

EI-696

STEINAR RASMUSSEN

BIRTHDATE: JULY 11, 1900

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 26, 1995

RUNNING TIME:

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM

INTERVIEW LOCATION: NORWEGIAN CHRISTIAN HOME, BROOKLYN

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: PATRICIA K. HILLIARD

NORWAY, 1923

AGE 23

PASSAGE ON UNITED STATES

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, October 26, 1995. I'm at the Norwegian Christian Home in Brooklyn and I'm here with Steinar Rasmussen. Mr. Rasmussen came from Norway in 1923 and he was 23 when he came. Present also is Peter Hom, who is running the digital recording equipment. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

RASMUSSEN: July 11, 1900.

SIGRIST: And where in Norway were you born?

RASMUSSEN: I was born on the island named Laneoy...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

RASMUSSEN: ...near Mandeval.

SIGRIST: Can, can you spell all that for me, please?

RASMUSSEN: L, L-A-N-E-O- (O, say O) -Y. That means island, them two words. Laneoy.

SIGRIST: Lan...

RASMUSSEN: ...eoy.

SIGRIST: And, um, can you tell me a little bit about where that is in Norway?

RASMUSSEN: Well, it's a mile east of Mandeval, city of Mandeval.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

RASMUSSEN: M-A-N-D-E-A-L.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

RASMUSSEN: Mandeval.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what it was like to grow up on an island?

RASMUSSEN: Well, we had a very free, uh, free life, very independent, and, uh, the kids, we went to school and, uh, uh, uh, fishing and, and uh, uh, what do you want to call it? Well, it, uh, there...farming, farming and fishing. That was the went on the island.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about fishing specifically, about what kind of fish and that sort of thing?

RASMUSSEN: Well, there's fishing, uh, salmon, that runs in the season, uh, in the summertime there. And we have a net out for that. And we, too, have a net for, uh, mackerel. That's also seasonal fish, uh, in the summertime.

Started that time, we started around 15th of May, uh, in May, and on through the summer and, uh, fishing mackerel.

SIGRIST: What kind of a boat would you use?

RASMUSSEN: We had an open boat, old boat. There was no motor at that time. Yeah, special, so we had a rowboat and, uh, we had the net in the middle in the boat and, uh, two men was rowing and two men was throwing the net out, one with the sinkers and one with the floats went out over the side. Uh, the mackerel comes up like that and you can see it. You make a little wave as you're going along and we ring it. Pull it in, pull in the net and let it sink down and bail it out and fill up the boat with whatever there was. So three, four, uh, hun...uh, ton at a time sometime.

SIGRIST: These are whole schools of fish traveling?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, school, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

RASMUSSEN: More like it.

SIGRIST: You said salmon and mackerel. What other kinds of fish?

RASMUSSEN: Well, we have, uh, lobster. That's a season, too, like mostly in the, in the fall in the season. We have a big pot for that, and, uh, three pots on the up and down troll because saving the ropes, you know. And a little distance, about six feet, between each pot. We put that around the net, rocks on the bottom. We know where they are, or think we know, (chuckles) and uh...

SIGRIST: What was the biggest lobster that you can remember back then?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, one pound.

SIGRIST: One pound.

RASMUSSEN: Or one, yeah, one kilo.

SIGRIST: Kilo, which is bigger than a pound.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What would you do with the fish or the lob...and the lobster?

RASMUSSEN: Well, we guarded it until we...fishing was finished, then we sold it to the buyer, uh, and he'd distribute it wherever he had the business, so on.

SIGRIST: Was this a way of making extra money?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, that was for cash, mo...mostly for cash. We lived on the farm. We grewed all what we want on the farm – uh, wheat and all, yeah. And then, uh, meat, uh - had a cows and sheep, pigs, and, uh, took the youngest one, feed it, fed them up, and got them good and fat and killed them and salt it down for the winter.

SIGRIST: Whose job was it to kill the animal?

RASMUSSEN: Well, most of the farmers could do themselves. And there was some people going around and do it.

SIGRIST: You would hire someone...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...to come in.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, mostly they, they had, uh, that, one that could be able to cut it up in pieces and...

SIGRIST: Can you describe your farm for me, the buildings that, that made, made up the farm?

RASMUSSEN: Well, we had the, the house where we lived in. Uh, that was...and, uh, then we had the barn for the cows and the pigs and the sheeps. Uh, different rooms, one room in a little section here, there's a pig, and the cows was at one end, and the pigs and the sheep was in the other side...

SIGRIST: How many...

RASMUSSEN: ...in the same room.

SIGRIST: How many of each animal did you have?

RASMUSSEN: Well, well, on the island there must have, uh, there was, uh, one or two farms that could feed two cows, but mostly it was only one. Most of the farms had only enough ground for one cow.

SIGRIST: So you had one cow?

RASMUSSEN: We, long as my father was able and had the farm, we had two.

SIGRIST: Two cows.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah. When, uh, my father, he was a pilot. Sea pilots at that time in younger days, you know, they went out to the sea and watched for the ship coming, took them into the ports, into Kristiansand or what.

SIGRIST: Did he have his own boat?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, yeah. We had a, we had a big boat that we had a cabin in it and, uh, they was sleeping there and they could cook the meals and they like that, because sometimes they went out, they stood overnight and took a couple days sometime at the time.

SIGRIST: So he, he was, he was in a small boat that was guiding the big boats, but...

RASMUSSEN: Right. He pulled the big boat.

SIGRIST: Was it like a tugboat?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was it what we call a tugboat?

RASMUSSEN: No, big, oceanliner.

SIGRIST: Right, but, but the boat that he was in...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...is a smaller boat.

RASMUSSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. So did, what did he do with the farm when he was...?

RASMUSSEN: Well, he...we kids had to work it and the ladies, all the women. They had to do a lot of work on it...

SIGRIST: So he would go...

RASMUSSEN: ...feeding the cows and milking the cows and put 'em and haul the hay, hay. Uh, the men was mostly cutting that hay and then the kids and the, the ladies, they...we had to work it and dry it and, uh, get it dry before we could put it into the, in the barn in the storage where it went to.

SIGRIST: How did the men cut the hay? How did they do it?

RASMUSSEN: Well, we had a big stick with the two knives and, and uh, is like a sickle, I guess you call it here, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Sickle, uh-huh.

RASMUSSEN: And, uh, you used when you cut it down and move it to rows on the, on the grass, and, uh, lay it down.

SIGRIST: All done by hand.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

RASMUSSEN: All by hand, yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, can you describe the house that you lived in for me, the farmhouse?

