

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

BJORKMAN: A-U-K-R-A.

SIGRIST: Is that the name of the town?

BJORKMAN: It's an island outside of Molde the city of roses.

SIGRIST: All right. Can you spell Molde for me?

BJORKMAN: Molde. M-O-L-D-E.

SIGRIST: And what was the city that you said?

BJORKMAN: Aukra was the island that I was born on. It was seven Norwegian miles around.

SIGRIST: Seven miles around.

BJORKMAN: Yeah, seven Norwegian miles.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Is that different than American miles?

BJORKMAN: Yes, much more.

SIGRIST: More.

BJORKMAN: Yeah. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being a child on this

island?

BJORKMAN: Oh, I had a lovely time. My father went here when my brother was, I think in 1912? My brother was born in 1911, 1912. Of course, he was, um, uh . . .
(she laughs) He went to school, to make, uh, oh, I just remembered a name . . . He made tools and everything, with iron and, oh, just very good pay and you take to school for two years. Interesting student.

SIGRIST: He was learning how to make these tools.

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes.

BJORKMAN: I may remember it (she laughs) before you go the name. The name is Trevil. That's my father's, I inherited that from him. I forget names.

SIGRIST: Well, that's okay.

BJORKMAN: And . . .

SIGRIST: We were talking about what you remembered about growing up on the island in Norway.

BJORKMAN: Yeah. I was on a farm with my, my, uh, mother's two brothers, and a sister (?). And . . . (disturbance to the microphone)

SIGRIST: Sorry, you might want to not play with the wire.
(they laugh) That's quite all right. I'm sorry, you . . .

BJORKMAN: They had a big, big farm. Of course, they didn't have the new things now. The last time they had fifty cows and . . .

SIGRIST: Tell me what it was like to be a little girl on the farm.

BJORKMAN: It was, I was very happy there. You could, and it was a beautiful place. And we saw a lot of islands around us with mountains that we could go and have picnics on. And we went bathing, of course, in the summer, us kids. (she laughs) But we also had to work.

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

BJORKMAN: I started when I was seven years old to clean on Saturdays. I was, since I started school at seven. And, and it increased by the years, and we planted

potatoes, my uncle had so much potatoes. Just like the best potatoes here, white. And we planted them and took them up at the, like this . . .

SIGRIST: With a tool that . . .

BJORKMAN: No.

SIGRIST: No?

BJORKMAN: Like, something that you dig with, like this?

SIGRIST: Like a shovel.

BJORKMAN: No.

SIGRIST: No?

BJORKMAN: (Norwegian) (she laughs) It has, like you could, the dirt, and then you took the top, the green, and shake them, and pick them up by hands at that time, all those potatoes.

SIGRIST: I see.

BJORKMAN: And then we had help, too. We were, had a lot of people.

SIGRIST: Did you have animals on the farm?

BJORKMAN: Yeah, we had cows. One, two, three, four, five, six sometimes. And calves. We either sold them or they had, had them for meat for ourselves.

SIGRIST: So if the cows gave birth to a calf, you would sell the calves.

BJORKMAN: They would sell the calves. Sometimes somebody wanted a good, uh, from the best milker, you know, but easy to sell those.

SIGRIST: So you had cows and baby cows, calves. What else did you have on the farm?

BJORKMAN: Pigs. We had, uh, a he-pig, too. Then you get two pigs yourself. They were not only, when the mother gives birth. So that's how they make money. Then they sell them, and have one for themselves. And, uh, fifty chickens, a lot of eggs. We brought that to the store, you know, to the grocery store. And he bought them, and then we shopped for what we got for the eggs.

SIGRIST: So cows, pigs, chickens . . .

BJORKMAN: A horse.

SIGRIST: And a horse. One horse?

BJORKMAN: Yeah, only one. I think it had two for a while.
But, uh, that was just one that he was going to sell.
We were, that he bought someplace, the uncle that
was the head of it. Uh, what else did we have?
Anything else? Two cats. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did the cats have a name?

BJORKMAN: Well, yeah, but I don't remember that. It was mother
and daughter always. In the daytime they came home
and lay underneath the oven in the kitchen that you
baked with and everything, the big iron oven.
(she laughs) And underneath the cats, the room for
the cats, they slept all there. And at night they
went to the barn to chase the mice away.

SIGRIST: Do you have any stories about the animals on the
farm, anything that you can tell us about . . .

BJORKMAN: My brother and I played a lot, too. And my brother,
I remember once they let the horses out in the spring
to run because they haven't been working for the
winter, you know. Certain days they let the horses
out to run, the neighbors and all. And, uh, our

horse and the neighbors' horse was friends.

(she laughs) And my grandmother went out when she was seventy-five years old, because the horse next door wasn't nice to our horse. She hit him, so he went home. (she laughs) And I was calling my uncle, "You'd better come and get Bestenor. She's gonna get hurt." But she didn't. She was slim. She was Spanish descent, that's what I've got to tell you.

