

EI-693/MATHISEN

EI-693

OLINE MARTINE HANSEN MATHISEN

BIRTH DATE: FEBRUARY 24, 1907

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 25, 1995

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 2/1999

NORWAY, 1925

AGE 18

PASSAGE ON "THE BERGENSFJORD"

SUBSEQUENT PASSAGE ON "THE STAVANGERFJORD"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Present also at this interview is Kari Janusz, the social services person at the Norwegian Christian Home. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 2/15/1999.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National

Park Service. Today is Wednesday, October 25th, 1995.

I'm in

Brooklyn, New York, at the Norwegian Christian

Home and I'm here

with Oline...

MATHISEN: (correcting Mr. Sigrist's pronunciation) Yeah, Oline.

SIGRIST: Oline.

MATHISEN: There's an "E" in the end.

SIGRIST: Yes, O-L-I-N-E.

MATHISEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oline Hansen Mathisen.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, and Mrs. Mathisen came from Norway in the 1920s and we are going to interview her about that experience. Present also is Peter Hom who is running the equipment and the social services person Kari, K-A-R-I, who has been with us throughout the day. We are just going to pause for a second. (break in tape) Okay, after a slight pause we are resuming and I just want to say for the sake of the tape that Kari has produced some information so that we can be more specific about Mrs. Mathisen's arrival and age at arrival. (Mrs. Mathisen laughs) We believe that Mrs. Mathisen arrived in this country in 1925 from Norway when she was eighteen years old. And we deduced this because we found her marriage certificate which says she was married in 1927 and we believe she was twenty at that time.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So, anyway, we're off and running. (they laugh)

MATHISEN: You'll find the tape in the cellar.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) That's right. Mrs. Mathisen, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

MATHISEN: My birth date, now?

SIGRIST: Yes.

MATHISEN: Yes. That I know for sure.

SIGRIST: Yes.

MATHISEN: February the 20--, February the 24, 1907.

SIGRIST: Thank you. (he laughs) And where in Norway were you born?

MATHISEN: I'm born in Lista, Norway. Lista. Hauge, my home town is a farm.

SIGRIST: And that's, uh, how do you spell Lista?

MATHISEN: L-I-S-T-A.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

MATHISEN: Lista.

SIGRIST: And Hauge, Hauge, we just, we just, before the interview began we spelled that out. That's H-A-U- G...

MATHISEN: Oh, A, "U," U-G, Hauge.

SIGRIST: H-A-U-G-E.

MATHISEN: Yeah, that's the farm.

SIGRIST: That's the farm.

MATHISEN: We owned that. That's the farm's name.

SIGRIST: Where in Norway is this in terms of the country?

MATHISEN: This?

SIGRIST: Yes. Where, where is Lista in terms of...

MATHISEN: On the first--, southern part of Norway. It's first,  
first point. (she gestures) This is Norway and I'm born in  
the, right on the point.

SIGRIST: The very southern...

MATHISEN: Southern Norway.

SIGRIST: Southern part of Norway.

MATHISEN: Yeah, that I know.

SIGRIST: What can you tell me about, about the area where you  
grew up? What do you remember as a child about that area?

MATHISEN: Oh, we were farmers. I been milking the cow and we  
have a hay. My father was in the country, in America, and made  
money. And, uh...

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about the buildings, what it looked

like in that part of Norway?

MATHISEN: Over near the house was, in the barn, like two; a house and an outhouse (she gestures) built all over like in a, together. Lista

SIGRIST: You mean the barn is attached to the house?

MATHISEN: Attached, yeah.

SIGRIST: What, what is it constructed of? What did they make the house of?

MATHISEN: Wood.

SIGRIST: Wood.

MATHISEN: No brick houses.

SIGRIST: And are they, are they painted, the houses?

MATHISEN: Yeah, white house. Must have been a white house.

SIGRIST: Was your house white?

MATHISEN: White, and the barn that was attached was red.

SIGRIST: The barns were red.

MATHISEN: Red, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. How many rooms did your house have?

MATHISEN: Oh, we had three, and four, four upstairs. And then the living room and the kamas [ph] and the kitchen and two more rooms was that. The stove, I recall it, and kamas [ph].

SIGRIST: And what were those other smaller rooms used for, the kamas [ph] and the...

MATHISEN: The kamas [ph] we, we cooked. We have electric stove there and most of the time we cooked there. So we have a table right by the window and we had it as a dining room for ourself (sic). But when we have company, we have to have the dining room, too, next, next to it like, dining room, yeah.

SIGRIST: Is there a piece of furniture that sticks out in your mind from your childhood that was in that house?

MATHISEN: Oh, everything. My father made all the furniture there. He was a carpenter. He made a dining room set and when he, he came from America, he had an organ, player organ. And in that organ there was a, what do you call it, old paper (she gestures) like here, (Kari Janusz speaks off-mike) a column which, you know, played all kinds of music.

SIGRIST: Yes. What kind of furniture did your father make?

MATHISEN: He made the bed and, and for the mattress we had, not hay but what do you call it, hull [ph], hull [ph]. He put that,

we made homemade mattress. And later on we had thin mattress.

SIGRIST: But early on it was homemade.

MATHISEN: Early, from the first, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity in the house?

MATHISEN: No, we had lamp, a lamp. Later on we have electricity, yeah. Oh, yeah, the whole house was electricity.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when the house was converted to electricity?

MATHISEN: Yes, I did.

SIGRIST: Can, can you explain to me how they did that?

MATHISEN: It's about a year. My father come home from America and we were going to have electricity. They hardly had that in Brooklyn but we got it in Lista.

SIGRIST: And how did they go about putting the electricity into the house?

MATHISEN: They put a big pole outside and the two (she laughs) (?) and the wire come from that to the house. And then we, they put in all, all at once electricity. And then we cook. And then if you used too much, they had something that would shut

off, uh, I don't know, the rippa [ph], the rippa [ph].

SIGRIST: (to Kari Janusz) Kari, you can talk. Just speak full voice, though.

KARI JANUSZ: I can talk. Oh, okay, The switch on it. They turned the switch off...

MATHISEN: Yeah.

KARI JANUSZ: ...it just shut off...

MATHISEN: And if you used too much, they stopped. They, they get dark, they up, up, up, (she gestures) you know, up and down, the electricity.

SIGRIST: Yeah, I just want to say Kari, it's all right if you speak. Just, just answer the question, you know...

KARI JANUSZ: Loudly.

SIGRIST: ...just one word or two words and, and say it loudly so that the transcribers can get it all. When the house was converted to electricity, where did the wires go? When they came into the house, uh...

MATHISEN: Well, they come in the end, in the end of all house all the wire. My brother done the electricity and all the wire, we have electricity in every room.

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SIGRIST: But inside the rooms, where did the wires go?

MATHISEN: From the upstairs, the bedroom.

SIGRIST: Were they, were they on the outside of the wall? Did  
the wires come down on the outside of the wall or were they  
inside?

MATHISEN: They come inside.

SIGRIST: So they, so they out the wires inside.

MATHISEN: Yeah, we got, yeah, the main thing from outside and  
then inside in the bedroom there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how old you were when they converted  
the house to electricity?

MATHISEN: How old could I be, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Were you a child or were you...

MATHISEN: Oh, yeah. I went to school.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so you were a child then.

MATHISEN: About six or seven years old.

SIGRIST: I see.

MATHISEN: Of course, my father was in America and come home and  
he wanted electricity, so that's, and then he come home I be  
about seven years old, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

MATHISEN: Andreas.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living? Oh, you said he was  
a carp--, cabinetmaker.

MATHISEN: Carpenter.

SIGRIST: But was that the only thing he did?

MATHISEN: He was, he worked in Brooklyn (?), he'd been to  
Brooklyn (?) because that I hear (she laughs) for many years.  
He worked there.

SIGRIST: So what, what, was he going back and forth between  
America and Norway then...

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...for a long time?

MATHISEN: And my mother was here in America, too. They were  
married here.

SIGRIST: They were married in America?

MATHISEN: They married in America in Elizabethport, New Jersey.

SIGRIST: Do you know how they met, your parents?

MATHISEN: I don't know. They met there in (breshay, ph), in a church, I think.

SIGRIST: In Norway.

MATHISEN: In Norway, yeah. They're not so very far apart in Norway.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever, or father ever tell you any stories about your birth, about what happened the day you were born?

MATHISEN: No, but my mother told me when she was married, she said they had it in her cousin in Elizabethport. They was going to have a little party, uh, well, (?) a little party, and, you know, how you wash and dress, and then, then she forget the flower when she come. But the church was right close to a, like a farm in Elizabethport. So they could, the one that was cooking home, they made dinner, the one that was cooking home, he, they took the flower and, and went after her and she was already up by the altar. But then my mother walked slowly up, she says, and handed my mother it. And people in the church, they thought it was something new. (she laughs) That she told me.

SIGRIST: Well, and, and just the fact that there was a farm across from the church in Elizabethport gives you...

MATHISEN: Yeah, Elizabethport.

SIGRIST: ...an idea of how long ago this was.

MATHISEN: Elizabethport, New Jersey.

SIGRIST: Yes, right.

MATHISEN: I still have the picture of her church.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like?

MATHISEN: I don't know.

SIGRIST: What, what was he like as a person?

MATHISEN: He loved to go out hunting and he'd invite people for dinner, for hare, roast birds and things like that. And one day I was home for a visit, then he invite them. He see a, not a havah [ph], a havah [ph]? Hare.

SIGRIST: Hare.

MATHISEN: Hare, yeah. And he invite them for dinner. And my mother said, "You can't do that." So he said, "Yeah, I know where he sits." And he took the, the gun and bang, bang, bang, he come home with two of them. So we have roast hare.

SIGRIST: Now was he in America when you were a young girl growing up?

MATHISEN: Yeah, he was in the America, uh, much of the time. Yeah, I will say yes, he was.

SIGRIST: And what was he doing in America? What job was he working at in America?

MATHISEN: Building houses, carpenter.

SIGRIST: And where in America was he?

MATHISEN: (misunderstanding Mr. Sigrist) Lista.

SIGRIST: In America? Where was living in America?

MATHISEN: (still misunderstanding Mr. Sigrist) Oh, we lived on Hauge, on the farm.

SIGRIST: When, when your father was in America and you were in Norway when you were a kid...

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...and your father is in America...

MATHISEN: My father was in...

SIGRIST: ...where was he living in America?

MATHISEN: ...in Brooklyn, I think. No, Elizabeth, no, in Brooklyn in Henry Street.

SIGRIST: Henry Street in Brooklyn.

MATHISEN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you see your father very much when you were growing up?

MATHISEN: Yeah, after he come home and I went to school and he never went back again to the America.

SIGRIST: Oh, so he came back and then he stayed in Norway.

MATHISEN: Yeah, he worked home, build house, and then repaired the houses, I think, and get paid that way.

SIGRIST: How was life different for you in Norway when your father came back to live?

MATHISEN: There wasn't anything different because he didn't even know the cow. He was a, builder, a carpenter. He didn't know the cow to the, the, uh (she laughs) the lamb. He didn't know the difference. He didn't know farming.

SIGRIST: He wasn't much of a farmer.

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MATHISEN: No, he wasn't. And didn't care for farm.

SIGRIST: Did you have animals at the house?

MATHISEN: Oh, we had four cows and a hor--, brown horse. And four, five sheep and twenty five chickens.

SIGRIST: Do you, do you have any stories that you like to tell about the animals on the farm?

MATHISEN: Well, my sister, she ride the horse like anything. She took the horse out but I, I was almost afraid of, of that. But I remember milking the cow, that's all.

SIGRIST: How do you milk a cow?

MATHISEN: Oh, gosh. Like that. (she gestures)

SIGRIST: You're making hand gestures up and down.

MATHISEN: Yeah. And then we went to the cellar and we'd, separation, the cream and the milk. And then we went, put them in the can, and then a car came every day and picked up the milk. And we sold the milk. I don't know how much we got.

SIGRIST: But that was extra income for the family?

MATHISEN: Income, and then we have butter. My mother has a such a good butter. We have a cow.

SIGRIST: How did your mother make the butter?

MATHISEN: With the, (she laughs and gestures)...

SIGRIST: You're making a circular motion.

MATHISEN: Churn? What do you call it? A chur--, chur--,  
(Norwegian)...

KARI JANUSZ: Churn.

SIGRIST: The churn?

MATHISEN: Churn, yeah.

SIGRIST: Churn. So it was all done by hand then?

MATHISEN: Yeah, sure. We didn't have no, no machine. We have  
the, the separation from the milk in the cellar. That,  
that as the only thing.

SIGRIST: What time of the day would you milk the cow?

MATHISEN: Oh, we, sometime, not like now, they go by the clock.  
But eight or eighty thirty in the morning. And then in the  
night six or seven o'clock.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about having to milk the cow?

MATHISEN: I don't like it. We like to go out. (she laughs)

They have a, uh, in front of a house we have a  
(Norwegian), a, a kind of berry. It's a long berry with, uh,  
red there. (she gestures) So we was there picking the berry,  
what do you call it?

SIGRIST: These berries that are...

MATHISEN: Berries, yeah.

SIGRIST: So you'd rather be picking the berries than milking  
the cow.

MATHISEN: Yeah, I didn't care, care for milking the cow.  
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: What about the other animals on the farm? Did you  
have to take care of those?

MATHISEN: No. We didn't have any. A cat we had. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember the cat's name?

MATHISEN: Lars was one. (she laughs) And Tobias.

SIGRIST: Lars and Tobias. (Mrs. Mathisen laughs) So you had two  
cats.

MATHISEN: Yeah. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

MATHISEN: Marta.

SIGRIST: Marta?

MATHISEN: Marta, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

MATHISEN: Uh, Penne...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

MATHISEN: Tonsen, Thompson.

SIGRIST: Thompson.

MATHISEN: She called, called herself Thompson when she come to  
the America but her name is Tonsen.

SIGRIST: And how do you spell Tonsen?

MATHISEN: T, T-E, uh, uh, N, N-S-E-N.

SIGRIST: So that's T, the O with the line through it, no?

MATHISEN: Yeah, the uh, yeah. The O with the line like that,  
(she gestures) that's uh.

SIGRIST: So it's T-O with the line through it N-S...

MATHISEN: S-E-N.

SIGRIST: ...E-N.

MATHISEN: All the Norwegian is S-E-N.

SIGRIST: Tonsen.

MATHISEN: Yeah. And Penne.

SIGRIST: Huh?

MATHISEN: The last name are Penne, P-E-N-N-E, Penne.

SIGRIST: Penne.

MATHISEN: Penne.

SIGRIST: And what was her personality like? What was she like?

MATHISEN: Happy and gay. She was very happy.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things she liked to do with the children when you were young?

MATHISEN: Oh, we went to the bazaar.

SIGRIST: To the bazaar?

MATHISEN: To the bazaar. And one day my mo--, my grandmother gave me (Norwegian), fifty, half a crown and I did get the number and I and I have a rocking chair. I won and I was so happy. And then my girlfriend, we carried it home. My father didn't know, didn't believe it that I got my, won it at a bazaar. Before I, I wasn't allowed to go to the bazaar. We could only go to the Salvation Army. That was his main, his main things, when he went to the Salvation Army.

SIGRIST: What would you do at the Salvation Army? What was there to do?

MATHISEN: Oh, we was there singing and we meet, always meet at Salvation Army. And that wasn't far from our house.

SIGRIST: You, you said you weren't allowed to go to the bazaar. Can you describe what the bazaar was and why you weren't allowed to go there?

MATHISEN: The bazaar was Salvation Army. The money went to the Salvation Army.

SIGRIST: The money that they made at the bazaar went to the Salvation Army.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But what were they doing at the bazaar to make money?

MATHISEN: Oh, they had (Norwegian), what's that? They knitting

stockings and they had a meeting once a week, make  
tablecloths and things. And then they have coffee and,  
and...

SIGRIST: So it was a social gathering place.

MATHISEN: Yeah, yeah, that's right. That I would say.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What were some of your mother's chores around  
the house? What, what were some of her  
responsibilities?

MATHISEN: They knitted, she knitted all bedspreads and things  
like that. And made all those clothes. They didn't buy any  
clothes in the store.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a, a suit of clothes that you had as  
a child that sticks out in your mind for some reason?

MATHISEN: No, because we got all the material from U.S.A.,  
dresses and coat and, my father bought it over here and send  
it to Norway. He was a, he worked as a, on a boat, too, so he  
made extra money.

SIGRIST: What religion were, were you?

