

KECK-122

DR. KAREN CHRISTIE

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INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT

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DENMARK, 1925

AGE 20

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett, and I'm speaking with Dr. Karen Christie on Thursday, January 16, 1986. We are beginning this interview at 10:15 AM. And we're about to Interview Dr. Christie about her immigration experience from Denmark in 1925. This is Interview Number 122 and it's the beginning of side one. Let's start back at the beginning of your story, and could you tell me where and when you were born?

CHRISTIE: I was born in Copenhagen, Heilus Trollesgade.

DALLETT: Can you help me to spell that?

CHRISTIE: Capital H-E-I-L-U-S. Capital T-R-O-L-L-E-S-G-, for George, A-D-E.  
I don't remember the number. But I was in, uh, the old part of Copenhagen.

DALLETT: And what year was that?

CHRISTIE: August 17th, 1904. I was a twin. My twin brother and I were born on that day. I was born first, five minutes ahead. My mother had uh, a little produce store. And, she had three other children at the time, three boys. A little girl used to come down there to the store and, uh, she never spoke, she always had everything written out. And my mother would ask her a question, would she, uh, yes or no. She never answered her. She just nodded her head or shake it. Since at my mother's house she was a little dumb, you know deaf. Not deaf, but dumb. Is that what my, what you call it when you have a, you can't talk?

DALLETT: Mute maybe? Dumb.

CHRISTIE: Mute. Well mute. maybe, is a better word, and when she had the twins, which is my brother and I, she spoke for the first time. She must have been about eleven or twelve years old. She said to my mother, "Can I see your babies?" And she brought us out, my twin brother had big black eyes and burly blonde hair, very beautiful ears, I remember. I don't remember from then, but, when we grew up. And he was very beautiful child and this, we were in swaddling clothes when she showed us. And she stood there and said, "That one is very pretty," meaning my brother, "But that one looks like a

monkey!" Because my mother said I used to have, screw up my face. And, of course, I had straight hair, small grey eyes and, uh, a nose that was crooked to begin with. (They laugh.) Because I always slept on my face. So, anyway, I used to hear that all my life. I had six brothers, then three brothers after that. And, uh, the two older brothers, John and Tom and George, are the three. They had all, two of them came to America, but they didn't come through Ellis Island. They skipped ship and stayed here. And my brother Carl had done the same thing and came back and, of course, he talked about America. And you'd think you should find gold in America, on the street of America, from the way everybody talked. And I remember my mother had a neighbor who had a son that came, uh, home from America with his wife who was very beautiful. And that time I was about four years old, I remember that so well, because this woman was so beautiful. And she, uh, was showing off, like, uh, (?) you know. And, landing there, it was, uh, when I was about, my brothers used to write to me. And when I was eighteen years old, my brother's brother-in-law. His wife's brother came to visit Denmark, and stopped off to see my mother, and I being the only girl at the time, I guess, was invited, he invited me to the theater and so on.

DALLETT: Was he American?

CHRISTIE: No he was Danish. He was home on a visit. And uh, while he was there, he buys a lottery ticket and wins a year's supply of food and, uh, clothing. And he sold to his father and mother, (she laughs), the, the auction of the food for so much money, he didn't give it to, and that, I was wondering. Well, anyway, when he went back to America, I could never get over that, He sold it to his parents. And he used to write to

me and I would write to him. It wasn't love letters, it was just, but then, of course, I, I was very much interested in going to America. So, I, I ended up with borrowing seventy dollars. American dollars. And that paid for steerage class. And at that time in 1925, you had to wait quite a little while to get, uh, uh, the quota system was being brought in to, as far as I can remember at that time, 1924, '25, because, uh, so many from each country could come. So, I had to wait into, February, and I believe it was February 9th. I sailed on the ship Hellip Olav. Holy Olav is the name of the ship. On the Scandinavian-American Line. And I think it, uh, was the 25th that I arrived here. It was the coldest day that we had in twenty-five years, in forty-five years, I was told.

DALLETT: Why, why were you so anxious to come to America, what--

CHRISTIE: Oh, naturally you were, you, uh, well I was always curious about things. See my twin brother was very amiable. He wouldn't go, he, he would, uh, go around a whole block to avoid a confrontation. Me, I would wade right in. Used to the kid down the street and he always, I always fought, uh, uh, battles for my three younger brothers, they were four years difference and five years difference except five minutes between my twin brother and I but my brothers were very amiable, they wanted this, uh, what do you call it? Anyway I would wade in where angels feared to tread, I was always told that. But I guess it was because uh, uh, I remember my younger brother used to say to me, "Karen, if I was as ugly in my hiney as you are in your face, I'd be ashamed to go to the toilet." (Dallett laughs.) Can you imagine? Uh? And, uh, my only reply was, "Well I, I am not lucky I'm behind my face, I don't have to look at it." (Dallett laughs.) So, that's one

consolation anyway.

DALLETT: Do you remember what kinds of things you had been told about America that led you to believe you were going to have to leave home and go do rather than live your life out in Denmark?

CHRISTIE: Well, I was, see, I wanted to be a cabinet maker. When I was, uh, fourteen years old, we all learn a trade. And, uh, my brother, twin brother, had a flair for dress design. He, my mother was a tailor. And, uh, he could take a piece of material, drape it on somebody, friends used to come, and he would slash it here, there and pin it together and go home and baste it. He wouldn't sew. He'd just, uh, design it, no matter what kind of a pattern it was. But my, I wanted to be a cabinet maker. My twin brother couldn't hit the head of a nail if it was as big as a barn door, but I always loved to make things with my hands. And there was, uh, a woman that was the, uh, Leverandor, they called it, to the royal palace. She made all the furniture for them. I used to stand outside and look through the windows and see this woman going through there. Because anything that was made out of wood I was fascinated. But, of course, in those days, in 1916, you couldn't be a, no, I was born 1904, that would be 1918, you wouldn't be a, a girl couldn't be a carpenter. Never heard of such a thing. A boy couldn't be a dress designer.