SIGRIST: Your grandmother.

BJORKMAN: My grandmother.

SIGRIST: You called her a name. Is that grandmother?

BJORKMAN: Bestenor.

SIGRIST: What does that mean?

BJORKMAN: That's Norwegian.

SIGRIST: For grandmother?

BJORKMAN: Yeah, Bestenor, Bestenor.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

BJORKMAN: B-E-S-T-E-N-O-R.

SIGRIST: What other things stick out in your mind about your grandmother?

BJORKMAN: Oh, I was a girl, combed her hair every Saturday, washed it and combed it. Shiny black hair, and then nose, brown eyes. And she was beautiful, olive skin. And I thought it was so nice because there wasn't anybody else like that around.

SIGRIST: Yeah, but she must have stuck out a bit in a Scandinavian country?

BJORKMAN: Oh, she stuck to the farm, that's all. She had six boys, six boys and four girls, yeah.

SIGRIST: Is this, whose mother is this, your mother or your father?

BJORKMAN: That's my mother's mother.

SIGRIST: Your mother's mother.

BJORKMAN: No, my father's mother lived on a little island, Bjornsund.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

BJORKMAN: That's my name.

SIGRIST: Oh. Oh, that's right. Can you spell that for us?
This is your maiden name?

BJORKMAN: B-J-O-R-N-S-U-N-D.

SIGRIST: Right. Let me just repeat that for the tape. B-J-O-
R-N-S-U-N-D.

BJORKMAN: Yeah, right. But his father drowned when he was, my
father was five years old, so that grandfather I
never saw. He was from up the mountains. Five
brothers came down, and settled around our area. And
they married, because there was, from a big farm was
when there was bad time, I guess. And, uh, and they
all married. He married my grandmother. She was,
what did one captain tell me I was home lately? She
was, uh, pracky, a pracky woman, a pracky donner.
She was admired by everybody. She had, she had guts
to do things. And her second husband was a good
sailor, and there was one time I (?), there was very,
he saved people all the time. He didn't come home
before all the ships was home. So one times, he was
up there, there was a lot of ship that was lost, a
big storm. My grandmother sent in order and says,
"You don't go out more than three times. If you do,

I wouldn't have a husband again." And he, he listened to her. They asked him to go out the fourth time, he says, "No, three times is enough, and I'm tired. I'm going to go home." They had sailboats then, I guess, so he came home. The next boat went down, that went to sail the others. So, but he was very good to me, too, but he wasn't my grandfather.

SIGRIST: Tell me, what were your grandmother's responsibilities, the grandmother that lived with you. What were her responsibilities around the farm?

BJORKMAN: Well, she must have took care of the barn then, you know.

SIGRIST: Took care of the barn?

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

BJORKMAN: The wife of a farmer took care of the barn and all the children. And he helped, and she cooked. She cooked the dinners. You know, you ate a lot when you worked outside.

SIGRIST: What kind of food did your grandmother cook?

BJORKMAN: Cook? We had a snack five o'clock in the morning when they were cutting the hay, because you had to do that when it was dew on it.

SIGRIST: What would you pack for a snack?

BJORKMAN: Just a glass of milk and a slice of bread. And when she was ready with the garden, we had (Norwegian), had breakfast. Dinner at twelve, but then they slept for two hours. Then I washed the dishes.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: What time did you eat breakfast?

BJORKMAN: Ordinary I guess, we, um, we didn't all get up at the same time when it wasn't outside work. So by eight everybody was done, we went to school, so we had to get the nine.

SIGRIST: What would you eat for breakfast?

BJORKMAN: Oh, we had, we could have grut. We wanted cereal.

SIGRIST: What was the word in Norwegian?

BJORKMAN: Uh, grut.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

BJORKMAN: We have that here every Saturday. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: How do you spell grut?

BJORKMAN: Well, um, the bokmol [ph], they have had so many
changing of the languages, it's G-R-U-T.

SIGRIST: And what does an U look like?

BJORKMAN: Round with a stick.

SIGRIST: Like an O with a line.

BJORKMAN: Like the Germans. And (Norwegian), New Norwegian,
it's G-R-U, grut, yeah. No, wait a minute.
(she laughs) I don't think I spelled it. I think
it's G-R-A-U-G, graug. So that we have fun with
here. Some say graug and some say grut.

SIGRIST: Now, the next meal that you ate was . . .

BJORKMAN: Middag.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

BJORKMAN: Yeah, Middag. That was twelve o'clock.

SIGRIST: And how did you spell that?

BJORKMAN: Middag?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

BJORKMAN: M-I-D, it's a double-D, no, huh. That I'm not sure about now. A-G. Middag. Yes, it's two D's.

SIGRIST: And what would you eat for that meal?

