

**EI-698**

**VICTOR JOHNSON**

**BIRTHDATE: 8/11/1906**

**INTERVIEW DATE: 10/27/1995**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 88**

**RUNNING TIME: 21:53**

**INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: RUCHI JAIN**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEW BY:**

**ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Edna Johnson, Victor Johnson's wife, is present during the interview and speaks occasionally.**

**Norway, 1923**

**AGE: 16**

**SHIP:**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

**USA: BROOKLYN, NEW YORK**

**NORWAY: HANDAL**

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, October 27th, 1995. I am at the Norwegian Christian Home in Brooklyn. And I am here with Victor Johnson. Mr. Johnson came from Norway. What year did you come, Mr. Johnson?

JOHNSON: 1923

SIGRIST: 1923.

JOHNSON: Mm-Hm

SIGRIST: How old were you when you came?

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JOHNSON: Sixteen.

SIGRIST: You were sixteen. And present also in the room is Mrs. Johnson, Edna Johnson. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

JOHNSON: My birthday August 11, 1906.

SIGRIST: And, where were you born?

JOHNSON: In Handal, [ph] Norway.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Handal [ph]?

JOHNSON: Handal [ph] Norway.

SIGRIST: And where in Norway is that?

JOHNSON: That's down south.

SIGRIST: In the southern part of Norway?

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, can you describe the house that you grew up in, for me? What did the house look like that you lived in Norway?

JOHNSON: Well, it was -- it was like any ordinary house, nice look in the house.

SIGRIST: What was it made out of?

JOHNSON: Huh?

SIGRIST: What did they build the houses out of in Norway?

JOHNSON: Well, it is wood. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What color was the house?

JOHNSON: White.

SIGRIST: And how many rooms did it have?

JOHNSON: My-my-my, about seven.

SIGRIST: Seven rooms. And, was it a farm? Did you have a farm?

JOHNSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did you keep animals?

JOHNSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: What kind of animals did you keep?

JOHNSON: Cows, chickens -- .

EDNA: Horses.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

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SIGRIST: Mrs. Johnson just said horses.

EDNA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your job on the farm?

JOHNSON: Well, it was helping out with everything. It was farming, all-all kinds of work.

SIGRIST: What kind of work had to be done on the farm?

JOHNSON: After so many year, how --how can I explain that?

SIGRIST: Did you grow vegetables?

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of vegetables that you grew?

JOHNSON: Well, potatoes, carrots, all kinds of -- .

EDNA: Turnips?

JOHNSON: Huh?

EDNA: Turnips, everybody had turnips.

JOHNSON: Cabbage.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Johnson just said turnips.

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JOHNSON: Mm-hm.

SIGRIST: Did you have to take care of the animals?

JOHNSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: And, which animal did you take care of?

JOHNSON: Cows and chickens.

SIGRIST: What did you do with the cows? Why did you have cows?

JOHNSON: What did he ask questions.

EDNA: The barn. (?)

JOHNSON: Yeah, for the milk and part (?).

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

JOHNSON: Andy.

SIGRIST: Andy?

JOHNSON: Yeah. Andreas [ph]. That was my -- his name. Andreas [ph].

SIGRIST: Andreas [ph]. And what did he do for a living?

JOHNSON: Well, he was here, most of the time he was here, he was like a carpenter, farmer.

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SIGRIST: Was he a carpenter in Norway too?

JOHNSON: I believe he was.

SIGRIST: Did he come to American at some point?

JOHNSON: Mm-Hm

SIGRIST: Do you remember what year he came?

JOHNSON: When he come?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

JOHNSON: How can I explain that? I was only - that was before my time.

SIGRIST: Were you born when he came to America? Had you been born when he went to America?

EDNA: You were eight-year-old when he died. So, you were born before he went to America. You were eight-year-old when he died.

SIGRIST: What was your -- .

JOHNSON: Well.

SIGRIST: Go ahead. (pauses) What was your mother's name?

JOHNSON: Navisa [ph]

SIGRIST: Do you know what her maiden name was? Before she was

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married.

JOHNSON: Larsen.

SIGRIST: Larsen. L-A-R-S-E-N. Larsen. What did your mother do on the farm?

JOHNSON: (?) Huh?

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did your mother do on the farm? What work did she do on the farm?

JOHNSON: Well, she take of the animals and housework and everything whatever.

EDNA: Wash clothes.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

JOHNSON: Mm-Hm

SIGRIST: How many?

JOHNSON: There were six -- seven altogether.

SIGRIST: Seven children. How do you fall into that? Are you the oldest or the youngest or -- .

JOHNSON: Youngest one.

SIGRIST: You're the youngest of the seven children. Did you go to school in

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Norway?

JOHNSON: Mhm-hm. Yes.

SIGRIST: How old are you when you begin school?

JOHNSON: Well, maybe I was seven years old. Is that it? Public school.

SIGRIST: Was there a school building in your town?

JOHNSON: Mm-hm.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like?

JOHNSON: It big wooden house, might as well say.

SIGRIST: And what did they teach you in school? What were your subjects in school?

JOHNSON: Well.

EDNA: The subject you had to take, you had everything.

JOHNSON: Reading and writing and everything.

EDNA: Reading, writing, arithmetic. You went to business school in Norway.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Johnson said you went to business school in Norway.

JOHNSON: Uh-huh

SIGRIST: What do you remember about going to business school? What did they teach you at business school?

JOHNSON: Well, it was, what do you call it -- .

EDNA: They call it, same thing as arithmetic, 'cause it's business for business.

JOHNSON: Business school. Yeah

SIGRIST: Mrs. Johnson, why don't come up closer to the microphone so we can hear on the tape.

EDNA: You don't want to hear me, do you?

SIGRIST: Well, well, it's okay, I'm going to interview you also but if you can help Mr. Johnson, that's fine.

EDNA: No, but I don't know what do -- . Business school there is like business school here. You know what they do. Business is mostly arithmetic.

SIGRIST: Is that what you learned at business school, arithmetic?

JOHNSON: Mhm.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

EDNA: He was very good at that.

SIGRIST: Yes, do you remember what kind of food you ate in Norway?

EDNA: A lot of potatoes.

SIGRIST: A lot of potatoes, Mrs. Johnson says.

EDNA: Homemade bread, homemade bread.

SIGRIST: Okay, hang on, wait, when I interview you, then you can tell me all of that.

EDNA: Okay.

SIGRIST: But if you know things that can will help Mr. Johnson to remember, by all means.

EDNA: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the kinds of food that you ate?

JOHNSON: Bread, potatoes, all kinds of vegetable.

EDNA: And the dried fruits -- . You had the dried fruits (?).

JOHNSON: And meats, fish.

SIGRIST: What kind of fish? Tell me about the fish that you ate.

EDNA: Cod fish.

SIGRIST: Hang on. Hang on. Tell me about the fish.

JOHNSON: It was cod fish.

SIGRIST: Where did the fish come from?

EDNA: I don't know (laughs).

SIGRIST: Did you fish?

JOHNSON: Yeah, of course I did.

SIGRIST: That was near where you lived?

JOHNSON: Mm-hm.

SIGRIST: Yeah. And you got cod fish. You fished for cod?

JOHNSON: Mm-hm.

SIGRIST: What religion were you in Norway?

JOHNSON: (?)

SIGRIST: Was there a church near your house?

JOHNSON: Not too far away, no.

SIGRIST: How often did you go to church?

JOHNSON: Well, when I was a kid, every, mostly, every Sunday.

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SIGRIST: Were there any ways that you worshipped at home? In your house, did you worship at all?

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you say prayers?

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When would you say prayers?

JOHNSON: Well, my family did, my mother did. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Mr. Johnson, why did you want to come to America?

JOHNSON: Why I want to come? Well, I was young and I was -- maybe, um, there was a better job here (?).

SIGRIST: Did you have a job in Norway before you came to America?

JOHNSON: No, I was only sixteen when I come here. I work on the farm. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have any relatives in America before you came here? You said your father was here. He had died.

JOHNSON: He died before, yeah, and my brothers and my sisters, yeah.

SIGRIST: Your brother and your sister?

JOHNSON: Mm-hm.

SIGRIST: Where were they living in America?

JOHNSON: In Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: What was your brother doing for work in America?

EDNA: Carpenter. He was a carpenter.

JOHNSON: Carpenter, yes.

SIGRIST: Your brother was a carpenter. What did you have to do to get ready to leave Norway?

JOHNSON: What did I have to do?

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to a doctor before you left Norway?

JOHNSON: Not at that time, no.

SIGRIST: Did you have to get special papers to leave Norway?

JOHNSON: No.

SIGRIST: No. What about a passport or a visa?

JOHNSON: Passport, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to get that?

EDNA: You went to the sheriff -- .

JOHNSON: (?)

SIGRIST: You went to the sheriff. Do you remember -- how did your mother feel about you leaving Norway?

EDNA: He was dead.

SIGRIST: The mother was dead?