MATHISEN: Lutheran, Lutheran, Lutheran, nothing but.  
(they laugh)

SIGRIST: And was there a church nearby where you came from?

MATHISEN: Yeah, I come from (Norwegian).

SIGRIST: Yes.

MATHISEN: A praying house, (Norwegian) they call it.

(Norwegian). Did you interview with Meba [ph], Lev Meba  
[ph]? We were neighbor.

SIGRIST: No, no.

MATHISEN: Lev Meba [ph]. He, he was the first caretaker that  
built up this. We were the same age and, and he's the, he's  
a little, no, he's not older. He's younger than I am.

SIGRIST: How, how often did you have to go to church?

MATHISEN: We did, uh, Christmas (she laughs) and Easter and the  
big holidays.

SIGRIST: So you just went to church on the big holidays.

MATHISEN: Yeah, but we went to Sunday school.

SIGRIST: And what, what was that? Where did you have to go for  
that, to the church?

MATHISEN: Yeah, no, to the praying house, (Norwegian) I would  
say. We went just down (?) where I live.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your Sunday school teachers or...

MATHISEN: One of my Sunday school teacher was Lev's dad (?) Meba [ph]. Uh, the Mebas [ph], they work here. Yeah, his father was Sunday school teacher and he was, ooh boy. One thing, we was going to sing Christmas song (Norwegian) and, you know, when you're a kid, hee-hee- hee, start laughing and then, then he took that, uh, slap his (she laughs), don't put, don't put that in, and slap his face, face because he was going to be, he was so strict, ooh boy.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so Sunday school was, it was a strict...

MATHISEN: Yeah, very strict.

SIGRIST: What about at home? How did you practice your religion at home?

MATHISEN: Uh, we, hardly nothing. We read (Father, our?) and then when we're going to eat, start with the (Norwegian). (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you say that for us in Norwegian?

MATHISEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: The prayer?

MATHISEN: Yes. "In Jesus' name we go to the table."

SIGRIST: Can you say it in Norwegian?

MATHISEN: In Norwegian? (Norwegian) (Father, our?), you know,  
the Lord's Prayer? That we...

SIGRIST: You had to say the Lord's Prayer?

MATHISEN: Oh, yeah, every night.

SIGRIST: And did you say that in Norwegian? (Mrs. Mathisen  
pauses) Did you recite...

MATHISEN: Yeah...

SIGRIST: ...that in Norwegian?

MATHISEN: ...everything. We couldn't speak English.

SIGRIST: Can, can you do that for us now on tape? Can you say  
the Lord's Prayer in Norwegian?

MATHISEN: Yeah. (she prays in Norwegian)

SIGRIST: Thank you.

MATHISEN: See, that I can.

SIGRIST: What about school? Did you, how old were you when you  
first started attending school?

MATHISEN: Seven years old. We all Norwegian have to start, start when they're seven.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about attending school in Norway?

MATHISEN: Walking in a bunch. Walking to, (she laughs) back and forth.

SIGRIST: The school was a distance away?

MATHISEN: Oh, yeah. It took a half an hour to walk. But I can't say just fifty, uh, half an hour because, you know, when you're a bunch of kids together, you stop there and blah, blah, blah a little bit. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: When you were in school, what, what were some of the subjects that you were taught?

MATHISEN: What do you mean, eh?

SIGRIST: What, what, what were some of the subjects that you learned in school?

MATHISEN: We learned, uh, arithmetic. We learn everything. We had a very, very good teacher. He was the best one there was for the whole Lista. So, his, his name was Peter Lesesblan [ph]. And he was one, nobody dumpte [ph], what do you call that, dumpte [ph], didn't make the test when we have an (examine?). They were all in that class passed. But it

was out of place in, in Lista. They, they didn't make the test because that day we have (examine?), you were not allowed to know, know the test before you started.

SIGRIST: So everyone did well in his class, they were all...?

MATHISEN: Yeah, in his class, whenever they had to. So he said that, nobody dumpte [ph], they called, went down.  
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: No one failed, that's it.

MATHISEN: Yeah, failed.

SIGRIST: Failed. (Mrs. Mathisen laughs) What kind of food did people eat when you were a kid growing up?

MATHISEN: Oh, we had oatmeal (we send it?), uh, and bread. And when my son was home, he said, "You can't call the white bread. Stoomp [ph], we say stoomp [ph]. They grow stoomp [ph]," he says because he learned to talk Norwegian, talk it half and half my son.

SIGRIST: What, what time did you eat breakfast in the morning?

MATHISEN: Oh, oh, when we feel for it. (she laughs) We have no clock, no clock. We don't go by the time, no.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you have to do chores before you left for school?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

MATHISEN: Just dressed and run to school.

SIGRIST: I see.

MATHISEN: It's not...

SIGRIST: Did you come home for lunch from school?

MATHISEN: No, that was too, sometime we did. Yeah, we did in nice weather.

SIGRIST: And what kinds of food did you eat? You mentioned oatmeal. What, what would you have eaten for like your, your big meal of the day?

MATHISEN: Meat soup. Stew, I would say. We had plenty of meat. (after soupen [ph]?) I don't know.

SIGRIST: What kinds of meat did you have?

MATHISEN: Lamb, because we have sheep and we kill them, put them in the barrel and cook pea soup and lamb stew, labscose [ph].

SIGRIST: How did you kill the lambs?

MATHISEN: Oohff, I don't know. (Mrs. Mathisen laughs) I never see it. But we had, they got blood and then they save the blood and they make blood pudding, uh, blue pudding, blood pudding and what do you call it, blue pudding?

SIGRIST: Liquid...