BJORKMAN: Oh, we had fish, good fish all the time. And then we had our own meat, you know. We had calves and we had, uh, sheep, and they salted it and they, uh, they made sausages for Christmas. We didn't have lutefisk at Christmas like someone had.

SIGRIST: What is lutefisk?

BJORKMAN: (she laughs) It's cod that they soaked in, well, it must be soda. It's, we have it here on Christmas Eve.

SIGRIST: Here at the Norwegian home?

BJORKMAN: Yeah, yeah. Those that want it. I love it.

SIGRIST: Do you know how to spell lutefisk?

BJORKMAN: Yeah. L-U-T-E, fisk is fish. F-I-S-K.

SIGRIST: Thank you. So you had sausages at Christmastime

instead of the lutefisk.

BJORKMAN: And ribs, lamb ribs.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me how sausage is prepared?
Like, how did you make a sausage?

BJORKMAN: Well, they grind it, you know, and spice it.

SIGRIST: What kind of meat? What kind of meat?

BJORKMAN: Oh, it was made of pork or, um, you could make it of,
I think beef, too, but we had it of pork.

(she laughs) And, and the lamb ribs, they, they
were salted from the (?), yeah. And that's good to
chew, you know, chew the meat of the ribs.

SIGRIST: Did you eat vegetables at all?

BJORKMAN: Yes. We had carrots, turnips, white and yellow,
cabbage. And they started cauliflower by the time I
left, to grow, and then they bought more. But now
there is no more like that. One of those big, there
was nine farms in a row. One of them sell milk and
vegetables. The one I was on it's cows and milk,
that's all, and they buy from the neighbor, because
the fertilizer they buy now, it costs more than the

potatoes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So after the midday meal then what was the next meal?

BJORKMAN: Five o'clock. Then we were through outside. We didn't work after five.

SIGRIST: Did the five o'clock meal have a name in Norwegian?

BJORKMAN: Noon. I don't know why they call it noon. It's afternoon, you know.

SIGRIST: And how is noon spelled in Norwegian?

BJORKMAN: N, noon, noon, noon. That I'm not so sure of. Noon, N, maybe two o's, an N, noon. I'm not sure about that.

SIGRIST: But it sounds like the English word, noon.

BJORKMAN: Yea, yeah.

SIGRIST: But that was the five o'clock meal.

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what would you eat for that meal?

BJORKMAN: We could have coffee, tea, different kinds, more like a smorgasbord with cold cuts or cheese. And when

you're, yeah. You went to (?), that's where the (?) was. (she laughs) That's the ones that bought, make cheese. And that's where the gjetost comes from, that we have here, too.

SIGRIST: The (?) was the big, the nearest town, right?

BJORKMAN: The nearest city.

SIGRIST: The nearest city.

BJORKMAN: We have a jazz music, is always there from all over the world in the summer, August.

SIGRIST: In Molde

BJORKMAN: Yeah. And they sleep in tents from all over.

SIGRIST: Clara, can you describe for me the house that you lived in on the farm.

BJORKMAN: Yeah. There is it.

SIGRIST: Well, but describe it in words for me.

BJORKMAN: It's a, it's an old house. It's not allowed to be sold. But it's (?) in (?), no. The stubble was built a little, where we now have all the food. That's where they lived for a little while.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

BJORKMAN: Wood.

SIGRIST: And what color was the house?

BJORKMAN: It was, uh, when I grew up, it was brownish, but not dark brown. I think I see some of it almost like it around here. And it was a grass roof, but that's not any more.

SIGRIST: How did they make a grass roof?

BJORKMAN: That I don't know. They have, what they had some, uh, underneath grass they had some small, uh, I would say pressed stone, like (?), we call it, that went like this, that were round like oblong, like, put a little on top of it, and wood underneath that. You know, the ceilings with beams and all the way on the top, on the top floor. And then they put dirt, I guess, and seeded the grass. That was done before I was born. And . . .

SIGRIST: What was the advantage of having a grass roof?

BJORKMAN: Warm, keep it warm. We didn't have steam heat. We didn't have heat. And when it rained, what was it

good for then? Well, then it had leaks in the roof.

(she laughs) So it must have been good. But they have it modern now.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did your house have?

BJORKMAN: We had two, or a (?) living room, big ones. But there were so many sleeping that they had, my mother had a . . . (disturbance to the microphone)

SIGRIST: Careful of the microphone.

BJORKMAN: Oh, I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: That's okay. (they laugh)

BJORKMAN: We had, my mother had a big stua with her marriage bed and a corner closet and a dresser and a big table for when you had company, a nice table that you drew out. And she had a nice oven, modern. I mean, one that looked pretty and that one. That was best, the stua.

SIGRIST: What is stua, stua?

BJORKMAN: The living room.

SIGRIST: That's the name of the living room.

BJORKMAN: Stua, yeah.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

BJORKMAN: S-T-U-A.

SIGRIST: Stua. Were you allowed in that room all the time?

