

KM-024

ELVY ELIZABETH HAGBERG SWANSON

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INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE

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SWEDEN, 1923

AGE 9

PASSAGE ON "THE STOCKHOLM"

MOORE: Good morning. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 14th of January, 1994. I'm in Pasadena, California at the home of Elvy Swanson, who came from Sweden in 1923 when she was nine years old. Why don't we begin by you giving us your full name and date of birth, please?

SWANSON: My name is Elvy Elizabeth Swanson nee Hagberg. And I was born on April 3, 1914.

MOORE: How do you spell Hagberg?

SWANSON: H-A-G-B-E-R-G.

MOORE: And where were you born?

SWANSON: In Fredriksberg Dalana[ph] in Sweden, province of Dalana[ph].

MOORE: And what kind of town was that, Fredriksberg?

SWANSON: Not at all large. I would say it was a very small town, a few homes.

MOORE: Only a few homes. And what was the population?

SWANSON: I would say five hundred.

MOORE: And what was the major industry in the town?

SWANSON: Most of the men in Fredriksberg worked at the paper mill.

MOORE: And what did the town look like?

SWANSON: It was surrounded by heavy forests, Sweden is so heavily wooded, and hilly. Just a beautiful, beautiful area.

MOORE: And was the town just a cluster of houses or was there a center to that town?

SWANSON: There was not any center, that I can recall.

MOORE: And what was your father's name?

SWANSON: Arvid.

MOORE: A-R . . .

SWANSON: V-I-D.

MOORE: And what was his occupation?

SWANSON: He worked in a paper mill.

MOORE: And what did he do there?

SWANSON: I'm not sure exactly what he did. I used to bring him his lunch, and I would, as I would go in I would see him in this deep, deep vat of, shall I say, it was a big, well . . .

MOORE: Recession?

SWANSON: Yeah, it was a big, I can't think of the word.

MOORE: That's okay. So you say it was a vat, that's all right, say it's a vat. And what was he doing there? Do you remember?

SWANSON: Well, I think that he was cleaning it out after the paper pulp had been put in there, because it smelled

like pulp, because I walked near there. And I don't really know what else he did. Probably other tasks too.

MOORE: Describe what your father looked like.

SWANSON: Very handsome, tall, over six feet, sharp featured. Not, I would say he was sandy-haired, not blonde but dark. Very good looking man.

MOORE: What color eyes?

SWANSON: Blue.

MOORE: And what about his personality and temperament? How would you describe it?

SWANSON: I would say he was a quiet man, but highly disciplined with us children, and gentle. A very gentle man.

MOORE: And is there a story about your father that you associate with your childhood, anything that he did that you tell about?

SWANSON: Well, he used to take, first of all, he made our skis, and he made our boots, and he used to take us when we used to go out he used to take us to cut the Christmas trees. And he always used to take us with him when

they went to cut the hay in the spring, and he took us wherever he could and we enjoyed that. We enjoyed being with him.

MOORE: What about your mother? What was her name?

SWANSON: Thelma.

MOORE: Thelma. And what was her maiden name?

SWANSON: Gefvert. G-E-F-V-E-R-T.

MOORE: And what was her occupation?

SWANSON: She did, she went to Stockholm for a while and worked as a maid or cook, and then she married my dad and she didn't work after that out of the house.

MOORE: And what did she look like?

SWANSON: Very pretty, small, petite. And dark, with dark hair.

MOORE: And eyes?

SWANSON: Kind of blue-green.

MOORE: And what was her personality and temperament?

SWANSON: Very sweet, sweet natured. I never knew her to raise her voice as long as I liked at home. She never did.

MOORE: And what were her chores around the house?

SWANSON: In Sweden? I would say they were very, oh, very difficult. I remember on wash days the women of the neighborhood would go down to the river that flowed just below our house, and take their clothes down there, and they would wash their clothes by dipping them in the river, and then slapping them with a board, and then putting them in this big cauldron, boiled. And they were white as they could be, and this rather difficult job of washing clothes. I don't know what they did in the wintertime, how they managed, but we were always very clean.

MOORE: So she had a hard work.

SWANSON: Very difficult, yes, I would say so. Yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: Is there a story about your mother that you associate with your childhood? Anything you can tell about her?

SWANSON: She played the guitar, and then she sang for us, and I liked that.

MOORE: And what type of songs?

SWANSON: Hymns.

MOORE: Hymns. What about your brothers and sisters? What brothers and sisters do you have?

SWANSON: I have an older brother and a younger brother.

MOORE: And what were their names?

SWANSON: My older brother's name was Henry, and my younger brother's name was Milt.

MOORE: And how much difference in age were they?

SWANSON: Oh, they were about four years apart.

MOORE: Four years older than you?

SWANSON: No, apart. My older brother was two years older than I, and my younger brother two years younger than I.

MOORE: Now, describe your house in Fredriksberg. What was it like?

SWANSON: We had, of course, it was painted red like most of the home were back there, red and white, trimmed in white. And it was a house with four apartments. We had two rooms, a kitchen and a living room, and that sufficed for our family.

MOORE: Two rooms, did you have bedrooms?

SWANSON: No, there were no bedrooms, no.

MOORE: And . . .

SWANSON: Our kitchen served as a bedroom also.

MOORE: Oh. And what was the house made of?

SWANSON: It was wood.

MOORE: How was it heated?

SWANSON: By wood.

MOORE: By wood stove?

SWANSON: Wood stove, yes.

MOORE: And was there a garden?

SWANSON: No, we didn't have a garden.

MOORE: What kind of furniture did you have?

SWANSON: There wasn't too much. But what there was was nice.
Comfortable. (she laughs)

MOORE: It was made by someone.