RASMUSSEN: Well, in the kitchen there was open fire. Uh, no, no, uh, stove or anything like that, just an open space where we cooked our fish. It had a big hooks on the different wood – high and low and so, and if you wanted the heat or cooking. Yeah, and, uh, hanging on the pot, uh, mostly steel, uh, uh, cast iron pots or cooking gear we had at that time. And, uh, you know in that day, it was an open fire. We had wood. Yeah, cooked, they cooked with wood and...yep. And, uh, heating the home, the rooms, we had a kind, some kind of stove there, also wood, and, uh, the soot went up in the chimney and smoke went all out up there, too, to the chimney.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

RASMUSSEN: Well, there was all wood, uh, lumbers. In the later years, they, they had, uh, uh, dressed lumber. And, uh, in the older days, in the 1800's and so on and before, it was, uh, just the whole tree, laid one on top of the other. And, uh, this was the way they did different rooms.

SIGRIST: Well, what was your house made out of, dressed lumber?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, right, dressed, yeah. We had a, well, our home was about 100 years old, I guess, so that we could still see, uh, the...we had one room, what

we called it the dining room, where we ate all, every...everydays room.
Uh, that we could see the big logs open.

SIGRIST: So you could still see the logs?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, and in the other rooms, they were kind of more dressed up. We had paneled that down, and, uh, so that was painted in the different colors what you want the room.

SIGRIST: Was the house outside painted? What color was the house on the outside?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, usually white. Usually white paint.

SIGRIST: And what kind of floor did the house have inside?

RASMUSSEN: Well, it...ordinary floor, floorboards like here.

SIGRIST: Wooden.

RASMUSSEN: Uh, we, we have white already in, in the nowadays. Uh, I'm talking now about 18, oh, 1800, yeah, before that, the other way, a little bigger, more like a plank.

SIGRIST: And what kind of a roof did the house have...the roof?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, that, that was, um...they were pitched like a ordinary house and, uh, we had some kind of made stones, stone, stone, you understand? They were locked in, in between, with a little knob in there. They were locked in between these objects, locked one another in. It was a little

hollow, so the water...there were no holes. (Chuckles) Uh, what is it that I know of the roof?

SIGRIST: So a, a pitched roof...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...with these interlocking stone things...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...on top? How did you light the inside of the house?

RASMUSSEN: That was ker...kerosene lamp.

SIGRIST: Can, can you describe for me the process of using a kerosene lamp?

RASMUSSEN: Well, the lamp itself was, uh, different shapes sometimes. It, the glass on it, made in the middle, there was a glass that when we lift up and light it, we had some kind of wick there and some thing that went down in the, in the oil, yeah. There was a...in the bottom was a box there that we had the kerosene in, and, uh, then that wick, we'd call it, uh, was laying in it then and it come up. You could screw that, uh, if you want the light. Somebody, sometime would screw it up a little bit, you got more light. And lower it, and, uh...

SIGRIST: Did any accidents ever happen?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, yes, sometimes. If you knock the lamp over, you know, then the kerosene will run out and take a fire.

SIGRIST: Did that ever happen?

RASMUSSEN: Well it wasn't often that we had, uh, that happen. I, I don't know if... It did happen at some places at some time and...but very seldom. Uh, on the island, I can't remember, remember any house burned down by fire. I can't remember that.

SIGRIST: Did your house ever get converted to electricity?

RASMUSSEN: We did. 1920. 1920, we got electricity out at the island.

SIGRIST: How did they convert the house to electricity?

RASMUSSEN: Well, the same as here. You run the wire and, and, uh, get different in places. They had a box there for the, the meter, uh, or the, the fuse, fuse box. That one goes, goes sometime. You had to, to play on that.

SIGRIST: What about the wires? Where did the wires go?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, the wires was open then mostly.

SIGRIST: They were...you mean on the outside?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, they used to, uh, yeah, up and down the, the wall...

SIGRIST: So you could see them?

RASMUSSEN: ...and the ceiling.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

RASMUSSEN: So you could see them, yeah, at that time. Later years, you know, they were covered and the new houses, they build it in the walls just like here in the later years.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in your house?

RASMUSSEN: No, no...

SIGRIST: Where did the water...?

RASMUSSEN: ...we had a well. We had a well outside. We had a bucket, we had to go and fill the bucket every time and we want to for cooking and washing and whatever.

SIGRIST: Was there a bathroom in the house?

RASMUSSEN: No, that was outside in the, in the room near...in the barn.

SIGRIST: What about, um, uh, uh, taking a bath? What, how did you take a bath?

RASMUSSEN: (Chuckles) Well, you used to have to stay up there and then dipped your rag down. You got your rag and washed yourself and...the best way you could.

SIGRIST: How often...?

RASMUSSEN: You couldn't go in the...we didn't have no tub at that time. We probably had a big, probably we could stay on a little warm water and went down and... It wasn't so easy. (Chuckles)

SIGRIST: (Chuckles)

RASMUSSEN: And those kids, we were not bathing in the summertime, you know. Just over the brook over the side.

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

RASMUSSEN: Salve...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

RASMUSSEN: ...Rasmussen. S-I, S-A-L, S-A-L-V-E, Salve.

SIGRIST: S-A-L-V-...?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, S-A-A-L-V. Salve. Uh, you have a pen?

SIGRIST: Here, yeah, right here. Just figure it out there.

RASMUSSEN: Where can I put it on?

SIGRIST: That's okay, just...S-A-...

RASMUSSEN: S-A-L-V-E.

SIGRIST: -E...Salve.

RASMUSSEN: Salve.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Tell me what your father's personality was like. What was his character and temperament?

RASMUSSEN: Well, yeah, I don't know how you can explain that. I don't know just now how to explain that. When he was a pilot, a sea pilot, and he was out more on the sea in all kinds of weather and tough and rough. And, uh, then he farming that he was home.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things that he enjoyed doing for entertainment, when he wasn't working?

RASMUSSEN: Well, there, that wasn't much...we didn't had much, uh, special entertainment because there was just me. We had always, we had something to do all times. After we got something, we went to bed. And, uh, we didn't have much, uh, time for any play or any enjoyment really.

SIGRIST: Just a lot of work.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

RASMUSSEN: Martine.

SIGRIST: Martine.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, Knutsen.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that? Here...he's going to spell it out on paper.

RASMUSSEN: Where did I write before? I can't go over that.

SIGRIST: Spell it out. Knutsen, you said her name was?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Would that be...? Let's see.

RASMUSSEN: Martine.

SIGRIST: That's M-A-R-T-I-N-E?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: OK, Martine.

