

KECK-141
JENNIE JACOBSON
BIRTH DATE: UNKNOWN
INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 7, 1986
RUNNING TIME: 32:00
INTERVIEWER: DEBRA ALLEE
RECORDING ENGINEER:
INTERVIEW LOCATION: SAN PEDRO, CA
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1986
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 7/1995
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

ENGLAND, 1908
AGE 8

ALLEE: This is Debra Allee, I'm speaking with Jennie Jacobson, on Friday, February 7th, 1986. We're beginning this interview at 10:48. We're about to interview Mrs. Jacobson about her immigration experience from England, London, England in 1908. This is Interview Number 141. I think the easiest way to start is just to ask you to begin at the beginning, where and when you were born and how you came to come here.

JACOBSON: Yeah, I was born in London, England. The reason I came to America was my father came over to visit his brother, so my father stayed here, then my mother was expecting one of her boys so she couldn't come at that time, so mt aunt and uncle, I was at their wedding, and they came over here, both, to live and honeymoon. My aunt Lucy and uncle Jack Williamson. So they said they would bring me over with them and we came over by boat and I was always, as a youngster, would remember the Lucitania. Now, I can not say positively, but the Mauritania is one I been always thinking about.

ALLEE: They you came on?

JACOBSON: Yes, 'cause I came, but I can't swear right to it but I thought,

"Hope this big boat doesn't go," you know how a youngster, "Go down." So I came over with them and it was a very big boat I know, but when we got into Ellis Island and my aunt and uncle says, "We're getting off," as we were, we were asked to step back, then my aunt, they were interviewing her about money. Of course, being that age, I didn't realize what it was. She had to have so much uh, whether it had to be American or not, that I'm not positive, but she says, "I don't have American money," or something. So they said, being that I was not their child, I could not come off with them unless they left a certain amount, I imagine you'd call it a bond, I mean we would here, something like that. So they said they didn't have it but when they got on shore they could pay it right back to, because my uncle was, he had been in Chicago and he owned the Standard Piano Bench Company and he would have, they would talk to him on the phone. So they said I still couldn't go with her, so they had to get off of the boat to call my uncle and this was late at night, and they, I could not go with them. So they said they'd stay until he got the money wired over, I mean, then they'd come and get me so they naturally got off the boat that night and then they came back, but they said they couldn't take me off where we would probably have stayed at a hotel or something. So because they didn't have this money, but they told me that they'd take care of me. So I kept waiting and after they got off, I thought they were going to take me into a bedroom, well they told me why I had to stay all night, but they didn't take me into a bedroom. They put me, oh about as wide as this room, like a small jail, they, so I thought they did it to, to me, you know, they would get me later or thought maybe I'd be one of them that would run around or something, they says, "You sit there." So I sat there. Suddenly, he told me that my aunt and uncle wouldn't be back, to get me on the ship, in the morning and bring the money that they had to bring. I didn't mind, I'm sitting on the chair, but I thought they'd put me to bed but I stayed on the chair and they also left the jail door (?) and I sat there until, all night, all night long. I think that's why I never forgot it. I wasn't really frightened 'cause I thought if they come they would let them on but they wouldn't. I guess it took that much time.

ALLEE: Can I ask you a couple of questions, going back to England

first. Uh, you grew up in the city, in London.

JACOBSON: Right down in London--

ALLEE: Right in the middle of London--

JACOBSON: You know Big Ben is where I learned to tell the time. Every Sunday morning my dad and I used to walk and he taught me how to tell the time under the Big Ben. He says, "When you grow up," he says, "You'll laugh when you know you've come over here to learn the time," you know, my father and I were very close.

ALLEE: And when he came here and decided to stay, what was it that made him decide to stay?

JACOBSON: Because my uncle, his brother, had that business in Chicago--

ALLEE: The piano benches--

JACOBSON: So he knew, instead of having TV, things, you know, like that, he built the case in town.

ALLEE: Cases?

JACOBSON: Yeah. Standard Piano Bench Company I think is what it called it and it was on Lake Street, Lake Street, Chicago.

ALLEE: So your father was going to have a good opportunity?

JACOBSON: So my uncle put him to work so he was safe.