DALLETT: What was it you were going to have to be? What--

CHRISTIE: So we ended up learning to make cigars. And I spent four years

learning to make cigars. And the year and a half after that, see, I finished at eighteen and, and when I was, two years later. But I was always going to be fired the day I finished my course, because I was always optimistic. But he kept me anyway. So I decided to go to America because my brothers wrote to me. You know, I would hear, you read about America, I read uh, all these stories about Nat Pinkerton and the Indians, the Wild West and all that stuff.

DALLETT: Did your parents encourage you?

CHRISTIE: Huh?

DALLETT: Did your parents encourage you to go?

CHRISTIE: I only have my mother, (she coughs), well, she didn't stand against them. I presume she thought that I was going to marry this man, my brother-in-law's, my sister-in-law's brother. But, uh, I've seen my mother, I saw my mother struggle with six, seven children alone, that wasn't for me. Absolutely not. So I, when I came here, I paid him off. And he, he made double his money in, in a very short time, because I came and, well, when the morning we came in, no it was evening, and somebody said--. Or maybe I should tell you, then, when I got on board the ship, I had a cabin with, uh, a mother and her daughter. And the mother promptly got seasick, just the thought of going on the sea. So she laid down and I had been up all night saying goodbye to people and all this stuff and I was tired. I went upstairs and sat in the third class salon, they call it. And, uh,

with this girl, a young woman. She must have been my age. And I was, I had sort of rested my head on the table because I was sleepy. And I heard a voice saying to, uh, (She clears throat), excuse me, saying to this, uh, girl, "Would you be interested in taking care of two children up on first class?" And she said no, she couldn't, because she had her mother downstairs in the cabin. So I piped up and I said, "Oh, I'll, I can do that." And she looked at me and she said, "Oh no. You're too young." I said, "Too young? I'm twenty years old!" I think my brother's-- "Oh," she said, "All right. All right. You sure don't look twenty." She didn't think I was twenty years old. So I got up there on the first class and I had the two, this woman had two children. Two, three, really, a boy twelve. But I didn't have anything to do with him. He was left to himself. And she used to sleep during the day because she was, uh, carousing around at night. And she was sleeping during the day and I had to take care of these kids. And up on first class they had this beautiful blue, uh, brocade on the seats. And that one kid, she used to wet her pants and she'd sit down, and a couple of times somebody came and said, "Do you know what your little girl did?" And I saw it happen, and I said, "You have to tell me when you have to go." So the second time it happened I just took her down to the cabin because I remembered that my mother, we had a dog, and we had a little house in Denmark, a garden house. And we had a dog, and that dog had I killed chicken. So my mother took the dead chicken, put kerosene, and hung it around the dog's neck. So I thought, "Well, if I take her panties and put them around her neck and she had to smell it, maybe she'll stop peeing in her pants." (Ms. Dallett laughs.) So that's what I did. I sat her and I just tied her hands with a handkerchief behind her back so she couldn't take it off and then I said, "Now you're just gonna sit there with that on." And I piled them around, took the legs and

put them around her neck and I said, "You can smell that. That's how smell to other people." And that she didn't do it any more. It helped, because she knows, then she'd come and tell me. So while traveling there on the first class, there was a very nice man. And he used to talk to the children and he also spoke to me, and I would be writing letters while we were playing. Then he said to me, uh, "I want you to, uh, write your name down here." And I wrote my name. And he sat and looked at it, and he said, uh, "You know, my name is Christianson, too." So he saw, and he said, "You have a very nice hand writing. You will go far." And we used to sit and talk. Then finally come the day when we, the night before we landed in the morning in Hoboken, New Jersey, as we come sailing in, uh, he said, "Karen, do you want to go up and see the Statue of Liberty?" And I said, "Yes." We came up there and there was the lady standing with the lamp, the lamp was lit then, and, uh, I remember he took off. He had a cap on and he saluted her and he threw the cap up in the air and it flew over the railing into the water. And he said, "Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm so glad to see her." And, of course, to me it was just a statue, you know. So then, uh, we landed in Hoboken, and it was five o'clock in the morning, and we came around to, I think the, what they call (?) North. And they piled us out. We had to, the doctors looking. Of course, I was very healthy because I stayed up on first class and ate first class food. All the steerage class looked so sick, but I was among them.

DALLETT: How many days had it taken?

CHRISTIE: Nine days. Yeah. And, uh, they looked so sick from third class.

Oh, it was dismal down there in the hull of the ship.

DALLETT:       What was it like down there? The only time you really went down was just at the end, because during the whole trip--

CHRISTIE:       Just that day, the day we arrived, and then we go down to collect my bag and I almost forgot that. So I remember they said when they looked at me, "How come you look so fresh? Everybody else look half dead." To that extent, you know. And, uh, I said, "Well, I was traveling first class." So then they wanted to know why I was there and I told him. So I got a dollar a day. It must have been fourteen days, because I got-- Was it -- No-- Yes , it was fourteen days, not nine days. Two weeks. And, uh, because I had thirty-nine dollars the, all together. And--

DALLETT;        So did they let the first class passengers leave?

CHRISTIE:       Oh, well, the first class passengers, we were poured out on the pier.

DALLETT:        And this is in Hoboken, not Ellis Island.

