

EI-699

EDNA HANSEN JOHNSON

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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NORWAY, 1926

AGE 17

PASSAGE ON "THE STAVANGERFJORD"

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, October 27, 1995. I'm at the Norwegian Christian Home in Brooklyn, New York, and I'm here with Edna Hansen Johnson. Mrs. Johnson came from Norway in 1926. She was seventeen years old at that time. Mrs. Johnson, can we begin by you saying your birth date, please.

JOHNSON: The 13th of March, 1909.

SIGRIST: And where in Norway were you born?

JOHNSON: I was born in Lynjldal, Lynjldal, in southern Norway, Lynjldal, near (?) Christianson. The name is Lynjldal.

SIGRIST: Can you spell it?

JOHNSON: L-Y-N-J-L-D-A-L. Lynjldal.

SIGRIST: And that's in the southern part of Norway.

JOHNSON: The southern part of Norway, yeah. L-Y-N-J-L-D-A-L, yeah. Lynjldal.

SIGRIST: We can look it up, so.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the town when you were growing up?

JOHNSON: I remember a lot. I remember he had, my father, we had a beautiful house. We had, I was born in that house. My father build it himself, him and his father, and he loved it. We were right near the water, and a little boat came into the town there, and we could, we were sitting there watching to see the boat come. So I, we had a very good home, a very nice home.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what it looked like, the house?

JOHNSON: Yeah. The house was white, of course. It was two-story, always two-story with, we had dining room, bedroom, my dining room, living room, and in the kitchen, in the hall. They were quite a big house, and you had three bedrooms upstairs.

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

JOHNSON: Oh, we used kerosene lamps, that's all.

SIGRIST: And, um, how did you heat the house?

JOHNSON: How do I what?

SIGRIST: Heat. How did you make the house warm?

JOHNSON: Oh, we, wood, a wood-burning stove.

SIGRIST: How many . . .

JOHNSON: We had, a stove in each room. And in upstairs we didn't have

your own bedroom, we had a main bedroom upstairs, and then we had two downstairs.

SIGRIST: And where did you get the wood to burn in the stoves?

JOHNSON: On the farm. We had a little farm, and there was a, plenty of wood to be had. If you didn't have enough, you'd have to buy some wood.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in the house?

JOHNSON: Oh, we had a well. We had to go and get the water.

SIGRIST: Whose job was it to go and get the water?

JOHNSON: Well, there was, well, those kids and, my father was over here most of the time, so my mother had to do a lot of work, and she had those kids, I had three, two sisters that was older than me. I was number three girl. So, yeah. We had to go to the well for, we had to go in the basement or whatever. We had a well in the basement of the house.

SIGRIST: The well was actually in the basement of the house.

JOHNSON: Yeah, but we had another one. We didn't use that old tub.

SIGRIST: Was there a bathroom in the house?

JOHNSON: NO. We had an outhouse.

SIGRIST: What about when you wanted to take a bath? How did you do that?

JOHNSON: Well, we had a basin, a big basin, and my mother had to heat the water, and he's the one was an awful lot of work, that we didn't get a bath that often, because in the wintertime was too cold, but we always got a bath. But she had all those kids to give

baths.

SIGRIST: You said that there was no heat in the bedrooms upstairs.

JOHNSON: No, just in one. The other two was like guest rooms when we had guests. And then my mother and father slept downstairs most of the time.

SIGRIST: This was a new house that your father had built.

JOHNSON: That was the new house, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were you the only child that was born in that house?

JOHNSON: No, my, it was only my oldest sister was born in a different house. In the same town, but my, they bought an older house on the farm, and my, and then my, my father had been in America, make some more money, he came back home and build the new house. Then my older sister was born in the old house.

SIGRIST: When did your father first go to America?

JOHNSON: He was (?), I don't really, because he was a citizen when he was nineteen years old, and he loved this country. He just loved this country. He taught a song about this country, and he could sing, and if it hadn't been for my mother, she didn't want to go, she didn't want to leave her family, we would have all been here. Because he was a citizen when he was nineteen. That's why I came over as a citizen, his papers.

SIGRIST: How often did your father go back and forth?

JOHNSON: OH, on the last trip he had was, well, he was here when I came over. That was where he were three years away. It was terrible. It was a long time. They couldn't go for, no, for a few months.