ALLEE: I see, so he got established in Chicago. And then he sent for you to come over with your aunt and uncle.

JACOBSON: My aunt and uncle talked to him I guess and they said, "If you'd like to bring Jennie, its okay." because he had to give his okay, my being not being their child, 'cause it was--

ALLEE: Yes, I understand.

JACOBSON: Yeah, their name was Williamson and I guess they were really on their honeymoon 'cause I was at the wedding, there was three of us and my oldest cousin got to ride back in the carriage and us two didn't get to ride in the carriage, we all had a little pout on that, and we went back a little bit earlier and took a few roses out of the bouquet (they laugh), that's kids.

ALLEE: And so then when you went on the boat, uh, were you excited to go to America?

JACOBSON: Oh yes, 'cause I've always loved water.

ALLEE: You loved to sail, on water?

JACOBSON: Yeah, on water.

ALLEE: Were you thinking what it might be like in America compared to England? Did you have any--

JACOBSON: I was anxious to see them, yes I think I was because then they were telling me it was a long ride--

ALLEE: Uh-huh, and when you were on the boat were you first class or second class or third class?

JACOBSON: Knowing my uncle, it may not have been first class, I'd say about second because you know how youngsters are, I'd see oh such pretty rooms would have bouquets or something and now afterwards I realized why they did. When I got off, because my aunt told me, those people had more money, like your uncle Joe was trying to explain to me--

ALLEE: Okay, so you weren't first class but did your aunt and uncle and you have a room--

JACOBSON: Oh yes.

ALLEE: You weren't like with a lot of people?

JACOBSON: Oh no, no, if I remember right, they had the double bed, I wouldn't call it a cot, maybe it was a youngster's bed, extra, see, in the rooms.

ALLEE: Did you play on the ship?

JACOBSON: I was all over the ship. I wasn't one to be still, I'd go see what people were doing and watching, some play cards and, but I, if there was music I'd be around.

ALLEE: You liked the music the best.

JACOBSON: Uh-huh, it was very enjoyable and I didn't get tired. I'd hear people, you know, say I'd be glad or I'd be glad there to see my father you see, he was already--

ALLEE: So you were excited about coming to see your father and you had a lot of energy?

JACOBSON: Yes, I've always had that, yeah.

ALLEE: It sounds that way. And you liked the music the best, is there anything about the big ship that was sort of different from what you expected or especially interesting or--

JACOBSON: I noticed there was lots of you could walk around, of course, sometimes like a youngster, see a big door open it might be somebody's room by mistake, you can't go there, you know how youngsters look but they had the concert or where they had some little, you know, entertainment at night.

ALLEE: Were there other children?

JACOBSON: Yes, but not too many and what I noticed, their parents seemed to hold onto their hands, were afraid to let them go where I was sticking my neck, which I still like to get on a boat and, I've been back to London.

ALLEE: You have? Have you been back often?

JACOBSON: Twice.

ALLEE: Did you enjoy that?

JACOBSON: Yeah, once when my husband was alive, he was back and he says, "I went back and went to sleep," because he was Swedish, that happened to be, I think it was, I think Sydney was a little small or he might have heard it, I told him to come over one evening, I says, "Just two days before Christmas, I want you to come over, I have something to tell you," and I says, he says, "Oh the boys coming over for," I says, "I'm going to tell them what I want for Christmas," that's what I said. When the boys come over, I handed their dad and envelope and he says, "What's that?" "Oh its your Christmas card, wait'll the boys come over they'll have a good laugh over it," because we never, that was my boy that just died and one that was working today and couldn't come over and when they opened it, it was trip to Sweden and he says, "I'm your Christmas day mother." I said, "Yes, he hasn't been home to Sweden." So I sent him but then he came back in a week and I said, "I thought you'd stay at least two weeks," he says, "No," he says, "They sent me home to get you, to let you go see your folks too."

ALLEE: Oh, that's nice.

JACOBSON: My husband was easy to get along with, but he was kind of a salesman and met all kinds of people but on the boat I did love it. Somebody said (?) I'd get ready tonight (they laugh).

ALLEE: When you sailed into the Harbor, on the boat, do you remember

coming into New York Harbor, your first glimpse of America?

JACOBSON: What I remember, something about water, then I remember somebody said, "Wait a minute," somebody talked to me, being as a youngster I answered their questions, but to be truthful, everything that I said I couldn't say I remember who was asking.

ALLEE; uh-huh, but do you remember anything that you saw, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty, or--

JACOBSON: Yeah, things like that, but I guess at that age they were just big, tall--

ALLEE" Tall buildings and a big statue.

JACOBSON: Buildings and yes until I learned about. Its like going into a park, I do notice even now when I see statutes and things and things in the park.

ALLEE: But you had to learn about after you were here.

JACOBSON: I had to learn who it was, yes. But it, an it was a little exciting and I thought it was, I don't remember what month but it was kind of cold and I remember saying I had (?) a broad coat. I don't remember saying the word sweaters, I don't even remember sweaters.

ALLEE: So, they let your aunt and uncle off the ship and was it that you stayed over night on the ship, is that where they out you or was that on--

JACOBSON: Oh no they wouldn't let me get off at all.

ALLEE: So you stayed on the ship?

JACOBSON: I stayed on until they came back with whatever money it was and they uh, let me out.

ALLEE: They let you out. When you k\landed did you go through Ellis Island or did you go through, in, land in New York City? Because Ellis Island was a special place for immigration.

JACOBSON: It seemed to me we come off and somebody told me something about the you know, about Ellis Island that was, oh that's not Chicago where we're going, you know, and I thought we just got off the boat and got into Chicago.

ALLEE: So, when you got off the boat though, well once your aunt and uncle came back with the bond money, that was the next morning?

JACOBSON: Yes, I don't know if they called it a bond exactly but I knew they told me at the end.

ALLEE: Then, what happened when you got off the boat?

JACOBSON: After we got off it seems to me that there was someone there, uh, to meet me and I was trying to think whether it was my dad and someone else or whether it was my dad and my uncle, 'cause I hadn't seen my uncle for a long time.

ALLEE; And this was, I guess this was just on the dock in New

York Harbor?

JACOBSON: Uh-huh. And of course there was all, I guess if they said we could go further, (?).

ALLEE: When you were in the brig, or whatever that was--

JACOBSON: It was strictly, I'd say, from that big to here, just a regular jail, I wished I'd had a camera.

ALLEE: That's about twelve, fifteen feet.

JACOBSON: Yeah, maybe they, maybe sometimes somebody got, you know, drinking or something and they locked them up. I wondered why they go to jail on the ship.

ALLEE: I guess they have it. But you were after awhile, when you realized it wasn't a bedroom, were you frightened?

JACOBSON: Yes, I kept sitting there thinking they were coming right back so that's why they weren't putting me to bed. See, I kept thinking they'd get a hold of uncle Joe and they'll get the money to them and they'll come back. But they let me sit there all night. And I wasn't really too frightened because if you said, "I'm coming back at ten," you could be delayed and I kept thinking, well I know aunt Lucy's just been married, they were newlyweds, not young by any means and I kept thinking, well, they'll be back, see, and I think I said something to the man, he says, "When they get back here, they'll get you." I mean it wasn't a very, instead of being nice, probably you and I would be to a youngster, just as soon as they got here, they didn't get back and I just sat there. You don't think, I think maybe I leaned on the other chair but I just sat there until they came in the morning. That's the part that I could never forget.

ALLEE: Yes, I can understand that. And then when you got off, you were in New York City, did you have any impressions of your first day here?

JACOBSON: Well in one way, New York looked a little bit like downtown London, you know, busy. Like I was getting off again, you know--

ALLEE: It was not so unfamiliar--

JACOBSON: No, it was very much like that, but I, some people were awfully nice and awfully polite but I thought that I didn't remember but one lady offered me candy or something like that but they wouldn't let me take it.

ALLEE: Someone went to offer you candy?

JACOBSON: Yeah, I don't know, it was something in a bag and they didn't let the guard or whoever was in charge of them, take it. Of course I didn't know why, I figured it was rules or something, it might have been something that I hadn't seen. I didn't see avocados when I was little and it was, I'm not saying it was an avocado it was just something they were handing me, a fruit and they wouldn't let me take it.

ALLEE: When you got off in New York did you stay at all in New York or did you go right to the--

JACOBSON: I think right to Chicago 'cause I think my uncle said, "We'll go," and went over to his place first and I know they called a taxi for a little bit and it must have board, for the train because I said, "Are we going on another boat?" I didn't, what I meant by that is if we are, take them too, I didn't want to go, be alone.

ALLEE: Oh I see, you were worried about having to go back on another boat.

JACOBSON: Yes, that's why I wondered whether--

ALLEE: And so you went on the train to Chicago?

JACOBSON: Then we went on--yes, the only way we would have been able to go there, we didn't have planes.

ALLEE: Right. Did you have any impressions of the countryside when you were on the train, did you, do you remember much about the train?

JACOBSON: (?) the countryside, I don't really and truthfully say I cared too much looking at it, I think I was pretty tired.

ALLEE: You must have been.

JACOBSON: I think I was, you know, on the train with my aunt and uncle, they were just married and they both loved me or they wouldn't have brought me over on their honeymoon until we met my uncle and then we met my uncle, he had a chauffeur, he had a business and he was pretty well, uh, fixed.

ALLEE: So you came to--did you sleep overnight on the train?

JACOBSON: I think I dozed on whoever's lap I was sitting on, yeah.

Nothing was cruel but it was, when I look at it now it was just a cold way to teach it, to treat a child, you know, if they were doing it now, that's the way I felt, they didn't like me or

something, just, I was different, cause there was a lot of foreign languages, when you come over on a big boat like that. There's every language in the world, and I heard a lot of them and you know, sometimes think, I wondered what I've done (she laughs). You don't realize it's--now there's like this ship, like I told you, it seems to me, maybe if my mother or father, one of them were around but they've all passed on, they would know, but somehow it seems the Mauritania always seems to stay with me.

ALLEE: Well, that may very well be the ship.

JACOBSON: See, and they say I couldn't sign something in black and white and swear to it but I always kept saying, "Well the Lucitania went down, I hope the Mauritania does (?) that some reason or another that stayed with me, that name.

ALLEE: The Lucitania went down later, it went down after you were here.

JACOBSON: After, yeah, I, 'cause I always thought about it, being a big ship, you know, filled with a lot of people.

ALLEE: Ad they were all talking different languages?

JACOBSON: Yes.

ALLEE: Ah, did you know what any of the languages were, did you find out?

JACOBSON: No, in fact I never did pay much attention to, I think more of language used here than I ever heard in London, as a youngster. You can just get on a short distance here and--

ALLEE: And hear someone--

JACOBSON: And here in San Pedro, cause you know I'm (?) by water here, (?) I liked living near the water.

ALLEE: How did you like Chicago, when you came here?

JACOBSON: It was a pretty, well I didn't think it was busier than that, but at least most of them were talking English.

ALLEE: In Chicago?

JACOBSON: Yes. But, you know, but Continental Bank, I worked there for five years.

ALLEE: In Chicago?

JACOBSON: Uh-huh.

ALLEE: Were you glad to see your dad?

JACOBSON: Oh yes and I was glad and he says, and oh how my mother was and he says, "Well, aunt Frances," her other, her sister, the (?) but then at that age we're not worried about whether they're having a baby, you know, you don't know what they're going through, doing that and they didn't go to hospitals like they do now.

ALLEE; And then did your mother come over after you?

JACOBSON: Ah, she came over in a couple of months, after that she came with the baby.

ALLEE: Do you remember where you lived in Chicago, what kind of house?

JACOBSON: West Side, I know as I got older it was on the West Side. And then I know we lived on Cicero Avenue but I used to have to walk down Lake Street and then take the elevator to get down to the Continental Bank 'cause I knew that a long walk from Huron Street. Believe it or not, just when did I go to Phoenix, last week there's, the girl that worked with me was in Phoenix from Chicago and I was there three days, but just down to see her again.

ALLEE: Was that your first job out of school, at the Continental Bank?

JACOBSON: Well, yes, I, of course my dad didn't get a lot of money, I'd say we were the average poor person and I went down to work and when I talked to the gentleman, he said, of course, I hadn't been to college--

ALLEE: So this means you must have gone to school first after you got here because you were eight years old.

JACOBSON: Yes, yes, but when I went to first to go to college there wasn't time, I didn't go through high school (?) college so I went down to the bank, I wasn't even thinking at the time when I, I didn't know what I had, I knew we had to wear gloves, we had to wear our hat, you didn't go down any old way. So I went down and the manager talked to

the employment one and he, "Just a moment, the manager wants to see you," and I felt, "What have I said wrong, done wrong," and he said, "But you come in my office a minute," he said, "What did you say your name was?" and I gave it. He says, "Just a minute," and he went and looked something up and he came back and he says, "Do you know, uh, Mr. Astin on Lake Street, Standard Piano Bench Company?" I said, "That's my uncle." So he said, "Just a moment," and he went back to the phone. Of course, I didn't know that at that time but years later, why he told me, he says, "I hired you because your uncle said that I'd never be sorry, that you were a good worker." See, that, I did like it though, worked there, but how different from today because when the bank examiners came, you didn't go home.

ALLEE; You stayed the whole time?

JACOBSON: Yes, if I was in this department, they used to have \$150,000 or \$500,000 in a clearing house and that, so when they come I stayed there and this department, this part the examiners were through. Tomorrow they may come for another division, its different than it is here and I remember laying across a table and falling asleep and then they, someone said, "There's the chauffeur waiting for you in the car down there," and it was my uncle.

ALLEE; Oh, that was nice.

JACOBSON: Yes, and the chauffeur and the car down there waited for me, I remember that much so--

ALLEE: So, when you started working at the bank, you must have been about what, fourteen or fifteen--

JACOBSON: Yes, it was quite young because somebody says, I don't think there (?). I was older than that, yes I was older than that but it was my first job. My folks

decided to come to America and I decided to stay if I could get work and that if, it just happened that I did but, I did because I remembered two days before, my mother was a very strict person, the top ones my kids here got A's all these A's, were going to have the day off to go to the park, we were going to some party at the park and I remember my mother not letting me go for something that I did wrong (she laughs) and not going, so that's how I remember that it uh, it was then that, when I left the bank they said anytime, wherever I went they'd give me a good recommendation.

ALLEE: Why did you leave the bank?

JACOBSON: My folks moved out here, they were here for a while and they kept begging me to come out, I didn't come with them.

ALLEE; What made you move here?

JACOBSON: Because my mother's brother was living out here, on my mother's side of the family and they were saying it was so nice and warm. They had a place on the Pike, if you know what the Pike was, in Long Beach, and that is where they had one of those little coffee stands and they wanted me to come out there and help them.

ALLEE: And so eventually you came?

JACOBSON: So that's when I came, and that, 'cause then that's how I was starting Long Beach.

ALLEE: And you've been here ever since?

JACOBSON: Gee, where have we moved to, Sid? Yeah, I haven't moved

away from San Pedro and Long Beach, now I'm correcting myself, one thing. I came out here, I was working at the bank when I met my husband. I had collapsed one day and 'cause I never mind working, I love it, you know, sometimes the bank, you worked until ten o'clock if you don't balance, it was different than it is today and I had passed away and they'd taken me over to the hospital and then uh, I had met my husband at a Swedish dance so, my girlfriend who, Alice, you know Alice she was here, she passed away and she introduced him to me and he came up that night to the--

ALLEE: To the hospital?

JACOBSON: Yes, and the lady with me, and she asked me and I says, "Oh, I just met him a couple of times," something, you know how you say. And she said, "He sure seems a very nice gentleman, you ought to hang on to him," you know how they talk to you, somebody, when I was coming to, so that's how I stayed on at Chicago, I did get married there.

ALLEE: And then when you came out here you came with your husband?

JACOBSON: I came, I came out here to visit my mother 'cause I was pregnant and my folks had moved out, (?) and then I came out here and I called him and I says, "You know where I'm at if you want me," and he moved out and the two days before he died he says, "You sure did the right thing when you said, 'Move'." (Off-mike someone says, "End of story.")

ALLEE: This is the end of Interview Number 141 with Jennie Jacobson, the time is now 11:20.