, there was (?), but they called him gunda.

SIGRIST: Gunda.

OLSEN: And Annie, and Toreus.

SIGRIST: Toreus?

OLSEN: Toreus. We call him Toreus.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

OLSEN: T-O-R-E-U-S.

SIGRIST: T-O-R-E-U-S.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Toreus.

OLSEN: And there were Ola, and there were Tegre, yeah.

SIGRIST: And then where do you . . .

OLSEN: Well, Tegre, my father remarried again, and, uh, Tegre was with his last wife.

SIGRIST: I see.

OLSEN: Yeah. So that was my half a brother.

SIGRIST: So are you the youngest of the children from . . .

OLSEN: No. There was one, Ola.

SIGRIST: Ola was the youngest from your true mother.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

OLSEN: From my mother, yeah. From my mother's side, yeah.

SIGRIST: What games did you play as a child in Norway?

OLSEN: Well, yeah, uh, we played ball. You know, you told there you had a big, you had a thing to hit ball with. It went out. And, uh, you couldn't run. You could run out if the ball was, uh, if you, you could hit the ball. If you run out and the ball wasn't far enough out, they could pick it up and hit you, and you were out.

(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did the game have a name?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah. We called it playing ball.

SIGRIST: Playing ball. What is that in Norwegian?

OLSEN: Uh, schlabbal.

SIGRIST: Schlabbal.

OLSEN: Yeah, schlabbal. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Were there any other games that you remember playing as a child?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah, seek and hide.

SIGRIST: Seek and hide.

OLSEN: Yeah. Oh, yeah, we played that a lot. That was fun.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any nursery rhymes?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Do you remember any nursery rhymes, or little songs that you sang as a child?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we had (?). (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you sing one for us?

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

OLSEN: (she sings in Norwegian) (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Thank you. (they laugh) What were you singing about?

OLSEN: Huh? I was singing about Norway. Yeah, I love this country, yeah, like it is.

SIGRIST: Well, that was great.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Thank you for doing that.

OLSEN: Um, what religion were you anyway?

OLSEN: I was Protestant.

SIGRIST: Protestant.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Any particular kind of Protestant?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Any specific kind of Protestant?

OLSEN: Uh, no. Lutheran.

SIGRIST: Lutheran. And where did you worship?

OLSEN: In a church.

SIGRIST: There was a church in town?

OLSEN: Yeah. There was a church in, you have to, well, it was a little, always, you had to be, (?), but it took too long to walk, so we went, we had horse and wagon. When we went to church, we took a horse and we had a wagon. We sat in this wagon, and we drove to church.

SIGRIST: And how often would you go to church?

OLSEN: Oh, every other Sunday we had church, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about the church itself?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the very church itself?

OLSEN: Well, Christian. I was Christian.

SIGRIST: Well, I mean, was there anything in the church that you remember, what it looked like, or . . .

OLSEN: Oh, yes. It was a big church. And it had, uh, how you say, the picture of this church with the spear where the, how you see in the picture, with that, uh, spear high up.

SIGRIST: Oh, like a spire.

OLSEN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

OLSEN: This (?).

SIGRIST: And then how did you, how did you worship at home?

OLSEN: Well, uh, my father read the Bible, yeah. He read the Bible.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Was there a certain part of the Bible that he particularly liked to read?

OLSEN: Maybe there was. I don't know. But he, he read the Bible.

Well, he read sometimes Christian books too, yeah. And that he did before we got to work. Yeah. We got up and we sat at the breakfast table, and after eating my father took the Bible. Usually, oh, he might read a Christian story, yeah, and he took the Bible most of the times. Sometimes he liked to read some stories, but they have to be Christian stories.

SIGRIST: Was it always right before you ate breakfast?

OLSEN: Right after.

SIGRIST: Right after you ate breakfast.

OLSEN: Yeah. Because then we were all together. And we kids, you had to sit so sill, that I remember. We had to sit so still when he was reading, that we used to (?) somebody. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: That was part of the strict upbringing.

OLSEN: Right, right, yeah.

SIGRIST: What time did you eat breakfast in the morning? When did you get up?

