

EI-879

KNUD OLAV RASK

BIRTHDATE: JULY 10, 1918

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 14, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 78

RUNNING TIME:

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

DENMARK, 1928

AGE: 9

SHIP: THE HOMERIC

PORT: SOUTHAMPTON

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay, today is May 14th, 1997 and I'm here in Fort Lauderdale, Florida at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Knut Olav Rask. Mr. Rask came from Denmark in 1928 at the age of nine. And at the time of this interview he is 78 years of age. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you would start by saying your birth date and where in Denmark you were born.

RASK: July 10, 1918 in a little town called Aars, Denmark.

LEVINE: How do you spell Aars?

RASK: A-A-R-S.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you live in Aars up until the time you left for the United States?

RASK: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, what was your father's name?

RASK: Jens [PH] Christian Rask.

LEVINE: And he—what did he do in Denmark before he came to the United States?

RASK: Well, he—I guess they—he was a horse trader, more or less.

LEVINE: Huh.

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember that at all? Uh-huh. Do you have any, like, personal memories of your father conducting his business?

RASK: Well, we had a lot of horses around all the time so I learned how to ride at an early age, you know. I was probably only five years old when I started riding horses.

LEVINE: Wow. And did everyone ride—and your sisters and brothers, were they also riding horses?

RASK: Well, they were all older than I was, see, because my sister, the next in age, is nine years older than I am. And my older brothers are 20 years older than I am.

LEVINE: [unclear]

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, was it the same mother and father? You just happened to come later. [chuckles] I see.

RASK: There was eight of us.

LEVINE: Wow. So why did your father decide to come to the United States when he did? Not your father. I'm sorry. It was your brothers who came first, right? Why did they decide to come?

RASK: I suppose they thought it was—be a better place to live.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RASK: I don't know. It's hard to say.

- LEVINE: Were—were they involved in the horse trading business?
- RASK: No.
- LEVINE: No. Do you remember what they did before they left Denmark?
- RASK: They were—I don't know. They worked different places, like, my older brother, well, he went to school. And the next [unclear], he was a—he was in gardening, you know. He was the one that built this house. He was a builder over here.
- LEVINE: Oh.
- RASK: He built a lot of houses in Florida, yeah.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. What were your brother's names, from the oldest on down?
- RASK: Well, Jens was the oldest. Then my—then my sister, Karen, was the next one. Then Del was the next one and then my sister, who stayed in Denmark. She just died and she was 91 years old. And her name was Anna. And then the next one was George. He lives up in Chicago. He's 90. And then my brother, Gunder [PH]; he died a few years ago and he was 87. And then my sister. She lives up in Chicago. She's 87 now.
- LEVINE: Oh. And then you came nine years after.
- RASK: Yeah.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- RASK: I guess I was a mistake.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- RASK: That's what they say.
- LEVINE: So did your three brothers come over at the same time from Denmark?
- RASK: No, they all came at different times.
- LEVINE: Was it the oldest first? Is that how it went?
- RASK: Uh-hmm. And he came to Canada and then he went on a ship and then he came into San Francisco.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: And then the—the next oldest brother, he came over and then the—my four—the fourth oldest came with my cousin. They came together.

LEVINE: And where did they go?

RASK: They all went to Chicago because that's—one of others lives in Chicago and they had all gotten—gotten to Chicago.

LEVINE: Do you know why they settled in Chicago initially? Were there other relatives already in this country before they came? Do you know?

RASK: I don't really know. It might have been. See, they might have known somebody in Chicago.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And when they got to Chicago, what—do you know what kinds of work they did?

RASK: Oh, yeah. My oldest brother was a painting contractor and my second oldest was a building contractor. He became a carpenter. And we—all in the building trades, all of us.

LEVINE: Hmm, I see. So now, getting back to Denmark, what was your mother's name?

RASK: Caroline Rask.

LEVINE: And her—her maiden name?

RASK: Gundersen.

LEVINE: G-U-N-D—

RASK: E-R-S-E-N, Gundersen.

LEVINE: Gundersen. And did she stay at home or did she work at all in Denmark?

RASK: Well, they had a hotel that they ran.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember the name of it?

RASK: No, I remember, it's—I think it was Aars Hotel—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RASK: —named after the town.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Was it big? Did it have a lot of rooms?

RASK: It was pretty good—pretty good size.

LEVINE: Oh. Did—did you have any duties having to do—

RASK: No.

LEVINE: —with the hotel as a child?

RASK: No. Then when I was born they didn't live—they didn't have the hotel.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: We lived in a house that was close by.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. Can you recall that house? Could you describe it?

RASK: Well, there's a picture of it. I can't—it had inside plumbing. It was modern, you know. And it was a very nice house, had a big garden.