SWANSON: Mostly by, mostly wood, we had. I know we had a wooden, a wooden couch in the kitchen that kind of opened up, and that served as a bed. There was wood on top.

MOORE: And how was it heated, not heated, (?), how was it lit, your house? What were the lights?

SWANSON: We had electricity.

MOORE: You had electricity. And what about plumbing, the plumbing?

SWANSON: Outdoor plumbing.

MOORE: Outdoor plumbing. And where did you get the water?

SWANSON: Wells. We had a well.

MOORE: Was it very far from the house to go?

SWANSON: No, no.

MOORE: Right next to the house.

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And who else lived in that building, in that house?

SWANSON: Well, there were three other families that lived

there.

MOORE: And did all the families work at the mill?

SWANSON: Most of them, yes. I think all three men did, yes.

MOORE: And who did the cooking in your family then?

SWANSON: My mother.

MOORE: And what was your favorite food?

SWANSON: Oh, I would say probably pancakes. (she laughs)
My mother made the most wonderful Swedish, what they
call pleta, tiny little pancakes. And that was one of
my favorites. We ate a lot of fish, and in season we
would go berry picking, and we would pick all kinds of
berries. I don't know if, carlberries, they called
them here. They were utren[ph]. Are you familiar
with that?

MOORE: Yeah. I (?).

SWANSON: Oh! Uh-huh.

MOORE: Well, did you have any animals at all?

SWANSON: No, we didn't. We had a goat at one time, because my
mother had TB, unfortunately, and she was advised to,

after she was released from the sanitarium, she was advised to get a goat and drink the goat's milk, and that's the only animal we had.

MOORE: Describe the kitchen that you had. Describe a little bit about it.

SWANSON: There was a stove in the corner, and I think it had just about two burners, and then a table over by the window in the front, and at the sides of the table was a bed that opened, in the corner was a bed that kind of opened up, and then we had a couch over here, and that's about all that was in that kitchen as I remember.

MOORE: What about meal time? What was meal time like at your house?

SWANSON: Well, it was, what shall I say? We all sat down together for one thing.

MOORE: For how many meals?

SWANSON: And, well there were mostly two, two, I would say. The noon hour was not, we were not together at the noon hour. And, as I say, we had a lot of fish, and my mother, of course, baked a lot. She baked every

week. So what food we did have was very, very delicious, very good.

MOORE: And were there other family members nearby, grandparents?

SWANSON: Yes. My dad's parents had a farm, I would say about five miles from where we lived.

MOORE: And did your, what were your parents', grandparents' names?

SWANSON: Her name was Anna, and I'm sorry I do not remember. I cannot think of his name right now.

MOORE: You called him Grandfather.

SWANSON: Yes, yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: And what were their, you (?) names.

SWANSON: Yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: Did you see them often, your grandparents?

SWANSON: Yes, we did. Uh-huh. In fact, I stayed at my grandparents' home quite a bit, especially when my mother was in the sanitarium. And we loved it, we loved to be there because there was so much to do.

They had cows and chickens and pigs and sheep. Also a very nasty ram that got me in trouble one time.

(she laughs)

MOORE: What did it do?

SWANSON: Well, my grandmother had, she told us not to go near that ram and, of course, that's all she needed to tell me. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to test that ram out. So I walked into the pen one time, and I didn't see him, so I continued walking. And all of a sudden there he was. He made a bee, and I had to climb over a fence to get in. He made a beeline for me. I'll never forget. He came for me, and I started for the fence, and I was halfway up, and he gave me a push, and I ended up, he sent me flying (she laughs) to the other side. So, of course, I never went back to that pea again. (she laughs)

MOORE: Were you hurt?

SWANSON: No, fortunately. (they laugh)

MOORE: What about, what else did, what did they grow on that farm?

SWANSON: They, oh, they grew potatoes. In fact, we, I helped,

I had, at that tender age, I, they had me out there planting potatoes, and harvesting potatoes. And they had all kinds of vegetables, and berries. The best strawberries I had ever tasted in my life. Delicious. And gooseberries, and oh, just all kinds of, and she had a beautiful flower garden also. It was a fun place to be.

MOORE: Well, who were you particularly most close to in the family? I mean, who was the closest family member to you?

SWANSON: My younger brother.

MOORE: Your younger brother.

SWANSON: Uh-huh. We still are very close.

MOORE: Is he living?

SWANSON: Yes, he is living. My older brother passed away.

MOORE: And why was he?

SWANSON: There was always sort of, you know, a feeling between us. We just, I was his protector, and when we came, I don't know if you want to hear this or not, but when we came to this country, you know, kids can be so

cruel. And we went to school, and they would, they picked on us because we did not know the language. And one time this, we were in class. They put us in the same class, although I was two years older than he was, for the first few days I was in the same class. And some kid said something nasty, and, or pinched my, pushed my brother, and I flew up there and gave it to that, that boy that did that.

MOORE: Did you punch him?

SWANSON: Yes, I did. (they laugh) From then on I was my brother's protector, and he used to always, you know, he always reminds me of that. Whenever he introduces his sister, he says, "This is my protector." And he is six feet tall. (she laughs)

MOORE: Well, what do they, all right, we'll get back to that. But what did they call you at school when they taunted you?

SWANSON: Oh, I really don't know. Probably they called me all kinds of names, but . . . (she laughs)

MOORE: We'll get back to that. All right. Now, do you know any anecdotes about your grandparents at all?

SWANSON: I just remember I used to love to go to the hen house.

My grandfather would take me and put me on his shoulders and carry me over to the hen house, and I could pick out, it was a real thrill if I found an egg, you know, in those little pens.

MOORE: And what about religious life? Was your family religious?

SWANSON: Yes, yes. However, we didn't get to church. We did not go to church very often but we were, yes, very religious.