No, he was, the last trip was three years. I really don't remember the other trips.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

JOHNSON: Alfred Hansen.

SIGRIST: Alfred Hansen. And tell me what he was like as a person?

JOHNSON: He was (?). He was, well, he was a nice-looking man in my opinion.

SIGRIST: And what was his personality like?

JOHNSON: Very, very good. He was a very high, happy man. He was very happy. And he was always singing, and he, and he was a hard-working man, even in Norway. Because we had only the one farm with two cows and some chickens, and we didn't have much too big a farm.

SIGRIST: You said that your father taught you a song about America. Do you remember what that song was that he taught you?

JOHNSON: Oh . . . (she laughs) (?) I don't remember, but we sang it so crazy. Oh, he sang so many songs, you know. Working on the Railroad, you know, Working on the Railroad. Different songs. I only remember, I remember how he could sing. I probably couldn't remember the way we sang it, but I can't remember now, because we're so (?).

SIGRIST: Do you remember any songs in Norwegian that you used to sing?

JOHNSON: That he used to sing?

SIGRIST: Or that you used to sing when you were a kid.

JOHNSON: Oh, we used to sing a lot of songs, (Norwegian). We sang that in school.

SIGRIST: Can you sing, can you sing it for me?

JOHNSON: No, I can't sing. I have no voice. Don't make me sing.

SIGRIST: All right, I won't. (he laughs)

JOHNSON: Because I have, I used to sing in the Stephen's Church, in the choir in the Stephen's, I had a good voice, but now I have no voice. I sing in the church now because I like to sing, but I couldn't sing, I couldn't sing for you, I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: Oh, okay, all right. (sound of a toilet flushing) You said that, you said that your father was a happy man.

JOHNSON: He was a happy man.

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

JOHNSON: When he wasn't working?

SIGRIST: Like what kind of things did he do for relaxation?

JOHNSON: We went, we used to sing (?). When we went, he had a brother that lived there, and we went to visit with him, and he went to, we used to (?) at Christmas time. We always had parties and went to each other, and he always like that. Even though with six children he had a lot of things to do. He had my mother in the home, too. And then he went to meetings, and he went to church, and we didn't, not a regular like church he went to, he had a smaller church, close enough that we could walk to, that he

called Bedehus. I don't know, when you say a prayer house.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

JOHNSON: Bedehus?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

JOHNSON: B-E-D-E, B-E-D-E-H-U-S. Bedehus.

SIGRIST: That's in a small church.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And how often would you go there?

JOHNSON: That was maybe once a week or some time more than that.

SIGRIST: Who was the most religious person in your family?

JOHNSON: That was my mother. That was my mother. She would read the Bible every day, and I, I still have a Bible here.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

JOHNSON: Lutheran.

SIGRIST: Lutheran. And, um, were there prayers that you remember in Norwegian?

JOHNSON: Yeah. We prayed before we, before meals, and then we said the Lord's Prayer at night.

SIGRIST: Could you say a prayer for me in Norwegian?

JOHNSON: (Norwegian) (she laughs) (Norwegian)

SIGRIST: Thank you. Do you remember celebrating Christmas?

JOHNSON: A Christmas song?

SIGRIST: Well, just celebrating Christmas.

JOHNSON: Well, all I remember was a lot of preparing, a lot of baking and cleaning, and everything had to be cleaned and scrubbed, and we got new clothes, and then there was, and there's a little prayer house, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there special foods that you had for Christmas?

JOHNSON: Yeah. We had that (?), when my mother baked, you know, everything was homemade. And we always had good, all kinds of cookies. Like, uh, chocolate chip cookies from (?). And then they, many different, many different kind of cookies.

SIGRIST: And was there a special meal served at Christmas time?

JOHNSON: That was, you used to call it, that we had Juledrot, Saturday. That was for Christmas.

SIGRIST: And what was it?

JOHNSON: Juledrot.

SIGRIST: And what is that?

JOHNSON: It's a rice pudding.

SIGRIST: Rice pudding. What was the name in Norwegian again?

JOHNSON: Juledrot.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

JOHNSON: J-U-L-E-D-R-O-T. Juledrot.

SIGRIST: And that was a special holiday . . .

JOHNSON: That was a special, yeah. We had that, Christmas Eve we had that.