RASMUSSEN: Ko-N-U-T-S-E-N. Knutsen.

SIGRIST: K-N-U-

RASMUSSEN: Ko-

SIGRIST: -T, Knut...?

RASMUSSEN: Knut...

SIGRIST: Knut...

RASMUSSEN: ...sen.

SIGRIST: -D?

RASMUSSEN: Knut...S-E-N.

SIGRIST: ...S-E-N, Knud. Well, K-N-U-D, Knud...?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Knudsen? S-E-N.

RASMUSSEN: Knud, Knudsen.

SIGRIST: I'll figure it out. Tell me a little bit about what your mother was like as a person.

RASMUSSEN: Well, they, they, they, they, too, was very, uh, regular people and, uh, no special...uh, really, she was good, good-hearted and would kept the house clean and lot of work with the kids. We were twelve sis....

SIGRIST: Twelve?

RASMUSSEN: Five, seven boys and five girls.

SIGRIST: How do you fall into that?

RASMUSSEN: I was the last one of the boys. And I, and, uh, or the second one from the bottom. We was the only two left then. I was number 11 and I had a sister, uh, after that, 12th.

SIGRIST: Wow. That's a big family.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: (Chuckles) Um...

RASMUSSEN: And, uh, they, as they grew up, the boys grew up and got confirmed, then you, you was a man. You, you had to protect yourself and make your own (unintelligible). Of course, I always worked on the farm.

SIGRIST: What, what were some of the...

RASMUSSEN: Mine, they....

SIGRIST: ...things you had to do on the farm?

RASMUSSEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: What were some of the things YOU had to do on the farm?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, I don't know, gee whiz. Hay and go water the cows and move them so they could grow big, bigger, eatin' up something. Uh, we had to move them from different places on the ground. Uh, tied up and couldn't let them go loose because we had a, that was vegetable garden and things like that they liked to get in to get at, get some carrots and, (chuckles) yeah, and, and, uh, that stuff. So we had to tie them up and so we had a big room they was eating around. And then in, every so often, we moved them, so, so they had enough. In the summer, we had a big, uh, farm near a forest, like, a big mountain there and we'd, we let them go by themselves. We took them there and let them go. They helped themselves. Yeah, there was a water hole for them to...water enough for the whole summer. And, uh, they would gather their own food and came

down whenever milk time came. They know when that time, they stood with the gate and waiting until the ladies came and, and milked them, and let them go.

SIGRIST: Did women always milk the cows? That was women's work?

RASMUSSEN: Well, women or men, there was difference, yeah. The men went out, too, sometimes, but it was usually the women's work.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what you remember about World War I, the, 1914 to 1918, and how the war affected your family, if it did?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, you know, we was, uh, Norway was neutral at that time, so there wasn't very...we wasn't too much in the, in the demand, that we was just ordinary, regular work we would do.

SIGRIST: Were there any, uh, any, uh, uh, shortages, for instance, of food or anything like that?

RASMUSSEN: No, not...uh, well, there was, uh, imports, like the coffee and sugar, maybe, yeah. That was a little, uh, scarce. Uh, we, we always, we had enough, uh...

SIGRIST: Living on a farm...

RASMUSSEN: ...at that time, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...helped probably.

RASMUSSEN: Later, in the, in the city or harbor, they felt it more because they didn't

have the, the, the ground, farm...they do farming. Uh, they didn't get the milk and the eggs and the, all that stuff that grewed inside. So the cities' people, they felt a little bit more by the hardship.

SIGRIST: Um, what, what do you remember about going to school in Norway? How old were you when you started?

RASMUSSEN: We started at 6 years, I think was. Six or 7, we started. And then 14...seven years schooling.

SIGRIST: Did you enjoy school?

RASMUSSEN: Yes, uh, uh...(chuckles)

SIGRIST: (Chuckles) A little bit?

RASMUSSEN: A little bit, I'll, (chuckles) I'll be good without it. Then, of course, we had to go there. Uh, see, um, 1909 or '10, my father got, uh, permit, uh, promoted to, uh, city pilot. What that means, city...I say "city pilot" now. That meant that, uh, he moves to Kristiansand, city Kristiansand, and, uh, took the ships out, out of the port to the sea. Took them outside and gave them the coast, wherever they want to go – German, French, England, America, wherever they want to go.

END OF TAPE A, SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF TAPE A, SIDE 2

SIGRIST: And that was a promotion from what he had been doing?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, that was, uh,...he was home then and he was so regular, I'd say. Before he had to go out to the sea and (unintelligible) there. Then, uh, then, uh, I tell you, we kids, then when we were six years old, uh, we was still on the island then and he had his pilot boat. We, the older boys, had to go take him out, put him out on the ship, go with him. There were two pilots and, and so on, but, uh, and when we was six years old, we was allowed to go with and see how things were going. When we were eight and nine years old, we had to go with and sometimes we had to take the boat home alone, 9 years old, we had to...(chuckles). Yeah. And of course, we moved to Kristiansand, there was a little easier, but still I had to go with him. Many a times, I had to put them aboard in the ship and, uh, sometimes the wave motion, you lay there in, in the rowboat with the oars and the ship, big ship, come bearing down on you, laying right on the bow out. Of course, they had to throw the line to me. I had to make that fast in my boat and, uh, steer, I mean, travel alongside of it, the other ship. And, uh, it was nine, eight, nine years old, or sometime there (chuckles). Was a kid, you saw that big sea boat come bearing down on you, and laying there and waiting until you got the line aboard the boat. Nineteen twenty-one, I was 21 years old then, so I thought I was really, I was grown then. But, uh, we, we had, uh, there was six pilots in the city and there was six ships go...wa...ready to go out. They all wanted a pilot when, uh, we had a hurricane came up, and, uh, really storm, big storm, a hurricane, so the order wanted all the ships remained in port. When the ship my father was assigned to, it was a German ship. And, uh, the Captain meant that he was on there, German now and he could make, go home. This was the day before Christmas Eve, two days before Christmas. And he said that he could get home. He never had had a Christmas home since he growed up, went to sea.