BJORKMAN: Not very much, no. And she, she was, uh, a tailor, you know, people. She had a very nice corner closet with cookies and a nice jar that she got from somebody when she was married. And a (?).
(she laughs) She called it wine. When they came from far, you know, to, they had to try the dresses. They just took a measure, and they didn't have patterns. And, uh, they had to come and try it once, maybe twice sometimes. She gave them, she gave them that. She said it was cookies and wine, the Russian wine. She didn't drink that. (she laughs) And I remember once I thought, "I'll go in and take one cookie from my mother. Now, I finished the dishes, I'm tired too, and I'd like a little cookie." I went in and put my hand in, and I didn't see that she had laid down to take a nap, she says, "No, no, no. You have to ask first." "I'm old enough not to ask," I said. "Look at all the work I do." "Well, that's

the truth in a way, but still you have to ask."

(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Where, where did you sleep in the house?

BJORKMAN: I slept on the top, and in that they only had three rooms. And, yeah, it was a big entrance, you know, in the front. And an entrance in the back where they had a byslag.

SIGRIST: A byslag?

BJORKMAN: Yeah. (she laughs) You came from work, working on the ground, you know, you had wooden shoes. You took them off and put slippers on, wash your hands, they had a big stand with water in ready, and then when it got dirty you threw it outside on the grass and put new water in. When you were taking in potatoes, for instance, you got dirty. And took off, we had to shake ourselves outside on the grass before we came in inside. It was nice.

SIGRIST: The word byslag. What does that mean?

BJORKMAN: It's an entrance like a, well, they have it here in the country, those small, like, things, too. But you can't have that in the city.

SIGRIST: When you first come into the house?

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah? Maybe like a vestibule? Was that . . .

BJORKMAN: Yeah, it's just square, not too big. You could put your working clothes that you have outside, hang them. You have, each have your own knob.

SIGRIST: How do you spell byslag?

BJORKMAN: B-Y-S-L-A-G.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Um, did you have electricity in the house?

BJORKMAN: Not at that time, no.

SIGRIST: How did you light the house?

BJORKMAN: Oil lamps.

SIGRIST: And how did you do that?

BJORKMAN: We had oil. We had, um, in the kitchen we had, I don't remember we had more than one big lamp. And in the wintertime when there wasn't so much work we all had handwork. We would be weaving teppe, you know,

the rugs, long rugs. You could make them out of rag, you know. We cut up rags, and I guess we colored the rags first or that, yeah. And, uh, made this big, long rugs out of those rags, colors. And that I loved to do. It was fun.

SIGRIST: And you were doing that by oil lamp light.

BJORKMAN: Yeah. And, uh, my oldest uncle fixed a, fixed a, he made two fish, fishing nets. He was so fast with his big hands, to make those knots. I tried that, too. So he learned me a little bit. (she laughs)
But . . .

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in the house?

BJORKMAN: No, we had a pump.

SIGRIST: Where was the pump?

BJORKMAN: In the kitchen, the one that we went this.

SIGRIST: Up and down.

BJORKMAN: We didn't have that to start with. We had a big, big, what do you call it, well, water, water well. What do you call that?

SIGRIST: A well.

BJORKMAN: Yeah, it was a well, a very big one. And I called it nils, its name was nils (Norwegian). But it took a while, a long time before you got enough water, lead the water. He had to make, he dugged up a hole ground and got water to run. It was very good water. And everybody, when the well went dry, you know, they come to that one. I said, "I got to stop this. I'm gonna cement it, and I'm gonna put a roof on it, wood roof, this way, and a door and a key, (she laughs) and a lock. And I'm gonna put in a pump." So it came up the hill a little bit, but still we got water.

SIGRIST: And that came right into the kitchen?

BJORKMAN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have a bathroom in the house?

BJORKMAN: No, not at that time.

SIGRIST: How did you bathe?

BJORKMAN: (she laughs) We had big barrels to bathe in. Every Christmas when they were fixing the Christmas

tree, my brother and I had to take a bath before we saw the Christmas tree. And I went first and then he went after me. Then they changed the water for the older people. They did it later, after Christmas, after we went to bed. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did they do anything to the water before they put it in the barrel?

BJORKMAN: I don't think so.

SIGRIST: What was the temperature of the water in the barrel?

BJORKMAN: Well, I guess they pumped it so it stayed there. It stayed there all day. It was in the kitchen by the oven.

SIGRIST: Was Christmastime the only time you took a bath?

BJORKMAN: (she laughs) No. And all summer we went to the beach, you know. So then we didn't.

SIGRIST: I see.

BJORKMAN: But now they have showers, oh, they have beautiful, just as good as here, more so.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: What did your father do for a living?

BJORKMAN: He was a blacksmith, going to school.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

BJORKMAN: Hans.

SIGRIST: Hans.

BJORKMAN: Hans Edward.