CHRISTIE:       In Hoboken. Uh-huh. And we were standing there, with just our suitcases, and then a guy came around looking at the suitcase, gestured that you should open. And I had gone ashore and forgotten my pocketbook, and I realized that. And I

wanted to go back on board again, and the guy, the guard there, didn't want me to go on board. And he didn't understand Danish, and I didn't understand English, and he held his hands across the gangway, that I couldn't go back. And I said to him, in Danish, "But I'm, I forgot my pocketbook." And he wouldn't let go, see. So I hit him on the arm. And he took the arm away, and I stormed up and ran down and got my pocketbook. It was fortunately underneath the mattress. And then I came back down and I showed him, see, that, uh, that was what I went for and he seemed to indicate he wanted some money. And I didn't have anything but Danish kroner, you know. I didn't have dollar bills. And how much was a Danish crown? Twenty-five cents. And he said, "No, no, more." You know, he, he pointed out. And I, and ran off to my suitcase. And I was standing over there. So when this guy came around to look at the, uh, suitcase, the inspector, he opened it up and laid it out and it was one of these things, it was like an accordion. On each side you could, it would expand. The more you put in the bigger it grew. And, of course, I had it filled to capacity. So he started through this thing to see if there was anything. And when he finished, I had these two big bundles on each side and I had to take off my glove and, gloves and , uh, fold it all up. And, oh, I was so cold. There was no place to sit or lay down or sleep or lay your suitcase on and you were kneeling on the ground. Anyway, he marked it, and he marked it up on the top, you know, when it was standing up. He just went down and he went like that. So after I finished I was tired, I sat down, and I had, uh, a scotch plaid suit that my mother had made with a long coat, you know, an overcoat. It was a three piece suit. And I sat down because I was tired. And the next thing another guy comes along and he's going to look at the suitcase. He told me to get up. I got up, and he told me to open it, and I said, "Nay. I'm not gong to open it again." And I tried to

explain to him, I'm explaining in Danish that it had already been inspected. And he wasn't going to take any guff from me. He told me I had to open it, and I said, "No, no." And I start looking for this, this, uh, chalk mark that the other man had put on. And then I looked on the back of my skirt and I realized it was chalk mark, and it was sitting on the back of my skirt. So I pointed to him, and he took it up differently. He thought I was telling him to do something else when I pointed on my back end. And I saw this man, Mr. Christianson, he called to me, and he said, "Well, goodbye, Karen," in Danish. And I said, "Oh, wait a minute. Wait a minute." I said, "Explain to him that it had already been looked at and that, that mark is on my seat." So he did and he roared, he laughed and the guy was so mad. I thought he was going to have apoplexy or a stroke. I almost got sent back. So then after that there was a whistle blown and that was, uh, the ferry at the end of the pier that was going to Ellis Island. And I grabbed my suitcase and followed everybody else. And my suitcase was very hard and I'm not very tall, so-- A man came along, a tall man. I never saw such long legs in my life. He, he grabbed the suitcase, and I was running like I was a little pony alongside him. Because he had such long legs, that's what, gee, I couldn't keep up with him. So when we got to the ferry he wanted to leave the bag down on the first deck. And I said no. I wanted to go upstairs. There were two decks. So I did. And, uh, he was nice enough to bring the suitcase up there. And while I was standing at the railing looking, we were going away from the pier, there was a man standing a little further down. a short guy, and he had a black suit on and a white collar, a strip of a collar, like. And he had a dark hat on, like a, uh, with a brim. Gee, I remember. And he had such black, piercing eyes. And he, he was standing watching me and he kept, he came up and, uh, he said in, uh, he looked at, you had a thing on where

the, where you came from, you know, Denmark. And he said to me, uh, "Oh, you come from Copenhagen, Denmark." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Where are you going?" And I told him, "Plainfield, New Jersey." Because I couldn't say "J". I didn't know you pronounce it that was in English. So he said, uh, "You got any family?" And I said, "Yeah. My brother." And he said, "Oh, he knows you're coming?" And I said, "Yes." He said, uh, "Wouldn't you like to go to Kentucky?" And I said, "Kentucky? Kentusky?" You know. that's how we pronounce it in Danish. And, uh he said, "Yes." And I said, "No, my brother he comes." "Well, maybe your brother won't come." Some idle conversation, but I didn't like him, so I walked away. And, uh, I saw there was benches all along the railing where you could sit down, but it was all packed up. And I said to myself, "I have to get away from him." There was a little space between the lady and someone else. And I went through and I said, "Can I sit down here?" And she said, "Oh, sure." And moved a little, and so did the other person. I sat down. I said to her, "You know, see that man there? He wanted to now if I'd go to Kentusky." "Oh, he's a Mormon." And, uh, she said, "He's bringing, see if he can find anybody, and bring them." And, of course, I had read about white slavery, you know. So I said, "Oh, he's a white slaver?" And. and she said, "I don't know." And she just smiled. So after--

DALLETT: Hold on a second. Sorry, we just have to-- Uh, that's the end of side one of Interview Number 122 with Karen Christie.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of Interview Number 122 with Dr. Karen Christie.

CHRISTIE: So anyway, uh, we came into some place. There was a big, big, like a, I don't know if they had quonset huts that time.

DALLETT: On Ellis Island?

CHRISTIE: Yeah. I don't know if the, the, what it was. Well, it was a big, big open, you know, it wasn't rooms. There were windows up on the end, and you saw some people standing up there in uniforms. And we were all piled in there. Women, children. All females.

DALLETT: Now, was this next to the, the big building, when you came in from the ferry?

CHRISTIE: Well, when we came in from the ferry we just, uh, we walked in and that's, that's where we walked in.

DALLETT: So not to the big building that had a canopy? No.

CHRISTIE: No, not that I can remember.

DALLETT: Something separate from that.

CHRISTIE: It was like, uh, uh, I don't know. It was like a big, big, long hall. But it did have windows. I remember the windows, and where the people were standing at the desks. And then we were told to take off our clothes, but there was no place to put your clothes. So I didn't take mine off. And I was the only one standing there with clothes on. And this woman came down, she was in an Army uniform with a brown belt, very nice, and she spoke to me and asked me why I hadn't disrobed.

DALLETT: In, English, did she speak?

CHRISTIE: In Danish.

DALLETT: She spoke in Danish?