And now, he said, uh, he was so near, he was going to go. Father said, "You're, you're...there's no sense, sense in it. You should stay." Uh, he insist, uh, he want to go. "Alright, but," he says, "you go, I go with. I'll take you out." So he came home. Oh, there was snowing. You couldn't see across the street. And the wind was just blowing. You couldn't (unintelligible). You'd stop too many times. Took one step and then two back then. (Chuckles) The wind was too strong. Well, he came home and said, "Steinar," he said, "you go with me." "No, I won't go (chuckles). I would go, but today, you see this weather, blowing like that, snowing?" You couldn't see across the street. "Well, so you,...it's not an order." Well, mother's trying to help me out, uh, get me home, stay home. Well, she, she meant that there were enough and the kid lost, had to lose one, not two, for Christmas. Well, he said, "Steinar, go with me," he said. "We go, we will be home for supper." Well, there was my father, I, I couldn't resist. I reacted, uh, said, "Alright, I'll go with." Then "I don't know why, you have, uh, five pilots you can pick that is better than, uh, expert more in the storm than I am." "Nah, no, I want you." So I had to go with him. That was tough stuff. Thing was when we got out, the ship, the Captain got scared. He said, "Take me in again. Take me in. How, how I'm not going to go." "No," father said, "I won't do that. You want to go, you want to go home for Christmas. You go or go under." he said. "That's up to you," he said. Then, "I'm not taking you back." "Well, you gotta go with me to Germany. I'm afraid." he said. "I can't take it." "Yeah," he said, "you were told before you left and you want to go, you go. I'm not going to Germany. I'm not taking you back. I have my son laying on the, towing the open boat next to the ocean, yeah. He's going to sit there to Germany?" "Nah," he said, "oh, no, oh, no." "Yeah, we can take him, we taking the boat, and we take, we get this, get your boat up on the deck somewhere sometime." He's saying, "Oh," my father said, "the best thing for you is to just go." he said. If you go under, that's up to you. If you make it, good and well. I

give you the coast and if you keep that coast,” he say, “you will get to Germany.” And that, that was it. Well, so my father come along, uh, to the railing and was going to come down the rope help a little and for me to go in and get it. No, I, that’s what he wanted because he know, he knew exactly what I want to do and don’t do. So waitin’ and went to get inside. Alongside I had to wait nearest wave to see what’s, wait, go in between the waves, pick em up and out. Then that time there were sails, no motors. We had, well, there were motors, but we didn’t have that. My brother had it. Uh, we, we were sailing. He said, “Come here. Take the rudders and sail it.” “Oh, no,” I said, “you sail, you sail.” In a hurricane, couldn’t hardly see. The wind, the water just looked like smoke. The wind was sweeping it around just like the smoke.

SIGRIST: Well, did you...?

RASMUSSEN: To hold your whole lungs in.

SIGRIST: Did you make it back safely?

RASMUSSEN: (Laughs) Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: By the good grace of God, you made it back safely.

RASMUSSEN: You can say that again! And, uh, well, he wanted...I didn’t sail hard enough, fast enough for him. He said, “You got to have more speed on that.” So, I say, he says, “Well, I can’t do no more.” Said I thought I had done good. “Yeah, you do fine,” he said, “but we got to have more speed. You know, I told mom we were going to be home for supper, and if you don’t sail hard, we wouldn’t make it,” he said. Oh, there were times we had to go just get into the mainland and scoot the taxi boat

there and get up on the highway and take the taxi home or that... Yeah, you know what happened? In this time, at that time, we made it home.

SIGRIST: Tell, tell me....

RASMUSSEN: Aw, that was tough.

SIGRIST: Tell me why you wanted to come to this country.

RASMUSSEN: Well, that's a lot of things. Yeah, if I had stayed in the...see, I had a good job in the city. I was overseeing tourists in the boat motors.

SIGRIST: Boat motors.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, and I worked on the factory where we made them and, uh, fixed them up and got them in shape and put them in the boats and things like that. And, uh, then after father retired pilot, he wanted to go home to the island. He bought a home there, a house that was for sale with a little ground on it, not too much, but enough, enough to... And, uh, he want me to go with. See, there was nothing in...fishing, yeah, we went fishing and, uh, there wasn't too much. For them that had the farm, then fish may be good. It was, it was alright. But just for one that had no farm, no ground to dig in and grow things in, it was hard to live for the fishing alone. Because...well. "Well, your brother and I, yeah, he, he want me to go with him and fish together. And, uh, we want to go to a little bigger, big, buy a big boat, covered deck, and real big boat and then, and then take the mackerel on the ocean." Yeah, before used to was, we had to wait 'til he got near, near land, so we could get around with the net. We had to lower the rope in first and, uh, then the net around them and then pull them in. And now we want it so that we could take them in the, in the open sea, just ring 'em. And then we had

to have a big boat for that and, and a small boat for anchor, like. You put the one, one rope fast and net on the rowboat, on the open boat, and then left it there and went with the big boat around and pulled the bottom together and then hoist it up and, uh, took the fish. Yeah, well, we couldn't make good on that. Then, uh, my brother did make good, and I could never make it. Uh, I came over here. "Reise gut, mi broder. My father will put up my share for the big boat of what it's going to cost." "It's nothing," say, "but don't go to America." Say, "You'll never come back." We had four brothers that left home, I never know. They were gone before I was born. They was over here. Four. And, uh, they never came back. They never wrote home. Mother didn't know if they were lived or they were dead or what. We never...until I came over. And, uh, I...

SIGRIST: What did you know about America before you got here? How did you think about America when you lived in Norway?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, well, we, we knew what there was a country where you could, uh, make it. There was lot, a lot of opportunity to, to make good. When, uh, the thing was with me, I, I, I was scared. I, I was frightened to take the chances to go at it. So when I got here, well, for get the big money, you had to join the union. And for joining the union, you had to be had a citizen or intent to be citizen. You know, we had what you call the "first paper," Intent to be Citizen of United States. We had to have a paper and then wait five years, then we will become citizen. Well, I couldn't, you see, I was...with me, I could not tell the United States I...for joining the union, I had to be citizen or intend to get the paper. And I couldn't ask for that because I couldn't tell the United States that I have intent to be citizen of this county.

SIGRIST: You didn't know whether or not you wanted to, to be that.

RASMUSSEN: Oh, yes, ah, ah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, I had no objection in that. When you see, at that time, well, it was in my, my mind was, I got the money enough, I go back. And I couldn't tell the United States that, that I like, I would like to be a citizen of it all the time I had in, in mind to go back. And I never did because I, I had to work for lower wages than union before I got married. Then, of course, then I know I wouldn't get back to United States, uh...to Norway.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you had to go through to get ready to leave Norway. What, what procedures did you have to go through?

RASMUSSEN: Well, we had to seek, uh, permission from the government to, to leave the country, uh, Norway. And, uh, well...no I don't think America had any, any objection in it. I think they were free, we could, as long as you came in the regular way with the permission on the two countries.