SIGRIST: Hans Edward was your dad. Tell me a little bit about what his personality was like.

BJORKMAN: He was a quiet man. He never got excited. My mother was the strict one. (she laughs) But she was nicer.

SIGRIST: Do you have a story that you like to tell about your father from your childhood?

BJORKMAN: Well, you see, I didn't see him, I remember him leaving, and I used to write to him when I started to write. Why don't you come home? All the other girls, when they go to church on Sunday, they're holding their father's hand, but I can't reach to

United States. (she laughs) And he said that hurt him, you know, he wished he could, but he had bad luck so he had, he got typhus fever. That didn't, in Berlin, New Hampshire, before we came down here.

SIGRIST: He came to the United States in 1912, you told us earlier.

BJORKMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was he doing work as a blacksmith in America?

BJORKMAN: No, he didn't get it. Because somebody told him it was better to, like, carp, a carpenter here, and he fell down from a building and (?). So that took care of everything. So then he worked as a handyman here in, uh, 42 Broadway. And they knew he had epileptic, and he would fall sometimes or get a motor on him, but they let him stay home, but he didn't want to stay home. It doesn't hurt. But that was maybe because he forgot to take his pill. They were very nice to him, but he couldn't get full pay, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you not see your father again until you came to America?

BJORKMAN: No, we didn't. Because we went to get money. My

mother, he could get a job in his trade, in Malda, and my mother didn't want to be in (?). She wanted to be in the city. And she said, "It's too expensive to hire there. We should build a house." So I had an uncle out west, and a lot of people from us, my mother's brother was out west. And now he didn't want to be fishing, he didn't want to go on a farm, so he didn't want to go out west. So he thought he could get, uh, the job. He didn't. So when we came he worked in Bush Terminal for a while, but then they moved to, I think they moved to Boston, the company he was working for.

SIGRIST: Um . . .

BJORKMAN: And at night he repaired violins with those arthritis hands, and he made violins. And, uh, he made a little extra money. And it was, it was a joy to him to come home. And then in the morning he got up, smoked, no, he didn't smoke his pipe first, make coffee first, or put oil. They were in a cold water flat. He made a oil, uh, he connected with the oven. It was an oven there on 4910 Fifth Avenue. Like an old oven, you know, that makes heat. But he put in a glass jar of oil outside. He fixed it so he had oil

that could burn all night, so it wasn't so cold when you got up in the morning. And my mother didn't have to make his breakfast. He made his own breakfast. He had his devotion, and then he gave my mother breakfast in bed, and she went to sleep, and he went back to work. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, good. Let's not talk about America yet, because we don't have you in America yet. Let's get you back to Norway.

BJORKMAN: Oh, to Norway, yeah.

SIGRIST: So your only memories of your father in Norway would be prior to 1912, prior to when you left.

BJORKMAN: That's all.

SIGRIST: Right. So you pretty much grew up without your father there?

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

BJORKMAN: Hannah.

SIGRIST: Hannah.

BJORKMAN: Regina, Regina. Regina. (she laughs)

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

BJORKMAN: Hjertvik.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

BJORKMAN: O-J-H, I mean, H-J-E-R-T-V-I-K.

SIGRIST: Say it one more time.

BJORKMAN: Hjertvik. Hjer is hot. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about your mother's personality, what she was like.

BJORKMAN: Oh, she went to (?) school, and she was smart. She didn't take high school. She took the summer, no, there was more than that. She was, she thought she would like to be a midwife, but she didn't become a midwife. And she took, uh, everything that you do for a house. It could be teaching and, and sometimes they were short of teachers at that time. She, in the winter she would be teaching first class someplace. They asked her, because she was good. I could do it, too. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did she teach you anything as a child?

BJORKMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What did she teach you?

BJORKMAN: Handwork, embroidery. Not school. That's what my uncle did. I had an uncle that was handicapped. He had hurt his back, so he was bent over. But he worked, he went fishing and all. And he had a uncle, he was named Ole, that teached him. And I, at night that (?) said, "I wonder where he came from." Because everybody talked about how smart he was, but he was a cripple. Never interested me at that time to ask why he was crippled. He sat in a chair and he teach all the children, but this (Norwegian), my mother's brother, (Norwegian), he teach me, and I wanted to learn, so when I went to school I had my Bible lessons, book, my catechism, and I know all the first in the catechism, and he teach me counting. And I had one in counting and language all my life in grammar school. I was the best student. My mother got tired of signing my, signing her name on it. I don't sign that name any more. Sign it all the time.

SIGRIST: Did this uncle live with you?

BJORKMAN: Yeah. It was two uncles that didn't get married, so that was (?). They were born in that house.

SIGRIST: I see. Are these your mother's brothers?

BJORKMAN: Yeah, my mother's brothers.

SIGRIST: So they're living in the house with your mother . . .

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you.

BJORKMAN: And another sister. Their older sister didn't get married. She took care of the barn.