CHRISTIE: Yes. She saw and she could talk Danish. So she said, "What's wrong? Are you scared?" I said, "yes. And my mother just made this suit. I'm not going to put it on the ground." So she, I was the first one then. She took me up and, uh, they looked at me and looked at whatever paper and marked me, and I was told to go to a door. So I went through this door into

another hall, and there was a lot, a lot of chairs, and there was a woman sitting typewriting. So in the middle of this hall, I went up to the left. There was nobody else. And then there was man sitting up at the high desk. He was sitting on a high chair, one of these standing desks. And, uh, I went, I was told to go and see him. And I went over there. And he turned and called out to this woman, and she got and went out. She was sort of mid-ways in this big hall. And then I would say the desk was maybe here in comparison to where the door at the end of this hall was. And he turned around on the chair and he was exposed. So, despite the fact of six brothers, that was my first introduction to an adult penis. And he got off, and he walked over toward me and I said, "Nay, nay." And I don't know what he would have done, but the woman came back. So instead of, uh, uh, turning around and walking back, he just backed up to the chair and got on the chair again. And then he signed my paper. So then I went out and there was like a big space. Maybe that was the main hall. And everybody was sitting. We all, as people, came out, had been, we sat down. And we waited and waited. This started at five o'clock in the morning. And we were sitting there and, oh, for a long, long, long time before everybody was sent through what I had just gone through.

DALLETT: Did they feed you?

CHRISTIE: No. Feed you? What are you talking about? We just sat there and they called you, they would call out names, and then the guy would go around. Of course, they all psi-pronounced all the times, and you didn't know it was your name. And they would go and look at the cardboard you had on.

DALLETT: Did they put you through a medical examination, though, even though you refused to take your clothes off, but they, did they do any medical exam?

CHRISTIE: Yes, oh yes. She just looked at my eyes. I looked healthy, you know. I was healthy. So they just passed me through. I didn't take my clothes off. Anyway, she marked the paper and sent me through. Anyway, the, uh, out there is where you had to answer to your name. So I had left my suitcase. This, uh, woman, that came and got me with the brown belt, she said, "Leave your suitcase here and come back for it later instead of dragging it around with you." Which I did. And out there where we were sitting in this, uh, crescent shaped, it was like a crescent row of uh, seats, I went around, and that 's where we paid eight dollars head tax. That was called head tax. And, uh, then we were told to go down and I remember we got and walked down like an incline. Quite a little walk. And there was one fellow ahead of me, a young fellow. I think he was a Jewish boy because, uh, he looked Jewish. We remember, you know, we had Danish Jewish people, but he looked like a Jewish boy, young man. He might have been, uh, oh, maybe seventeen, eighteen, maybe older, I don't know. But he had two suitcases, and he was, uh, hunched,

sort of, over a little bit, and carrying them. They were heavy. I didn't have anything, I was just walking along. And between him and me, was a man, a big man, in a uniform. In a dark uniform. And the boy set down the two suitcases to change them over, uh, one might have been heavier than the other. And as he set them down, this big guy comes, and he puts his foot in his rear end and kicked him. Picked up the two bags and swung them and then he sent them down this incline and he went up against the wall. And, I remember one bust open. They weren't very expensive, the suitcases. And I just looked at this fellow, man. He, he laughed, went on his way, was a big guy. And, uh, then he got in, in to an enclosure, I would say maybe as big as this space here. We were in one that was there, and I got a space where there was, uh, wire fencing, high wire fence. And you just stood, right out you could see, uh, where they were sitting with their backs to you at desks. And whoever came to the desk would be facing, whoever was in this enclosure. And I was standing there, hanging on to the wire so you wouldn't twist around. God, we were like sardines. And all of a sudden I saw, remember, I hadn't seen any brothers. I saw a man standing in front. I remember that the man sitting at the desk was a very big, black, man. But he was very sweet, very nice. Which I found out afterwards, but, he was so big and he was talking to this other man, and I looked and my brother turned and I saw the profile of my mother. And I yelled, "Hey John!" And he looked, then he knew it was me. And then he pointed to the man and the man turned around and he looked and he smiled. And then he said I could come out. So I got out of there and then we got expedited from there and I told my brother my suitcase, I had to go back to where we got the suitcase. And then he looked at the, at his watch and he said, "Gee, it's almost six o'clock." About six o'clock in the evening. It's eleven hours, twelve hours later, you know. And, uh, and he said we have to

hurry because that's the last ferry. Or else we have to stay here. And he grabbed his suitcase and he was running with it on his shoulder and I was running along. We got to the ferry and they had just started out. It had just, there was maybe a space like that. And he said, "Can you jump?" And I said, "Yeah." And I jumped and he threw the suitcase over and he jumped. It all happened very fast. And, uh, by the time we got on we were this far from the water. So we were pretty close, you know. So, the guard came and he bawled out my brother, you know. Said something in English, I don't know, but I heard my brother say, "Oh, shut up." You know, and I was so proud that somebody, because I still had in mind, these guys that I had seen, you know, in there. How they were pushing around, people around. Anyway, we got over to, uh, Manhattan, here. That's where the ferry end, uh, stopped. And, I met my other brother, whom I hadn't seen for many years. My next oldest brother, George. John is the one that came over to Ellis Island. And, he had a Village Knight car. Very easy, they had new side curtains on. It was a convertible, and no, no window in the back and it was cold. So the three of us are sitting in the front and we had to go to North Plainfield, New Jersey, which was twenty-seven miles from New York, I found out later on. And, it seemed that we would go forward three and slide back two steps. Because the tires, you know, we didn't have snow tires in those days, and all that stuff. And I remember, uh, we stopped for a light, uh, why, why we stopped, but there was a store where I saw that they served food. Like, uh, you know, one of those that had candy and the, uh, maybe hot dogs, and things like that. And I said to my brother, "Gee, I'm so hungry." Uh, you hadn't eaten all day. And he said, "Oh, okay." I was in the middle, so he jumped out and he came back with two bars of Peak chocolate. I'll never forget, it was coconut. That was the first thing I ate in America. Peak chocolate bar. So on every