SIGRIST: Where did you have to go to get that permission?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, we had that in Norway, uh, pretty good, through the government, through the, uh, the city office or whatever, to the lawyer and, and things like that. Then, uh, anything? Well, yeah, well, don't tell them that you were communist, don't tell them that you're socialist, and, uh, things like that. They, America, didn't want any part of that. They...

SIGRIST: Did you have to...

RASMUSSEN: ...like to say "No" when any, anybody comes in.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo medical examinations in Norway?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, we had, uh, yeah, we had, uh, some kind of...we had to see the doctor and get the vaccination. And, uh, that we had. Then, uh...yeah, they, they wanted, they wanted to know a little bit about you before you go out there, now, of course. In my case, uh, I was healthy enough to do anything.

SIGRIST: Well...

RASMUSSEN: I had no, no trouble with that.

SIGRIST: How long did that whole process take?

RASMUSSEN: No, it, it wasn't...I don't know. It wasn't long, a week or two maybe.

SIGRIST: But what about waiting for the permission from the government...

RASMUSSEN: Waiting?

SIGRIST: ...to, waiting for the permission from the government to say you could leave? Did that take a...?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, no, that didn't take long. Yeah, it was just, just like the mail, when, uh, you know some, you write a letter and then it goes. It takes a long time to get there and then the office look at it and so on and send it back, and.... Take couple of weeks, two, three weeks, I think, sure thing, so...

SIGRIST: Were you still living with your parents when you left?

RASMUSSEN: I left, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me, um, tell me how your mother felt about you leaving. You said your father wasn't all that happy about it.

RASMUSSEN: No, either one of them really wouldn't like to see me go. It wasn't that...yeah, it was a little hard to get, pack up and go. And there wasn't, there wasn't enough, if we think, thought of, let's see, I was, 21, 22, thinking of getting married someday. There wasn't enough money in fishing to, to start it and get married. And, uh, to have a wife or children and so on. No, I...

SIGRIST: What did you pack to take with you to America? What did you pack?

RASMUSSEN: Well, you couldn't, let's say, we didn't take too much, what we, all we need – shift of underwear and a shirt and a suit or two and... We had to come pretty light over here.

SIGRIST: Is someone traveling with you to America?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, we usually had a expert, yeah. We usually, there's always somebody went forth and back and, that had been over here before and knowed the ropes and regulations and so on. And now I had two brothers over here in New York when I came, so it was easy enough for me that. And I had a sister there, that was Myra, had a home and, uh, so I stood with her and, uh, my brother in Staten Island. He was senior supervisor on the Staten Island Rail, Railroad that time.

SIGRIST: Did your parents give you, uh, like a goodbye party, or some kind of a gathering, when you left Norway?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, well, I don't know. I usually went myself, I think, to maybe my sisters and brothers around there. I went and said goodbye to them. I went usually alone then.

SIGRIST: How did YOU feel about having to say goodbye to your family?

RASMUSSEN: Well, uh, it was sad. You were, you were wondering if you ever should see them again or be back again. It was sad. Then, uh, we, we had to overlook it, we had... That was the way of our life and we had to do it. Go.

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

RASMUSSEN: Uh, we went to Oslo.

SIGRIST: How did you get to Oslo?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, we had, uh, the, the coast boat, the steamer went along the coast, stopped at the different cities along...

SIGRIST: This little cruise boat that...?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. And then in Oslo, how long did you stay in Oslo?

RASMUSSEN: I think we had two, three days, I think.

SIGRIST: What did they do in Oslo, or what did YOU do in Oslo while you were waiting to get on the ship?

RASMUSSEN: We was in a hotel there, that's all, and, uh, I had no relatives or know no...anybody in Oslo, but them I traveled with knows some people there and we went visit them or we wait in hotel, walk the street and came over. Uh...

SIGRIST: Had you been to Oslo before?

RASMUSSEN: No.

SIGRIST: This was your first time in Oslo?

RASMUSSEN: That was the first time I go over.

SIGRIST: Does something stick out in your mind as of, from being in Oslo, something that, that you remember made a real impression on you?

RASMUSSEN: Well, not really, I don't think. Yeah, were couple girls from home that worked in Oslo and it's the same ones that the traveling companion knew. And we went and visit them. Well, I got a single look for one there and I liked her very much. Then, uh, I asked her for a date and I got it. Then, of course, I...she said, "You stay in hotel. I come, I come and get you," she said, "because you're going to get lost if you going out alone." Well, that's the way it went then. Another girl I was, yeah, anyway, I didn't see her before that night and then she called up the hotel there and, uh, got the busman. She crazy because every half an hour she called and asked for, asked for me. So then we came, we were three, three or four together from where...our place, hometown, and, uh, come to the hotel, they say, "Who is staying in...?" I sneaked behind everybody else and got up in the room. I think, "Here, what the heck want me for? I haven't done..." I didn't know what he would do. Nah,

so he, he said, oh, he gave the telephone number for me to call the other. So the thing was I had two girls that night. I couldn't get one of the other boys to take, take one. "Oh, that's good. You go ahead, you'll make it." I had two of them. So that was a job and, uh, I was wondering who I was going to take home, home last. (Chuckles)

SIGRIST: (Chuckles) So you had some fun in Oslo then anyway.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, I had a lot of...yeah, it was, it was okay.

SIGRIST: What, what was the name of the ship that you got on?

RASMUSSEN: That was United States.

SIGRIST: You got it on...

RASMUSSEN: That was a dandy ship.

SIGRIST: ...the United States.

RASMUSSEN: Danish company.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

RASMUSSEN: Company, they're Danish. Uh, United States.

SIGRIST: And where did you sleep on that ship?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, well, we went third class, you know, quite low, not too far down, but we were in a lower deck, the twelfth deck down, I guess.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much that cost?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, no, I can't remember that.

SIGRIST: Um, what time of the day did you get on the ship?

RASMUSSEN: Nah, that I don't know either. I can't remember that even. And I suppose it was the middle of the day or morning or something like that.

SIGRIST: Had you ever been on a ship as large as this?

RASMUSSEN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

RASMUSSEN: No.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the trip across the Atlantic?

RASMUSSEN: Well, it was interest. We had, uh, good food and, uh, good meal and, uh, as I said, the Danish people there. Yeah, 'course the sea didn't bother me, uh, anything. Uh, I did, I was used to that. And, uh, if we rolled and, and stooped to drown in it, that didn't bother me. A lot of people got seasick from it and so on, sick. And uh, I, no, uh, not that time, and, uh, one time I went, but in Norwegian line, Stavangerfjord, uh, home Kristiansand, and, and, uh, oh, boy, we had nine days coming over (otherwise it was six or seven days) when we had went into the big storm.

SIGRIST: How, well, how long, when you were on the United States, how long did it take to go across the Atlantic?

RASMUSSEN: Well, that was, I think that it was seven, eight days, I think, seven days.

SIGRIST: And do you remember when the ship came into New York Harbor?

RASMUSSEN: We came into Hoboken.

SIGRIST: Into Hoboken. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

RASMUSSEN: Well, I, I guess, uh, we know...we heard out about it, and knew about it. I'm sure we learned about it in the school, I guess. Yeah, and we know it, uh, who was the...

SIGRIST: And then what happened? The ship docked in Hoboken.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then what happened?

RASMUSSEN: Well, we...we had a, there was a holiday (unintelligible). The day after we docked was a holiday. And, uh, there was no work going on, so we, we, we wasn't allowed to go off. 'Course we were greenhorns then. We didn't know nothing, uh, so we stuck to the ship anyway. Then we went to the Ellis Island from Hoboken.

SIGRIST: How did you get to Ellis Island from Hoboken?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, ferry, ferry boat. Came to Hoboken, uh, nearby or we marched to, to the ferry area, I don't know, but the whole, the whole passenger ship, we, we went. We got to Ellis Island in, in the big room there and put us there. And, uh, I think we see, saw the doctor there, wasn't it? Yeah, I had to pay, pay the head tax. Took U.S. \$8. I had to pay before I come in. Think it was...

SIGRIST: Did everyone on your ship have to go to Ellis Island?

RASMUSSEN: All, yeah, that time. We had to go through Ellis Island and then from there, we went into the Battery Park. Uh, you know, the South Ferry, the Staten Island ferry from New York to Staten Island? There was a big house there, a big, uh, building, like so. And there we got in a big room and, uh, we had a iron fence in the front there, a big iron gate. We jumped up and we all was standing, stood in, in that big room. And, uh, then they, that we all was in there, they locked the door, yeah, padlocked it. We couldn't get out and, uh, we had to walk around there and wait until, 'til people that was supposed to pick us up, take us to their home, like my sister was supposed to pick me up, come and meet me there and, uh, take me home. But the way it turned out, someway or another, she got very much delayed. I had to wait, wait. And, uh, the people for the other group from the Island, they came, was going to pick up, yeah, so they talked with me. Yeah, well...

SIGRIST: Mr. Rasmussen, we're going to have to just stop just one second so that Peter can put another tape into the machine. So I don't mean to interrupt your story, but...

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

SIGRIST: Okay, this is Paul Sigrist and we're beginning Tape 2 with Steinar Rasmussen, who came from Norway in 1923, when he was 23, and, uh, it is October 26th, 1995 and Peter Holme is, Hom is running the equipment. Sorry, Peter. Um, you were telling us that your sister got delayed and she didn't come to pick you up...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...so what happened?

RASMUSSEN: So well, there are some people from the Island. They asked me if I want to go with them. "Yeah, I say, "I guess I have to," I said. I couldn't stay there, around there, in case something serious had happened to the sister and couldn't get there. So they, they, they lived in Hoboken and, uh, my sister lived in Jersey City. And, uh, it wasn't too far out of the way. When they had to sign for me that they took me out of there and, of course, the, the fellow asked me in English if I want to go with them. I didn't know what he said. I didn't know. So they, they asked me. I say, "Yeah, yeah." (Chuckles) I go. So then I went with them home and, and, uh, my sister picked me up there and I, I was alright then.

SIGRIST: Was, was this...

RASMUSSEN: When...

SIGRIST: Excuse me, let me just ask a couple questions about Ellis Island. This, this place where everyone was, where the gate was, where you were waiting...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...was that on Ellis Island? Where was that room where you were all waiting?

RASMUSSEN: Well, it was on the main floor at the main, maybe, entrance, yeah.

SIGRIST: But it was at Ellis Island?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, okay.

RASMUSSEN: Uh, and, uh...I think the doctor came through and we, we had an exam. And I had to pay my "head tax," they called it.

SIGRIST: A "head tax?"

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, I think it was \$8.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did anyone ask you any questions at Ellis Island?

RASMUSSEN: I don't think so.

SIGRIST: No? Did you...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, except where we was going and who was going to pick us up, but like that, uh, that's all.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what it looked like on the inside?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, no, I, I can't. It was just a, just a big room to me and, uh, bare room and so it was nothing.

SIGRIST: Did you eat anything while you were there?

RASMUSSEN: No. I don't...no, I don't think so, no. No, I don't think we did.

SIGRIST: So then...

RASMUSSEN: And even in, uh, New York, in, uh, Battery Place there, uh, we didn't have anything before we came. It was only a couple hours there, an hour or two in the, on the Island, I don't know what we...signed something, I think.

SIGRIST: Signed something?

RASMUSSEN: I think.

SIGRIST: Did you have your, your luggage with you?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, yeah, suitcase, yeah. Yeah, I had that, uh, carried that with me. And, uh, then when the thing was, when I, I left Norway, I said well, I was going to quit the sea and the storms and the waves. Now I going to get the (unintelligible) easy job, good job inside, or on land anyway, then I don't have to bother that sea anymore. And it turned, the way it turned out was I got an inside job on a piano factory up in Bronx. Now, you see, I was freezing, sitting in there all, all day long, with wood, oh, and pulling in the net, different stuff, strong in there. Sitting there with that there piano, ah, that wasn't for me.

SIGRIST: Was that your first job that you got?

RASMUSSEN: Yep.

SIGRIST: The piano factory?

RASMUSSEN: That was the first job. I lasted two weeks, then I got, uh, lonesome for the sea. (Chuckles)

SIGRIST: How did you get the job at the piano factory?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, a brother to my sister-in-law home, married my brother and had the, the farm, left before I left, before I came to Kristiansand. The brother bought the farm and, uh, and, uh, her, her, her brother, he moved here. And, uh, we got, I got the address, so I told him...I wrote to him and I said, "Now I'm here in the United States" and, uh, would like to see him if he thought he could get me a job.

SIGRIST: Where were you living at this time?

RASMUSSEN: Jersey City.

SIGRIST: With your sister.

RASMUSSEN: Jersey City.

SIGRIST: Yes, do you remember where in Jersey City?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, place you call Green...Greenville.

SIGRIST: Greenville, uh-huh.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah. I think it was Greenville they called it.

SIGRIST: So you were...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...so you were commuting then from Jersey City to the Bronx.

RASMUSSEN: (Chuckles) Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you do that?

RASMUSSEN: Well, this sister had to take me two towns, I think. Because I, we had to go take the bus at Boulevard, Hudson Boulevard, to Jones Square and then the subway to Cortlandt Street and I had to get out there and walk up to 14th Street and took the subway there to 125th Street, Bronx.