SIGRIST: She's your older sister, or your mother's older sister?

BJORKMAN: My mother's older sister. I have no sister. I only . . .

SIGRIST: Do you have other brothers?

BJORKMAN: One brother, but he died thirteen years ago, him and his wife.

SIGRIST: Was he older or younger than you?

BJORKMAN: Younger.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

BJORKMAN: Ivar.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

BJORKMAN: I-V-A-R.

SIGRIST: How much younger is he?

BJORKMAN: Uh, a year-and-a-half. Him and his wife got married young. She came from Lister, Norway. And she wasn't here a year before she was married to him. She told her mother, "I'm going to, I'm not going to stay some more. I'm going to marry a blonde boy with curly hair, a silky (?), a cleft here. And that's what he had. My brother was so handsome, I was jealous of him. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me about your religion in Norway. What religion were you?

BJORKMAN: Uh, state church.

SIGRIST: Which is . . .

BJORKMAN: Lutheran.

SIGRIST: Lutheran. And tell me how you practiced your religion back when you lived in Norway?

BJORKMAN: Practiced?

SIGRIST: Yes.

BJORKMAN: I, uh, I (?), after my catechism.

SIGRIST: Was there a church in town?

BJORKMAN: Oh, beautiful. You can see that. It's a hundred and fifty years old. I have it over there.

SIGRIST: Yeah, we'll look at that after we (?).

BJORKMAN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: How often did you go to church?

BJORKMAN: It wasn't every Sunday, because there were so many islands. I was, we were in the head island, where the pastor, the head pastor lived. But then he had assistance some time. But then one Sunday he go to one church by boat, and another Sunday to another, and then they would have a meeting at night, too.

But we had more meetings than they did. And,
uh . . .

SIGRIST: Was music part of the church service?

BJORKMAN: Oh, yes. We had a beautiful organ. My schoolteacher
was organist that all his life, he came from (?), and
he stayed there till he died. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you like to sing when you were young?

BJORKMAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the hymns that you sang in
Norway?

BJORKMAN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Could you sing one for us on tape?

BJORKMAN: Oh . . . A whole hymn?

SIGRIST: Yes, a whole hymn in Norwegian.

BJORKMAN: I have one for twenty-four verses. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Well, one verse.

BJORKMAN: Christmas.

SIGRIST: One verse will be just fine.

BJORKMAN: No, (?).

SIGRIST: Something you sang as a child.

BJORKMAN: As a child. I was in a girls' choir when I was a child. Then I started in, I was in a choir in the high school, and then I went in the choir, and then I came here. I don't know. Do you want me to sing about Norway? Do you want me to sing a hymn?

SIGRIST: I want you to sing something that you've sung your whole life, something that you've learned when you lived in Norway that you can sing for us on tape.

BJORKMAN: The trouble is I only remember the first verse, but do you want more?

SIGRIST: One verse is fine.

BJORKMAN: Because I have a Norwegian songbook.

SIGRIST: No, no, one verse is fine.

BJORKMAN: Well, I think one is nice. (Norwegian) The Earth Is Beautiful.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, go ahead and sing it.

BJORKMAN: I'm foggy a little bit here. No, I don't know if I know it. It seems I know someone. Uh . . . This was what happened to me sometimes.

SIGRIST: Well, we can do it later if you want.

BJORKMAN: Okay. We sang school songs, too, of course. We sang one song in the morning, and one hymn before we went home. (disturbance to the microphone)

SIGRIST: Careful of the microphone.

BJORKMAN: (she laughs) I'm trying to remember. Oh . . .

SIGRIST: Well, just start and see what comes out. (Mrs. Bjorkman pauses) That's all right. We can come back to this if you want.

BJORKMAN: I know I can know a very short one.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, go ahead. Do the short one for us.

BJORKMAN: (she sings in Norwegian) (she laughs) That wasn't good singing. I sing in the choir, but I can't in (?). My eyes are giving up.

SIGRIST: That was something that you sang when you lived in . . .

BJORKMAN: (she recites in Norwegian) "With Jesus I will stay until I die, and God help me through that, that has to last till I die." I shouldn't say that, say to, they wrote so much about dying that they go to heaven or go to be a spirit (?). Uh . . .

SIGRIST: Clara, when you were growing up in Norway what did you know about America?

BJORKMAN: All my father wrote about America.

SIGRIST: What did he tell you?

BJORKMAN: He wrote mostly to my mother. And we all heard. I'm not so sure I remember. My cousin was over there for two years, where he was. And he came back, he didn't like it. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What didn't he like about it?

BJORKMAN: What he liked about it?

SIGRIST: What didn't he like about America? Your cousin, who came back, why did he come back?

BJORKMAN: (she laughs) He wanted to come back to his mother. But he came and worked on the farm and was paid. He

did the hardest job on the farm, dugged up all the ditches, and that's how my (?) got good, a good worker.