SIGRIST: How would you, how would your mother make that?

JOHNSON: Well, with milk and rice, that's all. Milk and rice and salt and sugar, we had cinnamon on top of it, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did, where did the cooking take place in your house?

JOHNSON: Oh, we had a wood-burning stove that we cooked on, too. We had quite a, we had three burners on a big stove. We could bake, we could bake in that stove, too.

SIGRIST: What are some typical Norwegian foods that you would have eaten on a daily basis?

JOHNSON: Oh, that was mostly bread, homemade bread. And then my mother baked, baked something like rolls, you know, for breakfast. She could cook that on top of the stove, because that stove had grill. You could use that to bake some pancakes or whatever on top of the stove here. That was, and then all those cakes, we had, and crumb kaga, cones, you know, those cones we made.

SIGRIST: Cones.

JOHNSON: Cones, yeah. That crumb kaga.

SIGRIST: Crumb kaga.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And is that dough? What is that made of?

JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah, but you have to, they, I've seen that on television here, a woman that makes that. You have to have a special skillet to make that so they don't stay. They turn hard when you roll that, and you have a king, my father make, I roll them out so they be like a cone.

SIGRIST: Almost like an ice cream cone, sort of?

JOHNSON: Yeah, an ice cream cone. That's it, just like that.

SIGRIST: Who did most of the cooking in your house?

JOHNSON: That was my mother.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

JOHNSON: Elizabeth. Elizabeth Hansen.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

JOHNSON: Bantsen, Bantsen.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

JOHNSON: B-A-N, B-A-N-T-S-E-N, Bantsen.

SIGRIST: Bantsen.

JOHNSON: Bantsen, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

JOHNSON: Huh?

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

JOHNSON: How they met? No, that I couldn't tell you. They were married

in 1900. That's all I know.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Did your mother or father ever tell you any stories about the day you were born?

JOHNSON: (a cough is heard in the background on the tape) No, I only remember when my brother that was here was born, and I was, and my father was so happy because he had three girls, and then he got a boy.

SIGRIST: What were the names of your sisters?

JOHNSON: My older sister was Augut, my next one was Anna, and I'm Edna.

SIGRIST: And then what was the name of your brother?

JOHNSON: Harry. Harry. He's here, Harry and Bernard in (?). My younger sister is in Norway now.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. So there were children after Harry then?

JOHNSON: OH, yeah. That was my brother, Bernard. He died.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

JOHNSON: And then my younger sister is in Norway now.

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

JOHNSON: Tora.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

JOHNSON: T-O-R-A.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me a little bit about what your mother was like as a person.

JOHNSON: Well, I was told she was very good-looking. (she laughs) She was tall, and she had quite dark hair. She had beautiful hair.

SIGRIST: How did she wear her hair?

JOHNSON: She wear her hair in a bun on the top, you know. They wear that style now. That's the style come back. That's the way my mother was. She's coming up to the, from the back, and then she had a bun on top. But then she had natural curly hair, waved in the front, and she looked so beautiful. And she took so good care of her hair. I can see how she combed her hair every morning.

SIGRIST: How did people wash their hair back then?

JOHNSON: Well, they had a wash basin, and you have to dry your hair, you know, naturally in the sun. In the wintertime you have to dry your hair by the stove, or whatever heat you had.

SIGRIST: How often would you wash your hair?

JOHNSON: Well, not as often did he wash his hair, but I really don't remember. I wouldn't say, most of the time when we had a bath, and then may not, not really. Maybe every couple of weeks or so on.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What were some of the chores your mother did around the house? You mentioned the cooking. What else was she responsible for?

JOHNSON: Well, she had, you know, we had (?), you know, that had to be shaken out, and floors had to be swept. And she did that, and we helped her when we were old enough to do it. And then to wash clothes and then iron with the iron that was the, it was no an

electric iron. We had no electricity. It was an iron that we put, how would you say that you put in the iron and heat it up, coal, like. We put the iron in that, and that we make, and then you iron with that.

SIGRIST: What kind of clothes did people wear back then?

JOHNSON: Homemade clothes.

SIGRIST: What did they, can you describe a dress for me, what you would wear?

JOHNSON: Oh, a woman wore long dresses, very long dresses. But, of course, those girls, I never wore, I never saw my mother with a short dress on. It was always long dresses. Of course, those kids, we had shorter dresses, and homemade. My mother made most of the dresses. I don't know what time she could do it, but she did it.