MOORE: Do you remember where the church was?

SWANSON: I don't know. I can't tell you why we didn't.

MOORE: What denomination were you?

SWANSON: Lutheran.

MOORE: Right. And was there a church nearby?

SWANSON: It was a few miles from us.

MOORE: And when you say you were religious, how did that manifest itself?

SWANSON: Oh, my mother used to read the Bible, and she was,

like I'd say, sang hymns often. She played the guitar in Stockholm, as a matter of fact, for the Salvation Army. And, so, and she was a real true believer.

MOORE: And did you, she teach you prayers at night, any prayers? Did you say grace at the table?

SWANSON: No, we did not.

MOORE: Did you have prayers?

SWANSON: Occasionally I think we did, as I recall, you know, yes.

MOORE: And at night did you say prayers?

SWANSON: Most of the time, yes.

MOORE: Did you experience any religious persecution for being Lutheran?

SWANSON: No, we did not.

MOORE: What about holiday celebrations? What were your favorites?

SWANSON: Christmas.

MOORE: Why?

SWANSON: Oh, Christmas was, well, we did not have much in the way of presents ever. (a clock chimes in the background) The only present I remember that stands out in my mind was I got a pair of shiny black boots. (she laughs) To go over my high tops, and I thought they were the prettiest things I had ever seen. I put them, if you like, (she is moved) I get emotional.

MOORE: That's all right.

SWANSON: I put them on top of the dresser that Christmas Eve night so I could look at them, you know, when I woke up first thing in the morning. (they laugh) To me they were so pretty I didn't even want to wear them, because they were so beautiful. (they laugh) Oh, anyway, on Christmas Eve that was fun, because most of the men in the neighborhood, in the village, would get, they would rent a space, and then we would all, all be off to Julotta at five o'clock Christmas morning, and that was just a wonderful memory.

MOORE: To what?

SWANSON: Julotta. That was a Christmas service, Christmas morning.

MOORE: Five?

SWANSON: At five in the morning, yes.

MOORE: And who was there? How many people were there?

SWANSON: Oh, most of the village went to Julotta. That was . . .

MOORE: How do you spell that? Do you know?

SWANSON: J-U-L-O-T-T-A.

MOORE: And it was at, it was a church?

SWANSON: Yes, yes. We had a beautiful church. It was a lovely, lovely church.

MOORE: Describe the church.

SWANSON: Oh, well, there was, it was in cream-colored, and then kind of like an aqua, trimmed in aqua and gold. And it was just lovely interior. And . . .

MOORE: Wooden?

SWANSON: Yes. Uh-huh. When we went, one thing that stands out in my mind, I have never forgotten it, in the front was the picture of the risen Christ, the empty grave

and the angels. Lovely, lovely painting, quite large and I have never forgotten that. And it was, it was, I really regret that we did not get to church more often than then. I don't know if it was a matter of transportation or whatever.

MOORE: How did you get back and forth from your house to other places?

SWANSON: Walk. We walked, you walked. In the winter you skied. That was your main, they have up there called, have you ever seen a parksteadtning[ph]? It's a seat, you sit, there's a seat, and then there's the blades, long blades.

MOORE: Runners.

SWANSON: Runners, yes, uh-huh. Somebody pushes you. Have you seen it?

MOORE: You used that.

SWANSON: Yes, yes.

MOORE: Well, what about Easter time? Was that a holiday that was very big for you?

SWANSON: It was not, I do not remember too much about Easter.

We, I remember that we had a tradition of, that we kids had a tradition of writing, making pictures with crayons. And I remember drawing eggs and baskets, and we would come to each others' homes, and we would just open the door and throw these pictures in. Now, what the reason was, I have no idea, but we used to do that.

MOORE: How about Midsummer?

SWANSON: Oh, that was, we always celebrated that in a big way, I should say.

MOORE: How did you celebrate?

SWANSON: Well, first of all, all of the kids from the village would, they told us to get out in the woods and pick all the flowers you could, which we did. And then the men would decorate the maypole, and festivities started early in the morning, pots of food and there was much dancing and music, and it was just a day of great fun.

MOORE: And the maypole was in what shape? Was it just a pole?

SWANSON: No, it was the shape in, like a cross, actually.

MOORE: And that was the Midsummer maypole event?

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And the dancing, did your parents dance, too?

SWANSON: Oh, yes, yes, uh-huh. A lot of the dancing was around the maypole. Then, of course, they danced individually, too, and it was just a day of a lot of fun that lasted long into the night.

MOORE: Did you have a bonfire?

SWANSON: We used to have bonfires, huge bonfires. (electric saw heard in background) I don't remember what time of the year that was. Great, big, and I don't know what we were celebrating. I'm not, you know, I do not remember that. But I do remember that once in a while we would gather and see these huge, huge bonfires. They would make these huge bonfires, and I don't know if that was in celebration of anything or not. I really don't know.

MOORE: Did you learn, describe school life. What was school like back then in Sweden?

SWANSON: Well, we learned, we sat, and we listened, and we

didn't dare do anything. We were very, very disciplined kids. (she laughs)

MOORE: And how far was the school from your house?

SWANSON: Not very far. I would say, I would say it's about half a mile.

MOORE: And how did you get there?

SWANSON: Just, we walked.

MOORE: And was your school crowded or was it, how many children were in each class?

SWANSON: Oh, I would say probably maybe fifteen. Not very many.

MOORE: And do you remember any specific teachers or playmates?

SWANSON: No, I don't.

MOORE: What was your favorite subject before you came here?

SWANSON: I couldn't tell you, I really couldn't tell you. That, I couldn't.

MOORE: Did you learn any English prior to coming to the

United States?

SWANSON: No.

MOORE: What did you do for entertainment, as a child?