MATHISEN: And compferh [ph], blue compferh [ph], compferh [ph] (she laughs) they also made. We had, my, my son is (Polish?) but he never been there but he says he come to Norway this summer and, "They serving me compferh [ph]. Oh, that was good." He loved compferh [ph]. Steak come with it, with a lump of fat in it and bacon with that. So he said, "What, what you going to have for dinner," he says when he come. So I say, "Compferh [ph]." I was just going to tease him but she, he love it.

SIGRIST: What, uh, who did the cooking in the house?

MATHISEN: My mother.

SIGRIST: And what would she cook for a special occasion? What was a special meal that she would make?

MATHISEN: Roast pork.

SIGRIST: How would she prepare the roast pork?

MATHISEN: In the stove, roasted.

SIGRIST: But I mean did she do something special with it?

MATHISEN: No, put it in and, oh, I don't know, and (Norwegian),  
meat soup, (Norwegian) (she laughs), lamb, with lamb in.

SIGRIST: Lots of soup.

MATHISEN: (Lots of soup?), yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you celebrate birthdays in Norway?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

MATHISEN: They didn't have that.

SIGRIST: Didn't celebrate. What was the big holiday that you  
celebrated?

MATHISEN: Oh, that was Christmas Day...

SIGRIST: Yeah.

MATHISEN: ...and Easters [sic].

SIGRIST: Can you describe how you celebrated Easter for me?

MATHISEN: We have eggs Easters [sic] morning. We all have breakfast together with egg, cooked egg. And that's, and co--, we don't have, the kids didn't have coffee. We have milk. Of course, we have plenty of milk. And coffee, and that's...

SIGRIST: And then how, how else would you celebrate Easter? What ceremony was there?

MATHISEN: Oh, they went out cooking, outside the houses and cooked the egg outside. That was Easter. Then we went to the church in the morning, Easter Sunday. We went to church. I don't know what they want an egg for (she laugh) on Easter but we was out in the farm cooking the eggs, all of use like a party.

SIGRIST: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

MATHISEN: Oh, I had, we were five girls, so four, and one brother. He was five years older than, than me.

SIGRIST: Are you the youngest?

MATHISEN: I'm the oldest.

SIGRIST: You're the oldest of the children.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

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MATHISEN: Oldest, not the, my brother is five years older than me. And then there...

SIGRIST: So you're the oldest girl.

MATHISEN: Girl, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

MATHISEN: Five girls.

SIGRIST: I see. And your brother is five years older than you. Was there one, was there somebody in the family that you were the closest to?

MATHISEN: Yeah, my, uh, one of the girls. Elizabeth her name is.

SIGRIST: Elizabeth.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a story about maybe something that you and Elizabeth did as children together?

MATHISEN: We didn't do anything. She was, she was singing very good but I don't (sing?). She was (almost?) younger than me but was the best of us all five.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when she was born?

MATHISEN: Yes. And I remember I have to go for, from the school to my grandfather. They live in Kalaback [ph], and, and grandmother's. She stay there a few days till everything was all right. Here it's one or two days but there it was over a week when you had a baby.

SIGRIST: When, when a woman was pregnant, did she go out in public back then?

MATHISEN: Oh, yes, just like before. And some got the baby even the same day. They didn't...

SIGRIST: There was no big fuss made about it.

MATHISEN: No, no fuss and no nothing.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: When you were growing up, what did you know about America?

MATHISEN: I know everything because we got all the clothes from America, and shoes. And my uncle, he was a (Turner's?) construction foreman. He bought shoes and sent home to my sister Eliz--, we had a hole in the ceiling so the heat

could go up in, uh, upstairs in the bedroom. So, uh...

SIGRIST: Why did you want to go to America?

MATHISEN: To make money.

SIGRIST: Did you have a job in Norway?

MATHISEN: Let me see. Yeah, I have a few months in my mother's  
cousin. They have five kids. So I was going there to take care  
of the kids. And then all of us were going. That's my mother's  
cousin in Lyngdal. Then I went to America to make money. And I  
got a good job over here.

SIGRIST: (misunderstanding Mrs. Mathisen) What, what was your  
cousin's name, Luhda?

MATHISEN: Lyngdal.

SIGRIST: Luhnga?

MATHISEN: Lyngdal.

SIGRIST: Luhn--, could you spell that, please?

MATHISEN: (turning to Kari Janusz for assistance) Lyngdal?

KARI JANUSZ: Lyngdal is the place her cousins lived in.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see, I see.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But you, did you come to America with one of your  
cousins?

MATHISEN: No, I come with the Stavangerfjord.

SIGRIST: But, but didn't, did one, I thought before the  
interview started that you said that you had come to America  
with one of your cousins. That, that a cousin came with you to  
America.

MATHISEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was his...

MATHISEN: But I didn't go with him. I come alone (like?).

SIGRIST: You came alone.

MATHISEN: And my brother was here.

SIGRIST: Your brother was here.

MATHISEN: My brother was.

SIGRIST: Where was your brother living?

MATHISEN: My brother have a farm at home. He's dead now.

SIGRIST: Where was he living in America when, when you...

MATHISEN: In Cou--, Court Street, in Court Street, Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: Court Street in Brooklyn.

MATHISEN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was he doing for a living here in America?

MATHISEN: Oh, like the same, all the Norwegian, carpenter.

SIGRIST: He was a carpenter.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. How, how did your brother like living in America before you came over?

MATHISEN: He likes it. He was electrician because he put all the electrician [sic] in our house before he left. And then he, maybe he started over here, that I can't say, and, and help people building houses.

SIGRIST: But he enjoyed America...

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...when he came here. What do you remember about the

process of getting ready to leave Norway?

MATHISEN: That I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to a doctor?