SIGRIST: Did she have a sewing machine to do it?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. We had a sewing machine, a hand one.

SIGRIST: Did any other family members live with you in this house, other than mom and dad and the kids, like grandparents or anything like that?

JOHNSON: No, not at that time.

SIGRIST: Did you have grandparents that were living at that time?

JOHNSON: OH, yeah. I had grandparents until, uh, my grandmother, one, my grandmother, I don't remember too much on my father's parents, and on my mother's parents she gave, she got to be over ninety, and so did my Grandma. I remember them very well. We loved to

come to her house, because she always had something good for us.
(?)

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about going to Grandma's, and what you remember about your grandmother?

JOHNSON: I remember we used to walk a distance from where we lived, and we went there in, quite often. And when they went shopping, they had to pass our house, almost, and then she stopped in. And she was there helping my mother sometimes with mending stocks and things. I remember, I remember most of all when she made pancakes. When we came, she passed that. We always had eggs and milk and flour in the house, and she made pancakes.

SIGRIST: What did she look like?

JOHNSON: Well, she was kind of old, when I remember her, because, but she, too, had very nice hair, and she was, in my eyes she was beautiful. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in Norway?

JOHNSON: Yeah, I went to school in Norway. I went to, for school I had a (?), not (?) school, I had what you call a state school after that. I had a regular school in.

SIGRIST: Could you parents read and write?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did they feel about their children getting an education?

JOHNSON: Oh, they liked that. They all wanted us to have an education. My, my mother, she had more education than I had, a little extra education, and then my brother, too, he had extra education.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the school building that you used to go to?

JOHNSON: Yeah. I remember that. I have pictures of that.

SIGRIST: What did it look like?

JOHNSON: Like a small, like a small, it was just one big room. And then like an apartment that the teacher lived in. There was one room in the kitchen, in a room upstairs, like one big room that we had (?).

SIGRIST: And does anything about the teacher stick out in your mind?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. I love my teacher. And, you know, I, I, we had one teacher that after I heard, when the Germans came in there they killed him. They tortured him, and we loved him so much. That's the one night I remember most, when I was a little older then, you know.

SIGRIST: This was during, when the Germans came in, was this World War One?

JOHNSON: No, no. The (?).

SIGRIST: The Second World War.

JOHNSON: Yeah, Second World War.

SIGRIST: I see. Of course, you were in America by then.

JOHNSON: I was in America, yeah. I was in America.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about World War One, that time period, 1914 or '15?

JOHNSON: No. All I remember, we could hear the noise, that from, we were

not that far away from the war. We could hear the noise. When they were shooting, we heard that little noise, we could hear. That was 1918, right? And, you know, I wasn't, I was only eight years old. I don't remember that much. We were scared, because they said you're going to be rationed on all kinds of food. But we had food, we had potatoes and we had pretty good food.

SIGRIST: So the food wasn't rationed then?

JOHNSON: No, not that I remember.

SIGRIST: Okay. Do you remember when World War One was over, when the war actually ended?

JOHNSON: Well, I, I only remember, I heard about it, but I don't remember too much because that lasted 1918. No, I don't remember too much. I wasn't . . .

SIGRIST: You were kind of removed from it?

JOHNSON: Yeah, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any games that you played as a child?

JOHNSON: What?

SIGRIST: Games that you played as a child?

JOHNSON: Games?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

JOHNSON: We played a lot of games like checkers and, and, uh, played different kinds of games outdoors, you know. I can't describe them in English, because they had no meaning, Ring-Around-The-Roses, and, well, that is in English. We had homemade games most

of the time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember nursery rhymes in Norwegian?

JOHNSON: Nursery rhymes, yeah. I remember so faintly that I don't think I can remember most of it.

SIGRIST: It was a long time ago.

JOHNSON: It was a long time ago.

SIGRIST: Um, what did you know about America when you were growing up? How did you think about America when you were growing up?

JOHNSON: Oh, when I was growing up?

SIGRIST: Right. When you were in Norway, how did you think about America?

JOHNSON: I, well, I was so young when I came over, but I knew it was a good, I (?).

SIGRIST: Why did you want to come so badly?

JOHNSON: Why'd I want to come here? Because I saw they come from America and had such beautiful clothes, and they had everything, I told you. I thought money grew on trees in America, And I figure I can come. My father was over here when I came over here.

SIGRIST: How long had he been over here before you came over?

JOHNSON: Well, I'd been back and forth. I had been back and forth many times, but I've been here now since '26. I've been here for seventy-eight, sixty-some years.

SIGRIST: But how long had he been in America before you went over to America?

JOHNSON: Oh, he had traveled back and forth so many times. He was about to go to Norway when I came over here. He was only here for (?) but he went home for Christmas. So he just gave me money to buy some new clothes when I came in.

SIGRIST: When you were a girl in Norway and your father was going back and forth, did he ever bring you anything from America?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. When he came home he had so much stuff, he bought it, he came with all kinds of clothes, the (?) dresses. They really were too fancy for us, but we wore them anyway. And he brought a lot of things, tablecloths and everything. He bought, he had a trunk full of clothes that we'd have when he come home. I only remember the one time when he came home.

SIGRIST: But you remember he brought all this stuff with him?

JOHNSON: Yeah. He brought a lot of stuff here. He brought us a doll with hair on it, I told you, was beautiful. That we had.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you have, in Norway did you have toys to play with?

JOHNSON: Yeah, we had toys, my homemade toys. I don't know, made out of wood, though, or I don't know what kind of toys did we have.

SIGRIST: Who would have made the toys?

JOHNSON: My father used to make it for my brother. He made horses out of wood, and when we had dolls, you know, that my mother made, we made dolls, and he bought, could buy the head, you know, made out of plastic or something, you know. And then my mother made the body, and then she made the clothes, so we had dolls, that we

had.

SIGRIST: What would she make the body out of?

JOHNSON: Well, that was, when she'd have to make a figure and then stuff stuff and sort of make a body and make the arms. You couldn't even buy the arms for a doll, and the head. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Were there stores in your town? Were there stores that you could go to in your town?

JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah, but that was, that was not store, mostly variety store for food.

SIGRIST: What kinds of food did you have to buy as opposed to . . .

JOHNSON: Well, we had to buy sugar and all kinds of food to bake with, raisin, and eggs we had, and flour we had to buy, and baking powder and everything like that.

SIGRIST: Those are things that you couldn't produce on the farm.

JOHNSON: No. We couldn't produce on the farm. We had to buy. We only could produce milk and eggs and butter.

SIGRIST: So you had, you had animals on the farm?

JOHNSON: Yeah, we had two cows, a much smaller farm.

SIGRIST: Did the cows have a name? Were the cows named?

JOHNSON: (she laughs) Pluma and Dalos.

SIGRIST: Pluma?

JOHNSON: Pluma.

SIGRIST: And, um . . .

JOHNSON: And Dalos.

SIGRIST: Dalos. (he laughs) What color were the cows?

JOHNSON: They had all different colors, red and black spots, different spots on them. When I had Plumas, he was all red. I mean, not red red, brown, I would say.

SIGRIST: And who took care of the cows? Whose job was that?

JOHNSON: Well, my mother. I couldn't milk cows. I could milk before I went to, I couldn't milk that time. She milked the cows and took care of them.

SIGRIST: And did you ever, were the cows simply used to milk? They were not meat cows?

JOHNSON: No. Oh, no, no. No, no.

SIGRIST: Um . . .

JOHNSON: Just for milk.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me, you said before, did you go to business school?

JOHNSON: He went to. I went to another school that was, I was over the regular school, and I went for six months in extra school. I had six months after the regular school.

SIGRIST: I see. And what did you learn in the extra school? What . . .

JOHNSON: Well, they need more, might be a little, like with the arithmetic we learned different, like a different way to do, changed them. We made, he had crafts, you know. To all our girls, we made

different things.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you make?

JOHNSON: We could make, mostly it was like plain dresses and skirts. Not too much.

SIGRIST: Just kind of basic household . . .

JOHNSON: Yeah, that's it.

SIGRIST: Were there, were there things that your mother taught you how to do in the house when you were growing up?

JOHNSON: Hmm, you mean in handwork?

SIGRIST: Well, did she teach you handwork?

JOHNSON: Well, we almost taught ourselves. Crocheting, we did a lot of crocheting and embroidery and all that.

SIGRIST: That was an important part of . . .

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What a woman learned. Did your brother learn how to do that stuff?

JOHNSON: Oh, no. They learned to do, uh, carpenter work. Those days, the (?).

SIGRIST: Well, now, you said that you wanted to come to America because you thought it was wealthy over here.

JOHNSON: Well, it was more for an adventure, you know, you want to get out someplace.

SIGRIST: How did your mother feel about you going to America?

JOHNSON: Well, you know how she feels. She didn't feel so good about it. She says she didn't, I come because they're taking all her children. That's what she said. She cried when I left. I remember that. It was hard.

SIGRIST: Were you the first child to go to America?

JOHNSON: No, my other sister, my, before me, she was here when I came.

SIGRIST: Was she living with your father in America?

JOHNSON: No. She had a job, and (?) my . . .

SIGRIST: Where was she living?

JOHNSON: She was living on 56th Street and Eighth Avenue here in Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: And what was she doing for work?

JOHNSON: Well, she had housework. She worked for, so did I. She worked for some Jewish people.

SIGRIST: As a domestic servant.

JOHNSON: Yeah, domestic. Yeah, that's right.

SIGRIST: What, um, was your sister also writing to you in Norway?

JOHNSON: OH, yeah. But it was only one, on e year, I think, before I came. She wasn't here that long before I came.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: What did you have to do to get ready to leave Norway?

JOHNSON: Well, I had to get my, I had my papers ready. Because I had my, I came on my father's papers. I had his citizen papers.

SIGRIST: That's right. He was already a citizen, so . . .

JOHNSON: He was here, he was here.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to get your papers?

JOHNSON: Well, I went to the sheriff's office and got, I had to get the ticket and get on the boat.

SIGRIST: So you went to the sheriff's office to get the papers.

JOHNSON: To get, I mean, I used to, I don't really know how that happened, because all I can remember, I had those papers.

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

JOHNSON: No, I don't think so. No doctor. I think, no, I didn't go to no doctor.

SIGRIST: Who paid for the ship ticket?

JOHNSON: Who paid for it? I got the money from my mother.

SIGRIST: Did you have any money saved up of your own?

JOHNSON: I was sixteen years old, seventeen years old, how much money did I have. No. I didn't. I remember it was four hundred crowns, one trip.

SIGRIST: It was four hundred crowns.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Is that a one-way?

JOHNSON: One-way.

SIGRIST: A one-way ticket. And what was the name of the ship?

JOHNSON: Stavangerfjord.

SIGRIST: On the Stavangerfjord.

JOHNSON: What else. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Of course. The, do you remember the day that you left, the day that you left, when you said goodbye to your family?

JOHNSON: Yeah, I remember that. Yeah, I remember that. I was so anxious that my older sister went to the city. She didn't want to see when I said goodbye to my mother. And they all, I met her there, and I met some friends that showed me (?). That's all I remember. I remember my mother was crying, and that wasn't so good.

SIGRIST: Were you traveling with your sister to America?

JOHNSON: No, no.

SIGRIST: But your sister was just going to see you off at the ship?

JOHNSON: Yeah. See, show me off that with my older sister.

SIGRIST: So you're traveling to America alone?

JOHNSON: Yeah. No, I, once again, my cousin that they had been here, been here for a long time, and she was in Norway with me and her family. So I was traveling with her and her husband. They had three kids. They were with me.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you were actually traveling with a small group?

JOHNSON: With the family, yeah, my cousin, yeah. I did.

SIGRIST: Where did you get the Stavangerfjord? What city did you go to?

JOHNSON: Oslo.

SIGRIST: You went to Oslo. Was that the first time you had ever been to Oslo?

JOHNSON: That was the first time, yeah.

SIGRIST: What impressions did it make on you?

JOHNSON: Well, I sort of had an idea what it looked like. I heard so much about everything, so I know. But I (?), we had the same old (?), we ate in the same, we were only there for one day before we went on the big boat. Yeah, I remember that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt when you were going up the gangplank into the Stavnagerfjord?

JOHNSON: I don't really remember too much of that. I remember when Stavangerfjord landed here.

SIGRIST: Well, how long did the ship take to get to New York?

JOHNSON: Eight days.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about being on the ship for eight days?

JOHNSON: Well, we had a lot of fun on the boat, you know. They had different games. They played, they were playing, and they played accordion, and they were dancing, because I don't think I was dancing. But we had, (?).

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

JOHNSON: We had, we had, you know, sleeping quarters. And we had nice, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you on the boat?

JOHNSON: Huh?

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you on the ship? Where did you eat?

JOHNSON: Oh, we ate, well, we had mostly Norwegian meatballs and bread and eggs. They had always eggs for breakfast, and oatmeal, I guess, and things like that for breakfast, and we had pretty good food. And they had different kind of stew and everything for supper or lunch or whatever.

SIGRIST: And where did you eat on the ship?

JOHNSON: We had a big, a big, something like here, you had a big dining room, with long tables. Not long tables, but long tables.

SIGRIST: Do you, do you remember what, what class you were traveling on the ship?

JOHNSON: Third class.

SIGRIST: You were on third class. And did they have any activities for you to do on the ship?

JOHNSON: Not much, not too much, as I say, no. There was not too much going on. Just friends sitting there talking and maybe having fun, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go up on deck?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. Then we went on deck, yeah.

SIGRIST: What could you see when you went up on deck?

JOHNSON: You know why they say, nothing, but the water, you couldn't see anything but water.

SIGRIST: Was this the first time you had ever been on a ship like this?

JOHNSON: Yeah, the first time.

SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

JOHNSON: No. No, I wasn't seasick.

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

JOHNSON: That I remember.

SIGRIST: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't know what the Statue of Liberty was either.

(she laughs) I didn't see that. But I remember I was standing on the rail of the boat, and when I saw my father on the dock, he was taking off time he was working to meet me there. And I thought he looked so nice. He was all dressed up. He had nice clothes, and I, we were so high up, I don't think I could talk too much. He couldn't hear me. But he was supposed to come on board and pick me up, but being that they said my wrong name, instead of Edna Hansen they said Agnes Hansen, and they wouldn't send him on board. So that's why I came to Ellis Island. And then he used to go to the Seaman's Church here in Brooklyn, so the minute the pastor came on board and said I shouldn't worry, my (?) the wrong name. They were very particular at that time,

you know. I was so young, and they wouldn't, I said I can stay my father, and he couldn't get on board. So that's why they send me to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Because they called you Agnes instead of Edna.

JOHNSON: Yeah. They called me Agnes instead of Edna.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when they were taking you to Ellis Island?

JOHNSON: I wasn't afraid or nothing. I slept on board the boat that night, and then they took me over on the ferry. And all I remember from Ellis Island was that they took me, there was a big room there, and all, I think there was somebody speaking Norwegian, because I was, all I said, my father paper, I said I had. And they said if I could identify my father, he was in another room with a lot of people. And that was easy, I could remember him, I could identify him right away. And then they gave me something to drink, and they let me go. I wasn't there long. It was more grateful there.

SIGRIST: What did it look like on the inside?

JOHNSON: I don't even remember. Because all I had in mind to get out of there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you . . .

JOHNSON: Yeah, I wore, I remember that I wore, October was kind of cold in Norway, so I had, not a heavy winter coat, but I had a hat, and I had a coat and I had, I mean, I was dressed up. I mean, (?) a cold winter. It was kind of cold here, too, when I came.

SIGRIST: Where did your father take you when he met you at Ellis Island?

JOHNSON: He took me to my cousin's house.

SIGRIST: Which was where?

JOHNSON: That was in 56th Street near Eighth Avenue, 730 56th Street.

SIGRIST: And how did you spend your first night in America? What did you do that first night?

JOHNSON: I slept in my cousin's house. They had an extra room there, and I slept there. I was there for a week or two before I got a job.

SIGRIST: How did you go about getting a job?

JOHNSON: Well, the way we went, my cousin took me. My cousin's wife, rather, took me to an employment agency. And, first of all, that first Saturday was (?). My father took me shopping, and I went into a dress shop. And there were three girls there, three Jewish girls in the shop. And they said, oh, they could, they have a job for me. I could get a job right away with her mother, and I took that job. And there was three, they was going to give me everything for nothing. But I wasn't, thirty crowns, thirty dollars a month. I wasn't there long before I find out I could get a better job. But they were nice to me. I mean, anyway, I had to work hard.

SIGRIST: Did you, when they offered you the job, do you want to say something, Mr. Johnson?

JOHNSON: You want to sit over here? (break in tape)

SIGRIST: Okay. We were just talking about getting a job with the Jewish family. Um, did you live in the house with them?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me some of the things that they, some of your experiences when you were working.

JOHNSON: Well, you know, I didn't know a thing about Jewish cooking. And I couldn't understand that when they have chicken and she put the chicken on the tray and put salt on them, they make them kosher. They were kosher Jewish people. But I, but the woman did most of her cooking, and I used to, I wasn't there more than a month or two. Then I went to my cousin again and I stayed there for a while until I got a better job, and then I could know the language a little bit better. I couldn't, they talked Jewish to me, so I didn't learn anything there. The girls talked (?), but they were away all day.

SIGRIST: Did you learn any Jewish while you were there?

JOHNSON: (she laughs) No, no, not much. I didn't know nothing.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay with that family?

JOHNSON: Only a couple of months. I don't really remember.

SIGRIST: And how much did you get paid?

JOHNSON: Thirty dollars a month.

SIGRIST: Thirty dollars a month. And you lived with them?

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. Did they try to teach you any English?

JOHNSON: No, no. They were just (?), wanted me to wash down walls and things like that, because they figured I didn't know any better,

I wasn't good. I was too young to do that, climbing the stepladder and wash down walls. So my cousin went over there and said they shouldn't let me do that. I was not supposed to do that.

SIGRIST: Did you miss Norway?

JOHNSON: I did. I did. I did. But I was here for four years before I went back again. Then I saved up money, paid for my first trip and saved up money to come back again.

SIGRIST: When you, um, before you took your first trip, when you were here, were you writing back to your mother?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, of course.

SIGRIST: You said your father was here just a short time, though, after you got here.

JOHNSON: He was here three years the last time.

SIGRIST: But, I mean, you arrived in October.

JOHNSON: When he only had to Christmas, because he had been here, though, for over two years.

SIGRIST: So you really, he was only here for a month-and-a-half or so, and then he went back to Norway.

JOHNSON: That's true.

SIGRIST: Did he come back to America?

JOHNSON: No, that was the last trip.

SIGRIST: That was the last trip.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he know that was going to be the last trip?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't think, well, I think so, because he was quite up in years. When he was maybe, my mother wouldn't say maybe sixty years old or something like that, sixty-five or something. I don't really remember.

SIGRIST: Were you writing back to your parents?

JOHNSON: All the time.

SIGRIST: What were you telling them about your life in America?

JOHNSON: I told them whatever I had to write. I don't remember, but I told them I had plenty to write about, probably whatever was going on, something different every day and, oh, yeah, write a lot of letters back and forth.

SIGRIST: Did you send money to your parents?

JOHNSON: I did, I did. We sent money, a dollars or two in the letter. But we couldn't, when I sent money, otherwise, too, but I remember putting a dollar or two in the letter.

SIGRIST: So you worked with the Jewish family for about two months, and then what was the next job that you got?

JOHNSON: The same. It was a better job.

SIGRIST: Was it doing the same kind of work?

JOHNSON: The same kind of work. I was at that place for four years.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about that position, and . . .

JOHNSON: It was the same thing, the same thing. Cooking and cleaning, but they were nice people.

SIGRIST: Were they Jewish also?

JOHNSON: Yeah, but not kosher.

SIGRIST: No more salt on the chicken, then. (he laughs)

JOHNSON: No, no, no, no, no. They were not kosher. They were, had American cooking. And their brother had been a chef on a boat, this woman's brother, and he taught me a lot of cooking, so I learned a lot there. He taught me how to make apple pie and, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did they try to teach you any English?

JOHNSON: No. Well, they would speak English. They didn't speak Jewish, so I learned from them. And the daughter was a schoolteacher. So, I mean, I learned from them.

SIGRIST: And how did they go about trying to teach you English? I mean, how did you learn English from them?

JOHNSON: Just the way they talked, talked about themselves, talked back and forth. I don't know how I learned it, but I picked up some. Okay. That will be all, I think.

SIGRIST: Okay, all right. Well, thank you very much...

JOHNSON: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: ...for letting me ask you these questions. And this is Paul Sigrist, signing off with Edna Johnson on October 27, 1995. Thank you.

JOHNSON: That's right, yeah.