OLSEN: Oh, we got up, I guess we had breakfast around eight. My father got up before that and got out to work. But then he came in to have breakfast, so we would be together. That was the thing. He wants us to be together. And then he, we ate together. And the minute he ate, we'd read the Bible.

SIGRIST: And so what time did you get up and have breakfast?

OLSEN: Oh, we got up seven o'clock, I guess.

SIGRIST: And what would you eat for breakfast?

OLSEN: We had coffee and bread, and we had some kind of polleg, you know. Sometimes we made it. It was good.

SIGRIST: What was it?

OLSEN: We made the polleg.

SIGRIST: Porridge?

OLSEN: Polleg.

SIGRIST: Polleg.

OLSEN: Yeah, polleg.

SIGRIST: What is polleg?

OLSEN: Oh, that's Norwegian. (they laugh) Polleg is when you put butter . . .

SIGRIST: Butter.

OLSEN: On the bread, and then you put something else on it that we made ourselves. Some kind of cheese. We had all kinds of cheeses.

SIGRIST: Cheese. Oh, you made your own cheese?

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

OLSEN: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Okay. So that was breakfast.

OLSEN: That was breakfast.

SIGRIST: Then what was your next meal?

OLSEN: Well, there was, uh, lunch, like.

SIGRIST: What time was that?

OLSEN: Oh, that was, uh, (?), usually around eleven o'clock or maybe a little after.

SIGRIST: And what would you eat for the midday meal?

OLSEN: Well, then we had, like, a dinner, yeah. We had, like, a dinner. We had homemade soup, uh, you know, with meat and everything. Potatoes, carrots and, uh, some kind of, what do you call it? Grain, yeah, we put in. That we bought. That was, uh, what do you call it in English? Uh, you call that (?). They were some kind of, to make a little thing, you know.

SIGRIST: Oh, like flour, or cornstarch?

OLSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No?

OLSEN: It was grain. Rice. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Grain, rice, oh, uh-huh.

OLSEN: Rice, yeah. And we cooked that.

SIGRIST: I see.

OLSEN: And we had meat and potatoes and carrots and all kinds of things in the soup.

SIGRIST: But soup was a typical meal that you would eat at this time.

OLSEN: Right, yeah. Uh-huh. And sometimes we had a, we had a little

more, like we had a pig, and we, uh, we fried the meat, and then we'd have potatoes and things with that meat.

SIGRIST: Did you eat meat frequently?

OLSEN: Yes. We usually had it at every dinner, every meal.

SIGRIST: That mid-day meal.

OLSEN: Yeah. They used to have it in the daytime.

SIGRIST: And then what was the next meal after the mid-day meal?

OLSEN: Then coffee. That you have four o'clock. You have coffee and bread, and then we had, uh, this thing, cheeses and things on the bread.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And then did you have a meal after that?

OLSEN: (?) We had, but that was something very quick.

SIGRIST: And how late was that in the day?

OLSEN: That was at nine o'clock.

SIGRIST: Nine o'clock you'd have like a snack. And then when did you go to bed?

OLSEN: Oh, right after. (she laughs) We went to bed early.

SIGRIST: Did you share your bed with somebody, or did you have a bed all by yourself?

OLSEN: No. We usually, kids, we used to share that bed with a sister, things like that.

SIGRIST: I see. Um, did you go to . . .

OLSEN: Sister or brother.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in Norway?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah. We started seven years old.

SIGRIST: Seven years old.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, um, what was your favorite subject going to school?

OLSEN: Oh, uh, I don't know. I never had anything favorite.

SIGRIST: Did you like school?

OLSEN: I liked school. I loved school. You know, we had a period that we didn't go to school because the teacher had to go to another place and teach. He had two places. He had our place, and he had another place. And, uh, when he, he was away, when we are away, he was away and we didn't have school, I didn't like it. I loved to go to school. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Could your parents read and write?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Both of them could.

OLSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did they try to teach the children before the children went to school, how to read?

OLSEN: Right. The ABC's.

SIGRIST: ABC's.

OLSEN: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah. That's what we did.

SIGRIST: Do any of your teachers stick out in your mind for any reason?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the teachers that you had while you were in school in Norway?

OLSEN: I had one teacher. (she laughs) Or two.