SWANSON: We played in the woods. We loved to go into the woods and play. And, oh, I don't know. There was always something that we enjoyed doing. We were always outside. We were never inside, winter or summer. We were always outside.

MOORE: Any games, do you remember playing?

SWANSON: Oh, we played hide and seek, of course. And we had, during the winter we had races, on skis. And, oh, I can't remember.

MOORE: That's all right. About coming to America, who decided to come to America? (electric saw continues)

SWANSON: Well, my mother's family, they were all, all of them were here, even her mother. And so my two uncles came, and paid a visit to us in 1922, and they persuaded us that we should join them. They were all doing, in my mother's family the men were all doing

very well, and they figured it was a better opportunity.

MOORE: Where were they living?

SWANSON: They were, I had one uncle in Massachusetts, and all the rest were in Chicago.

MOORE: And so was any family member ever sending you money from America?

SWANSON: No, they never sent us money, but I had a cousin that was older than I, and she had the most beautiful clothes, so that was a big deal for me when I, once in a while I would get these packages from her, and they would be these beautiful velvet dresses. Gorgeous clothes, because all my clothes were handmade. Not too great. (she laughs) So I loved to get these packages.

MOORE: And do you remember getting ready to go to America? Do you remember discussion between your mother and father, or the family, about coming to America?

SWANSON: I don't remember any discussion, but I do remember that we had an auction where we auctioned off all my furniture, what little we have. And then we went to

live with my grandmother, my father's mother.

MOORE: Was that an emotional time?

SWANSON: Yes.

MOORE: The auction.

SWANSON: Yes, I'm sure it was. I don't recall right now how I felt, but I'm sure it must have been very emotional.

MOORE: And who came to that auction? Lots of people?

SWANSON: Mostly the neighbors, yes. Uh-huh, yes.

MOORE: And did you want to come to America?

SWANSON: Oh, yes.

MOORE: Were you excited, as a child, to come?

SWANSON: Yes, I was, very much so.

MOORE: Did both your parents want to come?

SWANSON: I think my mother was eager to come. I'm not sure how my dad felt about it, because he would be leaving his parents, his family, here.

MOORE: What did your grandparents think about that, your

father's parents?

SWANSON: Well, they thought what's best for the family is what we should do, they thought. I'm sure of this, that's the way they felt.

MOORE: And do you remember getting everything packed beforehand, packing up trunks or anything before you left? Do you remember any of that?

SWANSON: I don't remember that, no, I do not. I was not part of that too much, no.

MOORE: And do you remember a goodbye party?

SWANSON: No, not really, no, I don't.

MOORE: Do you remember a parting where the last time you saw your grandparents?

SWANSON: That does not stand out in my mind, particularly, really.

MOORE: Okay. When you, amongst the things that you brought to this country, was there anything precious that you, that they packed, something that you kept for yourself? A toy, or something very dear?

SWANSON: No, there wasn't.

MOORE: Okay. So when you were going to leave, do you remember the day that you left Sweden?

SWANSON: I don't remember the day, but I do remember how we left. There was, there was quite a few miles to a train station, and so we had to put all our belongings on a trolley, and that's the way we went to the train station.

MOORE: How did the trolley . . .

SWANSON: This kind of a trolley. (she gestures) You pull, yes, and it rolls.

MOORE: You put it on a track?

SWANSON: Yes, yes.

MOORE: And you pumped it to the train station.

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And who was there to help you put the things on those tracks?

SWANSON: I think a neighbor came with us then and helped my mother.

MOORE: Your grandparents, were they there?

SWANSON: No, my grandparents were not there, no.

MOORE: Did you take any food with you?

SWANSON: No.

MOORE: Did you take any, do you remember the luggage, the things you took with you, how much?

SWANSON: No, I don't. But I do, what I remember, my mother and my grandmother sat for many weeks during that year, when we had to wait to get the okay to come from my dad, they sat for weeks. My grandmother obtained a big, a big loom, and they wove a carpet, blue and white and checked carpet. Yards and yards of it, and that was to be cut in pieces and given to my aunt as a gift. It was a lovely, lovely piece, but it was just a big, huge roll. And it seems to me that my mother took that with her. She didn't want to send that, she didn't want to pack that and have it sent. So I think that she took that with her. But I can't understand, that must have been a very, very heavy thing, so I, I'm not sure I'm right on that or not.

MOORE: All right. So who came to America with your family?
Who was with you when you left?

SWANSON: My younger brother, my mother and I. My dad and my
older brother had gone ahead, a year ahead.

MOORE: I see. Let's go back, then. So your father, do you
remember your father and your brother leaving first?

SWANSON: Yes.

MOORE: And was that . . .

SWANSON: It was very traumatic, you know.

MOORE: For whom?

SWANSON: For all of us to see them go.

MOORE: And so it was . . .

SWANSON: Because we knew there would be a year separation.

MOORE: And so they went where, then, your father and your
brother?

SWANSON: They went to Chicago.

MOORE: To Chicago. And then did the whole family get
together and say goodbye to them?

SWANSON: Yes, they must have. I don't recall it but I'm sure we did.

MOORE: And when they were away from you, did they write back to you?

SWANSON: Yes, oh, yes.

MOORE: What did the letters say, do you remember?

SWANSON: Well, they just told what was going on. Apparently my dad was doing all right. He had apparently no problem getting a job, because there was a building boom at the time, and he went into that area of work. So he apparently got work right away. And . . .

MOORE: How about your younger, your only brother?

SWANSON: He was only thirteen, so he went to school.

MOORE: So did you have any medical examination before you left?

SWANSON: I do not remember that, no, I do not remember that.

MOORE: Now, what port did you leave from?

SWANSON: Goteborg.

MOORE: And you got from your home, and you went to the train tracks, and you pumped yourself to the station. Which was what?

SWANSON: Which was Falun, F-A-L-U-N.

MOORE: Falun. And then from there you took what?

SWANSON: We took the train, and we stopped in a town called Loxa, where my mother visited her sister, the one remaining sister, in Sweden, in her family.

MOORE: And you stayed overnight?

SWANSON: Yes, we stayed overnight, uih-huh.

MOORE: And how was that? Was that a very . . .

SWANSON: Oh, it was very sad. I'm sure it was very, very traumatic for my mother, very sad. And for my aunt also, because that was the last one in her family.

MOORE: Yes.

SWANSON: And from Laxa we went to Goteborg.

MOORE: And do you, did you stay overnight in Goteborg?

SWANSON: Yes, we stayed with a friend, and I remember getting

off the train in Goteborg, and we went through the marketplace on the way to this friend's home, and we saw bananas there, which we had never seen.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SWANSON: And so my mother bought us each a banana. What a thrill it was to taste something else. (she laughs) Something that we had not had before. And, in fact, grapes. We never saw grapes in Sweden as a child. I remember my Uncle (?) must have gone on a trip and he came back with grapes, and he gave us each one green grape. (she laughs) (?) of our lives.

MOORE: So he went to the friend's house and stayed there.

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And then what happened? The next day you went to the boat?

SWANSON: Uh-huh, yes.

MOORE: How did you get to the boat from the friend's house?

SWANSON: I, we must have taken a trolley, I'm sure, I'm sure, to the boat, yeah.

MOORE: Okay. Do you remember seeing a boat for the first time?

SWANSON: Oh, I could, I couldn't get over the size of it. I had no idea, this huge thing. But it just so big I couldn't get over it.

MOORE: And the name of the boat was?

SWANSON: Stockholm.

MOORE: Stockholm. And do you have any stories on the way to the ship, anything happen? Did your belongings all get there?

SWANSON: As far as I know, that was.

MOORE: All right. So you, did anybody see you off? Did friends see you off?

SWANSON: The friend, that's all.

MOORE: Came to the boat.

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: See you off. And when did the ship depart?

SWANSON: (whispering) Can you shut that off. I can look it

up. (pause in tape)

MOORE: We were talking about when the ship departed.

SWANSON: We departed from Goteborg, July 28, 1923.

MOORE: All right. What were the accommodations like on the ship?

SWANSON: We had a small cabin with four cots, and a washstand, and that's it.

MOORE: What class was it?

SWANSON: Fourth.

MOORE: Fourth, or third class?

SWANSON: Third class, third class, yeah.

MOORE: You had your own cabin.

SWANSON: Yes, we did.

MOORE: For your family.

SWANSON: Yes.

MOORE: And you didn't share it with anyone else.

SWANSON: Yes, another lady joined us.

MOORE: And what about your dining room facilities? What were the eating facilities?

SWANSON: Very nice, and the food was delicious. I remember the food as being very good.

MOORE: Were you allowed on deck?

SWANSON: Yes, we were.

MOORE: Were you allowed on deck?

SWANSON: Oh, I should say. And there was music and dancing every day. We had an accordion, and then we had, it was fun, it was a happy time, very nice, a very nice voyage. We were sick, my mother was sick one day, and I was sick one day, but outside of that, everything was just fine, it was enjoyable.

MOORE: What was the weather like, or the voyage like? Was it rough or . . .

SWANSON: We had, it was rough over the North Sea, but when we passed that the weather was very smooth, very nice.

MOORE: Do you have any anecdotes about the voyage? Anything that happened that you'd say that those . . .

SWANSON: I made, I made a friend with a girl that had been over to visit her grandparents. And she and I, of course, danced together, and she taught me my first words, "Come dance with me."

MOORE: In English?

SWANSON: But, of course, I didn't, yes. Because I didn't pronounce it that way. I thought it was all one word. (they laugh) And she had her hair cut straight with a big, huge big bow, and I thought, "When I come to America that's the way I am going to look." Because that's the American look, and so I did. The very first, the second day I was in this country my dad took me downstairs. There was a barbershop right downstairs from my grandmother's. And I had my hair cut, and my grandmother put a huge, big bow in my hair. I was an American. (she laughs)

MOORE: So when you, other than that, what about your brother? Did he, do you have any anecdotes about your brother on the boat?

SWANSON: No, I don't remember any, really.

MOORE: Were you protecting him there?

SWANSON: Oh, I should say. Oh, yes. (she laughs)

MOORE: Do you remember seeing land for the first time?

SWANSON: Yes, oh, yeah.

MOORE: And what was that like?

SWANSON: It was unbelievable. I remember thinking, "This is America," and seeing the Statue of Liberty, and it was just, it was unbelievable and very awesome. But, of course, at my age I didn't really know the meaning, how meaningful, you know, the Statue of Liberty was, and I had been, I guess, for, you know, people that had been persecuted and oppressed. So that's why I didn't realize at all at that time. But I thought, "This is America. This is just a wonderful land." And the skyline of New York, that's just, like I say, it's awesome, unbelievable. Because we had not, our biggest town, of course, that I had seen was Goteborg and, you know, there was nothing there that could compare to this skyline of New York, these huge buildings.

MOORE: How long was your voyage then, had it been?

SWANSON: About a week.

MOORE: About a week.

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And do you remember when the Statue of Liberty rose up. Were you on deck at that time?

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: What was the atmosphere like?

SWANSON: Oh, it was just, well, just exciting, very exciting.

MOORE: Were people cheering, and?

SWANSON: Oh, yes, yes. Some were crying. A very emotional time, I think, for many.

MOORE: How did, now, you went to Ellis Island. How did you get to Ellis Island?

SWANSON: By ferry.

MOORE: So the ferry came to your boat . . .

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And took you to Ellis Island.

SWANSON: Yes. They did not let us embark right away. We

stayed overnight on the boat. My brother says we were there longer than one night, so we differ on that memory. But I do remember lying awake that one night and just not sleeping, just looking and smelling, the smells of the wharf, and listening to the activities, and it was just so, so new to me and so exciting. So anyway, I just remember that one night. We may have been longer on the boat. Then they took us by ferry over to Ellis Island.

MOORE: And what was, what do you remember about Ellis Island?

SWANSON: All these years I've had memory of the three, I say three, we may have been there longer, as the most frightful days I have ever experienced. We were so frightened, because we didn't know what was happening at all.

MOORE: And as you walked in, walk us through, as you got off the boat, the ferry, what happened?

SWANSON: I remember going up a staircase and at the top of the staircase we were examined, kind of a cursory physical examination. And . . .

MOORE: What did they check?

SWANSON: Oh, just, they just looked at my brother and I, really. And my mother, they tested her a little bit more, but it was very cursory, nothing that you would call a real physical examination at all. Anyway, and then most of the people, I remember this, because I was so upset about this, most of the people went to the right, and we were told to go to the left. And I thought, "Something is wrong." I remember thinking that. And I thought, "What's wrong here?" Had they, you know, my mother had a scar on, she had been operated on for thyroid, and I thought, "Had they seen the scar?" And, "Or did they . . ." Because she'd had had TB? Was there some problem? Weren't they going to let us in? I remember thinking that, and so, of course, my mother was very upset, too. She didn't know what was happening. This must have been just very, very hard for her, and not knowing, you know, what was going on at all. Anyway, so we went into this huge hall where we were to sit for days, and we stayed there the first night. We must have been in the medical part of Ellis Island, because we were ushered into a room with four beds, nice clean sheets, nice clean pillowcases, and we spent a very comfortable night. The next night after sitting, my

mother must have been told that you go into this huge room and you sit there and you wait for your name to be called. And, so that's how we spent the day. And then the next night we were shown to, and the other nights we were shown into this huge dormitory with the other children and, mothers and children. And there were no, we just, there were no sheets or pillowcases.

We just had a very thin mattress and a blanket, and I think we had a pillow. And, not very comfortable at all. And noisy, and upsetting. I remember one evening my mother had gone into the rest room, and she came out crying. And I had not seen my mother cry for some time. She was a pretty hardy little gal. I think it was very, yes, very. And she was crying, and this Finnish woman that she had gotten to know came over and wanted to know what had happened. We kids did not know. We never found out what had happened, but she told this Finnish woman. And from then on this woman never left another my mother's side, and she stayed there to kind of protect her for us.

MOORE: And you still don't know what happened.

SWANSON: I never did find out, no. I never did find out. But it must have been just a very, a very upsetting time

for my mother, Mom. And there were rumors that the children were going to be separated from their mothers, and this was just very frightening for us. As I say, it was, it was so frightening, the whole thing was so strange. It was a strange experience, frightening, because we didn't know what was going on.

MOORE: Did anyone ever translate for you?

SWANSON: No, no. I do not remember . . .

MOORE: Was it crowded?

SWANSON: Yes, yes, very.

MOORE: Were there other Swedes there?

SWANSON: No, we did not meet any. The only one my mother talked to was this Finnish woman.

MOORE: What were you wearing when all this happened? What kind of clothes were you wearing? Did you have your best clothes on, or . . .

SWANSON: I really don't know. I don't remember what I had on.

MOORE: So you were there for how long?

SWANSON: Well, in my memory it seems like three days, and in my

brother's memory it seems as if we were there longer.

But another thing, we would go into that huge mess hall to eat. And I remember that's when we were first introduced to French or Italian bread with that delicious crust and white inside, and we thought that was the most marvelous bread. My brother and I, that's what we insisted on. And milk was plentiful. I remember that. And, so we had that most of the time. I don't remember anything else of what we ate.

Then, it was just recently my brother and I were talking about our experience on Ellis Island, and he said, "Do you remember how dirty that floor was in the mess hall?" I said, "Yes! Do you know that I have a memory of that, too?" That dirty floor was food thrown and all kinds of debris on that floor. I don't know if they ever cleaned it up. That stood out in his memory as well as mine.

MOORE: So the eating accommodations were dirty.

SWANSON: Oh, I should say they were, yes.

MOORE: What was the atmosphere like for eating? Was it . . .

SWANSON: Noisy, and, well, I just remember a lot of noise, and I guess we were served quite well, but I do not

remember the food, except for the bread.

MOORE: Now, what were your expectations, was there anything else that was new there in Ellis Island that you'd never seen before? Where did you wash, go to the bathroom?

SWANSON: Do you know that that does not stand out in my memory at all.

MOORE: That's okay.

SWANSON: Except in the evening, of course. You know, we went to the rest room off the dormitory. That's the only one I remember. During the day I don't remember, but there must have been washrooms around.

MOORE: So after the end of this, what you thought was three and your brother thought was longer days, how did you get out, and what happened after that?

SWANSON: Well, as I say, we sat there and my mother had to sit there and listen to her name being called, and finally she did hear her name, and we were told then that we could leave. Up to that point we didn't know whether we were going to be sent back, or if we would be allowed to go ahead, or whatever. So then we were

told we could go ahead, and we were ushered out, and another ferry took us to New York. And there we took a train to Chicago.

MOORE: Was anybody there to meet you?

SWANSON: No, there was nobody there. No. And when we came to Chicago my dad was in Chicago, and he met us at the train station in Chicago.

MOORE: And what was that like?

SWANSON: Oh, joyous, wonderful.

MOORE: On the train trip, was there anything new on the train you'd never seen?

SWANSON: Oh, I'm sure there was. I don't have much memory of that.

MOORE: What sticks out in your mind?

SWANSON: Nothing.

MOORE: At the end?

SWANSON: At the end of the trip? At the end of the trip from Chicago, my dad took us up to the elevated train. And, of course, I had never seen a train up in the air

before. And I worried. I didn't enjoy that train ride to my grandmother's at all because I worried. I thought for sure that train was going to go off the track. (she laughs) So that stands out in my memory. And then after this, I'd say the very next day, I went down and got my hair cut, and had a big bow in my hair, and that was it.

MOORE: What about your mother and father seeing each other for the first time?

SWANSON: Oh, very emotional. Swedes, of course, are not emotional outwardly, but that day they were.
(she laughs)

MOORE: All right. So when you went, describe the, where did you go to? What was the place that you went to? What was the house that you went to?

SWANSON: Well, it's my grandmother's house.

MOORE: In Chicago.

SWANSON: In Chicago, on Palina Street in Chicago, she had an apartment there. Uh-huh.

MOORE: And how many people lived there.

SWANSON: Just, she lived there with one of my uncles, her son.

MOORE: And how big was it?

SWANSON: She had two bedrooms and a living room and a dining room.

MOORE: How was it furnished?

SWANSON: Pretty nicely as far as I can remember.

MOORE: How was it lit?

SWANSON: Electricity, uh-huh.

MOORE: And heated?

SWANSON: Oh, yes.

MOORE: By . . .

SWANSON: Steam heated.

MOORE: Steam heated. And was there indoor plumbing?

SWANSON: Oh, yes.

MOORE: What about the neighborhood?

SWANSON: It was middle class, I would say.

MOORE: And what nationalities, what ethnic background was it?

SWANSON: I think they were mostly Czechoslovakian or Slavic, I think there was a Slavic neighborhood down there, I'm not sure.

MOORE: Did any other family members live nearby?

SWANSON: No. They were more on the north side of Chicago.

MOORE: Did your grandmother get along well with the neighbors?

SWANSON: Yes, uh-huh. Of course, she stayed with her, you know, stayed by herself pretty much.

MOORE: Now, what jobs did your father get in the States?

SWANSON: He went into construction.

MOORE: And . . .

SWANSON: Bricklaying and carpentry.

MOORE: Did he support the family?

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: What did your uncle, who lived with your grandmother, do?

SWANSON: He worked for (?).

MOORE: Did your mother work at all when she first got there?

SWANSON: No.

MOORE: Did you go to school?

SWANSON: Oh, yes.

MOORE: And describe your school experience, going to school for the first time.

SWANSON: Well, I put my brother and, as I said before, they put my brother and me, and myself, in the same class. And, of course, that couldn't continue because I was about nine years old, you know. So, as I mentioned before, we had quite a time because the kids were pretty cruel to us, teasing and everything. And I really don't know how the teachers managed to teach us anything because we didn't understand anything. But it must have been awful for them and for us, too. But, anyway, I was not with my brother very long. Just a few days I remember my teacher asking me to come up and write A, the letter A, on the blackboard. And so I did, and I just wrote ABC. And she just

looked. And she knew I had had some kind of schooling before, so. She did send me to second grade. And then I skipped a couple of grades to get into my age group in school. And we seemed to have picked up the language pretty well. I don't think it was very difficult for a long time for us.

MOORE: Were there any names, particular names the kids called you? Do you remember any of them?

SWANSON: That I don't, no, I really don't.

MOORE: And do you remember anybody who was kind to you, who helped you a lot? Did anyone do something special?

SWANSON: Oh, yeah. Well, I had a friend that, I went to church, Sunday school, right away, and I met a girl there that became my lifelong friend. We were friends until she died just recently, and she was very, very kind to me.

MOORE: So you kept a friend from that first year?

SWANSON: Oh, yes.

MOORE: That's nice. What was her name?

SWANSON: Ethel.

MOORE: Ethel . . .

SWANSON: Amquist.

MOORE: Amquist. She was a Swede?

SWANSON: Oh, yes. We met . . .

MOORE: Did she speak Swedish?

SWANSON: Oh, yes. We met, oh, she was born here, but we met in a very Swedish neighborhood in Chicago. It was all Swedes, practically.

MOORE: Eventually, or after you left your grandmother's house?

SWANSON: After we left our grandmother's.

MOORE: What neighborhood was that?

SWANSON: It was, if you know Chicago at all, it was north of, it was northwest, north of Foster Avenue, and it's called North Park, if you've heard that. But it was all Swedes.

MOORE: How about your mother and father? Did they learn English?

SWANSON: My mother did not very well, because one drawback about being so close to your family, her sisters were all around, and they were her social outlet.

MOORE: And she lived in a Swedish neighborhood.

SWANSON: Yes. And so she never did really even learn too much of the English language. She got along all right. But my dad, of course, I used his dictionaries when I'd write to my cousin in Sweden. And he learned pretty good. He spoke pretty well.

MOORE: Did you speak Swedish all the time at home?

SWANSON: Yes, we did.

MOORE: And did you ever mix English with Swedish?

SWANSON: Oh, yes, we did, yes. (she laughs)

MOORE: Did you have any, what about your religious life, then, here? Did you continue going to church?

SWANSON: Uh-huh, oh, yes. All through.

MOORE: And did you go regularly here?

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: Like once per week.

SWANSON: I went to Sunday school, I went on Wednesday evenings, I sang in the choir. I was very, very active in church.

MOORE: So you were more active here than you were in Sweden?

SWANSON: Oh, yes, always have been, yes.

MOORE: And did your mother continue her religious . . .

SWANSON: She didn't really go to church. She was not in the habit of going to church, I'm sorry to say. But she was, you know, had her religion.