SIGRIST: I was just wondering what you thought about America, what you were expecting to find before you got here?

BJORKMAN: Fine dresses. Because with my cousin, he sent me a nice summer dress. It was so beautiful, and it was so big. I think I wore it when I went to high school.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what it looked like, this dress he sent you from America?

BJORKMAN: Yes, it was kind, and it was small stripes, white and blue, all the way down. And some blue, and a collar here, and belt. And then a blue trimming, plain blue, around the collar. And I thought it was so pretty. Nobody had a dress like me. And when I went to Confirmation, we, our religion in school, you know, an hour every morning. But when we were confirmed, they come from all the churches that belonged to the same churches. We, and stayed there, and we had three or four weeks of, uh, testing, if you were knew enough to be confirmed. And teaching

us. And we had the, not the bishop, the one before the bishop, we called him Proust, that's Proust, bishop, that teached us, because we didn't have pastor that year.

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

BJORKMAN: I didn't want to come. It was my mother that wanted to come.

SIGRIST: Well, okay. So it was your mother who wanted to come. Well, how did you feel about having to leave Norway?

BJORKMAN: I didn't want to go. My uncle said they didn't know that they had full scholarship that would pay for the two years. One year one pay, one the other, and traveling coming home from there. It was, uh, I guess two to four, I don't know how long it took to go there that time. And, uh, in the summertime I could work on the farm, and that would be good for me to be out. And I cried, because she wanted to come.

SIGRIST: Why did your mother want to come?

BJORKMAN: Because my father was here. And she said, "I'd better go there, and maybe when I come they can say

that they, that he can save money so he can come home and we can build a home. They built a home after they retired, and (?).

SIGRIST: In fact, your father's not particularly healthy in America, is he, at this point? He had had some . . .

BJORKMAN: No, he wasn't too healthy. He had epileptic all his life.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about packing to leave Norway? What did you pack to take with you to America?

BJORKMAN: They told us not to take any clothes or anything from Norway, furniture, nothing. My mother left it. No, she had an auction and sold it. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember the auction?

BJORKMAN: Yes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the auction?

BJORKMAN: I didn't like it. I cried. She sold the corner closets that I loved so much to her own sister. Every time I went over and I went home from here, I see that closet in the corner.

SIGRIST: It reminds you of that auction. (they laugh)
Well, was there a goodbye party when you and your
mother went to America?

BJORKMAN: We went to parties to everybody.

SIGRIST: Who was actually leaving? You and your mother . . .

BJORKMAN: And my brother.

SIGRIST: Oh, and your brother, too.

BJORKMAN: Yeah. And I cried in any house I went to. I didn't
want to go. (she laughs) It was so nice, we had a
nice party. I wanted to go to the house, but I
didn't want to go to America.

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

BJORKMAN: We went to Bergen.

SIGRIST: And how did you get from your island to Bergen?

BJORKMAN: Boat, with a boat. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And, um, and what ship did you get in Bergen? When
did you get on the big ship?

BJORKMAN: Thirteenth of May we went on the boat.

SIGRIST: And the name of the boat was?

BJORKMAN: Bergensfjord.

SIGRIST: Did you pick the Bergensfjord up in Bergen, or did you have to go somewhere else?

BJORKMAN: No, in Bergen.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What did you think when you saw this big ship?

BJORKMAN: Oh, that was nice. It was fun to be there.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What sticks out in your mind about being on the Bergensfjord.

BJORKMAN: A lot of fun I had. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What, tell me a little bit about the fun.

BJORKMAN: Well, it was . . . (disturbance to the microphone)
Here I go again. There was dancing at night, and I met a nice man from (?), older than me, clean cut living man. (she laughs) And I danced. My mother come and look at us. I was thinking if the boat sank, my mother said, "What would you think you were going?" I said, "Wherever you be going. You come and look at us." (she laughs) And he was a nice

man, you know. And we were on the boat, see, there was ice, we had icebergs, so we had to take a different way. We didn't come to, to Ellis Island before the 22nd of May. So we had a lot of fun.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing an iceberg?

BJORKMAN: Uh, I think I, I think I thought I saw an iceberg, but I don't know. I wasn't interested in the iceberg.

SIGRIST: Just wanted to dance. Um . . . (they laugh)

BJORKMAN: No, that was, not every night. We had seventeenth of May, and I had my national dark, you know, the heavy things like they have there.

SIGRIST: Oh, you were wearing that sort of traditional . . .

BJORKMAN: The 17th of May we walked on the deck, and we paraded 17th of May, you know. So we walked around the deck, all of us. And then we had games, and we had sock hop.

SIGRIST: A sock hop.

BJORKMAN: Yeah. And I had it outside, that heavy skirt, and I got the first prize. But I was the youngest, too.

SIGRIST: You were wearing the traditional Norwegian costume.