EDNA: His father was dead when he was eight years old.

SIGRIST: Right, but was your mother still living when you left Norway?

JOHNSON: Mm-Hm

SIGRIST: How did she feel about you leaving?

JOHNSON: Well, you can figure that yourself how she felt when.

EDNA: She was not too happy.

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

JOHNSON: All me clothes, that's about all.

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

JOHNSON: In Haslow [ph], Haslow [ph], yeah.

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SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship that you took to America?

JOHNSON: (?)

SIGRIST: And, had you ever been on a big ship before?

JOHNSON: No.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you were getting into this big ship?

JOHNSON: Well, what would you say when you go into a big ship? You feel the same way. You know that.

SIGRIST: I've never been on a big ship so I don't know what it would feel like.

JOHNSON: Well then, you can figure out yourself what would happen if you go into a big ship.

SIGRIST: How long did it take to get to America?

JOHNSON: Almost seven days.

EDNA: Seven to eight days.

JOHNSON: Seven to eight days, yeah.

SIGRIST: And did anything happen on the ship while it was coming to America?

JOHNSON: Not as far as I know, no.

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SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

JOHNSON: No.

SIGRIST: No. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came into New York?

JOHNSON: How can you answer question?

EDNA: (?)

SIGRIST: Do you remember going to Ellis Island when you came into New York?

JOHNSON: I remember that, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about Ellis Island?

JOHNSON: Well, I know that we landed in (?) street in Brooklyn. And I was taken out on the boat to go over to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: And what happened at Ellis Island?

JOHNSON: Well, I was only sixteen when -- and I was maybe uh -- I felt alright but I was skinny and you know, but when I know -- I eat good and everything so nothing like that happened. But I was like skinny and I was taken like to over to the hospital at Ellis Island. That's -- I was spent uh -- the next day I was - they let me out.

SIGRIST: So you had to stay overnight?

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You were there overnight. What did they do to you while you were at Ellis Island?

JOHNSON: They maybe check up that -- I don't remember that. But I know I was -- some kind of hospital well I guess. And I thought maybe that time you know when I you're on the ship that something you know bothered me. Lice, what do you call? So because I was taken in to a room and there was a big bath tube, very big bath tub, and there was two men, one on each end at the bath tub, with one water. And I thought that was cause of lice and something that happen on the ship. So that's what happened on that.

SIGRIST: Where was the bath tub?

JOHNSON: huh?

SIGRIST: Where was the bath tub?

JOHNSON: Where did -- what?

SIGRIST: Where was this bathtub? Was this on the boat or at Ellis Island?

JOHNSON: Ellis Island, in the hospital there.

SIGRIST: I see, so that's where you had to take this bath was at Ellis Island. Did they feed you at Ellis Island?

JOHNSON: Yeah, not too good though, no.

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SIGRIST: Do you remember what it was that they fed you?

JOHNSON: Well, I had mostly bread and I don't remember one, what kind of food.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like, the room where you had to sleep?

JOHNSON: No, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if anyone could talk Norwegian to you?

JOHNSON: No.

SIGRIST: Did someone come and meet you at Ellis Island?

JOHNSON: No.

SIGRIST: Where did you go when they released you?

JOHNSON: They let me out and I went on the ferry and I come over to -- and I had a piece of paper with my name and address on to my brother that lives in Brooklyn and I give that to policeman and he told me to take subway but I did not know what that was. But he get the taxi and he took me over to Brooklyn. That's all.

SIGRIST: When was the last time you had seen your brother?

JOHNSON: How can I (?) them after so many years?

SIGRIST: It had been a long time since you had seen your brother?

JOHNSON: I don't think it was. I couldn't say that.

SIGRIST: Where was your brother living in Brooklyn?

JOHNSON: That was 330 41st street.

SIGRIST: And you said he was a carpenter in Brooklyn?

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

JOHNSON: (?) Yeah.

SIGRIST: And when did you get your first job in America?

JOHNSON: That was Staten Island, I guess and (?) the ship...yeah.

SIGRIST: But how long did it take before you got your first job?

JOHNSON: That couldn't be too long.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in America?

JOHNSON: I went to school and I want to learn English.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what it was like to learn English?

JOHNSON: That, I can't tell you that, you know that yourself. If you gonna pick up another language, how long will that take?

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SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first words were that you learned in English?

JOHNSON: No. Well, that's all I can tell you. That's everything. That's all.

SIGRIST: Okay, alright. Well thank you very much for letting me ask you these questions. I appreciate it. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Victor Johnson on October 27th, 1995. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW