

EI-842

CARL PEDERSEN

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ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE:

LEVINE: Today is January 23, 1997. I'm here at the Ellis Island Oral History studio with Carl Pedersen who came here from Denmark when he was only two years of age. Today Mr. Pedersen is seventy-five years of age and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you'd start by saying your birth date and where in Denmark you were born?

PEDERSEN: My birth date is the 19th of February 1921 and I was born in Ugelbolle, Demark. U-G-E-L-B-O-L-L-E. Which is a fantastic area today, it's up on a high bluff overlooking the western shore of Jutland [ph] and now it has the most exclusive golf course in the world established, well in Denmark anyway. And I told my mother when I got back, well this was years ago,

that had she still been living there they have multi-million dollar homes built where we were born, where I was born, and I told her had she stayed there she would have been a multi- multi- millionaire. I says, "Thank God you came over here though." (Both laugh).

LEVINE: Well, did the family live there for many years prior to your birth or how did that work out between Sweden and Denmark and your families ancestry?

PEDERSEN: Well, my granddad, my father's father, was born in Sweden so he came to Denmark, I don't know weather him immigrated officially or not, I have no idea, as a youngster and he went to work there. His name was originally Persson. P-E-R-S-S-O-N. Which is typically Swedish, the double 's'. And his first name was Bodel so that's why I wound up with two names, called B.S. Pedersen, the Bodel from my one grandfather and the 's', Stenmar , from one of my uncles. So everyone was included, nobody's feelings were hurt.

LEVINE: Maybe you could spell your two middle names?

PEDERSEN: Okay. Bodel, B-O-D-I-L, oh E-L, make that an 'e', 'l' is a girl. B-O-D-E-L. Stenmar, S-T-E-N-M-A-R. So the initials are fantastic, Carl B. S. Pedersen. When I was flying I'd just use C. B. S. Pedersen. So I'd call up and- especially coming into Colorado Springs, where the Air Force Academy is now, and its Pedersen field. So I'd call up, "Pilot Pedersen." "Where are you going?" "Pedersen Field." And it worked out nicely.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. And now on your mother's side. Was your mother's side strictly speaking Danish?

PEDERSEN: No, my mother was Swedish, she was born in Sweden too.

LEVINE: Oh, she was born in Sweden too?

PEDERSEN: Yeah. Both her parents were Swedish. That's why I say I'm Swedish ancestry with Danish birth.

LEVINE: Do you know why the family went to Denmark?

PEDERSEN: My grandfather, I don't know why he went there, he was born in 19- 1863, and I don't know when he went to Denmark but he lived there, well hwe was there when I got there in 19- well when my family returned. My mother and dad were married in Perth Amboy in New Jersey.

LEVINE: Oh.

PEDERSEN: My mother came over, she left Sweden on the day that World War One broke out. And she was deathly afraid that she was going to have to go back to (?) in Sweden because she and her step-mother were not the best of friends. And they had engine trouble when they left and they- luckily they got it repaired so she didn't have to go back to Sweden and she came over here. And her older brother was living here in Perth Amboy. He came over as a nine year old. He had a tag on his coat that said Rasmison [ph], Perth amboy. That's all.

LEVINE: That said Rath-

PEDERSEN: Rasmison [ph]. His uncle Rasmison [ph] I guess it was. So he got here safely, he got to Perth Amboy safely and it's sort of a Hortatio Algers story, he grew up in Perth Amboy, became a boxer, professional boxer, took the name of Harry Ramsey and then went to Philadelphia. He got on the police force in Philadelphia (coughs), became the mayors

bodyguard, rose to the rank of sergeant and still continued boxing and taught the Philadelphia police force how to box. And, well he was about 6 foot three I guess and weighed like 240 pounds or so, he was in good shape. Then he married a young gal, she was about eighteen, he meet her when she was only eighteen, and they decided to get married and this didn't fit well with her parents. He owned a couple of banks in Philadelphia, a few movie houses and here she is marrying a cop and that didn't go over at all. So there was some strained relations for quite a while until, well, the daughter was born one year before I was born, you know, Marion, and even after she was born the relationship was still very strained. It did finally break down after about twenty years, I think, before anything broke. And my other, my mother's younger brother, well actually-

LEVINE: That was her older brother?

PEDERSEN: Her older brother. And she had another brother though, just a couple of years older then she too. And he came over also. He came over before she did, he came over 1908 I guess, or something like that.

LEVINE: Well, now did they send for your mother, when she was young or-?

PEDERSEN: No, she was fourteen and five, she was nineteen, she just decided to come over here to meet them. They had a place for her to stay and they had this Uncle Rasmussin [ph] here so- she didn't want to stay with her step mother at all cause they- so she did the normal thing and hoped on a- not a plane but a boat- and came over here and stayed with them and in the interim-

LEVINE: Your father came over?

PEDERSEN: Yeah, my father was in the Danish Navy and he was discharged and came over to the states and he came over here 1917 I think, if I know what the papers say, I believe that's correct. And they meet in Perth Amboy and they started a courtship and finally they got married in Perth Amboy 1920, yeah, April 16, 1920 they were married. And then they left- my grandfather had a big farm in Denmark, the place I was telling you about, so they decided to go back there and see how that would work out. So they went back to Denmark and then I was born in Denmark, I was born there on the farm which, when I got there in 1946, was identical to what it was when they left there, I took quite a few movies and some snapshots. It was identical they said, to what was there. Windmill. And they got in trouble, well not trouble, they were looked down upon by the neighbors because they had a bathroom inside the house and a bathtub. But that worked out fine.

LEVINE: Well, was there running water at that point?

PEDERSEN: Yeah, mm-hmm. So that's why it was rather unique on a farm.

LEVINE: Right.

PEDERSEN: And then, I don't know what- just before Christmas, I don't know if it was the same year or the year after, that was 1921 I was born, they got over there in 1920, and I was born in '21 so it must have been probably Christmas of 1921 or 1922, my grandmother died, my father's mother died, and my dad wanted nothing to do with farming, he didn't care for it at all so they decided to come back to the states. And his dad, Bodel, who was born in Sweden, of course he didn't want to stay in Denmark either, so he came back, so the three of us came back together. My father's father, my mother, and I came back on Oscar II. And as I see here I arrived here, we arrived here on August the 15th of 1923.

LEVINE: Well now, where did the family go from here, from Ellis Island?

PEDERSEN: Well they were met here by my uncles. And we went to Perth Amboy and my dad had come over early, he came over in the latter part of May, the first part of June, I think it was. He came over to arrange a place for us to stay. So we went there and, I don't know, we- we stayed there I guess. I have no memory of it at all.

LEVINE: Well now, did your father go back then and come back over again with you and your mother and his-

PEDERSEN: No, no.

LEVINE: No.

PEDERSEN: He came over, let see, he went over here in May, the 31st of May-

LEVINE: I see. And you came over here and joined him?

PEDERSEN: -of the same year and then he arranged a place for us to stay and then we followed in the 1st of August we came over or left Scandinavia, yeah.

LEVINE: Now were you still in Perth Amboy when you started having a memory about growing up?

PEDERSEN: Oh yeah. I started school in Perth Amboy. Kindergarten and, uh, for some unknown reason that I- vaguely remember they took me out of Kindergarten, I don't know what I'd done wrong. They moved me up to first grade. (Laughs). And the teachers name was Hexrum [ph] which I think was Swedish.

LEVINE: Do you recall being around other people who had come from either Scandinavia or any place else in Europe when you were a little boy?

PEDERSEN: As a little boy I knew people that were friends with my family but the rest of us that I knew we had no idea of who was from what country or what. I did know that we- where I went to school in Perth Amboy there was many Slavic people there. And there was a Slavic church, Holy Trinity, on one corner and a block away was Holy Rosary which was basically and Italian church. So I grew up in a total mixture of peoples and it was a wonderful- no one knew what anyone else was, it made no difference. I do remember there was three boys I used to play with, Judgos [ph]. Change around, (names several names), all Joes were Judgos [ph]. And playing tag I do know that when they ran by the front of the church, Holy Trinity Church, they had to stop and bless themselves and I was a protestant and I didn't have to do that. So I knew I'd get a two second brake if they were chasing me and I always tried to make a point to go by the Catholic Church and it worked out fine.

LEVINE: That's great. Now how about your family? Do you- well fist of all were you able to speak English by the time you started school?

PEDERSEN: I couldn't even speak Danish when I was born. I'm joshing with you obviously. No, no I spoke no English when I came over-

LEVINE: Started school-

PEDERSEN: -I was only two years old.

LEVINE: but by the time oyu started school, when you were five, were you speaking?

PEDERSEN: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Certainly.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PEDERSEN: I mean I was.

LEVINE: And how about your family, did they catch on fast to English? Did they speak Danish at home, or Swedish, or how did that work?

PEDERSEN: Well my mother had been here before. She had been here- she came in 1914- she was here six years. Her English was rather well. Rather fine. And my grandfather spoke no English at all. So that was the best thing that ever happened to me I think, that had he not been with us I would not have been adept in speaking Danish and Swedish because that's what I had to speak to him for him to- it was a wonderful (?) and it worked out fine later on. I feel so sorry for these children of parents that came from Europe, I know many of those Danes and Swedes I know, their mothers and dads insisted on speaking English all the time. They would here no Danish, no Swedish, just pure English what- rephrase the English. And the children never heard the language.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PEDERSEN: totally unfortunate. If you just here one foreign language, no matter what it is, you can adapt to any other one. It makes it so much easier.

LEVINE: So your grandfather spoke to you and to your mother and father in-

PEDERSEN: Mm-hmm. Danish or Swedish.

LEVINE: -Danish or Swedish. So you always heard that. So he didn't learn English, your grandfather.

PEDERSEN: No. He could read it okay but he never got around to speaking it. He could but he never would admit it.

LEVINE: And how about your mother and father? Did they - were they part of a Scandinavian community in Perth Amboy or did they mix and be just as - have as much contact with people who were not from Scandinavia?

PEDERSEN: Well, Perth Amboy at that time- I just wrote an article some years ago about fifty years of Danes in Perth Amboy and the list was endless. You could get anything done by a Dane in Perth Amboy. The former governor of Perth Amboy, Morgan Larsen [ph], was a Dane. The police chief in Perth Amboy was a Dane named Tunison [ph]. The mayor was Olson [ph], the post master of Perth Amboy was also a Dane, Fred Hansen [ph]. So there was a multitude.

LEVINE: They were all first generation you think?

PEDERSEN: Ah, yeah. Well, no, the- some were born here. First generation was that those that were the children of immigrants?

LEVINE: They came over. Well they would be second. In other words, did these people actually come from Denmark? Or do you think their parents maybe did?

PEDERSEN: A few of them did. Their parents did, oh yeah. And the janitor in Perth Amboy high school was of Danish origin. About- I think I've counted ten or eleven teachers in Perth Amboy high school who are Danish origin. So there were quite a few. And it was totally mixed- mixture of people in

Perth Amboy. There were Russian churches, there were Slovak churches, as I said there was Italian church, there was just a mixture. Any church you wanted you could find in Perth Amboy, it was- Hungarian church.

LEVINE: What was it about Perth Amboy that attracted these people, do you know?

PEDERSEN: I- I- obviously it must be like it is today. One person moves in there and gets employment and get roots and there- it was quite industrial. Quite an industrial set up in Perth Amboy. And they had Terracotta there and the Perth Amboy dry dock was run by a fellow named Olson [ph]. So many of- most of the Scandinavians were tradesman, carpenters, brick layers, painters. And so they could always find something to do around here so it worked out fine for them. And then with the- with the factories around they were owned by Danes. They just got here and then- there were three Danish churches in Perth Amboy. Ours is celebrating the hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary this year and I'm chairman for that committee and I was chairman at the hundredth anniversary in 1972 so, ah, the word Danish is gone now, it's just the Lutheran Church. And- but there were three churches, Danish Churches, and one Swedish one in Perth Amboy at the time.

LEVINE: What did your family attend? Which church? Or did they?

PEDERSEN: Ah, yeah, ah, I think they were married in a Danish Methodist Church and then when we came back I went to Sunday school at the Danish Lutheran Church cause that was the closest. I'd walk to Sunday school. And then we moved to Woodbridge in third grade- when I was in third grade I guess, yeah. And then the Presbyterian- Methodist church- was the closest so I went to the Methodist Church. We moved back to Perth

Amboy and I went back to the Lutheran church and I was confirmed there. My wife and I were confirmed together and we were married in the same church in 1944.

LEVINE: Oh.

PEDERSEN: That's fifty three years ago now (laughs).

LEVINE: Wow. So was your family particularly religious, I mean, would you say, growing up?

PEDERSEN: I don't know what particularly religious could mean. They went to church and they made sure that I went to Sunday school but I don't know- they believed in a supreme being that's for sure, that was the crux of the whole thing. They did attend church regularly and when they had any special functions going on they were always there too. At the time, at the Lutheran church, the services were conducted in Danish, so the children didn't care for that too much, you know, because it was, the language was just a little to high for us. But we went anyway, we didn't have much choice.

LEVINE: And how about social clubs? Were there any Danish or Swedish social clubs in Perth Amboy?

PEDERSEN: Many of them, yeah.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father, you know, go to dances or any other kinds of events that they might have had at those social clubs.

PEDERSEN: Oh yeah. There were daily- or monthly- Danish dances at (?) Hall. The fellow that had the Danish band, which he called Chris Petersen's

Copenhagen Five, consisted of- Chris himself was the saxophone player, and he was- Christopher's Danish. The piano player was Danish and he used to play in the pit when they had silent movies he was a piano player down in the pit and played the organ in the pit. One of the other people in the band was Italian, one was German, and one was Polish. And they're all from Perth Amboy and it was a real fine Copenhagen Danish band. (Both laugh). It was a lot of fun. We-we- my wife and I and many others of my generation learned all the Danish dances and the, of course the American dances of the time. And when we got to Scandinavia we did these traditional Danish folk dances and many of the people over there couldn't do them. My wife and I could do them because we just grew up with it and they'd gotten away from it.

LEVINE: Now, did you meet your wife when you were in church getting ready to be confirmed? Is that how you met?

PEDERSEN: Yeah, we went to Sunday school together, yeah. My wife was born in the other Island, Staten Island. She was born in New York City so we, they used to come to Perth Amboy, take the six- there was a six minuet, no a six cents ferry trip across. It cost six cents to cross the (?) to get to Perth Amboy and then they'd walk up the school, up the church, from the ferry slip. And they are just starting to renovate the ferry slip now it's been- well it was like Ellis island was twenty years ago but they renovating it now to maybe reinstitute some more ferry service, I don't know.

LEVINE: So in other words your wife would come to Perth Amboy because it was a Danish church.

PEDERSEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that why she would come from Staten Island?

PEDERSEN: There were none on Staten Island, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh

PEDERSEN: And her parents were married in Perth Amboy also so they had good roots there and she had uncles and aunts and cousins of course in Perth Amboy. So that worked out, it was a communal thing and I guess they all got together.

LEVINE: Yeah. So, okay, was there any other ways that the family carried on traditions, either Swedish or Danish, once they got to this country? Were there any celebrations, any kinds of food, any ways of doing things? Anything that you recalled that they tried to maintain?

PEDERSEN: Mm-hmm.

LEVINE: From the old country?

PEDERSEN: Very much so. When we got to Scandinavia, my wife and I, in 1946, Denmark and Sweden, the food wasn't at all strange to us because we had it all our lives. Danish type food, Swedish type food, so it was not at all strange, we just fit right in perfectly.

LEVINE: What about the food? What could you say about the Danish food that you've had? What kinds of food or ways of cooking it or anything? Is there anything about it that makes it particularly Danish in your mind?

PEDERSEN: I guess there's a special flavoring or maybe the way it is arranged or cooked. I don't know It's just been so good that I've never thought about

it other than being real fantastically good food. And, uh, Christmas Eve we had- it was the big time when we had- I remember as a kid in Perth Amboy we were waiting for Santa clause and, oh we just talked about that, the Christmas trees, they had lighted candles on them.

LEVINE: Even in Perth Amboy?

PEDERSEN: In Perth Amboy. All my childhood, or from the time I can remember up until I was about eight years old, every Christmas there was lighted candles on the tree and why there was never a fire I'll never know. But it worked fine. And that was the one traditional thing they had. And then they had what they- were going to have another one next month, I reactivated it about eight, nine years ago, it's called a Fastelavn. The Danes have it, it's the weekend before ash Wednesday. So the Danes have this Fastelavn, as they call it, to celebrate the coming of Lent. And they have quite a big time there too, big, big parties and they make these special buns. My wife does a pretty good job of those buns too. She- she got the recipe from an old Danish friend of our that- of hers- of ours too, that- the fellow you talked to, (?), his mother had the recipes for these (?). So she would tell my wife to just take this- and my wife went up there one day when she was going to make some and just watched her. She's take a little bit of this, a little bit of that and then she'd make down- mark down- the amount. So finally she got it right. She does a beautiful job on those (?). So if your free on February 22nd come on- at the Danish home were going to have a Fastelavn and you'll love it. It's Saturday.

LEVINE: so its mainly food and is there any kind of ceremonial, something to do with lent, anything that happens at that time?

PEDERSEN: No, no. Nott at that time. But then we do have, we just finished the Lucia fest [ph]. We had one at church and that's an old Swedish festival that celebrates an Italian saint. Saint Lucia. And it's kind of a morbid type thing but it's a beautiful arrangement. The Lucia, so called bride, is dressed all in white gown with a big red ribbon and a crown a candles in her hair that are lighted. Seven lighted candles she carries down. And this is every year in Sweden when the Nobel prize is awarded. The Swedish Lucia at the town hall in Sweden presents the winner of the Nobel Peace prize with the traditional coffee and Swedish buns. So she does that in a very formal presentation. And in Swedish homes the senior- the oldest girl- on the morning of December 13th, she wakes the parents and serves them coffee and buns, just before day break. One other tradition that the Danes have is that on the fiftieth anniversary usually they, a group gets together and before the sun is up they go and wake up the bride and groom or the celebrants and I've done that for quite a few people for some years. We have a lot of fun with that. One family, they didn't know what was going on and they got angry, what's all that noise out side? And they didn't realize it was their fiftieth birthday, er, fiftieth wedding anniversary, yeah.

LEVINE: So, what do you do, go outside and ring bells or something?

PEDERSEN: Oh, yeah. They have accordions. No, just music. You go outside with accordions and violins and just sing 'Happy Anniversary to You' and things of that guild.

LEVINE: Sounds nice.

PEDERSEN: Yeah, its very nice. And you get a big gathering together and newspaper photographers show up usually and take some pictures.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, well lets, now, what did you do for work most of your life or did you start-?

PEDERSEN: I flew airplanes. I was a retired pilot. I *am*- let me rephrase that, was is a bad word to use. I *am* a retired pilot. (Laughs).

LEVINE: Were you in the air force?

PEDERSEN: In the Navy. I was in the navy.

LEVINE: In the Navy.

PEDERSEN: My dad was in the Danish Navy. And I always heard stories about him talking about people in the army and he said that he was glad to be in the navy because he always had a clean bed to sleep in every night, he didn't have to sleep in any mud. And that made quite an impression on me. (Laughs). So when World War Two broke out I signed up for the Navy immediately and I thought, now if I got in the Navy Aircore I could maybe fly home on occasion. I'd have a clean bed and I could still maybe fly home on occasion. So I signed up as a naval cadet in the US Navy and it worked out pretty fine.

LEVINE: So how old were you when you signed up?

PEDERSEN: I was 22.

LEVINE: I see, so you stayed in for a career?

PEDERSEN: No, I stayed in until the war ended.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

PEDERSEN: Now when was that? I signed up right after Pearl Harbor and then I got out on Christmas Eve of 1945, yeah. That's when the war ended, in '45 yeah. And, um-

LEVINE: So were you in Europe?

PEDERSEN: No, I was in the ocean, on the Pacific.

LEVINE: The Pacific.

PEDERSEN: Yeah, we flew nuisance raids over the Japanese Islands, northern islands. Technically I guess that's supposed to keep the Japanese fleet at bay so they claimed that one third of the Japanese fleet were tied up by our little flights. We had twin engine bombers that we flew all alone, no escorts, so we flew over the northern pacific, over to the islands, dropped a few nuisance bombs and ran like hell for home again. (Laughs). Thirty-six times. (Laughs).

LEVINE: Wow. So, okay. Then the war got over and then what did you do next?

PEDERSEN: Well, what happened- I was stationed- well lets see I was in Seattle and I was- the war was over so I had enough points to get home so my wife and I were out there, we had driven out there from home, and then we drove down through San Francisco- her brother, Norma's brother lived there. Oh, Norma's my wife's name.

LEVINE: Yeah. What's her maiden name, Norma's.

PEDERSEN: Sorensen.

LEVINE: 'Ch'?

PEDERSEN: 'S'. Sorensen. S-O-R-E-N-S-E-N. 'E-N' is Danish. 'S-S-O-N' is Swedish.

LEVINE: Right.

PEDERSEN: 'S-E-N' is also Norwegian. But usually a double 's' and an 'o' is a Swed. So my granddad, as I said, was P-E-R-S-S-O-N. Persson. So how the 'perss' never got in there I'll never know. I guess it just got to be a habit. Instead of calling Persson they just started- it would up as Pedersen. So then, ah, christmass, we drove home through San Francisco and picked up an old buddy of ours who was in the Navy on an aircraft carrier. And we came home and I was sent down to Cape May, back to Atlantic City Naval Air station, then two days before Christmas I was called into the execs office and I was told that I had to get out because I owed the Navy fifteen days, I had gotten fifteen days too much leave. And I couldn't figure that out. He said, "Yup." Cause I had figured out if I worked it right I could get out of the Navy on January 2nd and I'd get a whole year tax free. I mean, ah, tax, ah more then tax free.

LEVINE: Exempt?

PEDERSEN: Not tax exemption but a special for service men, if your in the service. But it didn't work out that way so Christmas eve I had to go to Manhattan and I was released in active duty in Manhattan, came home and we had a Danish-Swedish Christmas celebration at my parents home and I think two or three days later I hadn't been to Manhattan for quite a while so I went through Staten Island, caught the Ferry, the Saint George Ferry to Manhattan and was walking up Broadway and I saw a Danish flag hanging outside. I said well, I wonder if they need pilots in Denmark.

And I walked in, it was the Danish consulate, I walked in there and 'Do you need pilots?'

'Oh, yes. Can you go up to Park Avenue and see So-and-so, ah, Max Westfall [ph]?'

I said, 'Yeah, sure.'

I went up there to see him and 'Can you come back out chief pilots coming over in maybe a week or two, can you come back and speak with him?'

'Certainly' So I did and I went back and spoke with the chief pilot when he came a week or two later and they wanted to know- he was a pilot with Danish airlines, excuse me- it was the Danish Embassy and they referred me to the agent for the Danish airlines. So when he came back, his name was Jenson [ph], and he came back with another fellow, his name was Pedersen, spelt the same way as mine, and we sat down and had lunch together and they spoke Danish and he says, 'Can you understand what I'm talking about?' And I said, 'Yeah, fine.' 'Oh, okay. You're hired.'" (Laughs). So that's how I became a pilot with the Danish airlines. The first Danish- American pilot hired by Danish Airlines.

LEVINE: Wow. That wonderful. We're going to pause right here and turn the tape over and then we'll resume.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1. BEGINNING OF SIDE B, TAPE 1.

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming here on side two of Carl Pedersen's tape and you were saying how you landed a job with the Danish Airlines and then- so did you stay working for them?

PEDERSEN: Well they were- they just ordered airplanes from Douglas aircraft. The Danes ordered two air DC4's the Swedes ordered three and the Norwegians ordered two. And they were talking about merging to form

Scandinavian Airlines. So I was sent out to Cali- Sana Monica, California in March and I stayed out there until- until May watching them build the first DC4's out there. My wife came out and spent the month which was nice. And then in- near the end of May the two Danish airplanes were ready so the first one went over about a week before I did and then I went over around May the 21st I guess it was I left. We flew the DC4, the new DC4, from Sana Monica, landed in Las Vegas and bought the airplane in Las Vegas. That way no one has to pay California sales tax. So it was brought in Las Vegas, officially, and then we flew to Manh- New York. LaGuardia Airport. There was no (?) at all at that time. And, uh, I went home, packed my gear, and the next day went back to the airport and we flew back to Denmark. We flew to Gander [ph] first and I volunteered to navigate, which I'd done in the Navy quite a bit, and so I navigated to Copenhagen. And that is one of the two most emotional things- times- I think I can remember was the first time at about nine thousand feet coming over and seeing the coastline of Denmark, you know where I was born, I'd never seen it before, never thought I'd ever get there. And then to see it spread out like a big map in front of you which is quite- quite a moving sight. And that compares very much with August of 1983 when I had an occasion to come over here with the Governor Kane's [ph] Ethnic Advisory Council, we had a special little boat which took us over here while they were still working on Ellis Island. Nothing- no work had really been started at the time and we walked through this maze of confusions and weaves and trees and dilapidation. So that was a- that was the only- I still am I guess- the only member of the Ethnic Advisory Council that actually came through Ellis Island. So it was unique for both me and for them.

LEVINE: Now did you- did your mother or father ever tell you anything about Ellis Island? Anything they ever experienced when you did come through when you were two years old?

PEDERSEN: They probably have but I cant remember that at all. That's why I was very happy I found this, my arrival sheet all properly stamped.

LEVINE: Right. Well, now- I'm sorry go ahead.

PEDERSEN: And any state I notice on here, each state they checked off by the ship's doctor that they had checked your health or something. I do remember they had- my mother said it was a very rough crossing and on one occasion every one was sea sick except me and she said everyone was sitting around and I came over to ask her if I could have a pork sandwich (both laugh), which didn't go over to well with some of the poor ill people.

LEVINE: Well, now, when you came over here as part of the ethnic, ah, advisory group or what ever, what was the purpose of that particular trip before the place was renovated?

PEDERSEN: Well just an opportunity we had to come over here. I don't remember the background of it but they made it because it was there- so many ethnic- well of course the Ethnic Advisory Counsel was biased on ethnic people and so they thought it would be a very nice idea to come to where the majority of Americans had come up to 1954 so it was a very good move and I think it was an emotional move for everybody but very much so- much more so for me.

LEVINE: Well, um, tell about some of your activities, particularly about how you got involved with the Wallenberg [ph] Committee.

PEDERSEN: Well, of course being Scandinavian background I guess there's something you seem to think about other people quite a bit more then you do your self quite often, but on October the 5th of 1981 Raoul

Wallenberg became an honorary citizen of the United States and the only other one that is an honorary citizen is Winston Churchill. It's amazing that they are both tied in with World War Two, to different degrees of course. So I saw the picture the next day of him, of President Reagan signing the form making him honorary citizen of the United States so I said, 'Now that's very- that's amazing. Here you have someone who does so much, saved all those thousands of people in Hungary, and tomorrow they'll forget about him.' So I said that's not quite right. So I drew up a two page resolution that, ah, proper ceremonies, event, should be held every year on or about October the 5th to remember the deeds of Raoul. So, with proper ceremonies and things, I presented it first to one of the organizations I helped to found, the Scandinavian- American Heritage Society, and they approved it immediately. Took it to the American- Hungarian foundation in New Brunswick, approved immediately, and then the Jewish Federation of Northern Middlesex county and they approved it. So there we were, the three countries involved with Wallenberg- the Hungarians, the Jews, and the Scandinavians. So it became a wonderful association and exactly one year after we organized the Wallenberg committee we had our first program on October 5th of 1982 at Rutgers and the guest speaker was Ambassador Per Anger who met Wallenberg when he came into Budapest in 19- uh- 1944. And he- Per Anger was in Sweden and I didn't know how to contact him so I sent a letter to an old friend of mine who was an old neighbor who was a Sec- Secretary, ah, Attorney General of Sweden and I said, 'How can I get a hold of Per Anger?' He says, 'I know him. I'll get him for you.' So that summer I went to Sweden to meet with Per Anger and the Attorney General Bertsen [ph] met me. He said, 'I just talked to Per he's waiting for us.' I said, 'Fine.' So we went out to his island. I remember we had a problem the first day because Bertsen [ph] motor stopped on his motor boat so we had to get a friend of his the next day to take us out there. So we got out there,

talked to Per and these three fellows, Bertsen [ph], my friend, his friend and Per Anger had been cadets together in 1932 and they hadn't seen one another since.

LEVINE: Oh my goodness.

PEDERSEN: So Per made the comment that it took a person from New Jersey to get the three of us together. So he came over here and he gave the keynote speech. Governor Kean was there, that was his first speech after becoming governor. Well second actually because he had back trouble. And he gave a very moving speech, Governor Kean did also and it was one of his typically nice, fantastic speeches.

LEVINE: what is it about Raoul Wall- wall-

PEDERSEN: Wallenberg.

LEVINE: Wallenberg that particularly stuck you to take it up as a real kind of a mission or something that you felt was important enough to organize around.

PEDERSEN: Who- who- if it's important enough for him to become an honorary citizen of the United States then it must have been a fantastic thing for this man to do. And when you start reading about what he had done and then combining that with the fact that he was a Scandinavian or a Swede, and I had quite a few Swedish roots, I thought it would be something that I could get people to rally around and work and it worked out that way, worked out very fine. And apropos that in 19, uh, 1993 I organized a "Thanks to Denmark" program at the temple in Edison, Temple Emanuel. And we had- it was just fifty years since the Gestapo tried to pick up all the Jews in Denmark and of the nearly 75 hundred

Jews in Denmark, less than 400- a little over 400- were picked up. All the rest, 7000 or more, were safely taken to Sweden by the Danes. So there again it's a, uh, a sort of a tie in there too between two Scandinavian countries. Of course having a – having both Danish and Swedish blood in me I thought it was just the thing to do to bring this us. And the Temple Emanuel coincidentally had also organized their congregation at our old Danish church. So they organized in our church while we were waiting to get in the new one so there was that tie in too. And the – the Danish- the Rabbi in Denmark, I spoke with him and, uh, he sent a beautiful message across for the program. The, uh, Consulate General of Denmark in Manhattan came to be part of the program, a fellow named Life Dundee [ph] and I'd met him some years before at another- in April- a Holocaust celebration in April down in Cranberry and he spoke there and my wife and I, I guess, were the only non-Jews there, well that's not important but- and he spoke, and we'd met him before. He talked about this Danish boy that came home from school and his family said, 'Okay, come on. Get dressed, were leaving.' And he wanted to know why. 'Don't ask questions, just get dressed, were leaving.' So they went down to the coast, got in a little boat, and headed for Sweden. And they got stopped a few times by engine trouble and almost by the German coast Guard but they managed to get to Sweden and, uh, the boat was leaking and he stood up and said, 'you know, two hours after we landed, the boat sank.' Up until then no one knew that he was the little boy, the little Jewish boy who was on that thing, yeah. And amazingly enough the Rabbi today, the current Rabbi today in Copenhagen, was the other passenger with him. Yeah. So there are a lot of little coincidences that come up which makes it interesting. Oh! Also in 19- oh the Germans walked into Denmark, I think it was 1940, and everything worked fine for a while and then the Danes started to get very uppity, I guess. They got tiered of having the Germans there and then they started threatening the Jews and that broke the back of the

Danes. So the Gestapo picked up the police men and military people and were going to send them down to a concentration camp in Germany but then they had an agreement. If the Danes would built a camp, in Denmark, that they would just stay there. So the Danes did, they built a camp right down on the German boarder and the Germans promised that no Danes would go down- would be sent to Germany. Three weeks after they opened the camp up, they started shipping people to Germany. And I was there about two- three years ago in the barracks. And one of the barracks has a huge- the long wall that's full of names. Listing the name and the exact- list the name and the exact date that this and this person was sent to the concentration camp and I looked on there and there were seventy-two Pedersens so I figured, 'Ahh. Thank God my mother came over here rather than staying there.'

LEVINE: Yeah.

PEDERSEN: I had to thank her once for many a things but my name could have been up there had she not decided to come back here, or my parents had not decided to come back. So...

LEVINE: Do you know why you- I mean do you have Jewish blood? Is that why you, you-

PEDERSEN: No. Not that I know of.

LEVINE: Why do you think you've taken such a really strong interest and done so many, uh, worthy acts?

PEDERSEN: Well it's just one of the many little things that you think about doing, I don't know. You just think, ah, something has to be done so you do it. You can't explain it. You cant explain why I want to come out here and

talk to you, I mean, it's just, just something you want to do and it just happens. But it's been a wonderful association; I've met so many people I never would have met before. And, uh, you have this ability to talk with people and it, it- oh, one of the first fellows that joined our Wallenberg was a classmate of mine from high school and he joined it right away, Teddy Simpkin [ph], and we went to school together. I didn't know he was Jewish until, god, years ago. In high school we didn't know who was Jewish, who was Hungarian, who was Scandinavian, who was anything. You just didn't know. We had a platform, we had Sam Mason [ph] who, I guess, now that you break it down was English background, Britain, British, Mayflower type thing. He ran for President, I ran for Vice President. Royce Stolberg [ph], another Dane, Danish boy who was in my class, Danish background, ran for Treasurer, I guess it was. Teddy Simpkin, no Teddy Simpkin ran for treasurer, the Jewish boy. And Roy ran for Secretary and we all got elected except Ted. And Ted was the only one who had a slogan. He had "Some cant but Simkin." But it was- (laughs), we've had fun with that for years and years since then, you know. But Ted got a start on this thing and he got us our first seed money and the first program we had at Rutgers we had a full house up there at the Douglas Campus. So we've had them- been running almost every year- every year since the "Thanks to Denmark" program. That was to be held on October the 1st but they had a problem with the Jewish Federation because that was the Sabbath and they said, 'We can't give our support to that.' And I said, 'Well, here.' He said, "Cant you change the date?" I said, 'Well you could have told the Nazis to change the date as it is. Its not me that made the date.' So, but, I called Life Dundee [ph], the Danish Consulate General, who as you- as I told you before is a Danish Jew and he said, 'I cant make it on the first either, I'll be in Oklahoma.' I said, 'How about the fifth?' 'Perfect.' So we had a combined Salute to Wallenberg and a "Thanks to Denmark" program.

LEVINE: How nice.

PEDERSEN: And what I had done on- in the afternoon I was thinking, 'What could be different?' So I just sat there- well this reminded me of it, that, ah, I got little Danish flags that could just fit on here and I put it on a bunch of these name cards, stick on name cards, and I had someone in the audience who was talking about the Star of David that the Jews had to wear in Europe, except in Denmark, so then I said, 'This will be a switch.' I had all the Danes who were born in Denmark that were there during the occupation, had them all stand up and had a friend of mine, had his daughter go around with the little stickers to put on their chest just to reverse the procedure and I said, 'Now those of you who are Jewish, and even non Jews, go talk to these people and ask them about what happened in Denmark while they were there. You can get a first hand account of events.'

LEVINE: Good idea.

PEDERSEN: So just a switch on the a- switch on the Star of David type thing which of course is not quite a true story either.

LEVINE: It's not?

PEDERSEN: I mean in Denmark, its not.

LEVINE: You mean that it wasn't

PEDERSEN: That the king- that they had to wear the Star of David in Denmark, they just never did that.

LEVINE: They never did. Oh. Well, how do you think now about your Danish heritage, given that you arrived here as a young child and grew up and have lived in this country but yet you obviously have a strong connection-

PEDERSEN: Oh, Yeah.

LEVINE: How do you think about that? I mean, as far as the Danish or Swedish side of you and the American side of you. How do you put it in some perspective for yourself?

PEDERSEN: It's not a perspective, I think its an advantage. Because you can look at- one advantage I think I have is when I met with some of the Ethnic Advisory Council members, we had- oh Chief Crazy Horse. Native born American, we get along famously. And I come in - I walk in to one of the meeting there and I said, "You know what the trouble is Chief? There are too just many- just too many foreigners around here." And I could get away with it because I was born- I wasn't born- I was a foreigner also. So that opened up and made a repour with every one. It was a relaxation for every one, there was not- there were no walls built, it just worked out very nicely. And the chief indicated that the Swedes came over in 1638 which is another tie in that the Swedes- the Swedes, the English, and the Dutch are the only ones that had colonies in the original thirteen colonies. Swedes had one right here in New Jersey and I was on that committee, we built seven log cabins down in southern Jersey- they are still there- in Bridgetown [ph]. And the Swedes brought the log cabin to the USA and as I told Governor Kean one day- he made presentation of Statue of Liberty- of Lincoln to the library and I said, "Governor," I said, "if it weren't for the Swedes, Lincoln wouldn't have been born in a log cabin because they brought it over here, you know." So, it a little- the King and Queen were here for the dedication and they had a reception for them in-in- Princeton at (?). My wife and I was there

so we- I told the Governor that Norma and I were in Sweden the same year- came to Sweden the same year that the King- that the King was born, 1946. So he said, "Did you tell his Majesty that?" I said, "No." He says, "Well you better tell him." So when we got up to the king and I told him that Norma and I had come to Sweden the same year that he was born and we were probably the only people there that were there when he was born that were here at this place tonight, too. (Laughs).

LEVINE: Well, um, as far as, um, your life now, it sounds like its very full.

PEDERSEN: Oh, fantastically full. It's, uh, there's so many things you can do. Any body that says that they- when they retire that there's nothing to do, it's obviously not true. There are so many things you can do, so many ways you can help other people. And just go visit them or just talk to them. And not be bashful. That's why I'm involved with the church now, too. I go, I got them started on our anniversary thing which will be in September. And then I got on, lets see, I was on the board for- oh, I was District Master of the Boston [ph] Order, which is a Swedish organization. I was District Master of New Jersey in 19-19-1966 when they had the International Convention here and the Danes, I've been involved with them, the Norwegians and just a multitude of things.

LEVINE: Can you imagine what your life might have been like if you had not come to this country as a young child?

PEDERSEN: I'd probably be- start milking cows and all- I just have no idea what it could have been like. But I'm so thankful to my parents for coming over here that its just unbelievable. But thankfully we- they just didn't want to stay over there. They knew it was much better here. And it turned out to be that way also. I mean everything that has happened has been a positive factor, nothing negative at all. I cant think of any negative thing

that has happened. Of course people look at things in a different- in a different way. No matter what- everything has a positive side to it, nothing is all negative, there's no way in the world there's not a positive side to everything that happens.

LEVINE: Do you think some of your outlooks or attitudes come from a Swedish or Danish kind of way of thinking about life?

PEDERSEN: That could possibly be- I never- yeah, that way be too cause I- cause there are a lot of Danes and Swedes that think the same as none Danes and Swedes think but I think the majority of them have a different- see that was another advantage we did have too. There were three of us, there were three children that I grew up with. A Dane, a Swede, and I was a Dane. There was a fellow, a close friend of mine that was born in Sweden and another one was born in Norway, we went to school together, graduated high school together so we used to mix, go visiting the families. So I would here Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian through out my life. So it was no change when I got over there. For my wife it was, she wasn't used to Norwegian or Swedish but for me it was just...Even today my wife says I speak Danish with a Swedish accent and Swedish with a Danish accent, so its...

LEVINE: How about your father and mother? Do you think there was a period early on when they felt like foreigners in thins country and then did that change?

PEDERSEN: Hmmm. I don't know- they were so determined and they had the big advantage of having been here before.

LEVINE: Oh, that right.

PEDERSEN: And they came back of their own volition so it was not a matter of they had to come over here, they were forced to come over here, they were dragged over here. They came on their own. And of course having family here, and then friends, made a terrific difference.

LEVINE: Right.

PEDERSEN: Because in Denmark my father's brother was- came over earlier- excuse me- and he- my father lived with him and he was here all the time so it was the two brothers and my wife's- my mother's two brothers came over also. A third brother came over. The four of them, four siblings were here. None of them stayed in- my wife's father and his town brothers left Denmark and never went back. My father-in-law did go back once but that was in his seventies, I guess. But they just cut their ties and left. It was worse, I think, on the family then it was on the fellows 'cause They got along fine over here, they were all very successful. Got what- wound up in businesses and there were no problems- no problems at all.

LEVINE: Now, can you think of any attitudes maybe your mother and father had that you think they might have tried to pass on to you as far as, you know, the kind of person that you should be or the way you should live or anykind of values or attitudes?

PEDERSEN: They were very strict with me about being courteous to other people. That was a real- what was I going to say? And being polite and thank you and they couldn't stand- well I think I do the same thing now, I talk to youngsters and they don't say thank you or please I say, "You forgot a couple of words there, didn't you?" And I guess that's one thing that grew on me. The other person is never wrong. He may not agree with you but he is never wrong.

LEVINE: Oh.

PEDERSEN: So you have to have your own- your points and his view are wrong but his and your view should not be wrong.

LEVINE: How about children? Did you and your wife have children?

PEDERSEN: We have no children, no. So that's why we had lots of time, I guess, to get involved with a multitude of other things and other- other- other peoples children.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PEDERSEN: Like right now, of course, our neighbor ah\s a six year old boy that started first grade and she's a nurse and he works at Pikitiny [ph] so Andrew comes over to our house every morning about 7:30 and we put him on the bus about 8:40, he comes home at 3:15 and stays with us until one of his parents come home and that's a five day week-

LEVINE: Wow.

PEDERSEN: -enjoyment. It's not at all a chore, its just a pleasure for both of us. We did the same thing with the people on the other side and our nieces and nephews and (?). It's, uh, its amazing when you think back- oh you said about my parents. Our grown nieces and nephews now they were with us quite often when they were youngsters they- they come back and say we've learned so much with you, this is what I remember from you and what I learned from you so I guess I learned a lot from my parents too that I don't even think about.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah, right. Well gee, is there anything else you can think of that maybe we haven't covered-

PEDERSEN: Oh yes, many things (laughs).

LEVINE: that is pertinent here. Yeah, I'm sure you could go on for a few more interviews but is there anything else you can think of, we have a couple of minutes left.

PEDERSEN: Okay, yeah. I think the important this is for people to get involved with other people, other peoples. And that- that's- no one is different if you can just joke with them and have fun with them and- and I think to point out the fact that, for example, um, make little comments about if someone is Jewish, say something about it. To them it's a compliment because they realize that you know something about their history. Um, one of my closest friends is South Vietnamese (trips over the word)- South Vietnamese (pronounces it slowly) friend, I met him at school in 1963, we had a class together and there were nine of us and the instructor went around to all of us and spoke to us and said, "Any other questions?" And I says, "Well, I have just one request, that is to keep all gasoline and matches away from Chen [ph]." That was the time of the Vietnamese were- ah- burning themselves and, uh, if looks could have killed I wouldn't be sitting here, talking to you today, but we became the closets of friends after that because we spoke about it. I says, "It's a compliment to you that I know what going on and this brings it up to everyone else." So from that time on, where ever we went we, ah, we (?) around together and I- we- kept calling him a, ah, foreigner and finally one day, one of the last days there, I says, "Ahh, Chan [ph], don't think your so big and mighty because your not the only damn foreigner around here because I'm a foreigner too." He says, "You got that foreigner too?"

I says, "Yes." So it was just one of those things that- you could talk to everybody if you just do it in the right way. With respect.

LEVINE: Well it sounds as though your proud of being a foreigner and that- that's part of who you are and how you present yourself.

PEDERSEN: Very much so. Oh yeah, there's no doubt about that, yeah. It's a thing that very few other- there aren't to many others who can say it now because they are all youngsters now and those that around it- very difficult- the Danish museum out in Iowa, they contacted me quite a few times because they don't know who else to contact and they need information on this and other bits of information so I- I guess I'm their only contact and its very difficult to find leads for them now because the people that I know are no longer here.

LEVINE: Right. Yeah. Well, I want to thank you very, very much for a most interesting interview. I've been speaking with Carl Pedersen who came in 1923 at the age of two years- on the Oscar II. Today is January 23, 1997 and we're here at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.