BJORKMAN: I made it myself.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

BJORKMAN: No, one of my, my daughter-in-law has mine, and I made one for my mother. And my great-niece used to, my, uh, my sister-in-law gave it to her daughter because it was too small for her. I said, "You have some nerve. I can't use mine, and I made all that." I thought my mother had made it. I said, "No, she didn't make a stitch on it. I made it all for her."
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: When the ship came to New York, you said you went through Ellis Island.

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being at Ellis Island?

BJORKMAN: We had to, we were checked by the doctor on the ship. We had to undress to here, take off our blouse and walk in a line. I didn't see Ellis Island. I just saw a big line. (she laughs) And my mother didn't have to but we, I guess, my brother and I went like

that. Maybe because we were young then. There was a big line. And then after we got dressed, we were in the room with, with the Russian woman, Austrian. We were four in the room, waiting for people to come for us. My mother said, "Where is your father?" And he's here, was all the right, forty-one. This is my mother. His mother, that he, I had that, too. But I didn't get it that young. I said, "That old man over there? That's my father?" And everybody laughed. (she laughs) He laughed, too. He didn't get mad. "It was so nice to hear you say, 'my father.'"

SIGRIST: You hadn't seen him since 1912.

BJORKMAN: No. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: How long were you at Ellis Island?

BJORKMAN: It wasn't long. It was no problem. I did what I should do.

SIGRIST: Did you do anything else other than making you, you know, doing the physical exam and . . .

BJORKMAN: The doctor, no, I don't remember anything else I did.

SIGRIST: And then where did your father take you and the

family?

BJORKMAN: To Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: To Brooklyn.

BJORKMAN: 48th Street. 5, 512 48th Street.

SIGRIST: And tell me, did you get a job?

BJORKMAN: Uh, I had a job home. My mother had so many operations, and she, she wanted to be taken care of. She took a gallbladder out, I had to stay home three months. I took my gallbladder out, I had to start to work.

SIGRIST: Is that right after you got to America that she had the operation?

BJORKMAN: Yeah. She had, she had one in September. We came in May, and then she took her tonsils out. And she was a bleeder with every operation.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you learned English.

BJORKMAN: Just by listening. (disturbance to the microphone)

SIGRIST: Careful of the microphone.

BJORKMAN: No, I wanted to go to school, but when I was home I could go to night school. I went a little bit. But then when I got a job in houses, you can't go. One woman on Shore Road had four kids. She let me go one night every, she had four boys. (she laughs) And I was young, and she left those four boys with me and went out all the time. She was an old kind, so she was very nice.

SIGRIST: So was that the first job that you got, doing, as a servant in a household?

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Um, can you tell me what the first word was that you learned in English?

BJORKMAN: Oh, I don't know. I guess yes and no. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Was anything surprising to you when you were working in that household as servant?

BJORKMAN: No, I was really, I was surprised that she left the four kids to me, the four boys. I woke them in the morning, they slept in one room, and she slept and her husband was a detective. And he says, "You are

giving too much work to that girl." When he came home one night he said, "You are giving . . . See, now, two smallest one is in her bed because it's hungry. They didn't come to your bed, did they?"
(she laughs) She wanted to lose them.

SIGRIST: Did the family help you to adjust to America at all?

BJORKMAN: Yeah, she was nice that way, but I didn't stay there so long, because when my mother got sick, I don't know which one, which sickness it was, so I had to quit.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you got paid?

BJORKMAN: No, that I don't remember, what she paid me. He said, he told her, "You pay her too little, too, to do all that work." But I don't remember.

SIGRIST: When you think about yourself now, do you think of yourself as being Norwegian or being American, or being something else? How do you think of yourselves in terms of . . .

BJORKMAN: You mean, Swedish, you mean? (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, you married a Swedish.

BJORKMAN: Well, I, uh, no.

SIGRIST: When you think of who you are, how do you think of that?

BJORKMAN: I'm a Norwegian-American.

SIGRIST: Norwegian/American.

BJORKMAN: No, I like America. (she laughs) I like it here. And I could go to the home, you know, where we have a beautiful home. And everybody wanted me to go there, but I said no. I'm gonna be buried where my husband and baby is buried. I lost my first baby through birth after twelve years of marriage. Whatever.

SIGRIST: What was your husband's name?

BJORKMAN: Axel.

SIGRIST: A-X-E-L.

BJORKMAN: Yeah. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And obviously his last name was Bjorkman.

BJORKMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And . . .

BJORKMAN: Olav X, Axel. But he used Axel. They all have Olav for first name.

SIGRIST: Olav.

BJORKMAN: Yeah, Olav. All of them Olav. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, Clara, we need to end now, but I want to thank you very much for being able to ask you these questions. We're back a long way. (they laugh) This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Clara Bjorkman, on Thursday, October 26, 1995, at the Norwegian Christian Home with Peter Hom in attendance. Thank you very much.