SIGRIST: You had one, that whole time.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about him?

OLSEN: Oh, he was very nice. And he used to play some kind of, some kind of instrument that was laying on the, like a, almost like a violin, that was laying on the, that was laying on the table. He laid it on the table, a long thing. I don't know what you call it. I forgot the name of it. And he used to play that. And we used to send, every morning when they came into school, we had to sing a Christian song. And he played this thing. There was, there was, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember that song that you had to sing every morning at the beginning of school?

OLSEN: Yeah, some of them.

SIGRIST: Could you sing that for us, too?

OLSEN: Uh, I don't know. (she coughs) I forgot what song was that.
(she sings in Norwegian)

SIGRIST: Well, you had to sing every day, but it was a long time ago.

OLSEN: It was a long time ago.

SIGRIST: A long time ago. When you were growing up in Norway, what did you know about America? How did you think about America when you were a girl in Norway?

OLSEN: I thought it was a big country. We thought it was great. We thought America was a big country, and it was a great country. And a lot of people that, if you went there to make money. Yeah, we thought America was great.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you ever know anyone who had gone to America and come back to Norway?

OLSEN: Well, uh, no, not when I was a, when my sister went.

SIGRIST: She went before you went.

OLSEN: She went long before I went. I was small.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what year it was that she went?

OLSEN: No, I don't remember what year that was. Well, she went first, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did she go when she came to America?

OLSEN: She went to New York.

SIGRIST: And what did she do when she got there?

OLSEN: Well, she was in, working in the house there, doing things.

SIGRIST: Doing domestic work?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Doing domestic work in a house?

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Serving work.

OLSEN: Yeah, yeah, serving. And she loved it.

SIGRIST: And what was she writing back to the family telling them?

OLSEN: Oh, she thought it was great. "Oh, yeah," she said. "Everyone, after you get out to work," she said, "come to America." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Why was it that you wanted to come to America?

OLSEN: Because I wanted, I, I wanted to work in America. And my sister thought America was great, and she loved it. Both of my sisters went down there.

SIGRIST: Before you did.

OLSEN: Before I did.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. So they're both here and . . .

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, how did you, do you remember asking your parents if you could go to America?

OLSEN: Uh, yeah. I felt I wanted to go. And . . .

SIGRIST: And what was your father's reaction to this?

OLSEN: Well, he, my sister and, my two sisters had made good in America, so he didn't say much about it. If I feeled like I wanted to go, okay. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And tell me about what you had to do to get ready to leave Norway?

OLSEN: Oh, I had to buy, I had to buy some clothes and things.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the clothes that you bought?

OLSEN: Oh, I don't remember. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Did you have to, um, did you have to have a medical exam before you left Norway?

OLSEN: Uh, no. I don't think, I don't remember that. No? No. But you had to be healthy, I mean.

SIGRIST: What about getting papers to leave Norway?

OLSEN: They did that, uh, I tell you, they did that on the boat, or before you get on the boat. They examined you, or you have to be, when you come over here you have to be examined. You have to go into Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Right. Which we'll get to when we get you to Ellis Island. I was just wondering if you had to be examined before you left Norway, too.

OLSEN: No, no.

SIGRIST: So you didn't.

OLSEN: No, no, you didn't.

SIGRIST: Did your mother and your, did your stepmother and your father give you any kind of little goodbye party when you were getting ready to leave?

OLSEN: What do you mean?

SIGRIST: Well, just some kind of a little gathering to say goodbye to you.

OLSEN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah. We did, they got together with the family and most.

SIGRIST: How did you feel . . .

OLSEN: And somebody else, I know they were crying. I remember that. They said they feel sad about this. At the same time, you know, they feel sad about that, going over here. Because they missed, they wouldn't see them. They know they has to stay there. You know, so far away, you couldn't go back. In, at that time . . .

SIGRIST: They were feeling sad because you were leaving.

OLSEN: Right.

SIGRIST: How did you feel?

OLSEN: Yeah, well, I was feeling sad, too, (?) my parents, you know. I know I would see them, so I feel, that goodbye, that goodbye was unhappy. No, I remember that. I feel bad leaving my parents, and they feel bad seeing me go. But at the same time they thought of us best, it was better over here than it was in Norway. If you have to work, it was better to work in America than it was to work in Norway. You pay much more here, and things are so different here. Everything (?) there they told us

was so beautiful. Precious, you know.

SIGRIST: So they thought that even though it was sad for them, they knew it was the best thing for you.

OLSEN: Right, right, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed to take with you? What did you take with you from Norway?

OLSEN: Oh, I took a, I didn't take too much, because my sister said, "You're gonna buy it much better and much nicer in America than you can in Norway." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you take an object with you that would be a remembrance of Norway for you?

OLSEN: Oh . . .

SIGRIST: Like a Bible or something like that?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah. The Bible, I took it. Yeah, oh, yeah. (?) And my father said, "Never tell a lie." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you have to, were you bringing anything for your sisters in America?

OLSEN: Uh, no. My sister was in America. For me, I was the youngest. I was the youngest out of those three sisters, and they had been here before. So they had a, they had, they come home to Norway. A lot of nice clothes and a lot of nice things. Oh, yeah. I thought it was beautiful.

SIGRIST: So they didn't want anything. They didn't want anything for you to bring to them.

OLSEN: No.

SIGRIST: I thought maybe like some cheese or something, you know, bring them in America.

OLSEN: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Where did you have to go to get on the big ship?

OLSEN: We had to go to Christianson.

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

OLSEN: Oh, by, by horse, horse and wagon. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, it's 1914. You said the war had just started.

OLSEN: Right. (?) war.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that? 'Cos that's all happening at the same time as you're getting ready to leave, isn't it?

OLSEN: Well, the war had started, and Norway was in war. And I remember we got out on, I think it was Bergensfjord. The ship's name was Bergensfjord.

SIGRIST: The Bergensfjord was the ship, yeah.

OLSEN: So we got out there in the, in the middle of the ocean, Atlantic Ocean. And that big war ship stopped us. They stopped us. You have to stop the ship. And we were shaking, because this was so young and war ship. They stopped us. They stopped us. And we got called up on the deck, every, all the (?). Called them up on the deck. And we stood there. We saw that ship out there. And, uh, we were shaking, because we thought now they're going to sink us, they're going to sink us. And we didn't know what's going to

happen. But we were lucky that we didn't get sunk. That ship didn't sink us. That was just the, I think that was just the beginning of the war. Yeah, yeah. It was just the beginning of the war. They couldn't have sunk us, that they didn't. And we were so happy. When we saw this, they went around. You know what they are looking for? (?) They know there must be passenger aboard. Passengers, they're not allowed to sink passengers. They wanted to see do we have any ammunition, and they came around and they went all around the place, and they didn't find anything, so they let us go. I never, I never forget those, those, that time we stood on the deck and didn't know whether we were going to go to the bottom, to the bottom of the Atlantic, or if we're gonna pass. They're letting us pass. They didn't find any ammunition on it.

SIGRIST: I can tell just by listening to you . . .

OLSEN: That's just a passenger boat.

SIGRIST: I can tell just by listening to you . . .

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: I can tell just by listening to you the emotion that you still feel talking about it.

OLSEN: Yeah. (she laughs) Yeah, I've been feeling.

SIGRIST: It was scary. You know, that leads me to also ask you first the Titanic sunk just a couple of years before you went on the ship.

OLSEN: Yes, Titanic, yeah.

SIGRIST: When you got, when you got onto the Bergensfjord, how did you

feel about getting on a big ship?

OLSEN: Well, I didn't feel too good. I didn't feel too good, no.

SIGRIST: Had you ever been on a big ship before?

OLSEN: No, I'd never been on a big ship before. That was my first time, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the Bergensfjord?

OLSEN: They had beds down, down below. Yeah. They had beds, four in a room.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And . . .

OLSEN: One on the top and one on the bottom on each side. And then every other place they had, you know.

SIGRIST: And who was in your cabin with you? Who were the people traveling? What do you remember about them?

OLSEN: Uh, well, they were Norwegian. I don't remember. I have trips I don't remember special, you know.

SIGRIST: Were you traveling alone? You didn't have a chaperon or anything with you?

OLSEN: No.

SIGRIST: You were just by yourself, or was there someone traveling with you from, from home to the ship?

OLSEN: Well, I think, I went with my sister.

SIGRIST: Oh, your sister had come . . .

OLSEN: Had come home.

SIGRIST: Oh.

OLSEN: And I went with . . .

SIGRIST: I see.

OLSEN: Because they say to me, "Well, if you have to work, the best place to work is in America. So I decided to go. They were home on a visit. And they told me . . .

SIGRIST: Both of them?

OLSEN: Yeah. They told me that. That's how I got here.

SIGRIST: Oh, I didn't realize. Okay. So you're traveling with your sisters.

OLSEN: I'm traveling with my sisters.

SIGRIST: Are they in the cabin with you then?

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: All right. So it's, it's your two sisters and you and some other person.

OLSEN: Yeah, four in all.

SIGRIST: Does anything else about the voyage in the ocean stick out in your mind? You told us the story about the Germans stopping you. What else happened during that voyage that you can remember?

OLSEN: Uh, I told you about the . . .

SIGRIST: The Germans stopping the ship.

OLSEN: Yeah. Uh, well, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Did anything happen during . . .

OLSEN: No, it didn't. We were scared that the ocean got so rough, you know. We were out, out there, out in the, on the Atlantic. They were big billows. They come rolling in on you.

SIGRIST: Big billows.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Big waves.

OLSEN: Big waves, yeah. And then you think, oh, they're going to roll over the ship and we're going to sink. When you sit out on the deck and look at those big billows, you think they're going to swallow you up. Yeah. Then there is a time that the ocean is still, it's not like that. It's only in a storm. If you get out in a storm. It's very bad that a ship get out in a storm, because it might almost sink the ship.

SIGRIST: Where did you spend most of the time on the ship?

OLSEN: Oh, I spent most of the time, I think, out on the deck there.

SIGRIST: Up on the deck.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything unusual, other than the big waves, when you were up on the deck? Anything that made an impression?

OLSEN: Well, if I saw a ship then, you know, then there was something, you know. We saw another ship, but that happened that we could

meet another ship, we could see them say goodbye and things like that, but not very often.

SIGRIST: How long . . .

OLSEN: We only saw the ocean.

SIGRIST: How long did the journey take on the . . .

OLSEN: Oh, at that time it took eleven days.

SIGRIST: Eleven days.

OLSEN: And they used a (?), if you had, if you had, uh, this there leaning against you, then it took longer, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came into New York?

OLSEN: Ah, I never forget that. (she laughs) I was up early to look for the Statue of Liberty, because they said that the Statue of Liberty was the first thing we saw of America would be Statue of Liberty. And we all went and looking, looking, looking for Statue of Liberty. Yeah. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What did it feel like when you actually saw it?

OLSEN: Oh, it feels good. Yeah, it feels good. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then what happened? After the ship came into the harbor . . .

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Then what was the next thing that happened?

OLSEN: You had to go through Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: To Ellis Island.,

OLSEN: Yeah. They took us over to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: How did you get over to Ellis Island?

OLSEN: I think they took us by boat, yeah.

SIGRIST: The same boat, or a different boat?

OLSEN: No, I think it was a different boat, yeah, smaller.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about being at Ellis Island?

OLSEN: I was scared.

SIGRIST: Did you know what it was?

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Did you know what it was that was going to happen to you at Ellis Island?

OLSEN: No, I didn't know what's going to happen. They might refuse me and send me home, yeah. And, uh, they asked me a question there, (?). And if it was something, then they let me go. But, because, oh, well, they saw, they, uh, you couldn't come in if you were sick. They, uh, examined you, but that was just, they, they looked at your throat. I remember that. I thought I had to have some kind of examination, but I didn't have any (?). They said, "Just look at my throat. Open your mouth." I opened my mouth, and there was, they looked at my throat. But in my, my throat (?). So . . .

SIGRIST: Did they examine anything else?

OLSEN: No.

SIGRIST: Other than your throat? That's . . .

OLSEN: No, not that I can remember.

SIGRIST: What did Ellis Island look like on the inside?

OLSEN: Oh, I tell you, it was a pretty big place. I can hardly remember because they had done away with Ellis Island. You don't have to go to Ellis Island now.

SIGRIST: No, not now, right. What about your sisters? Were they with you when you were at Ellis Island, or did, were they, did they have to go through all that, too?

OLSEN: They had to go through that, too. Yeah, we all had to go through that. And we had to have a name and address over here to go to. You had to have, give that up, if you had a place to go to.

SIGRIST: How long do you think you were at Ellis Island?

OLSEN: Oh, I went pretty fast through there. But somebody was held, you know. If you're not well enough, I think you were held back. But not that, it didn't happen very often.

SIGRIST: Did you eat anything at Ellis Island?

OLSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

OLSEN: No.

SIGRIST: Where did you go when you left Ellis Island?

OLSEN: I went to my, uh, my, uh, some friends in Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: In where?

OLSEN: In Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: Brooklyn.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And were your sisters with you? Did they go with you?

OLSEN: Yeah. They went with me, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you think of New York City? You know, you came into New York off of Ellis Island. What did you think of all of this?

OLSEN: I think it was big, was great. I thought it was great, what I saw.

SIGRIST: Did you have to take a subway to Brooklyn? How did you get to Brooklyn?

OLSEN: Um, yeah, no. Uh, we took a little boat. We had to get out that big boat that we were sailing on and get into another boat to go to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Right. And then the little boat took you back to New York.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then how did you get to Brooklyn?

OLSEN: Oh, by subway.

SIGRIST: Yes. Had you ever been on a subway before?

OLSEN: No, I never been on a subway, no.

SIGRIST: And what was that like, going to Brooklyn on the subway? What was it like to ride on the subway?

OLSEN: Well, I thought it was great. I thought America was great. I must say that.

SIGRIST: Did you get work?

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long were you . . .

OLSEN: Oh, it didn't take long.

SIGRIST: And what kind of work did you get?

OLSEN: Oh, I got, uh, housework, in the house, yeah. And I couldn't talk. (she laughs) How could they hire me? I couldn't understand one, one word of English. How could they hire me, and pay me for work?

SIGRIST: How much did they pay you?

OLSEN: Oh, I guess it was thirteen, fourteen dollars a month, that's all. But they did pay, and I didn't know one word of English.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

OLSEN: I learned it there, in, when I worked.

SIGRIST: In the house.

OLSEN: In the house.

SIGRIST: What was your first word?

OLSEN: Uh, oh, I can't remember. I can't remember what it was. Maybe

it was cleaning, or something like that. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Did you miss Norway? How did you feel, when you were here, how did you think about Norway?

OLSEN: Well, it was my, my, uh, birthplace, and, uh, I couldn't forget Norway.

SIGRIST: Were you writing to your parents?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, and what were you telling them about America?

OLSEN: Oh, I was telling them how great it was. I thought it was great, and I was great, too, for me. Yeah, I thought it was great. But it was hard to start with, because I couldn't understand and I couldn't, I couldn't understand English. They couldn't understand me, and I couldn't understand them. and they must have had to be patient, I think. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Were they, were they good with you, though? I mean, did they take the time to help you learn?

OLSEN: Yes, they were good with me, yeah. I must say that. I have nothing to, they were good to me. And, uh, I got to places, I have a place, uh, there was only three people in the family, and they were all grown up. And, you know, they were loud most of the time, and I said my sister and I are never gonna learn English. There's nobody to talk to.

SIGRIST: Could your sister speak English?

OLSEN: Oh, yeah. They had learned it. So I said, I said, "I have to get a place with, uh, children." So I got the place with

children, and children, you know how they talk all the time, and that's how I learn English.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Olsen, we need to end now. We've been talking for a whole hour now. (they laugh) But I want to thank you very much for letting me ask you these questions. You've got a great memory. You remember a lot. We're going way back, too.

OLSEN: Yeah, we are going way back.

SIGRIST: And I appreciate you singing for us, too. It was great.

OLSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: I appreciate that you sang for us on tape, too.

OLSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Olevine Olsen, is that your name, Olevine? On October 25, 1995, in Brooklyn at the Norwegian Christian Home. Thank you very much.