February 9th, uh, whatever date, was the twenty-fifth, I, uh, yeah. I used to buy two Peaks. They sell, they don't sell them anymore so I can't celebrate it. But, uh, just in (?). Then I got here and I stayed with my brother. and he registered me in, oh, uh, we got home around 12:30 at night. And, of course, before I opened up the suitcase, give my, my mother had sent to my brothers and my sister-in law made some coffee and sandwiches. My brothers decided we should play cards. So we played a game sixty-six. Into the following day, I just sat there and played cards, it was ridiculous. And I fell off the chair so they decided maybe I should sleep. So I did. I slept. My sister-in-law thought I had died, because I was, didn't move. (They laugh.) But after that he registered me in, uh, Swedish Agency for house, he thought I should, uh, work in a house. And I was with my brother for about, I think a week or two weeks and then I got this job, uh, uh, Mrs. C.L. Riley. Mrs. Riley, L. Riley, Hilltop North, Plainfield, New Jersey. And I was, uh, at the same time they hired a cook, Margaret Beal. And she was in her seventies. And this, uh, kitchen was a big kitchen. And then there was a pantry and, of course, the dining room and your, the living room downstairs. And there were, in the dining room, these windows. These small windows, you know, little squares. There were ninety four of them. I had to wipe them off every morning, before breakfast, on the inside. Anyway, it's the, uh, I swore that if I ever built a house I make it with windows round so there wouldn't be any corners to clean. That's the worst job. Stand there and clean all those corners.

DALLETT: Did you live there or were you still--

CHRISTIE: Yeah, no, I was, I was hired. She wanted me, you slept under,

under the roof. You had a small room up there. And they made the roof with just a bed and, uh, bureau and your suit, uh, your suitcase or your trunk. And, uh--

DALLETT: Did she speak Danish or did you have to learn English at that point?

CHRISTIE: No, I had to learn English. So, Margaret Beal, I never worked in private. We had, uh, four burner kerosene stove and a regular coal stove. So, Margaret's work was to cook. And, of course, she should have taken care of the kitchen and all that stuff. But I used to feel sorry for her, so when I washed the floor in the, in the pantry, I would wash the floor in the kitchen and I used to take out the ashes of the stove and all that stuff for her because I was taught to respect older people, you know. But Margaret was Plymouth English and if you ever heard somebody from Plymouth talk English, they stick their tongue out of their mouth. And they put the H's in the wrong place, "Heggs and Am" instead of ham and eggs. And, I remember writing home saying, "I'll never learn this language because you have to stick your tongue out of your mouth to talk it." Because, uh, thee, see if I ever thong this, you know. And, of course, we, it was very hard so you, we had to talk with our hands. But she was very mean, this lady was very mean. Really mean. No matter what you did for her. So I remember, one time, she asked me to go and look for, I had just shelled, it wasn't really my work, but she pushed a lot of work over on me that I had to shell all the, uh, peas. And I had this big bowl of peas and, and we, we're going to have a guest, I think, that she was preparing for. And the grapefruit was cut in baskets and all the, the, uh, pieces were inside there and there was all sitting, there was

one room as big as half of this room, that was what you called the freezer room. And where there were refrigerators. And she had this in the, uh, she told me to get parsley. And I, I understood, I was supposed to go and get the parsley. And I didn't know what parsley was but I thought maybe if I see it I'll recognize it. And I'm out there looking into the refrigerator, I can't find the parsley. I didn't know what the hell I was looking for. But, anyway, she came out, it took too long, and she came and the next thing, this whole bowl of peas came sailing by, and so did the tray with the grapefruit. She was so furious she just pulled it out and threw it on the floor. Then I stood there, and every time she threw something I ducked, because I was going to find out what parsley was, you know. And then she comes out with this little green bunch of parsley. So I never forgot parsley. Anyway, uh, this went on, she was very mean. She would, uh, be at farm and you would have that much milk in the glass, and she would pour water in it. For me, I had to eat outside, you know. And she found a little squirming kitting, kitten. And she used to let it run all over and, uh, on top of the table where you ate and I came out one day and the cat was lapping up this soup from my plate. And I didn't want to eat it and she wanted me to eat it and I said, "No! I'm not going to eat it." And I remember it was, uh, cream of corn, I never tasted corn soup anyway, I didn't like the smell of it. But the cat was licking it up so anyway I didn't want it. So anyhow, she was very mean and she wouldn't give me enough to eat, you know. Because she would wash up while I served inside. See I was the waitress and I was the, uh, parlor maiden, everything. So, we had the, three, three boys and one girl that would come home from college. He had one boy that was home all the time, Dicky Bird. Dicky Bird, he was a nice kid. I almost drowned him. (they laugh.) In the sink. Because he was mean. He, uh, loved to play tricks with another kid, with Dr.

Clancey's boy. He would come up there, Howard, Howard Clancey, and he, and he would, uh, play tricks. So one day I got mad and I stuck his, I just washed all the dishes, and they came out in the pantry. And I took him and I, he wasn't a very big boy and he was light built, he was only about eleven or twelve, and I just grabbed him by the waist of his pants and his back, and I stuck his neck, head into the sink. Almost drowned him. But anyway, the, uh, he never bothered me again after that. The, uh, Mrs., after six months she had to let Margaret Beal go because it was impossible. What she did. and Mrs. Riley thought that because I came from Denmark I would, I could make butter and all this and that. So they had this farm and they used to bring up all the cream. You know the milk and the cream and you had to skim the cream off. And she showed me how to put in, you put in, uh, in a gallon, I think that maybe held two gallons. And there would be a gallon of cream in there and you, and she told me, "Fourteen three-quarter minutes." You just kept sitting, pulling this around. And the day that, the reason I tell you that is because the day that Margaret Beal was fired, she became impossible, so, the madam fired her. Too green, too wise, ridiculous. She fired her and, uh, Margaret went up and put on and she came downstairs. I was sitting on top of the sink in the pantry churning this butter thing and Margaret came down, she has a, a voile dress, I don't know if you know what voile is. This is very transparent, and she had one of these, uh, slips underneath, uh, we call it voile, it, it, uh, changes color. What, what do you call that material that changes color like that? Well, when you looked at it underneath, the, the voile, through the voile, it was like rainbow colors. I know the word in English but I can't, uh, it will come to me. Anyway, she, uh, came and she had a hat on with a veil that came half way down from the, and a lot of flowers on it. The whole Botanical Gardens. Standing there, it was very

pretty, I suppose. And she's standing in front of me making faces. She's mad because she has to leave, you know. And I just tried to ignore her. And I kept turning this and it was fourteen three-quarters of a minute. It separated, now I had to strain it. So I had this bowl with a piece of cheesecloth. And you poured the butter in and the water runs, the milk runs down, off. And then you stick it into, the bowl of fat, you stick it into ice water to wash off the remainder of the milk or cream, whatever you call, buttermilk. So, just as I was turned it up, she moves the bowl, and this whole blob of fat falls on top of the sink. And I just took one look at it and I scooped it up and I slammed it right in here face. And it went all over her. Whole Botanical Garden and her hat and her face, her, her, veil and he face and she screamed. And when she was screaming, the door opened from the dining room, and Mrs. Riley looked and she runs back in. She didn't say a word, she went back in, she must have thought there was going to be a bloody battle, uh, she was scared or something because then Mr. Riley came out. And he had a full beard, and I remember looking at him and I could see by the wrinkle of his eyes that he was very much amused by the picture he saw. And he just, uh, grabbed a dish towel and he wiped her face off, and took most of, he didn't even allow her to, to go up and change. Stuck her in the car and took her downtown, wherever it was she was going. But I never, but Mrs. Riley her blessed butter was wasted. She was so stingy. So, she, I was getting forty, forty-five a month and I worked from four o'clock in the morning to ten o'clock at night before you turned down all the beds and all that stuff. Talk about slavery. So, anyway, I stayed there and worked, and worked, and worked, and worked. Because I was afraid that my brother, if I wanted to quit, would say I was lazy, you know.

DALLETT; Uh, plus you had, you had to repay your, your debts, right?

CHRISTIE: Yeah, yeah. Which I did. I paid double. I paid, uh, uh, I sent so much every, and by that time and he wanted it in Danish money. And see when he bought them it only cost you, the, the Danish kroner were very low. So he paid only seventy dollars. By the time I paid him back it was one hundred forty. He mad twice the money. Can you imagine if I had married that guy? (They laugh.) So, anyway, but I found out afterwards that my brothers told me that Axel, that was his name, he was so stingy. That, uh, whenever he went out, he'd always get on last, on the bus, so they would pay the fare, you know. When they went in and he would visit all his sisters, he had six of them, every Sunday so he wouldn't have eat, pay for dinner and all that nonsense. Anyway--

DALLETT: Do you remember back, back when you were working for this family, did you, did you think you had made a mistake to come and, and work so hard or were you pleased with what you saw in New Jersey and life in America?

CHRISTIE: Oh, no. Well, well, of course, I worked very hard but I was young and I could take it and then if the, uh, the people went away on vacation and the only, uh, reason I, I, uh, stayed was because simply I didn't want anybody to, well you were more or less afraid, because you don't talk the language completely and so on.

DALLETT: And were you picking it up by, by working in this house?

Yeah.

CHRISTIE: Oh, yes. I was, well, then after Margaret left, we had fourteen cooks in two months. And in between, I would be cooking. And if he had guests, they would hire Mrs. Hickey who was over at that, uh, Washington Rock Park Tea House.

DALLETT: That the end of side two, and--

END OF SIDE TWO

BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

DALLETT: This is the beginning of tape two, of Interview Number 122, with Karen Christie, side one.

CHRISTIE: Where was I?

DALLETT: Where were we? Oh, you had the fourteen cooks that were working there.

CHRISTIE: Yeah, there was all these cooks, come there, and it was way up in the woods. And there was particularly, we had a Seventh Day Advent Baptist. She was, uh,

very strange woman, she stayed one day. Then we had, the one I, oh, we had so many in, uh, fourteen in two, two, uh, months, who came and went. But there was on particular one, uh, she happened to come on my birthday. And she went from one window, she looked out and she saw the woods, and she said, "Glory be to God isn't it lonesome her?" Her name was Riley too, she was Irish. And then she went to the other window and she looked and said, "Glory be to God, isn't lonesome here?" I don't know what she expected to see from side of the house to the other, be sitting on top of a mountain. And she went to the third window and she said, "Glory be to God, isn't it lonesome here?" So I was going off, it was my birthday, it was my day off, and I, uh, left and that, uh, see, I would get off at ten o'clock in the morning and had to be back again at ten o'clock. We got twelve hours off every week. And then to boot we had every other Sunday. But you never went until after dinner on Sunday. Which was two, three o'clock. You had to be home at ten. So, anyway, that night I came home, and when you walked up into the kitchen, you're going to the back hall and go up a flight of stairs. But you always had to come back down if you turned on the light, so you got used to it. So I walked up in the dark and the next thing I felt something on my foot. And I thought, "Oh, my God, what's that?" And I pulled out my foot of it, and turned on, got up to the hall and here I see my right foot all covered with my birthday cake. This cook had left a birthday cake on the stairs and if I'd turned on the light I would have seen it. She had baked the cake and I planted my foot right in it. So when I got upstairs, uh, see when I came in with the farmer, at ten o'clock, who came to get me downtown with my brother, at my brother's place, uh, I saw a taxi cab leaving the house. The people were away. And, uh, they were out for the evening, or something. Because there was nobody home but just the cook. The kids were at college so Mr. and Mrs.

Riley were out. And I saw this taxi cab leaving, so when I went upstairs and I said to her, "Are you awake?" and she said, "Yeah, I'm awake," and she's drunk as the Lord. And I said, "Why did you put the cake on the steps? I stepped in it." Oh, she said, "Isn't that too bad, that was your birthday cake." But she was, she's very nice, but what had happened was that she called downtown for a case of beer and she had drank it. The whole darn case was standing there all the beer bottles were there. And then she was drunk as the Lord. And so she, she only left, lasted that one day. So, I don't know, oh, yes, then the, the madam and the husband were going to Europe. They were going to take a long trip. So they rented out the house for the summer. And, uh, Miss, Mrs. Simmons and her daughter came to live there. And the daughter was an artist. And they were very, very nice people. And I remember Dorothy Simmons, uh, use to draw all these pictures and I used to go over and watch her and they were not, oh, they were very nice, they took me along and, uh, Mrs. Simmons' sister came, Mrs. Whitmore, and she stayed with them for a month. And I remember, I was pulling out a drawer, they always slept, the two ladies slept with their caps on their heads. Uh, I served them breakfast, they had these head, caps, fancy caps on, with ribbons. And, I always wondered why. And then I found out they were both bald. And the drawers were full of wigs, all kinds of wigs, you know, drawers full of them. But they were nice people. And, uh, they treated me so nice, not at all like the Riley's did. Uh, I never told you what the Riley's did, pshhht. It would take years. Anyway, the, uh, when they, after they had been there for that month, uh, three months, then I, they had gone to see, Mr. and Mrs. Riley had gone to see my mother in Denmark. And naturally when the Simmons's left I prepared the house for them. Set flowers around. I worked like a horse to get everything just so. And I was sitting in the kitchen waiting for them, I heard them

come in. You didn't, he didn't ring the bell he just opened the door and came in through the front door, you didn't have to go and open the door when anybody came. So I was sitting in the kitchen waiting, because I'm, my mother had said that she had, he had something for me that she had sent with them. And the, this was three o'clock in the afternoon, they arrived. And they never came out, never said anything about how nice the house looked. I had put flowers all over and so on. And I was sitting there and I was getting madder by the minute. And around six thirty she comes out to tell me what they're going to have for dinner. And I remember, one of the things she was going to have was, the, two things, scrambled eggs and scalloped tomato, uh, potatoes. So I said, "Well, that's what you want for dinner?" By that time I had learned a lot more English. I said, "You make it, because I'm quitting." And they were surprised, she was surprised. Then she came and, no, I went down to the farmers and I said I was quitting. And then she came and she talked with the farmer because I didn't take anything with me. And then Jimmy said, uh, Mrs. Riley wants you to come up to the house." I came up there and she said, "Well you know, we have this for you from your mother," and she said, "Why did you act that way?" And I said, "Well you were home, here for three, since three o'clock and you never even came out and give it to me. And you didn't tell me anything about the house was nice." So I said, "I got mad, I wasn't going to cook dinner." So she apologized. Well one night, it was, I decided to take a walk over to Mrs. Hickey. Which was over at the Washington Walk Tea House. And when, after I got there, a storm broke out. Now I had to go down one mountain and go up the other and probably a half hours walk through the woods. Well, Mrs. Hickey was afraid to let me go back because it was thunder and lightening. And she gets on the phone to call Mrs. Riley and tell her that I'm over there and she's not going to send

me back until morning, or at least 'til the rain stopped. And, when, when she was on the phone, the lightening struck the phone, and she was knocked on the (?), and the, uh, phone went out of commission. So she couldn't get in touch with Mrs. Riley. Well I got up at four o'clock, and started home. So when you come from the woods, I had the high boots on and I had only unlaced them. And I knew I, I had to be in, you know, quick, and I had unlaced my shirt and, uh, unbuttoned it, and I'm walking into the kitchen and the madam sees me half undressed. So she said something. Now at that time, she showed the picture with me, with, uh, Janet Gaynor and Farrell. And they was, uh, can't remember his first name, but the actor that played with, uh, Farrell. Uh, was, uh, "Street Angel." The name, and my brother had told me what Street Angel meant. So, I, she tells me, sees me half undressed, because I was going to change very fast, and, she grabs me by the hand, runs me upstairs, into the boys room, the boy, Eddie's room, Eddie wasn't there, they were in college. And she sits me down and starts lecturing me. That she can't have a girl that stays out and comes in like this and all this and referring as if I had been out doing God knows what. And I stood and looked at here and I just say, said to her, "Me, no Street Angel. My mother trusts me." I got angry, see. So, she said, "All right, all right." And she went downstairs. Now, in those days they had a toaster that you had flapped it down manually. And then it would turn over, then when you would flapped it back the toast would turn. And you had to stand there and make her toast. She was going to New York and I had to serve her breakfast. So, I'm standing there making this, so, uh, she said to me, see I wasn't home, and she expected to go to New York. I didn't know that she was going to go. And she had left a note on this string of the light in the kitchen. But I never turned on the light in the kitchen. But, so by the time I got there she was already up.

And, I didn't know that, uh, I would had been home earlier if I had known. So, she didn't consider anything, that it had rained or anything. So she wouldn't take anything for an excuse anyway. So, she, uh, said, "I bought you, your time is my time. I bought you for forty-five dollars a month." And that kept ringing through my head, she bought me, she bought me. I'm not a slave. And I'm standing there making this toast, she wanting this toast for her, and I said to her. "Ust one minute." I couldn't say just, then. I said, "Ust one minute." And I ran upstairs, and I got a penny., And I came down and I laid the penny in front of her and I said, "You see, Abraham Lincoln, no more slaves, I quit." And I ran upstairs again. So she came upstairs. She was worried that I was going to quit. I was doing the work for three people. And she, uh, brought in, it was a little while, she, she never did go to New York that day. She brought me, uh, facsimile of the letter that Lincoln wrote to Mrs. Bixby, the one had six sons that died in the Revolutionary War. And then a copy, I still, I have it out in my house in Long Island, a copy of the, uh, what do you call it, Constitution of America, Bill of Rights. So, these two, someday I was going to frame it, you know. And then she told me that she would send me to school, I shouldn't quit, that she'd send me to school, and I should learn English, and she raised my salary ten dollars. To fifty dollars. So, I began to think I had a little power, you know. So every Monday I quit. And every Monday I quit, I got ten dollars raise. So, uh, for in July, I earned uh, seventy-five dollars a month. And then I decided to leave. That was after two and a half years. So then I went, then I got to work for a, I took vacation for quite a long time. I went to see Mrs. Dickey's, uh, relatives. I went with her to Pennsylvania and met a lot of people. And then I came back, my brother was the superintendent of number one Lexington Avenue. And there was the president of the Grace

Line, W. R. Grace. He lived on the eleventh floor. They lived on the eleventh floor. And they needed a maid and I started working for them. And I was with them for six and a half years. And then into 1931, 32, 1933, I went and worked on the Grace Line, I worked there for six years until, I worked there until, uh, we got off the ship because of the World War. And then I came out, and then I worked briefly in a Hotel Paramount, that's in Maine, for about a week and a half. Because the couldn't, you see, you had twenty rooms to keep there, to make up the beds, and I used to do cleaning, you know. So everything was so filthy in that hotel. And this, I started, thought I started this apartment. There was one room and a bathroom. And I really, I thought when you cleaned, you cleaned, you know. And I was in there all day, I washed the walls and everything. And the, nobody could find me, I was in this one apartment. And the housekeeper was looking for me, uh, everybody was complaining, nobody had made up their beds, there was twenty rooms to be made up. But I didn't know. I thought you cleaned, you cleaned. Oh, I was stupid. Anyway, the, uh, the woman that had that room, she was so pleased. She came home and she found the room clean. She said, "You have a houseman that does this work, you don't do this kind of thing." So, anyway, the housekeeper said, "Look, you don't belong here," she said, "For heaven's sake, this is no work for you." And I was, uh, because I, you had to go and, uh, this Paramount Hotel on 48th Street was nothing but a whore house, you know. All they did was, uh, you made up beds all day long. Because the hookers would go in and out. And that's against the law, you know. So the, I suppose the, thought I, I might talk or something. I don't know.

DALLETT: So did you become a citizen by that time?

CHRISTIE: Oh, oh in 1932 I became a citizen. Yeah, and I changed the name, I shortened the name from Christianson to Christie. Because I admired the guy, the Christie's Mystery Story. I love mystery stories, so I took, I shortened to Christie. Just took some letter off, because everybody spelled it wrong. Anyway--

DALLETT: And then, when did you become a chiropractor?

CHRISTIE: Uh, in, I was, uh, I started in 1942, and went to the first, uh, semester of, uh, what do you call when you first go to college?

DALLETT: Medical school, first semester, freshman year.

CHRISTIE: Freshman, yeah. I completed the half, the first half of the freshman year. And then unfortunately I lent my money to somebody supposedly that was going to save, uh, the house. And it was two people I had to work with. And it turned out to be a lie. I never got the money back, so I had to go back, work, I worked three years then. I worked as a superintendent of this building. Use to, uh, climb five flights of stairs, sweeping them, and washing down stairs, and shoveling coal, and taking up ashes, and went to school, three times. That was in 1945. I started back. And instead of going, I had to go three years. All the

schools had, had amalgamated and formed the Chiropractic Institute of New York. And it was now a four year course. And instead of paying seven hundred and fifty dollars, uh, a semester. It was now twelve hundred. So, I had to go to work and earn the money. So I used to take care of the house here, and clean on weekends. Clean people's house and go to school four hours at night.

DALLETT: Did you ever do any cabinet making like you had, like you had dreamed of in Denmark?

CHRISTIE: Well not very fancy. I made all the things that's in here. But, uh, that's not fancy stuff, you know. Because you looked right in here, that's the kitchen there, and you would, and there wasn't anything there. You had to look into, you just looked into the bathroom, you fell down. I put up the partitions and so on. No, but that's not fancy. I wanted to make fancy furniture. Good furniture. Now I want to make, I want to retire and build, uh, uh, doll houses. Because I'm entitled to dream to a second childhood, right? (They laugh.) If I live long enough.

DALLETT: And did, uh, others from the village where you were from in Denmark come?

CHRISTIE: Yes, don't you dare call Copenhagen. Beautiful--

DALLETT: Sorry, Copenhagen, right. Did they join, did they join you and your brothers in, uh, Plainfield? Was there a Danish community there at all? Or your brother just happened to be there.

CHRISTIE: No, no, my brother just happened to work there. People died, I didn't see too much of them.

DALLETT: Did you go back to visit?

CHRISTIE: I haven't been back yet.

DALLETT: No?

CHRISTIE: No, there was always something that interfered. I had the house in Long Island. There's no one, if any, they break into it all so often, and the only one that can go and take care of it is me. I either have to go and live there or I have to go and sell it. Uh, I always wanted a house with a, white house with green shutters and a picket fence and God knows I got it. But it's a headache, it's an albatross. I can't go anyplace because I have no relatives to take care of it or anything. Or to, it was only on the second of January I got a call that they had broken in again. Last month people came and ransacked it and stole an awful lot of stuff.

DALLETT: I have a feeling I could go on asking you questions for

the rest of the day, but, uh--

CHRISTIE: Yes, it's taken a lot of time, of your time.

DALLETT: Is there anything else you just want to add about, you know, the whole, sort of, experience of leaving home as a young girl, and--

CHRISTIE: Well I presume had I stayed in Denmark, I probably would  
have just made cigars and at least, it became an  
adventure. And I have a lot to be grateful for especially to the  
Chiropractic --

DALLETT: How about your twin brother? Did--

CHRISTIE: He was killed when we were forty-five. I have one brother left out of six. My mother passed on too. So, well I'm thinking of, either got to go and live in my house or sell it. But I should go home and see what it's like. My niece was here in 1982, visiting. My youngest brother's daughter. And my youngest brother, he's four years younger than I. Just retired and he, uh, say, "Why don't you come home?" But the question is, can one go home? The, there isn't, of course, I have nieces and nephews over there and this one brother. But the question is, can one, uh, I can acclimate myself pretty well, but, uh, maybe after all, he don't want this old bitty in there. who knows?

DALLETT:       Okay, I think I've, I've asked you everything I need to.

Thank you very, very much.

CHRISTIE:       You're welcome.

DALLETT:       Uh, this is the end of side one, tape two, of Interview

                  Number 122 with Dr. Karen Christie and it is 11:45.