MATHISEN: No, we never go to the doctor in Norway. (she laughs)

We didn't. Not before the day we die. (That's what doctors say?). He says, "You have to have the (open?) when we call for the doctor. They didn't believe in the doctors. Even my great, my granddaughter is a doctor. But they didn't. Years ago, nobody went to the doctor.

SIGRIST: Do you remember home remedies that your mother made in the kitchen that would take care of illnesses that the children had?

MATHISEN: No, I don't think so.

SIGRIST: Like if you had a bad cold, how would your mother take care of you when you were a kid?

MATHISEN: Stay home in the bed. No, we didn't have anything. We have the whooping cough. We have the mumps.

SIGRIST: But Mom didn't make special medicines...

MATHISEN: No, there was no special.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Where, did you have to get papers together

before you left Norway? Did you have to get like a visa and  
stuff like that?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: Not that you remember.

MATHISEN: Nothing.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you to America?  
What did you pack to take to America?

MATHISEN: Uh, a couple dresses and a coat and that's all. And  
some shoes. We didn't have much because they gave us, when I  
come over my brother bought everything. My uncle, he dressed  
me up from the toe to the hair because he was the (Turner?)  
construction foreman, so he had plenty of money.

SIGRIST: Was there a difference between the way women dressed  
in Norway as compared to how they dressed in America at that  
time?

MATHISEN: I don't think so. I didn't notice it.

SIGRIST: It looked the same to you.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did they give you, did your family give you a  
"good bye" gathering of some sort when you were getting

ready to leave?

MATHISEN: No. (That story was from we were born and up?) We  
have to (Norwegian), how do you say, say a prayer before we  
eat and then the (Father, our?). Then we went to bed, that's  
all.

SIGRIST: But did...

MATHISEN: And then I went to Sunday school.

SIGRIST: But, but, when you were, the day that you left your  
family to go to get on the ship...

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did they, did they give you a little "good bye" party  
of some sort?

MATHISEN: No, no, there was no such party.

SIGRIST: No.

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: Did, where did you go to get on the ship?

MATHISEN: In Kristiansand.

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

MATHISEN: Oh, how did we go? With a boat

SIGRIST: And did any of the family go with you?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what it was like to say "good  
bye" to your family?

MATHISEN: No. At fourteen you were grown up. You had to take  
care of yourself. Fourteen or fifteen you were grown up taking  
care of yourself, uh huh.

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

MATHISEN: On Stavangerfjord it is quite big. No, not before.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the ship that you got on to  
come to America?

MATHISEN: That was, I think it was Bergensfjord.

SIGRIST: The Bergensfjord.

MATHISEN: Bergensfjord, yeah.

SIGRIST: And tell me what you thought when you were going up  
the gangplank looking at this great, big ship.

MATHISEN: Didn't think of anything. I think my sister went with  
me to Farsund, to the big, big town where we come from,  
Farsund. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: (he laughs) So she went with you part of the way.

MATHISEN: Yeah, she went to where the, the, (Norwegian), the  
little boat went into Kristiansand. And then, when we come to  
Kristiansand, we went to Oslo to the big, there we got  
Bergensfjord.

SIGRIST: So it, it...

MATHISEN: And Bergensfjord (she gestures)...

SIGRIST: You're, you're making wave motions with your hands  
here.

MATHISEN: It was terrible. Stavangerfjord much better. But  
Bergensfjord was oooooohhhh. (she gestures)

SIGRIST: Why, why are you talking about the Stavangerfjord?  
When, when were you on that ship?

MATHISEN: When I come back again.

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SIGRIST: All right, so that's a later trip then.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, okay. I was confused.

MATHISEN: It was a better ship.

SIGRIST: Yeah. When you were in Oslo waiting to get on the Bergensfjord, did you undergo any kind of examinations?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: Did you have to stay overnight in Oslo before you got on the Bergensfjord?

MATHISEN: No, we went right on the Bergensfjord.

SIGRIST: Right on the ship.

MATHISEN: Right on the boat. From boat to boat.

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

MATHISEN: Oh, we got a little, tiny, little room with a bed upstairs. (she laughs and gestures) Two beds, two narrow beds.

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SIGRIST: Now, now, you are saying "we." Is it just you or is someone with you?

MATHISEN: There were four, no, four, four in the bed, four in the...

SIGRIST: The cabin.

MATHISEN: In the cabin.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

MATHISEN: Small cabin.

SIGRIST: Did you know the other three people in your cabin?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: No. Did you like them? (he laughs)

MATHISEN: Yeah, I never have trouble with people I didn't like, never.

SIGRIST: How long did the ship take to get across the Atlantic?

MATHISEN: About seven or eight days.

SIGRIST: And tell me what sticks out in your mind about being on the ship.

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MATHISEN: Oh, (she pauses and then laughs)...

SIGRIST: (he laughs) Nothing?

MATHISEN: I, I could tell you a terrible story. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Oh, I love terrible stories. (he laughs)

MATHISEN: I went to the bathroom and ship, boat, boat went that  
(she gestures) and we didn't have the closed window, what I  
mean, and then I got a, poof, the ocean come right in my head.  
(I was kind of damp?) That I never forget. (they laugh) The  
wave come and, hepps! (she gestures and laughs)

SIGRIST: Hit you right in the head.

MATHISEN: All, all the water. I had to go in the cabin. I  
changed all clothes. (she laughs) That I never forget.

SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: No. Where did they feed you on the Bergensfjord?

MATHISEN: What?

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you?

MATHISEN: Oh, we had to go into the dining room, big dining

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rooms they have there, a lot of good food. I remember the  
oatmeal was so good. We didn't have sugar on it like here. We  
have (Norwegian?). (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember being on the deck of the ship?

MATHISEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what did you do up on the deck?

MATHISEN: Nothing. Just look.

SIGRIST: What did you see?

MATHISEN: Nothing, nothing but water, nothing.

SIGRIST: Did any, you said the ship was rough...

MATHISEN: Yeah, it was rough.

SIGRIST: It was, yeah. Do you remember anybody else getting  
sick on the ship?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

MATHISEN: No. It was leaning. There was narrow bed. It was  
not bigger than that sofa there.

(she laughs and gestures)

SIGRIST: Uh huh, just a small, little thing.

MATHISEN: Oh, but long. But narrow. You couldn't hardly turn around.

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

MATHISEN: No, that I don't remember.

SIGRIST: The Statue of Liberty. Well, tell me, you said you went through Ellis Island.

MATHISEN: Yes, I did.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about, about being processed?

MATHISEN: I remember before we go, go into the, we had two small girls with, from Arendal, and they look at the colored people. They get so scared. They were crying like anything. It was so scared [sic] for them. And then before, they didn't examine me that day, examine or anything, but they comb my hair and see if we had lice. (microphone disturbance) But I was clean and no, (not know anything about that thing?).  
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: How did you feel inside when they cut your hair...

MATHISEN: I didn't cut my hair.

SIGRIST: Or when they were looking for...

MATHISEN: I had long, long hair.

SIGRIST: Yeah...

MATHISEN: Yeah, and then after I cut it.

SIGRIST: But how did you feel when the doctors were looking for lice?

MATHISEN: I feel terrible. I thought that was terrible, to see if they have lice in my hair, oooph.

SIGRIST: How long, how long were you at Ellis Island?

MATHISEN: Oh, we just come in there. It wasn't, we went, went to a big, long table and there was somebody that combed your hair and looked, ooh, and then we went out. And then my mother's cousin, she live in Sixteenth Street, picked me up there. And my (brothers were?) waiting in that pier. What do you call that pier now? Where they...

SIGRIST: There are lots of piers.

MATHISEN: Yeah, but we come there in South Street...

SIGRIST: Yeah, Battery Park?

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MATHISEN: With a ferry, yeah. And that's, and then we took the subway from, to Sixteenth Street I come and (near Fifth Avenue?).

SIGRIST: Did, did they examine anything else...

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: ...at Ellis Island?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: Just, just looking for lice.

MATHISEN: Just, uh, yeah. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did anyone ask you any questions?

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything that you had never seen before when you were at Ellis Island?

MATHISEN: We went to ice cream parlor. I had banana split and I never did have that before. (she laughs) That's the only thing. And we had, went up there for supper, and potato salad

and things like that I never ate before. And the girl had been,  
the girl was home, my second cousin. They have the kitchen, a  
round, big kitchen table and they have potato salad, all kind  
of cold, cold cuts and everything. I never had salad before,  
no.

SIGRIST: Did you like it?

MATHISEN: Yeah, I like every, I always like food. You can see  
that on me. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Tell me about, uh, you said you got on the subway and  
went to Brooklyn.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you'd ever been on a subway?

MATHISEN: Yes, we have no subway for Lista. No, no.

SIGRIST: And what was that like for you, to be on the subway?

MATHISEN: I don't know. I can't say that. Nothing. It went  
fast. One, two, three we was home.

SIGRIST: Did you have any impressions of New York and, and  
Brooklyn, and what you were seeing?

MATHISEN: No, my father have big, big picture of the bridge.

SIGRIST: The Brooklyn Bridge?

MATHISEN: Brooklyn Bridge and Manhattan, but all the bridges. A big, big picture. We have it in our (room?). Saved it up to the late, later year. He had it home, everything.

SIGRIST: So you sort of knew what it looked like, in a way...

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...before you got here.

MATHISEN: That's it. And they talk about New York and they talked, my mother and father talk English together so we don't understand it when they were going (she laughs) to do something. And that's all (she laughs) they, so we...

SIGRIST: How did you learn English, then, once you got here?

MATHISEN: Oh, me, I don't know, like here everybody else did it. And then I went to the (four shuttle?) school and then I learned a few words there.

SIGRIST: Did you get a job when you came...

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...to America?

MATHISEN: Yeah, housework.

SIGRIST: How long did it take you to get the job?

MATHISEN: Oh, that could, a week.

SIGRIST: Just a week.

MATHISEN: I can get it right away.

SIGRIST: And how did you get the job?

MATHISEN: Through my cousin's family. And they know somebody.

But I was there, they were too dirty to wash the windows  
and I quit. And then, when we going to eat, they give us  
chicken soup with the, the feets [sic] of the chicken. Ah! And  
I was going to throw up. I know I didn't like that. Chicken  
soup, not noodles in, just plain soup for something. Oohh,  
that's all.

(they laugh)

SIGRIST: That would be enough to make anyone want  
to quit.

MATHISEN: Yeah, and the chicken feet that lady...

SIGRIST: Chicken feet.

MATHISEN: I think, I think they scrape it (?) but oohhh...

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake...

MATHISEN: That I never, that I never forget, when we have chicken soup with the chicken feet.

SIGRIST: This was the first place that you went to work?

MATHISEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes, and can you tell me a little bit about that family that you went to, to work in their house?

MATHISEN: They was, I wasn't there so long. Two months, maybe. I had very good pay, forty five dollars a month.

SIGRIST: Forty five dollars a month.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you live with them?

MATHISEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes, and what weresome of your duties in the house?

MATHISEN: Everything.

SIGRIST: Which is what? Tell me what you had to do.