LEVINE: Was it wooden or was it made out of something else?

RASK: No, it was—I think it was stucco.

LEVINE: Stucco.

RASK: Stucco, masonry. All the hou—all the houses in Denmark are either brick or concrete. They don't have too many wooden houses.

LEVINE: I see. So you went to school in Denmark. Could—is there anything about the school there, perhaps compared with the school after you got here—

RASK: Well, they're very good. They—they're very—Denmark is the—one—I guess it's the most literate country in the world.

LEVINE: Was it a strict kind of a schooling or—

RASK: Oh, yeah. It's pretty strict.

- LEVINE: And was it, like, a public school?
- RASK: Oh, yeah.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And how about, like, your sisters and brothers? Were you closest to any particular one or ones of them?
- RASK: Well, yeah. My sisters, because my brothers had all left.
- LEVINE: Right.
- RASK: So, yeah.
- LEVINE: And how many years had went by between the time that the last brother left and—and the rest of the family came here? Do you know?
- RASK: Well, it was years.
- LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.
- RASK: It was long years between the first one came over and when we left. I think he—the first one came over in, like, 1920 or something like that.
- LEVINE: I see. Oh, so you were just a baby.
- RASK: Yeah.
- LEVINE: Did you remem—when you got here, did you remember your—any of your brothers? I mean—
- RASK: Not really. Not really.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm.
- RASK: I probably did. It's hard to think, you know.
- LEVINE: Yeah. And, let's see. Well, when you think of Aars and Denmark, what—what are the kind of things that you remember most about the town and life there?
- RASK: Well, it was—it was very nice and it—it had a park down in a—it was sort of built on two hills. And down below there was a little river ran

through it. And then there was a park right—built right there at—at that, you know.

LEVINE: So it must have been a pretty place.

RASK: Oh, it was.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Do you remember things you did as a child up until you were nine years old?

RASK: Yeah, we used to go up on a hill and go sledding down in the wintertime.

LEVINE: And did you ski as a child in Denmark?

RASK: No, no, no.

LEVINE: And how about the summer?

RASK: Well, most of the time I suppose we—I remember we used to go out and pick lingonberries, you know. They used to grow on heather hills and we'd go out and pick them in the summer. And they was—they had a lot of fruit trees. I—we had a big garden and we had a lot of fruit trees, pears, apples, so forth.

LEVINE: Did your mother—was she a good cook or did she cook? Yeah. Can you think of any particularly Danish dishes that she made that you recall?

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: [chuckles] You make them, huh?

RASK: Yeah. Well—

LEVINE: Like, what—with the berries, was there anything in particular that she made with them?

RASK: Well, they made—from strawberries, they made a lot of—they have a thing in Denmark they call grod and can't pronounce it. It's hard to pronounce.

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

RASK: G-R-O—is it like an O with dots on it—

LEVINE: Okay.

RASK: —and D for—and that's like a pudding made out of strawberries and different berries.

LEVINE: Oh. What was the last letter? P?

RASK: D.

LEVINE: Oh, D, uh-huh. And so what would be, like, most of—of the family meals? Was it—was there any particular thing that was prominent in—in what you ate as a child?

RASK: There you—you—they make a lot of soups to begin with. And Denmark, you know, as a country has—is—is a rich country as far as, you know, livestock and so forth. So there were never—nobody every starved there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RASK: In fact, they used to import everything to England and Germany, like hogs and livestock and different things like that.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm. Did—did you—like, as a family, did you have your own chickens and things like that or—

RASK: Yeah, we had a big yard and they had, I think, chickens and even raised pigeons. My brothers were great pigeon raisers; they liked that.

LEVINE: Oh. Did they race them as well?

RASK: No, they raised them. Yeah.

LEVINE: They raised them, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: How about what—anything else that you did for fun that you recall as a—

RASK: Well, we used to ice skate in this park that had a big lagoon, a little island on it. And we used to ice skate on there.

LEVINE: Hmm, oh. And were you a religious family?

RASK: Oh, yeah. Very.

LEVINE: And what religion were you?

RASK: Lutheran.

LEVINE: And can you remember any ceremonies or religious events that were celebrated in—in Denmark?

RASK: No, not too much.

LEVINE: But you were churchgoers, I take it.

RASK: Very—my mother was very strict. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about, like, holidays? Christmas or—

RASK: Oh, that was a big deal.

LEVINE: What was Christmas like for you in Denmark as a little boy?

RASK: Well, they decorate the tree in a different room and then when Christmas Eve—then they open the doors and the Christmas tree is lit. And the—and the presents. They give out the presents. It's very festive. They—it's a big deal in Denmark. It's Christmas.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. It—I assume it has religious—more religious significance, perhaps, than we have here.

RASK: Well, they—in those days, they—people went to church, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RASK: It was very, well—I don't know how to say it. They—it was, like, almost a must, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was Easter like that too?

RASK: Yeah, I don't remember so much about that. We used to have Easter egg hunts and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Hmm.

RASK: But mostly Christmas. You know, then we—they used to have candles on the Christmas tree and then used to light them. They—

they—they put—attach them, you know. They—I was telling my kids how they attached the candles to the tree.

LEVINE: Yeah, how?

RASK: They'd take needles and they'd heat them and then they'd put them into the bottom of the candle. And then they stick them into the limbs with the needle stick in the limbs. And they stick on there like that.

LEVINE: And is—was—did you ever hear of the hazards of fire—of lighting the tree like that?

RASK: Well, they only lit them for a little while and then they threw them out.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and would it be a big tree?

RASK: Oh, yeah. We had a big tree.

LEVINE: And how about your mother and father? Did they—can you remember, like, what they did to socialize? Did they visit or were there any other sort of, either singing, dancing events that you can recall?

RASK: Well, in those days going to the movies and dancing was a no-no.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: [chuckles] My sisters used to sneak out and go. But going to the movies was, like, bad stuff, you know.

LEVINE: Well, what was it like being the baby and, really, you just had your sisters and your mother and father?

RASK: Well, they used to have to fight because nobody wanted to baby sit.

LEVINE: Oh. [laughs] Uh-huh. And any other things you can think of that have to do with Denmark, your first nine years that—

RASK: Well, well, I remember I liked school. I was good in school, you know. And we had a lot of fun—or the kids.

LEVINE: Was it a—a big school? Did you have, like, the same teacher?

RASK: Oh, no, no. We all had different teachers. It was a good size—the town was pretty big. It was maybe, thousands, maybe 5,000. It was—it wasn't small.

LEVINE: Well, now—

RASK: It was a railroad center too.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: [unclear]

LEVINE: And most of the people in the town, were they involved with agriculture or what? Was there any industry in particular that—

RASK: Well, they—

LEVINE: —the town was involved with?

RASK: Well, they—they all had businesses, you know. There was a—there was a big dairy there. And then there was a big slaughterhouse where they used to take the—and send it over to—they would ship it out of the country, you know. And—

LEVINE: Was it—was it cows or pigs or what?

RASK: Mostly pigs, I think. And I know they even had a factory where they made clothing, dyed clothing.

LEVINE: How about grandparents? Did you have grandparents living nearby?

RASK: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you have memories of them?

RASK: Well, most of them were dead when I remember. When I grew up, I remember having a lot of aunts because we had a—my father had a big family. And they're—most of them are all buried in that town.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember any particular experiences with any of your aunts?

RASK: I know one of them was blind. But—and that a lot of his brothers were in the butchers—you know, in—in the butcher business.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: Which was big, you know, because they had a lot of animals that they—I can't see.

LEVINE: Oh, your school—

RASK: What is that?

LEVINE: Is this your school class?

RASK: Yeah, that's one of my classes [unclear]. Let's see. I can't think—

LEVINE: [unclear]

RASK: I'm right there somewhere.

MRS. RASK: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah.

MRS. RASK: [unclear].

LEVINE: Right, uh-huh.

MRS. RASK: Yeah, you're on that.

RASK: I think it's right there.

LEVINE: Okay.

RASK: Right there somewhere in this front here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Okay, well, now, do you know why you left—you and your sisters and mother and father left at the time you did in 1928?

RASK: Well, I guess—things were starting to get kind of tough, you know, in Denmark. And our brothers all miss—wanted us to come here. That's about all I can remember about—

LEVINE: Do—do you remember if you had any examinations or any of the processing that you had to go through before you were able to get on the ship and come here?

RASK: Yeah, we had to go to Copenhagen and to get our stuff—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RASK: —straightened out, whatever it was.

LEVINE: The immigration papers and there was a quota at that time.

RASK: I don't know. I imagine.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. And do you remember actually leaving—leaving Aars?

RASK: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I remember we went to a town in west Denmark, southern Denmark, [unclear]. And we went on a ship from there. We went to London. We went up the Thames River to London. And then we took a train from there to Southampton and we got on a ship.

LEVINE: Do you remember, like when you were leaving, when the family was leaving, were there—did people come to say goodbye? Or do you remember any of the departure?

RASK: Not too much. I don't quite remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you—can you think of anything that your mother packed or that you personally wanted to take with you?

RASK: No, I don't remember.

LEVINE: Okay.

RASK: I mean, being nine years old, it's—a lot of that stuff is—

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Right. Okay, so, you remember the ship?

RASK: Yeah, it was a big—it was a British ship. It was one of the biggest and it was, like, 50 or 60,000 tons. Yeah. I remember they was—it was pretty old ship because they scrapped it right after that voyage. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And it was the Homeric.

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that happened aboard ship on the passage over?

RASK: It was rough.

- LEVINE: Now, were you traveling third class or steerage? Uh-huh?
- RASK: Third.
- LEVINE: Third class. So you had a cabin. And was it—was it—was your—all the family that was traveling together, were you all in the same cabin?
- RASK: I think we had two cabins. My mother and father and I were in one and then my sisters were in another one.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. And anything else except for the fact that it was—
- RASK: Rough.
- LEVINE: —a tough voyage? Yeah. Do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?
- RASK: Yeah, and I remember we came in and, of course, New York, you know, was a big deal. You saw the Statue of Liberty and saw the big, big—you know, the big buildings. We never saw those in Denmark, skyscrapers and so forth.
- LEVINE: How—do you remember you felt as a nine-year-old coming here?
- RASK: Well, I was excited, you know. When you're nine years old and you're going to another country, you—it's a big deal, you know.
- LEVINE: Did anyone want to stay, of your sisters or your mother or father that—were they reluctant to come?
- RASK: Well, my one sister that—my second-oldest sister, she was married so she stayed. She never did come over. But she's visited here a couple of times. And you can show her the picture. Then you can tell a little bit better. Oh, there's the picture that was taken when we—when we first came over.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- RASK: That's my younger sister.
- LEVINE: Oh, this is you.
- RASK: And that's my parents.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful.

RASK: And this one was taken in Denmark and I've got a picture in my hand.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, you were a blond-haired boy, huh?

RASK: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, that's—

RASK: Well, my mother was dark-haired but my dad was blond.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RASK: But this is the—this picture was taken when my sister came over, oh—

LEVINE: Pausing. Okay, we're resuming here. So let's see. So when you got—did you know what the Statue of Liberty was?

RASK: Well, pretty much. We didn't. They explained to us what it was on the ship, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RASK: Because everybody was pretty ex—well, they were excited, just coming into New York harbor.

LEVINE: Yeah. So then were you met when you first got into the harbor?

RASK: Well, then the Im—of course, you have to go through Immigration. But it seems that somewhere along the way the money for the tickets to Chicago hadn't got there. So that's why they sent us to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—

RASK: My sister said—when I talked to her, she said, "Oh, they were going to send us back." But I don't think they would have, you know. But they were very nice out there.

LEVINE: Yeah, it sounded like—

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: —from this that you had a nice experience at Ellis Island.

RASK: Yeah, it was so clean and it was so big, you know. There was only a few of us there, maybe 50 people in this whole huge place.

LEVINE: And people treated you well?

RASK: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And so you were there for one week?

RASK: Well, that's right. That's what my sister said. She can remember more than I do.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you did during those days when you were at Ellis Island?

RASK: Well, I remember used—I used to go out in the yard and play because they gave us toys to play with, you know. I don't even remember. I think I was the only—I thought I was the only kid there.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: You know.

LEVINE: And did you sleep in dormitories or did you have rooms where your family was?

RASK: Well—well, I think there was dormitories but the women were in a separate and the men were in another. But we would eat together, you know.

LEVINE: Did you go with the men or with your mother?

RASK: No, I went with my father.

LEVINE: Oh, with your father, uh-huh. And the food? Do you recall anything?

RASK: It's good, yeah.

LEVINE: So do you remember—well, you—I guess you wouldn't have socialized because they were all adults, the others who were there.

RASK: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: So what happened? Did some—somebody got in touch with your brothers?

RASK: Yeah, the Immigration must have contacted them.

LEVINE: And—

RASK: And then the tickets was sent and then we got on a train.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving Ellis Island and getting to the train?

RASK: Yeah, well, because they took us by ferry, you know. That was another thing. You know, they took us out by ferry and they took us back. And we got on a train and we went up—it was Illinois Central and we went all the way up to Niagara Falls that goes through New York. And we saw the Falls, you know.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: And that was a big deal.

LEVINE: Right. And how was it? Did anyone in this family speak English?

RASK: No, not the ones that—my brothers all could speak English.

LEVINE: But you traveling to Chicago?

RASK: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. And so how long did it take? Do you remember?

RASK: By train? Oh, I don't know. Maybe a—oh, maybe one day, day and a half.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You didn't sleep in the train that you recall?

RASK: Well, we slept standing—sitting up, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And when you got to Chicago, do you recall the reunion?

RASK: Yeah, my brothers were all at the Illinois Central Station waiting, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RASK: And then we all stayed with them.

LEVINE: Were they all living together at that point?

RASK: No, they were all married.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: That is, the two of them were. And I stayed with my one brother, the one that's the miller. And then somewhere we all were split up, you know, living with different ones just for a little while. And then—

LEVINE: Had they married women from Denmark or were they American born or—

RASK: No, the—my oldest brother—that's the one that's the—she's from Bohemia. She's Czechoslovakian. She's the one that lives over here.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

RASK: And the second one, she marries the Polish girl. And the other two, they had—they weren't married yet but they married Irish girls. I'm the only one that married a Dane.

LEVINE: Wow.

RASK: But my sisters both married Danish boys.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Okay. So what—those first few days and weeks when you were in Chicago, were there any things that really struck you about this country or what you saw or experienced initially?

RASK: Well, we came from a small town. When we went to Chicago, everything was big and busy, you know, and noisy. You know, we had elevated trains and [unclear].

LEVINE: Well, one of your brothers was a butcher, you said?

RASK: No.

LEVINE: A sl—had a sl—

RASK: That was in Denmark.

- LEVINE: In Denmark. But in Chicago—
- RASK: No.
- LEVINE: —he didn't do that?
- RASK: No, he didn't over there either. He—they were all tradesmen. My oldest brother became a painting contractor. And my next—the other one, he became a carpenter and he was a foreman for a big construction outfit. And the others all worked on construction, you know.
- LEVINE: And did you go to school soon after you arrived?
- RASK: Yeah, right away.
- LEVINE: And what was there like for you without knowing English?
- RASK: Well, it was funny because the north side of Chicago there was one block; they were all blacks and they went to the same school. And I had never seen blacks. But it was funny because they picked on the guys like me who couldn't talk English. They had somebody they could pick on, you know.
- LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm. So did you get into fights? Is that what happened?
- RASK: Well, more or less. [chuckles] That went on for a long time because when you have an accent people pick on you, you know.
- LEVINE: Did you ever—were you called, like, a greenhorn or did you get any of that kind of taunting by kids?
- RASK: They—well, they mostly taunt you about your name.
- LEVINE: Oh.
- RASK: See? See, in Denmark, that's a common name. Over here, it's not. But that—over there, it's like Bob or Dick or, you know, something like that.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how did the teachers treat you in—in the school [unclear]?
- RASK: Oh, they were very nice. But it was hard to communicate, you know. Yeah. But I learned pretty quick, yeah.

LEVINE: Were there many children who had immigrated in your school when you were there?

RASK: Yeah, [clears throat] because we lived in a Scandinavian neighborhood. And so there were some Norwegians. You know, there was a lot a Scandinavians.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, do you recall any kinds of social clubs for Scandinavians that were—

RASK: Oh, yeah. They all had their own—I belonged to the Danish American Athletic Club and my wife belonged too. There's a picture of us. We did gymnastics and stuff and we also had teams. You know, soccer teams, basketball, baseball and so forth.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about your parents? Were they part of a—of a Scandinavian or of a Danish social club?

RASK: Well, they belonged to a Danish church, you know. There were Danish churches all over the neighborhood.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RASK: There were two or three of them.

LEVINE: And did—did they have the sermon or did they conduct the service in—in Danish?

RASK: Yeah, they held it in English and then they would hold it in Danish.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So what were your mother and father's attitude about becoming Americanized?

RASK: Oh, they did real well. They—you know, they were older. See, they were, like, in their 50s and, maybe, 60s. And then I wanted to be a citizen so bad but they wouldn't let me, you know, because I had to be 21 years old. So they said, "Well, wait until you get in the Army." So I became a citizen when I was in the Army. I was in the—in the ski troops. And I—we were out on a patrol and I broke my leg and a—in an accident, you know. And it was real cold; it was, like, 30 below. And I ended up in the hospital and then they sent me to a hospital in Denver, Fitzsimmons General, which is the big hospital. That's where Eisenhower was when he had his heart attack, and still a big, fancy hospital. And a guy came one day and said, "Oh, you've got to go and get your citizenship papers." I said, "I can't. Look at me." He says, "Well, I'll take you." So he took you in a cab and we

went down to these—in fact, that's where they're having the trial today with that McNay—McVeigh.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: And it's downtown Denver. We went there and there was about, oh, maybe 25 of us that were soldiers. And I was on crutches, you know. And it was like you said, the Italians and the Germans were kind of—they grilled them. You know, they—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, before they would give citizenship papers.

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RASK: But see, in the ski troops we had a lot of foreigners. We had a lot of Norwegians, had escaped from Norway and there was a lot of, even, Austrians and Germans, you know.

LEVINE: Well, when you became a citizen, as a soldier, did you have to study? Did you—you asked questions about the government?

RASK: No, they didn't ask me. They knew. I think we all knew. But my parents, after I became a citizen, then they decided to become too. And, you know, they had a—they were older and they had it a little tougher but they learned.

LEVINE: Did they go to night school or anything like that?

RASK: I don't know but they could take the test and they did everything.

LEVINE: Would they—would they speak English at home or did they continue to speak Danish?

RASK: Well, you see we would never speak Danish to our parents. We would only talk English to them.

LEVINE: Did—did you decide that or who decided that that—

RASK: We all did. We didn't—see, we don't—we didn't talk Danish to each other either. We spoke English. Just didn't—my kids can't—they—Eleanor [PH] and I can both speak Danish but we never do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

- RASK: Our kids, they don't even—well, they know we can speak Danish but we never did though, so—
- LEVINE: Can you think of any attitudes that your mother or father had that they tried to instill in you when you were growing up?
- RASK: No.
- LEVINE: Ways they wanted you to be or—
- RASK: Well, just wanted us to—I think wanted us to go to church, you know, that they were religious, especially my mother.
- LEVINE: So did you—did the family continue being religious in this country?
- RASK: Well, I don't—I think they—I think it was just the opposite. It was too pushy, that they sort of stay away—well, they all belonged to the church and stuff. But they were not that gung ho.
- LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Hmm, yeah. Let's see. So, well, before we get into the Army part, you went through school and then what did you do between finishing school and joining the military?
- RASK: Well, I worked. I became a painter. I worked for my brother. And then I worked for another place for awhile. But it was in the '30s and, you know, things were not that easy. So we kind of went, you know, to what we knew. When we knew somebody who could get you into the union, you know, so because—then I became—had my own business when I came down here.
- LEVINE: Was it a painting business? Is there anything else about the Depression time that—
- RASK: [chuckles] I was—
- LEVINE: —we can talk about?
- RASK: They were—they were tough. We—we more—my—my sister—my older sister got married and her and her husband lived—we all lived in the same apartment. And my other sister, the younger one, she lived there too. You know, we all lived in a big apartment and we—there was a couple of bedrooms, three bedrooms, whatever. But I remember I had to have—sleep in the dining room, you know. Things were tough, you know. There was just—it wasn't a matter of—it was just easy—not easy even to get a job. [several words unclear] work.

- LEVINE: How about your brothers and your father? Were they—
- RASK: Yeah.
- LEVINE: —able to work during the Depression?
- RASK: Yeah, because, you know, the construction—my—my second—the one that was a carpenter, he couldn't find any work. The painters could find work because there was always some painting. But he—there was another Danish guy and he—they went [unclear] and made—he was a butter maker from the Old Country. So they went in and started making butter because that was one of things that people had to have, food, you know. So what else? In fact, my mother and sisters, for awhile they ran a boarding house for a bunch of Danish fellows, yeah.
- LEVINE: Huh, I see. As opposed to taking in boarders into your living space, they had—
- RASK: No.
- LEVINE: —an actual boarding house.
- RASK: It was one—or had this one big building. And they had turned some of the apartments into rooms. And they—that's—that would have rented—that was the fellow that owned it rented out the little rooms to the guys. And then they—my sisters—they—my mother—they had a restaurant, like, in the basement part. And then they would eat there. They would make the food for them.
- LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. Now, were you—you were working while you were still going to school? What kind of jobs did you do while you were still going to school?
- RASK: No, I didn't work while I was going to school. I—when I was in high school, my brother—one of my brothers, another one—they had a grocery store. They would distribute butter but then they had a grocery store and I worked in a grocery store when I was going to high school.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm.
- RASK: I went to Lane [PH] Tech in Chicago and that's the largest high school in the country.

- LEVINE: Now, were you learning a particular trade?
- RASK: Well, Lane Tech is a technical high school. And it's—it's like a pre-engineering school. And then when I went—I started working, I would go to college at nights and on weekends, and I went to Lane and Armor [PH] Tech, which is Illinois Tech today.
- LEVINE: Oh.
- RASK: And it's—it's on the south side of Chicago.
- LEVINE: So you—were you studying engineering? Is that what you would study?
- RASK: Uh-hmm.
- LEVINE: And then what were the circumstances under which you became a soldier?
- RASK: Well, the—it was getting—I was—1943 and a lot of the—see, I belonged to the Danish American Athletic Club. And you know, gymnastic—they were all going in so I figured I'd better—figured I was going to miss something. So I went down and volunteered. And then a whole bunch of us were sent down to Arkansas for basic training. We took our basic training. They came one day and they said, "We need a lot of soldiers for ski troops, mountain troops." So we took a physical and the ones who passed were sent up to Camp Hale. [PH]
- LEVINE: Hmm. And had—did you know how to ski by then?
- RASK: Well, partly. I had learned because, you know, we—we lived in Chicago and right around that area there's a lot of skiing, you know, up in Wisconsin and stuff. Even outside of Chicago there's Payless [PH] Park and stuff where they do ski. And we ice skated. We're—you know, we were all Scandinavians in the area. But, of course, then they—they really taught us, you know, how to—in fact, the guys—we had this Torge Tuckle [PH], who was a champion ski jumper. But he had to teach him how to go cross-country skiing, or up—sides the mountains, yeah.
- LEVINE: Hmm. So once you were trained, where were you sent?
- RASK: Italy.
- LEVINE: And how about your Army experience there?

RASK: Well, we were up in the northern Italy around—just south of Bologna. And we were fighting in the mountains because the mountains were [unclear]. And, well, we went overseas and we landed in Naples. Then we went on landing [unclear] and went up to Leghorn [PH]. And then three days later, we were already fighting the Germans. We had fellows getting killed already. But, see, the mountain too—we had to take the mountains before the rest of them could advance. They couldn't run the tanks or anything through the valleys because the Germans would just knock them out. So we would take—have to take the mountains, you know.

LEVINE: So how long were you there doing the—

RASK: Well, I was there from January, '45 to—I went home May—there about four months. But was there long enough to get wounded three times. We had—well, my outfit put nine German divisions out of action. But we had a thousand guys killed and over 4,000 wounded. So it was—

LEVINE: Yeah. So you—you—when you came back, you came back on a hospital ship?

RASK: Uh-hmm. Funny—the funny part of that was the captain was Danish. He talked with a Danish accent. And I told my nurse that, you know, so he found out and so he invited me up. I'd go up and have coffee with him every afternoon up above where nobody else was allowed. So it was a very nice trip but it took, like, 21 days to go from Naples to Charleston, South Carolina.

LEVINE: And was that because of the war—of the—

RASK: Well, the hospital ship goes slow.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: And they'd go down to the South Atlantic so it's not so rough, you know. And—because—

LEVINE: Were you in very bad shape coming back?

RASK: Well, not too bad but I was in bad shape in the beginning because the telegram says I was seriously wounded, you know. I was hit in too many places.

LEVINE: And you were hit in your hands and your shoulder?

RASK: Well, they went right through my hands and it came right out—in both shoulders in the back.

LEVINE: Hmm, wow. So you must have felt a real camaraderie with the other—with the other soldiers.

RASK: Yeah, because it's the only outfit. They were all really volunteers, really. And they—we trained for two years before we ever went overseas. So you got to know them real well. And the—the fact that they're like—the paratroopers are real close too, that's—you find that these—they call them E-Life [PH] Divisions. They're kind of tight, you know. See, they—the ski troops were the only division in the United States Army where the guys would go to OCS and they'd come right back to the same division. They wouldn't do that to the others. They would send them to different outfits. But they would come right back. So a guy would be a private and they'd come back a lieutenant. And the guys would say, "Well, now, don't pull any"—[chuckles]

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah. Well, when you look back on that period of your life, being in the—in the ski troops, how do you think about it now?

RASK: Well, because we have our own organization.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: Yeah, they—they go back to Italy every three years and now they have reunions all the time and—local ones still. And Southeast Chapter, I was the secretary for a long time.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So this was a big part of your life? That whole—

RASK: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —time and since then?

RASK: And then I—we have our organization. I belong to that. But I also belong to Disabled American Veterans, the [unclear] Purple Heart Veterans and the VFW.

LEVINE: When—when you look back on your life about coming to this country as a little boy and then serving in the service and all that, how do you think about it?

- RASK: Oh, we were—you know, the reason probably foreigners that go in, they feel they have a duty, you know.
- LEVINE: Is that how you felt?
- RASK: Sure. I'm afraid that's not the way it is today. You know, well, even during World War II there—we had the ones who went. I remember the day that they bombed Pearl Harbor, I went in to have my car checked at Ford's. And they had thousands standing in line to enlist, you know. And the—well, that's why I volunteered, you know.
- LEVINE: Yeah. Well, let's see. So when—were you married when you were in the service?
- RASK: Hmm-uh.
- LEVINE: No. So maybe you could just kind of summarize when you got out and then what kind of turns did your life take?
- RASK: Well, I didn't work for awhile because I was in the hospital for 10 months.
- LEVINE: Oh.
- RASK: And I had a lot of operations. And then when I got out I was a 50 percent [unclear]. So—but then I started going back to work.
- LEVINE: As a painter? And did you continue? Uh-huh. And then how did you meet your wife?
- RASK: Well, she belonged to the same athletic club that I belonged to.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So did you know each other before you went into the service?
- RASK: Well, I knew her because she's younger than I am. So, you know, didn't pay that much attention but—
- LEVINE: She grew up while you were away. [chuckles] I see, uh-huh. And your wife's name and maiden name.
- RASK: Eleanor Oler—O-L-E-R. Oler.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And how many children did you have?
- RASK: Two.

LEVINE: And their names?

RASK: Sue Rask. She lives up in Chicago. And she's a—how do we call that—art director for a company. She was in her own business for awhile. But she's worked for a lot of big companies up there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RASK: And my son is a travel agent and he worked for Citizens Federal Bank for a long time. And then they sold the bank to another bank. You know how that is.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RASK: But now he works for the Seminole Indian as a travel agent for them.

LEVINE: Wow. And he's the one who visited Ellis Island?

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: And got the story, uh-huh. What do you feel really satisfied or proud of—

RASK: What?

LEVINE: —that you've done in your life?

RASK: Well, I was proud I went in the Army. Right—all my medals came at a price.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, yeah. How do you think of yourself as far as Danish and American? How do you reconcile the two?

RASK: When—you used to say, "Well, you're Danish." And I said, "No, I'm not Danish. I'm an American." That's how—I think that's how most of the Scandinavians feel. I know the second generation does.

LEVINE: Did you—was there a period of time when—when you felt like an outsider when you—soon after you came, where you felt an outsider in this country? And then did that change?

RASK: Not really, you know. When you're young you can, you know, adjust.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, yeah.

RASK: And then we—there was a lot of Danes and Scandinavians in Chicago. And we all had our clubs, you know. There was the Danish American Club, Norwegian American, Swedish American. And we'd have dances and folk dances and, you know.

MRS. RASK: Competition.

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Competitive dancing? They had competitions for dancing?

RASK: Well, the folk dancing, yeah, more or less. Something.

LEVINE: Hmm.

RASK: In fact, Eleanor—or that doll there—she used to have a Danish costume on her.

MRS. RASK: Not today.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

RASK: But the Danish folk dancing costume she had is almost exactly the one she made for the doll.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you actually did enter into these folk dancing competitions?

RASK: Oh, yeah. And then there's a picture there of the—our gymnastic team. And they even went and—they even went to Denmark and had exhibitions.

LEVINE: Wow.

RASK: Yeah. And they did folk dancing. But [unclear] had these folk dancing festivals all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So when was it that the family started moving to Florida?

RASK: Well, that was during the war. My—the one that was a carpenter, he worked for a big construction company up in Chicago. And he was, like, a superintendent for them. So he decided to go to Florida. So

he was the first one to come. He built this house. He built about 40 houses in here.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: Yeah. And then—then my nephew, my oldest brother's son, he came down when I did. And he went in the building business too.

LEVINE: And then were you painting?

RASK: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Is that what you were doing when you came down? Uh-huh.

RASK: Yeah, when I had my own business I had about five people working for me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So some of the family stayed in Chicago but some of the family came down.

RASK: Yeah, my—my sisters, they stayed in Chicago. And my older—my one brother that's still there, he stayed there. They all were married and had families and stuff.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RASK: But then my older brother, when he retired he came down here.

LEVINE: Well, what do you think about you and your family immigrating here? Do you think it made a difference in the kind of people you are? Do you think that immigration experience sort of has somehow colored your life in any ways?

RASK: Well, I think they're all glad that they came from Denmark because my sister that stayed, she was there when they were occupying—Germans were occupying them, you know. See, they—the Prussians have been trying to take—they were always fighting over southern Denmark because part of it is Danish and part of it is German. And people—one of them speaks German. The other speaks Danish. So Germans will always—you know, if there's one German, why, they think they belong to Germany. That's the trouble with—that's how World War II more or less started. People don't understand. They think—they start talking about—I hear them talking all the time. "Well, when we grew"—in fact, the Danes have been fighting the Germans for hundreds of years over southern Denmark. In fact, my

grandfather—they had two wars and he fought in both of them. In 1848 and 1863 they fought the Germans.

LEVINE: Oh.

RASK: So they've been fighting back and forth all the time.

LEVINE: I see. So you have a real tradition in your family of fighting the Germans.

RASK: Well, that's [chuckles]—when we grew up in Denmark, when you talking about the Germans and the devil, they were like the same.

LEVINE: Wow.

RASK: I mean, that's just the way they felt, the Dane felt.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, we're just about finished with the tape. Is there anything that you'd like to say in closing?

RASK: No.

MRS. RASK: [unclear] happy you've been here.

RASK: Huh?

MRS. RASK: Tell them how happy you've been here.

RASK: Oh, yeah.

MRS. RASK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, this has been a wonderful interview and I want to thank you. I've been speaking with Knut Rask, who came in 1928 at the age of nine. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]