SIGRIST: That's a long way to go for a job.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah. Yeah, and, uh, didn't know English. Didn't know, couldn't talk. I didn't know where the...I used to stand and look at the, get the, the light on the subway. Yeah, could know where, what subway train to take. And, and, uh, yeah, I don't know. And, oh, I got lost sometime big.

SIGRIST: Well, now, what, um...had you ever been on a subway before? What were...

RASMUSSEN: No, no.

SIGRIST: ...your impressions...

RASMUSSEN: No, no.

SIGRIST: ...of being on a subway the first time you rode on the subway?

RASMUSSEN: I got scared. You know we went, uh, from South Ferry and, uh, Whitehall Street, I, I think it was, isn't it? Isn't that what it's called in New York? And then we go to Hoboken. And after we got down, well, that was alright, go down the stairs there and I think no, that's nothing. Now what's happening? I, I got scared. I was scared to go down there and come in and subway, they start up all the noise in the street. No, no, boy, I said, do this? No, I, I thought there must be another way, highway top of the ground. And, uh, no I was very scared. And we got to Hoboken and, uh, then from Hoboken to Jersey City, there was a streetcar or bus...streetcar you had at that time. So that was alright, that was...as long as I was up on the ground, or out in the open, I was okay.

SIGRIST: You were happy above ground and unhappy under the ground.

RASMUSSEN: Oh, boy, I was scared and I didn't like those subways. I was a long time before I, I, I did, and that was the only way I could go. So then, uh...

SIGRIST: Tell me what the next job was that you got, after you quit the piano factory.

RASMUSSEN: Uh, yeah, then I had to get back to, to sea again. I had to get back to the boat. Uh, 'course, I mean, you always know somebody and they say, "Come on, I, I'm working on this so-so passenger ship." Uh, you know, the old passenger ferry called the Fall River Line?

SIGRIST: The Fall River Line, going to Boston?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah. Yeah, we went to New Bedford and Fall River and Newport and out that way. And, uh, I knowed this, the mate. The mate on that ship, he came from a near town where...mainland, of course. And, uh, we know him very well – I know her handily. I didn't know him, but I know his family. Uh, I took his sister something, couple of times on a date. So we, we went...that's alright that way. Then, uh, yeah, you know, he said, "Yeah, you come aboard," he said. "I, I'd take..." So we was working there as a seaman and, and, uh, like I say, Norwegian. I got them, too, after a while then.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you learned English when you first got to this country.

RASMUSSEN: Well, that was a hard thing for me because I was scared to, uh, use it. Because before I know the words, what the words, because you really got to remember the greenhorn didn't know the English and coming in with the men here, they like to tease you. They like to tell you things you wouldn't use otherwise or couldn't use in an ordinary conversation.

SIGRIST: Did that happen to you?

RASMUSSEN: Oh...

SIGRIST: Do you want to tell us about it?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, they would, they told me anything and, uh, I...when, you see, I was working one time with my brother on the Staten Island, yeah, and he was saying...and, uh, I remembered the, the word and tried to say it. And, oh, he said, "Never use that," he said. No (chuckles), never, never open it, never. Just forget that. Of course, that's the way I had to...I was scared to use the, the English. That's what took a long time for me to learn, until I got married.

SIGRIST: Do you remember...

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...some of the first words that you learned?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, no, no, I don't think so.

SIGRIST: Was anyone particularly helpful to you while you were trying to learn English?

RASMUSSEN: Oh, yeah, yeah. My brother, he, he did.

SIGRIST: Did, your brother spoke English?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, and, uh, my, my family, 'course, they, they were trying to. When I really got into it, and I got married. I met the girl I went with. She would pound it in me. She, she didn't mind, uh, my, my broken English, you know, whatever I tell her. So if she didn't mind that one, she, she, she'd pound on me. Yeah, so the little bit English I can talk now, that's more credit to her. I was sailing on the yacht for a while, then I went home in 1929. I got lonesome for the family again, so I went home for a year, come back in 1930. It was Depression. Couldn't get no job nowhere. But I was lucky. I was talking with a, a fellow from home and, uh, we started talked about here in Brooklyn. And, uh, well, one fellow came along and said, "Ah, you, you, you want to go with me," he said, uh, "on the yacht?" He said, "I was selected mate on the, on the yacht there." His uncle was captain and this fellow had never been on a boat. He didn't know nothing about it. Now he was the mate. Why not, his uncle was the Captain. So, he said, "I'm going to hire you some

men,” he said and so “I have this one here,” he said. “Take him.” “I have work,” he said. “I’m not quitting.” Then “Take him with you.” Well, yeah, so we talked a little while. I said, “Yeah, I haven’t been on a yacht,” I said, “but I know boats,” I said, “and I’m not afraid of that.” So “Alright, come...I’ll meet you so and so day. Uh, tomorrow at so and so time we’ll go to the captain and find out. If he say okay, uh, you’re hired. Okay with me,” he said. So we then, we met the Captain and he said, “Yeah,” and we talked a little while forth and back. I said, “I have, I admit that I hadn’t been on a yacht. I don’t know what they look like and what the...but I know boats,” I said, “and I know seamanship.” “Ah, alright, ah, you will, you will do,” he said. “You, you okay.” When the thing was that, uh, we had to go to Ho...to Philadelphia to pick up the yacht. The owner had just bought it and he was landing in Pennsylvania. And we had to go there to one ship shop there and pick it up and for us to fit them out so we could just take it to New York. Not complete, but enough...get the gear, the gear we need and so on in place and, uh, get it fitted. Well, I had to study that and what to do and know what to use. So the Captain came after a couple of weeks and we was loading. And he said, “You did a good job,” he said. “You say you’ve never been on a yacht?” “No,” I said, “I haven’t. This is the first.” “Well, okay,” he said. “You have done a very good job. Now we can come and take it down to New York and fit it out.” So we went up on, uh, New York there,...I can’t...

SIGRIST: Were you married?

RASMUSSEN: I know the name, but I can’t get that. And, uh, with the yacht, they fit them out in the shipyard up there. Nyack.

SIGRIST: Nyack.

RASMUSSEN: And done with the ship, that ship got there, and, uh...

SIGRIST: Were you married at this time?

RASMUSSEN: No.

SIGRIST: This was before you got married.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, yeah, this was in 1930. I got married in '34. I met the wife, though, in that time, in 1930, but not before. Well, I had, uh, it not before. I had met her before I went to Norway in '29, one or two days' time we, we had together. And I felt that was something special. I hadn't had that feeling with any other girl, so I said, "Uh-huh."

SIGRIST: Was she American-born?

RASMUSSEN: No, she was born, she was born in Norway, was come over here with the family when she was three years old. So she was educated over here.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, Gudrun.

SIGRIST: G-...

RASMUSSEN: Gudrun Jansen.

SIGRIST: G-U...

RASMUSSEN: She come from Ronda. They would come from Ronda. Her father was a mate on the sail ships...

SIGRIST: Gudrun...

RASMUSSEN: ...but not...

SIGRIST: ...is spelled G-U-D-R-U-N.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And Jansen?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So it's J-A-...

RASMUSSEN: -A-

SIGRIST: -N-S-E-N?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Jansen?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Jansen.

RASMUSSEN: -S-E-N.

SIGRIST: And what year did you get married?

RASMUSSEN: '34.

SIGRIST: 1934.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, um, what was it that attracted you to her?

RASMUSSEN: Well, she was to be honest and fair and, uh, just nice, uh, easy to go along with.

SIGRIST: And did you have children?

RASMUSSEN: We had, uh, four.

SIGRIST: Could you name them please?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, well, the first one lived only five days. It was a mis...more or less, it was eight months pregnant. She tripped, was going to go up on the curb and tripped and, uh, maybe hit the, went down on the, on the knees on the sidewalk and that brought, brought it on. So she was born eight months' pregnancy. I was on the ship then, and, uh, sailing. I didn't know, no.

SIGRIST: Now what...

RASMUSSEN: So...

SIGRIST: What were the names of the children?

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, let's see. Janet, uh, that was the first, alright, the second one that lived. We called her Janet. And, a boy, second boy, second g...child was Edward, and the third, girl, otherwise that would have been the fourth, but the one that died at five years old. That's...we never had her home and, uh... Her name was Dorothy.

SIGRIST: Dorothy.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah. Yeah, so we had the first one, we didn't had her home and we didn't get to, to name her because, uh,...yeah, the, the doctor told her...he claimed there was a valve in the heart that didn't close. And he thought if you give him a blood transfusion, it would close, and, uh, lucky I had told the mate this and I...“Listen,” I said, “the wife was in the hospital with the, giving birth, I have (unintelligible). “Yeah, why don't you go?” he said. “Go ahead. And if you need a night there, let me know,” he said. “Stay over.” Trip every other day in New York. And, uh, so I had to leave. I had come to the hospital and there they was, oh, the whole family (unintelligible). Oh, boy, oh, boy, uh. I (unintelligible). “Hey, oh, hey,” my brother cried. “Here's the father” or “Here's the husband, yeah, come,” so the doctor heard that, he grabbed me right away before I could talk to the mother-in-law or anything. He grabbed me in another room and, uh, came and told me, boy, I... The blood transfusion didn't do any good. She died at five days, and, uh, I'll, I will have luck with the God, I'll tell you, yeah, alright. (Sighs deeply)

SIGRIST: Perhaps we could talk about when you became a citizen and what you had to do to become a citizen.

RASMUSSEN: Well, you know, I had to learn the...wha, how, what, how the laws was made and what the Congress must do and the Congressmen and, and, uh, different things. I went to school for that, uh, learned that. I learned that

much English I could, uh, get the paper. Uh, I had to have a witness. I got up for the second, second paper. I had to go up before the judge and the thing was now up there, I got mixed up in the arriving time and leaving time. I arrived New York before I left Norway. (Chuckles) I had the date mixed up. It, it just was alright. And the clerk, he said, "Hey, (whispered)," talked to the judge. "Do you think I'm going to remin..., reny, neg...reject a fellow that was innocent paper because he...date is mixed up?" he said. "He had the dates, the date is there," he said, "if you put the last first and the first last. I'm not going to deny him that. No." So I got the paper.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when you became a citizen?

RASMUSSEN: Uh, I felt, uh, good and satisfied and I think that will be alright.

SIGRIST: Do you think of yourself as being an American or being a Norwegian?
How do you think of yourself in terms on nationality?

RASMUSSEN: Well, you have to feel that you are a American. You have to live like that. 'Course, you know, you, you was always 20, 23 years in Norway, so I growed in the, the Norwegian, uh, style and, uh, that's it. Well, uh, you had to forget that and, uh, see... The daugh...the daughter, uh, the wife, why, she was American, as I said, well, immigrated at three years old, you know, and, uh, but she...I felt now, I, I, I, I felt that I was belong to America.

SIGRIST: Can you speak some Norwegian for us on tape? Perhaps, uh, recite a prayer that you know or a poem or something in Norwegian, um, or sing a song perhaps that you know?

RASMUSSEN: No, sing a song I know, I can't sing.

SIGRIST: (Chuckles)

RASMUSSEN: That's one thing I never had even in the school. The school teach...well, I shouldn't use the tape for that.

SIGRIST: (Chuckles). Is there a, a prayer, perhaps, that you could say for us in Norwegian?

RASMUSSEN: Well, you have the, The Father Lord, we call it, The Lord's Prayer.

SIGRIST: Could you say that?

RASMUSSEN: Well, I did that in the English and the Norsk. Father Lord...(chuckles). Now you got me mixed up now. Nah, I don't think I can get that now.

SIGRIST: Okay. That's alright. If, what kind of, um...what are your secrets for your long life? If, if, if you had to give advice to a young person who said, "Tell me how to lead my life happily," how would you, what would you tell them?

RASMUSSEN: Well, these last, yeah, oh, very first year in the America, I learned to...I was very lonesome and longed for home then and, uh, very lonesome and have nobody in America, but I become a Christian. I got saved. The Lord took care of me, so I do lean on the Lord more now than ever. I'm 95 years old now and, uh, he has sent me to, uh, many, many jobs. The last job I had for the railroad, I worked for rail...liner ship captain, liner captain for the railroad. Uh, on the boxes, you know, they took the cargo from the railroad to the ship, steamship piers, on the boat and I was there for 30 years. I was the liner captain and I, I had a lot of experience in that and different things. And I always thought that, uh, the only way to

be happy and content is in try to please the Lord, do what He would want you to do. That's the only way I can explain.

SIGRIST: I think that's probably a good place for us to end. Um, Steinar, thank you very much for letting us ask you all these questions about your life.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah, well...no, I, I, I have, uh, I have to give the Lord the credit for whatever I, that happened to me after that, I tell you.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist, signing off with Steinar Rasmussen on Thursday, October 26th, 1995, here at the Norwegian Christian Home in Brooklyn. Thank you very much, sir.

RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW