

KECK-168

EDWARD MYRBECK, SR.

BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 29, 1911.

INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 4, 1986

RUNNING TIME: 55:00

INTERVIEWER: DEBBIE DANE

RECORDING ENGINEER: DEAN CAPPELLO

INTERVIEW LOCATION: BRAINTREE, MA

TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1986

TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 6/1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

SWEDEN, 1923

AGE 12

PASSAGE ON EITHER "THE OSCAR II" OR "THE FREDERICK VIII"

DANE: This is Debby Dane and I'm speaking with Mr. Edward Myrbeck, Sr. on Tuesday, February 4, 1986, we're beginning the interview at 10:50 and the Interview Number is 168. We're about to interview Mr. Myrbeck about his immigration experience from Sweden in 1923. He was 12 years old and it is Interview Number 168. Mr. Myrbeck, would you tell me what day you were born and where you were born.

MYRBECK: I was born in Rosengatan in Sundbyberg, Sweden which is a suburb of Stockholm, and I was born on October 29, 1911.

DANE: But you didn't stay in Stockholm very long, tell me that story.

MYRBECK: Uh, actually, my stay in Stockholm was limited due to the fact that shortly after my birth, my mother became very sick and she passed away when I was about a year and a half old and consequently my father uh, who at that time was a relatively young man, he couldn't take care of the three children he had, I had a brother by the name of Gustav, sister by the name of Elsa, who were older than I was by a few years. So that was one of the reasons that I didn't stay there and fortunately I was adopted by a family or picked up by a family by the name of Myrbeck's who lived further south in Sweden and that's why I didn't stay in Stockholm.

DANE: Where did you move to, where did the Myrbecks live?

MYRBECK: Well, actually we moved to several places but we finally, without going into any explanation of the various places down further south, we finally landed down in a place called Balebo, which is a small village connected with a, what they call a socken in Sweden and that is

Backebo and that is located in Kalmarlan, about 20 miles west of Kalmarland in a province of Smaland.

DANE: Would you spell, Smaland is S-M-A with one dot over it L-  
A- N-D and then you mentioned another name.

MYRBECK: Well Smaland, being the province is spelled that way, S-M-  
A- oomlat over the -A and L-A-N-D and Balebo is spelled B-A-L-E-B-O, and Backebo is spelled B-A with two dots over it, -C-K-E-B-O and Kalmarland is really another section of that province, in other words its divided like in counties, you might say that Kalmarland is a county.

DANE: Is that spelled with a -K-?

MYRBECK: That's K-A-L-M-A-R, named after Kalmar which is a city on the east coats and, uh, that was one of the first ships that came to this country, was called Kalmar Nyckel from Sweden, however that's neither here nor there.

DANE: What kind of region was it, it was agricultural or industrial?

MYRBECK: Mostly an agricultural region, a very poor agricultural region that is termed to be a place that when God created Sweden he threw all the rocks there and if you ever go over there you'll find there's an awful lot of stones and rocks over in that section of Sweden and the stone walls are very, very much abundant.

DANE: What kind of life did you have there, your father's work?

MYRBECK: Well, my father essentially was brick layer and I must say, in memory of him, I'd say a very, very good one. But when the war came along, which I recall very distinctly, there were no bricklaying and, uh, he tried to sell sewing machines, so I remember him as a Singer Sewing Machine salesman and also another make of sewing machine called Huskvarna but I doubt whether he did very well at that.

DANE: How did the war affect your life, was there hardships, scarcity--

MYRBECK: You mean the war?

DANE: Yes.

MYRBECK: Well, what I recall of the war was the lack of food more than anything else, uh, actually there was no food and what I recall very much was the fact that we ate a lot of turnips. You could eat all the turnips you wanted to and surprisingly enough I still like turnips but I like them raw, I don't like them cooked. And I remember coffee for example, I remember my father and mother going out picking dandelion roots and taking the dandelion roots and actually baking them in the oven and cutting them up and mixing them with the coffee, the little coffee they had and that's what they had for coffee. And, uh, I do think that in view of the fact that our parents probably thought a lot of the children they probably had less to eat than we did.

DANE: Meat, did you ever--

MYRBECK: (He laughs.) I doubt you had any meat. I do recall that some of the farmers had, who were fairly well-off, I'm talking now about the people who actually had farms, but, uh, it was very, very dangerous to try to get any food out of the farms because the farmers, I mean there was no law that said that they couldn't just take their shotgun and fill it with salt and that's what they used against people with if they tried to get any of the food.

But it was rough, really rough. And you asked what I, also another thing I remember about the war was that some of the German boats came in there. I recall distinctly, one of the most proudest things a kid my age could have at that time was a Kaiser helmet. They used to sell those over there in Sweden, uh, I don't know if you ever seen the Kaiser helmets but with the golden thing up on top, I remember that. I didn't have one but I would have loved to have had one with the sword and all. But I do remember seeing a ship in a port city called Oskarsan, uh, that actually, uh, had a warship come in there and, of course, it was quarantined, whatever you, not quarantined but it was put under submission in Sweden, it was not allowed to leave after that once it got in there, Sweden being a neutral country.

DANE: Would there be discussions at the dinner table about, during the day at home, about the war, were you aware--

MYRBECK: I presume so, but I don't think I would be interested in those kind of discussions and probably I wasn't, as a kid you were more interested like children over here are in playing war, you know, you don't, you're not quite as interested in it at that age.

DANE: And clothing, was it difficult to get shoes and coats and-

-

MYRBECK: Uh (he laughs), clothing you never thought of, I don't know, you had your clothes, you didn't get dressed up, don't forget we lived out in the country, you know, it wasn't as if you went to a dinner ball or into a restaurant, I don't think I, as a matter of fact I didn't go to a restaurant even in this country until long after I got here.

DANE: Uh-huh, the hardship, after the war, there was depression.

MYRBECK: Very much so, very, very much so, it was very difficult and, uh, naturally that's one of the reasons why my dad decided to leave the country.

DANE: Tell me that story, were there discussions at home, did he--

MYRBECK: I think there was a lot of discussion relative to going home-- My father had many siblings, my mother had many. Several of them had come over here as a matter of fact. I remember one sister coming over here when she was 16 years old, most of them went over here before they were 21,

22. My father was one of the last ones. He had never thought of going over, my mother the same way, she stayed, there were only three sisters over in Sweden left in my mother's family and I know my grandmother, I remember my grandmother telling my mother that if she ever left she never wanted to see her again. Uh, my paternal grandmother. she felt that my father shouldn't go but if he had to go, why, that was his decision and there was talk between my mother and father that I listened to, I wasn't part of the discussion but I listened to it. Finally I asked my father whether or not I could tell my school teacher in school, a country school where all four or five classes met in one room, we didn't have separate rooms in the school, whether or not we, could I tell her that we were thinking of going to America. He said, "No." But finally he said, "Yes, now you can, you can tell them, its been decided we're going to go and things--made a decision." So, I did tell the school teacher in school and the children that I was happy I was going to go to America.

DANE: Were you excited, was this a big adventure?

MYRBECK: Very much so, I thought I was going to see Indians, I thought I'd see, I read about Mark Twain, Mark Twain's books, I thought I was going to see a lot of those people, I, uh, I had never seen a Negro in my life, I was excited about seeing a Negro and there was a lot of things that you were excited about. I don't think the trip excited me as much as coming

to America, my gosh, there was gold all over on the sidewalks, you know, and everything else. I always said, you know, you expect to see gold but you find chewing gum on the sidewalks. (They laugh.) And when I told the school teacher, this is something I'll never forget, I'll never forget this. He stood up in front of the class after I told him, because I didn't tell him during class, I told him to one side, and uh, he said that, my name in those days was Rune, it wasn't Edward, my name is Edward Rune Myrbeck but Rune is spelled R-U-N-E, and the reason I don't have it anymore is that when I came to this country why they called me Rooney and then it got be Andy Rooney and I didn't like Andy Rooney because that was a comic strip and I just didn't like Andy Rooney so my father said, "Well call yourself Edward," so now my name is Edward not Rune. But anyway, he said, "Rune has told me that they have decided to immigrate to America." He said, "I cannot imagine anyone, anyone in their right mind leaving this country of such great wealth with iron ore, an abundance of copper, forests, all kinds of agriculture to leave for America." I went home and told my father this. Would you like to know what he said? I'll say it in Swedish but I won't translate it (says in Swedish). He gave out the first cuss words that I ever heard him say in front of me and he says, "You tell the school teacher, if I am given a few of these things to use then I will be the most grateful man to stay in Sweden." And then he walked away from me and I felt kind of bad but needless to say we did decide, he decided to immigrate and leave for America and eventually to bring us over.

DANE: And your reaction when you saw your father's rage and frustration really in not having, I mean here's one person saying we have so much and he says but I don't have anything. What was your reaction to all of that?

MYRBECK: Oh, I just think that I felt bad that he felt that way, that we shouldn't go to America, that's all. I, I don't think the reaction was there, how did I know what he could have or what I could have, that they could have, uh, its just like, uh, saying, "Why didn't you miss television in those days, why didn't you miss radio, why didn't you miss all these things that you have today?" You didn't miss them, you figured you were well-off, I was probably well-off. Was he well-off, that's the question (he laughs).

DANE: As you said, you had aunts and uncles that were here, would they send letters and describe their life here in America?

MYRBECK: Yeah, well, when we decided, of course my father, my father was coming over here because he had relations here so he had, he wasn't coming over just to,

ah not, meet anybody. All my mother's relations were in Rockford, Illinois, all the, uh, father's relations were all in, my father's relations were all here in Boston or on the east coast, in Boston actually, outside of Boston, a suburb of Boston. Anyway, uh, we did correspond back and forth. I think, I think probably the majority of people that immigrate to this country in those days, I'm not saying now, but in those days, probably spoke more so of their life over here as being an awful lot better than it was in Sweden. And I think the people in Sweden got the idea that it was so wonderful over here, just go over here and here you had everything, you know, you started right in. But you mustn't forget, you came over here, you send a 37, 38 year old man, his wife a little bit younger, needless to say none of us spoke a word of English, not a word. I could read on the Swedish matchboxes made in Sweden, made in Sweden, you know, you could read that, but you didn't know any, not any English. You come over here, uh, all your correspondence back and forth was in their own native tongue. Its very difficult I think to realize what a man went through in those days. He comes over here, he's got to get a job, uh, he, he came in. he came to Rockford, that's where he was going to. And you ask

whether there was correspondence, of course there was correspondence, back and forth.

DANE: To urge him to come, or did--

MYRBECK: I think, uh, I think both, I think both. I remember my, uh, when my uncle left Sweden, both of my uncles, Uncle Sven, my father's brother, Uncle Karl, my brother, uh, his brother. I remember when they left. They were going to send me Shetland ponies. Well you know you go waiting for these, I mean you're a kid, you're 11 years old, you think that they're going to America, you're going to have a Shetland pony. Uh, I know what Shetland ponies were, they're the small ponies. Do you think I got them? No, I never got them. I was going to get rubber boots, hip boots, I never got them. Uh, I could tell you one thing that I got, when they made my passport photo--

DANE: That's great, yes--

MYRBECK: (He laughs.) Well that's another story. Of course, we sold everything at an auction over there, everything! This is before my father went and I guess

that's how he got the money to come over here. I don't know whether he had a mortgage on the house, I don't recall that and I never asked him that when we got over here. But I don't assume he owned every bit of the house, but the house was sold on the countryside, all the furniture, all the toys, all the, uh, all the trivial things that you had. You had nothing when you got through except your clothes.

DANE: Was it a day-long auction?

MYRBECK: Yeah, it was a day-long auction> Uh, a lot of fun for me.

I thought it was a lot of fun to see all these people around, everything being sold. How my parents felt, I don't know. Uh, I think the worse thing was when they sold the old wagon I had over there, I remember that.

I'd like to have that today, but I haven't got it. But anyway, so anyway, of course, before you go away you have to have a passport photo. Well, I guess it was no difficulty for my mother to get one and the kids, my sister was only about five and my, the various children they had after they didn't think they were going to have any children because that's why they adopted me, I uh,

they had another boy that was a year and a half, Gunnar, he was a year and a half old and no trouble taking pictures of them, but it came to a 12 year old kid, he got to, had to, have a suit, so my aunt in this country had sent over a nice suit with knickers on it, real nice looking one but they didn't send a shirt along and I didn't have a shirt that was good enough to put on underneath the suit. So, my grandmother, I remember, brought out a beautiful, white linen towel and they wrapped that around my neck and put my suitcoat on and, uh, I've seen that picture, I've got to find it sometime, but, a beautiful picture. Only trouble is, no necktie there but you didn't have to have a necktie in those days, I guess. But I stood in my knickers and that's how I got my passport photo.

DANE: So you made do without a shirt?

MYRBECK: That's right, made do without a shirt and then uh, then its a question of going over on the boat and I don't recall whether we came over on Oscar II or Frederick VIII. There was two boats and as I recall they were both Danish boats, we went to Copenhagen to take them.

DANE: The day you left your town, well wait a sec let's back up a moment. Your father's preparations to leave involved selling everything, not having a home anymore--

MYRBECK: That's right.

DANE: But you and your mother and your siblings didn't leave with your father?

MYRBECK: No, we, we lived with my grandmother in a small, real small house that she had, God bless her. That's my father's mother, she had moved into the same community that we lived in. She had a very small red cottage and I think that it consisted of just two rooms. And we lived there and we thought we were going to have to live there for some time but my father really worked hard over here. He got a job as a bricklayer, no problem at all, out in Rockford, Illinois and, uh, he sent for us relatively soon, that same year. He left, I believe, in February and we left in, uh, well, about six months after that, so it didn't take us long for, him long to, in other words he was making good money in those days as a bricklayer.

DANE: Uh-huh, its unusual that they send for the family so quickly.

MYRBECK: Yup.

DANE: Several times--

MYRBECK: And we went over, my mother, my mother and with a year and a half year old kid on her arm and another five year old kid, held onto one hand and a 12 year old kid that didn't know how to behave, (he laughs) running around. We left.

DANE: The day that you decided--it was time to go, you had the money, you had your passports, your father was ready, was it an exciting day or a sad day, how did you feel about it?

MYRBECK: I think it was an extremely exciting day, I think that for me, I think it was a very sad day for my mother. I, uh, needless to say I'm quite sure she wanted to join her husband but I think it was, I think it really was. And, uh, you must remember also, in those days when the mother

of the children left, they never expected to see them again. My grandmother had never seen any of the children except one, on my father's side, coming back for a visit. On my mother' side, she had never seen any of the children that went over here. So it was a question of same, uh, same as a funeral procession, uh, because it wasn't a question, once they got over here to leave, the only way you could leave was by boat, you couldn't leave by airplane, that ,meant a couple of weeks one way, a couple of weeks another way. How could people get the time off? Needless to say even if the money was there, it was difficult to get time off from a job, somebody else would take the job. So it, I don't think it was happy, I think it was happy for kids, yes, I think that I was excited as all get out.

DANE: Okay, hold on just a--are we okay? What port did you  
leave from?

MYRBECK: Uh, we actually, uh, took the boat from Copenhagen, That's  
in Denmark, uh, how we got, I know we got there by  
train to the west coast of Sweden, don't forget, we were  
on the east coast which didn't take long, uh, I don't

recall, I don't recall how we got from, uh, we must have taken a ferry from, from Sweden to Denmark and then, uh, or either that or the Danish ship came into, it more, uh, probably the Danish ship came into Gothenberg or Goteborg, I think it probably did.

DANE: What did you take with you? Do you remember?

MYRBECK: Oh, we took some, a couple of trunks with some things in it, some personal effects, but not much, there wasn't an awful lot.

DANE: Any food?

MYRBECK: No, no food, we had, food was good on the ship, that was excellent. First time in my life I ever had oranges. I, I, uh, remember my mother couldn't find me on the boat, I was, she always found out that I went up on the second class, we went third. There were three classes, first, second and third and I got to know some other children that were going on the second class and we always sneaked up on the second class, you know, and they had fruit always up there, filled your pocket with fruit and then yo go down below and get the oranges and things so, uh, oranges was to me something that you never had.

DANE: Did you know how to eat it, did your friends show you that--

MYRBECK: Oh, we had no problem there because at Christmas time every year my grandmother would give me one or two oranges so I knew what oranges were like, no question about it, I had no problem. Bananas, I had only one or two in Sweden, those were, and I had never peeled a banana, I don't think in Sweden, but I got, I got them cut up, you know, from other people that had them.

DANE: Its late. This is the end of side one, Edward Myrbeck, Interview Number 168, its 11:16.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DANE: This is the beginning of side two, Edward Myrbeck, Interview Number 168, Its 11:20. Let me remember where we were. The boat ride. We were just talking, you were a youth of 12 years old. Was it, was the boat

impressive to you?

MYRBECK: Extremely so. It, uh, I think from a standpoint of being oppressive, I think it, things just from there on, from there on it started. I would say it started from there on. I recall distinctly, people being, uh, on the boat being sick and, uh, if you've ever been a boat, they have these big canvas covers over the cargo and I remember people laying there being sick, you know, it was kind of disgusting and but then you discount that and you think of the more pleasant things and I remember some of the young people that were there, we were children and I think my mother had more trouble with me than she had with the year and a half or five year old because she's always told me, and she just passed away here last year at 92 years old, God bless her and she always used to say, "That you were more trouble than anybody else, I never knew where you were, never knew where you were." And of course, the trip over was real pleasant, I enjoyed every bit of it, we got into, into New York and, uh, and--

DANE: How long were you on the ocean?

MYRBECK: Uh, I don't think we were on there, more than probably, probably nine days, something like nine or ten days. It was a relatively good voyage, I, uh--

DANE: Ant storms?

MYRBECK: Not that I can recall, no. There again you see, being a child, I don't think of those things, I don't know, if it had been a real bad storm then, I think, uh, I think I would have thought of it.

DANE: Do you remember where you slept and what your accommodations were like on the boat?

MYRBECK: Yeah, they were relatively nice as an old boat. It wasn't, it wasn't, certainly wasn't one of the modern boats that you see today, they take cruises on but it was a nice boat, it was a, and don't forget when you come from a country and you have to go to an outhouse and you don't have running water in your house and you don't have central heating and you don't have all these things, almost anything is good, almost anything! And I think these are the things that impressed you. I think it was

an entirely new life and needless to say, I don't want you to think that Sweden, in those days, didn't have these modern things but I wasn't used to them, we came from a, we came from the countryside.

DANE: Uh-huh. Was the first you used a running water toilet, on the boat or was that in New York?

MYRBECK: I don't think I'd ever seen one, I don't think I'd ever seen one, no, absolutely not, no I don't think I'd ever seen running water out of faucet that I can recall at least. But there again my mother, my grandmother previously to having moved next to us lived in an apartment house in Oskarshamm, which was big city, but I don't think they had running water. You went out, in Sweden, where we lived, I had to walk, carry, carry two pails, one on either shoulder, you know, on one of these things you put around your neck, uh, walk a good 500 feet to get water anytime you wanted it. And you got it out of a deep well, at a neighbor's house and the neighbor was real well-off and they did not have running water. So, we didn't have electricity until, uh, oh probably a year, year and a half before we left Sweden, had no electricity

in the house, all oil lamps, candles, oil lamps and that was one of my greatest excitements. I think that's what got me interested in electronics, which became a profession afterwards for all my life. To see a, push a switch on the wall and see a light go on (he laughs).

DANE: Magic.

MYRBECK: Yeah, that's right, yeah.

DANE: Also, where would you sleep, were there cabins on this boat that you were on or was it a communal--

MYRBECK: No, no it was a cabin. We had cabins down there, we had cabins, small cabins, very, very small cabins with bunks, very small cabins.

DANE: And how would you entertain yourself during the day, on the boat?

MYRBECK: How would I entertain myself? I can think of other voyages I've taken where I've entertained myself differently but all I did was, would be around with the kids, running around, making a nuisance out of myself.

DANE: Were they Swedish boys?

MYRBECK: They were all Swe--oh, I wouldn't have been able to talk to them if they weren't so that they had to be Swedish boys and girls, sure they were all immigrants that were coming over. Yup. When I say all, there weren't that many, we had there was probably two or three of us that I recall that we got real friendly with.

DANE: Then land ho, and you pull into New York Harbor, Statue of Liberty, any recollections?

MYRBECK: Yeah, I remember seeing it. Frithstsguddinan they called it, Freedom Goddess, that's what it translated into, if you translate it literally. I remember seeing it, it didn't a, I think a lot of people on the boat, the, uh, the older people, they probably had a different feeling than I had. I didn't come from, don't forget, I didn't come from what was an oppressed country. I came from a country that was very poor, uh, whether or not my mother thought of it as a freedom, the freedom she was getting, maybe she just said, "Well here I am, I'm going to meet my

husband," you know, and all that. Uh, I think probably what got me more than anything else was to see the electric lights, you know, especially in the evening and, uh, a lot of people especially on, uh, Ellis Island, all the people and don't forget now you get into a melee of people. I assume the languages were different but to me they all sounded like just a mess. You couldn't understand anything, nothing at all and I think this was one of the things that, uh, really, you said to yourself, "How in the world am I ever going to make myself known what I want or what I want to do here?" Its an odd situation, its a, for a young kid to come into a, just into a place where there is a, absolutely no knowledge of what people are saying. Somebody would look at you and say something and you'd just shake your head, that's all, yeah.

DANE: And chaotic, was it chaotic--

MYRBECK: It was, it was messy, it was a lot of people, just an awful lot of people and some of them looked, well some of them looked really terrified, some of them looked happy, some of them looked as if they, they were ready to

be doomed for something, you didn't know what it was all about and I talked with some people since who had to stay there for two, three days at Ellis Island. We were fortunate. We could come right through. We did not stay there for any length of time, which I think was very fortunate for my mother.

DANE: Do you remember being checked physically, medical exams when you were on Ellis Island?

MYRBECK: Only cursory inspections, nothing, nothing really, you know, there was nothing inhumane about what we had to go through or anything. It was, it was real nice, I was, as far as, now I'm speaking from my own knowledge, now I wish, you see I wish a lot of times that, this was one of the unfortunate things, you don't speak with your parents until its too late, until its absolutely too late and then you don't find out these things but I, I many times I heard my mother say, "Oh," she says, "It was terrible, I didn't know where you were, all of a sudden I look around-" Don't forget she couldn't ask somebody, she couldn't say, "Now look, I had my son here five minutes ago, I can't find him," she just had to keep her eyes on him.

DANE: Do you remember being frightened at all?

MYRBECK: Not at all, not at all. All I was, I was just enthralled about the whole thing. Getting into the harbor on the boat, was late in the, in the evening, in the evening. I think what got me more than anything else was the lights, I couldn't get over the immense, uh, lights and, don't forget, they didn't have neon lights in those days but what they had was these flashing signs that would come off and on, off and on, off and on, different colors. And I remember one sign especially, it was a huge sign that I could see, it said "Lipton's" in big letters, L-I-P-T-O-N, Lipton's and I remember that word because I had seen it on, on various and sundry things in Sweden and I said, "Lipton, that must be the name" and then there'd come on tea, well that's t-e-a. Well in Swedish its spelled almost the same with three letters so I said, "That must tea, that must be tee," tee in Swedish. Then it said, "Lipton's Tea," would come on and then cocoa, that's spelled practically the same in Swedish, so now I said, "Well by gosh, that must be cocoa" and coffee is spelled the same way with exception of a -C- its got a -K- in

front of it so I said, "Well that must be--" you know, I'd say you pronounced it differently, but there's, "Lipton's Tea, Cocoa and Coffee." Now there was my first English lesson, I stood looking at that, looked down on the dock and I say, said, "Fire alarm." In big letters on another, uh, metal plate there and I said, "Well, that says Fire Alarm." That's how you pronounced it in Swedish and F-I-R-E in Swedish means to hoist something, alarm is exactly the same so I said, "I wonder why they want to hoist the alarm." Well, I got to thinking about that and I stood there and I thought anyone, I said, "Somebody's going to come and hoist that alarm, eventually." But nobody did come and hoist it so those are the first two things and then, of course, we took the train from New York out to the Midwest, out to Rockford, where my father was. Want me to continue?

DANE: Before you leave New York, you came in the fall, it was near Christmas time--

MYRBECK: Ah, yes.

DANE: --Was it at that point that you saw the stores and saw all

the--

MYRBECK: We didn't go, don't forget, we didn't go into the city at all. I saw very little of New York, with the exception of going, of taking a cab from the ship to, uh, Grand Central, down where the trains went, that's as far, that's all I saw.

DANE: And the skyscrapers, were they visible to you?

MYRBECK: Uh, I saw most of those when I was standing by the boat, you know, that's, that's where you saw them and they weren't as many skyscrapers then as there are now don't forget, we didn't have the Empire State Building and some of them but there was still a big, uh, it was a huge city as far as I;m concerned. But, actually, New York City I saw very little of then.

DANE: The we go on to Chicago, on to Rockford.

MYRBECK: On to Rockford, and the reason for going to Rockford was that, as I say, that used to be primarily a community of those, consisting of practically all Swedes. Uh, I know we got there, we got into there by

railroad on Seventh Street, down Rockford Avenue, I've been there many times since then, in conjunction with some of the activities I have with the Scandinavians but we got in there and my uncle's, he had one, two, three, four brothers met him there and, of course, this was a wonderful reunion so they, and it was nice because I could understand what everybody was talking about too but I remember my Uncle Axel who later on went back to America, Sweden, he emigrated, went back again, he's living over there now as a matter of fact, this year of 1986. And still living, and he, uh, we're walking he and I, he was talking to me, I went by one of those gum machines, the round machine that had the gumballs and I asked him what that was and he says, "Oh, that's candy." He dropped a penny in there, he gave it to me and then, of course, being a polite kid, like I was, brought up properly, why I put it in my mouth and started chewing, its the first time I had ever had chewing gum.

I'll never forget that as long as I live for the simple reason that, my God, it uh, you could never finish it, you know, and I chewed and I chewed and I chewed and tried to talk at the same time. Well, we walked, I would say, from the railroad station to where my uncle lived, lived in an apartment, it was at least a mile, a mile and a half, and I kept chewing all the time. Finally I said, "Boy, I better swallow this, don't look good for me chewing."

And my uncle said, "What did you do with the gummy?" And I said, to me gummy didn't mean anything, its gum but I didn't know what it was and I said, "I swallowed it." "Oh," he says, "You shouldn't do that." And I couldn't understand why, but that's it. Then I started school after that.

DANE: Explain to me, why did you swallow it rather than spit it onto the ground?

MYRBECK: You don't do those things, when you're brought up properly, my dear (he laughs). You see, things were different in Sweden. When we met the school teachers, if you met the school teacher or you met the minister, called the priest, they call them the priest over in Sweden even though they're mostly Protestants, uh, you would stop, take your hat off and you would bow and say, "Good morning," or "Good afternoon." You would never spit, you would never speak against any, any parent, you would be very polite, you would never use a swear word but there were things that when you were told something, when my father said anything to me, I did it. It wasn't a question of saying, "I won't do it." You know, you did it, it was the upbringing you had and I'm sure that it was very much similar in those days here, you know it, you just didn't spit anything out on the sidewalk, you just, uh, a Swede would never, in those days, its a little bit different in Sweden now, a Swede would never, after having lit a cigarette, throw the match on the sidewalk. Even in

1947, when I was in Sweden, I saw people taking the matches out, turning them around in the matchbox, and I said, "Why do you save your matches?" He said, "What am I going to do with them, I'm not going to throw them on the sidewalks." But that's changed now, that's all changed.

DANE: But that was part of the whole thing, because it never occurred to you just to spit it out--

MYRBECK: No, no, no, no, you could never do it, you could never do that, you could never spit anything when you're walking down the street.

DANE: Also as a child uh, America was a land with more things, more prosperity--

MYRBECK: Oh yes.

DANE: Christmas time came and you had told me a story about going and window shopping and seeing all the toys.

MYRBECK: Oh, its a theater I'll never forget. Family Treater, Midway Theater with those flashing signs. One

of the first things I wanted to go, was to the Family Theater, I saw it when I went by, I said, "Pa, I want to go there." So I know, a day or two afterwards, he gave me the money to go there, and now he says, "Remember," he says, "This isn't going to be something that you're going to all the time." I'll never forget the first movie I went to, the first movie. Wonderful! Alright, so Christmas comes along. Uh, you go to the stores, you look in. I remember Jamesville coaster wagons, I can name these off to you. The old Tinker Toys, the old, old things like that, thing that you would love to have. But it never occurred to you, that you could have them, you couldn't have them and, uh, I didn't have them, I didn't get anything like that for, well, good Lord, I didn't, I never had, I had, I remember having some Tinker Toys but, uh, these electric trains, those steam engines, oh if you could only have one of those. But it did not occur to you that, that was for you. That was inbred in you, what you got for Christmas was the same thing that you got, only more of it, it was clothes, you got stockings, you got a shirt, you got this and you got that, it, uh, you just didn't get anything like that. So it, uh, but you were happy, I mean you didn't, uh, go around saying, "I want

that," you know. First bicycle I got, I practically made myself out there but that was when I got to be around 14, 15.

DANE: Your mother, was she happy in America?

MYRBECK: She was very happy, I think, she was very contented. I think it was very difficult to have left her mother and her sister were in Sweden when she left. I remember some sending money over, you know, and writing back and forth. I still have some of those old letters and, uh, she was very happy because in Rockford, the iceman spoke Swedish, the newspaper boy spoke Swedish, the mailman spoke Swedish, they all spoke Swedish and it wasn't until she came out here into the Boston area that she actually had to really fight and get to know the English language and I think it was good for her. Me, it wasn't difficult for me at all. I think I have mastered the language relatively well.

DANE: Oh you speak beautifully, you'd never even know. (He laughs.) Did you learn in school?

MYRBECK: I went to, I started school about a week or two after I got here. They put me in kindergarten. Have you ever seen the kindergarten chairs? They're about, oh

they're about 12 inches high, I thought, I can't sit on those, and the teacher, you know, I just shook my head, she didn't speak English, Swedish, and they finally got me a chair in there, I sat down and you take now, they'd taken a 12 year old kid, he's getting in there and, uh, they have things on the blackboard, you know, you don't know what it is and then finally about after a week they decide well he must be bright enough, so they put me into the second class. And you get up to where they've got to be, they've got two, and you get up into the third class and they have, one plus one equals three and then you consider yourself real smart. Everybody makes fun of you to a certain extent when you get out in the school yard. Some of the kids could speak Swedish. I think one of the things they'd like to have you learn is some of the nasty words because you, invariably you go in and ask somebody what this, that word means and they tell you, "That's a word you're not supposed to use." You know, but you never know what it is. Uh, I remember getting up and we started to have singing lessons, there was a song that, uh, that uh, intrigued me to no extent, I didn't know what they were singing but I helped them to sing and I was never good at singing anyway and it sounded like bam bam wonk,

wonk, ta, ta, tak ta--(he sings) and that's what I sang, come to find out it was, "Baa, baa black sheep, have you any wool" (he laughs). That I didn't learn until long after I got out of school. It dawned on me then that what they were singing wasn't bam, bam, blink any, any wong, (he laughs). But it didn't take long, I think I learned the English language reasonably well, till I, uh, about six or seven months and then. There was no lessons, there were, there were lessons, I'll take that back. Uh, the name of the school was the P.A. Peterson School, that I went to, you notice that's a Swedish name and uh, they did have lessons there but, uh, they had a teacher who tried to teach you certain words, but more or less you, its a--

DANE: Did the other children ever make fun of you, were you--

MYRBECK: Oh, they kidded you, they called you Swede, they would call you "squarehead," they called you that out here but then they always called me "Swede" and that "Andy Rooney," that, that bothered me more than anything else. That's why I had to change my name from Rune. I'd like to have that Rune. Don't you think that Rune's a nice word? That a real nice Swedish name but, uh, it became Edward

R. instead of Rune Edward.

DANE: And that happened when you were first here?

MYRBECK: That's when I was going, just when I started out there because I couldn't stand that "Andy Rooney" they called me "Andy", you know, and then "Andy Rooney".

DANE: We're running out of time, so I want to jump ahead and ask you a question, uh. that has to do with your heritage, that you were Swedish-born, came and grew up in America, learned English, now you're involved in the Swedish community here, have gotten a medal from the King of Sweden. Your thoughts on your roots and you American citizenship.

MYRBECK: Say again?

DANE: Your thought on--

MYRBECK: Oh, my thoughts. You mean my own personal thought?

DANE: Exactly.

MYRBECK: Only my own personal thoughts, my own personal thoughts are this. That, I doubt very much, regardless of the immigrants if he speaks sincerely, I'm talking sincerely now, there's always that feeling, I don't care if you go from America over to another country or from another country over to America, and regardless of what country it is, I'm saying regardless what country it is, that you have that feeling that you, uh, it isn't a feeling that you want to go back but there's a feeling that you, you come somewhere else. I think I'm very fortunate that I've got children. That neither one of them knows any Swedish, uh, they've never been taught Swedish, I've never thought of it that way, I wish they did know a different language now, they know a little bit, not much, uh, its a, I think we're very fortunate in being in this country, extremely fortunate. I think I am better off in this country, uh, than I ever would have been, having grown up under the circumstances I did in Sweden. Now don't forget, I say under the circumstances. Had I been in a different milieu in Sweden I probably would have been equally as well-off there or perhaps under the circumstances because its a smaller country, even better-

off, you know, if you say better-off or something in position in life, I'm talking about position in life now. Health-wise, wealth-wise that's the question. I think I'm just as well-off here as or better-off than I'd ever be in Sweden. However, if I may be permitted to say anything about my father and mother, they having immigrated under the circumstances they did and at the age they did and under the circumstances again and coming over here, I almost think that in their later life they would have been better-off in Sweden than they would have been here or were here. As a matter of fact, I'm willing to say that they would be but I think that I will be a lot better-off here than ever would be in Sweden, even in, even in my life not providing I'm permitted to have the health I've got. If I get violently sick, terminally sick, then I won't go into that.

DANE: Are you Swedish or are you american?

MYRBECK: I'm an american. After all look, I'm 75 years old, uh, I'm 60 what is it, take 12 years away from that, that's 63 right? Uh, you can't be anything but American. You get over into Sweden, I've been into Sweden probably

four or five times, you see the American flag and you say, "That's where I belong," right? You get over there, you see the Swedish flag and you have a certain feeling for that. If I didn't have that feeling, I wouldn't have been so involved as I have been in the Swedish community. Uh, and I wouldn't have got to be knighted by the old king of Sweden if I hadn't been involved. My brother has always said, "You've been too much involved." Well, I've always said, "I have more friends than he's got but I've got a lot more enemies too." I have been with, on the board of directors out in Chicago now for over 30 years, 35 years, I'm still on the board of directors. I've been head of the Independent Order of Vikings and a national president, I'm uh, I'm in the Masonic Lodge and the Swedish Masonic Lodge over here, uh, oh I started a club with 16 other people here, Scandinavian, uh, my father said it could never be done. Its got over 1,100 members, its the biggest club, its the next-biggest club, in membership in the whole United States with the exception of Jamestown, and don't forget, we're living in an Irish community here in Boston and needless to say, I love every ethnic group so it isn't that I don't like one or another but we have, we have done something I think which is good for the

American people and that is to, its supposed to be a "melting pot", it is a "melting pot" and uh, when I speak well of Sweden, I speak sometimes with the feeling that it is a good country and nobody can say to me, "Why don't you go back there?" because I don't belong there. I belong here.

DANE: This is the end of side two, Edward Myrbeck, Interview Number 168.