MOORE: Was, the religious service that you went to, was it in Swedish?

SWANSON: No. Oh, we did have, yes. We did have some Swedish sermons, yes, uh-huh. But most of it was in English.

MOORE: Did your father go to church?

SWANSON: Uh-uh.

MOORE: So you did.

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: Your brothers?

SWANSON: Yes, yeah.

MOORE: Your two brothers?

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: So church also was a social gathering.

SWANSON: Oh, yes, uh-huh.

MOORE: Now, how about your other family members. Did any of your family members ever think of going back to Sweden? Did your parents ever want to go back? Were they homesick enough . . .

SWANSON: I'm sure there were times, when we had the bad times, I'm sure that they probably missed Sweden. I'm sure they did, and I'm sure that that thought came to them, but they didn't (?) very long.

MOORE: What bad times did you have in this country?

SWANSON: When my dad couldn't find work. When they were through with a certain building, and there was a lapse before they started another one. And so my brother had to quit school before he graduated from high

school to help support the family. He became, he worked in a butcher shop, and then he later became a butcher and then a salesman. But he helped support the family for a number of years.

MOORE: Your older brother.

SWANSON: Uh-huh.

MOORE: What about the Depression? How hard did that hit your family?

SWANSON: I can't say that we were very badly hit by the Depression. My dad managed to find work and my brother being in the butcher business, we always seemed to have enough food on the table. So I can't say that we suffered a lot from the Depression.

MOORE: Did any family members ever go back?

SWANSON: Just to visit.

MOORE: Just to visit. And do you think your family was satisfied or dissatisfied with life here? Which, if you look at your parents, do you think that they, how did they feel about their decision to come to the States?

SWANSON: Well, my younger brother had a very unfortunate accident when he was nine years old, so that was a couple of years. We had been here just a couple of years. And he was run over by a loaded excavating truck. He was on his bicycle and his left leg was just thoroughly smashed. Fortunately the doctor, even in those days, he was able to save it, and he's been a cripple, he had a choice of either keeping his leg straight or bending it, and he chose to have it permanently bent because it's a little bit easier to walk that way, so that is the way he has walked since he was nine years old, but it has not kept him from doing anything that most normal boys did. And he roller skated, he ice skated, and he of all the family has become the most successful. He had his own tool and dye company during the war, and he's now retired, but he's been very successful.

MOORE: So that tragedy, your parents, how did your parents react to that?

SWANSON: Well, I'm sure that my mother often thought if we hadn't been here, this would not have happened. But, you know, you can't, you don't know what would have happened back there either, so you can't really think

that way. But I'm sure that entered her mind.

MOORE: Could you tell a little bit about your life then? Since then, what the milestones in your life were after that once you grew up in terms of if you had family or not, or what you did that was important to you, so that we can have a follow-up as to what your life was like here.

SWANSON: Well, that's a number of years. We lived in, we were married in Chicago in 1938 and . . .

MOORE: How old were you then?

SWANSON: I was twenty-four.

MOORE: Did you finish high school?

SWANSON: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, I worked, I worked as a legal secretary before I even, I trained before I was even through high school, and then when I graduated from high school I went, this lawyer hired me permanently from, you know, on a regular basis, and so I worked for many years as a legal secretary. And after we were married in '38 we went, (?), my husband, got a job up in Salt Lake as a salesman of automotive parts, and we were there for three years, and then he was

called into the service, and he was then, thirty-six months overseas. However, that was in Hawaii, so he didn't get into action. There was not, it could have been much worse. He was on his way to Saipan when the war in Japan was over. So then that, the soldiers that were on their way, they were disembarked in Hawaii, and he spent time there, about six months there in Hawaii, and then came back. And after he came back from the war, his dad was a builder, and he joined his dad, then, became a partner with his dad, and he built homes in Chicago.

MOORE: And what ethnic background was your husband?

SWANSON: Swedish.

MOORE: So he was a Swedish-American, born here?

SWANSON: Oh, yeah. He was born in Chicago.

MOORE: Born in Chicago.

SWANSON: Oh, sure. He was a Swede. (she laughs) So, and then we were in business with his dad for a while, and then there was an opportunity out here that a friend of ours, we had several friends that had moved out from Chicago, and they all wanted us to come out here.

And then one of our friends offered us a good opportunity to go in business out here with him, so we made the move, and that was in 1963. And, since then, now he is retired, finally. He worked until quite late. He retired this past year.

MOORE: And your family, your brother?

SWANSON: Oh, we had, I should say, we have an adopted girl who is married and, well, she is divorced now unfortunately, but she had two boys, and one of the boys is now married, so we have a great-grandson. And my brother lives out here. He lives up in Santa Ramon, and that's the only one in my family, of course, that is left.

MOORE: Did he marry and have children?

SWANSON: Uh-huh, oh, yeah.

MOORE: So you also have nieces and nephews?

SWANSON: Oh, yes. He married, and they had a boy and a girl, and his son is a psychologist and a teacher, and then the daughter is a teacher, and they both have their doctorates, so they've done very well.

MOORE: So when you and your family, say you and your brother or whatever, when you look back on your life, how do you think about that original decision to come to the United States?

SWANSON: Oh, I am very happy that we did. I am. I have enjoyed life here in America. I can't imagine living back there. I have thoroughly enjoyed it.

MOORE: Do you think that your brother has any regrets at all?

SWANSON: Oh, no, I should say not. Even, no, I don't, no, I don't think so.

MOORE: We'd like to thank you on behalf of the Ellis Island Oral History Project for helping us.

SWANSON: Well, I'm so glad you came out. It's kind of, it's been a lesson in going back for me, too. Thank you.

MOORE: With Elvy Swanson in Pasadena, California, this is Kate Moore on January 14, 1994 signing off for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.