MATHISEN: Cleaning, vacuum cleaner, clean the window, (bashing?), scrubbing the kitchen floor, washing clothes.

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And they send t heir clothes out to the, that wash and dry  
the clothes and iron it. And we work like slave. So I send  
a letter home to Norway to my cousin. I said, "Here it is so  
easy. I can go in the night and lay down and go back to work,  
you know, it's nothing." I always like America. My brother, my  
brother was happy (for and he had a phone in his  
room?) in Fifty Second Street and Fifth Avenue.

SIGRIST: Were you living with your brother...

MATHISEN: No.

SIGRIST: ..when you first came here?

MATHISEN: No, no.

SIGRIST: But you were living in the house?

MATHISEN: I live with my mother's cousin...

SIGRIST: Right.

MATHISEN: ...in Sixteenth Street.

SIGRIST: Now you got married in 1927, we decided right before  
this all started.

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you met your husband-to-be.

MATHISEN: Should I tell you? A dance, in a dance.

SIGRIST: At a dance.

MATHISEN: He, he played accordion and violin. He's a musician  
and her came from the town named Sandefjord. That's near  
Oslo.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

MATHISEN: Meidel, M-E-I-D-E-L, Mathisen.

SIGRIST: And what was it about him that you liked? What was  
the attraction?

MATHISEN: I don't know. I forgot that. (she laughs) He's been  
dead now two years. (she laughs) No, he was a, he was a nice  
fellow.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about getting married? Can  
you describe the ceremony for me and what you wore and...

MATHISEN: I had a brown dress on. (she laughs) That's all I, I  
married at Forty Sixth Street church and pastor I, I don't  
know.

SIGRIST: When did you become a citizen?

MATHISEN: That time we bought a house so they say, "You better

be a citizen." On Fifty Seventh Street and Eighth Avenue.  
We bought a two family house. So, I said to the judge, "I want  
to cut out my second name. I hate Martine." So he says,  
"Martini? Good American drink." (she laughs) So I said,  
"I don't like that name." (Mr. Sigrist laughs) That I  
remember so good.

SIGRIST: Did, did you have children?

MATHISEN: Yeah, I have a boy and a girl.

SIGRIST: And their names?

MATHISEN: One is Edward Meidel and the girl is, what's her name  
now, I can't, she's forty seven this month, my daughter.  
And he, I think he's sixty seven, something like that. I can't  
remember just the date.

SIGRIST: There's a, there's a big age difference between...

MATHISEN: There's a big, he was in the navy.

SIGRIST: I see.

MATHISEN: So he, now, my grandson come home from the navy and  
say, "What a nice, young husband you have." (she laughs)  
He thought that was my husband.  
(Mr. Sigrist laughs)

MATHISEN: How do you think your life would have been different

if you had stayed in Norway?

MATHISEN: Oooph. We were farmer [sic]. I don't like farming.

SIGRIST: You'd be milking cows now.

MATHISEN: Yeah, I don't like that, ooohhh. And then we'd,  
don't know, (bray?) milk, they all, in it, the bag, I don't  
know what you call it.

SIGRIST: Do you, when you think about yourself, do you think of  
yourself as being American or being Norwegian or how do you  
think of yourself?

MATHISEN: I think of myself as being pure Norwegian. That is  
born in me and nobody can help it. And, and that's mixed it  
up with Norwegian and talk Norwegian and never gave up  
Norwegian.

SIGRIST: Did you always have Norwegian friends...

MATHISEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...throughout your whole life?

MATHISEN: Yes, my neighbors.

SIGRIST: You've been back to Norway, yes?

MATHISEN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: How many times?

MATHISEN: Oh, about five times...

SIGRIST: Yeah.

MATHISEN: ...back and forth.

SIGRIST: The first time you went back, how did it feel to be  
back in Norway?

MATHISEN: Oh, same thing. Like I been there for always.

SIGRIST: Like you hadn't even left, sort of?

MATHISEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, that's interesting. Did your parents ever come  
to America to visit?

MATHISEN: Oh, yes. My mother was for a year and she love it.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

MATHISEN: She was sorry she went home but, see, my grandfather  
want them to come home and that's where they bought the farm,  
his fa--, on my father's side.

SIGRIST: But I mean when you were here in America, did your

parents ever come to visit you here? I know they had been in  
America before..

MATHISEN: Yeah, they...

SIGRIST: ...but, but after you were here, did they ever come?

MATHISEN: Yeah, not my, not my father.

SIGRIST: No.

MATHISEN: But my mother was a couple times.

SIGRIST: Yeah, and you said she really liked it.

MATHISEN: She love it.

SIGRIST: Yeah, great. I guess I don't have any more questions.

I think that we've put you through your paces (they laugh)  
for the day.

MATHISEN: I guess so.

SIGRIST: Yeah, well, Mrs. Math--, Mrs. Mathisen...

MATHISEN: And we all the five girls is married in Norway.

SIGRIST: Yeah, oh, you mean the other children?

MATHISEN: Yeah, that's it. My sisters.

SIGRIST: Your sisters.

MATHISEN: One is in a, uh, is in the farm with a Danish guy.  
His name is Albertsen [ph] and the rest is Norwegian.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Mathisen, thank you very much for...

MATHISEN: You're so welcome.

SIGRIST: ...letting me, you did a great job. (they laugh) You  
have a good sense of humor, so, this is Paul Sigrist signing  
off with Oline...

MATHISEN: Oline, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...Oline Mathisen on October 25th, 1995 with Kari  
[Janusz] and Peter [Hom] in attendance at the Norwegian  
Christian Home in Brooklyn. Thank you.

MATHISEN: That's right. Thank you.