

KM-047

DAGMAR IRENE FORSELL NILAND SWENSON

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INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE

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FINLAND, 1917

AGE 21

PASSAGE ON "THE BERGENSFJORD"

MOORE: Good afternoon. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service, and today is the 26th of June, 1994. And I'm at the home of Dagmar Forsell Swenson, who came to the U.S. in 1917 at the age of twenty-one years old. Could you, why don't you begin by giving me your full name and your date of birth, please?

SWENSON: Dagmar Irene Forsell, my maiden name. And it was heartbreaking to leave Finland.

MOORE: When were you born? What's your birthday?

SWENSON: April 4th.

MOORE: What year?

SWENSON: 1995 [sic].

MOORE: Yes. And how do you spell Forsell?

SWENSON: F-O-R-S-E double-L.

MOORE: And where were you born?

SWENSON: In Terjarv, Finland.

MOORE: How do you spell that?

SWENSON: T-E-R-J-A-R-V.

MOORE: Okay. And what size town was that, in Finland? How big was that town?

SWENSON: A small town, just a country place, yeah.

MOORE: How many people in?

SWENSON: I could not say that.

MOORE: What did the town look like?

SWENSON: Oh, it was beautiful. We had a lake right in the middle of a (Finnish). It was right up that road about ten (?) that that was (Finnish).

MOORE: And what was that major industry in that town? What did people do for a living?

SWENSON: Just farming.

MOORE: Farming.

SWENSON: But then they started to have a factory, made different materials, yeah.

MOORE: And what was your father's name?

SWENSON: John Alfred Forsell.

MOORE: Yes. And what was his occupation?

SWENSON: He was a farmer.

MOORE: And what did he look like?

SWENSON: Oh, he was regular. Oh, I don't know what to say.

MOORE: How was, what color hair did he have?

SWENSON: Oh, he had gray hair.

MOORE: And his eyes?

SWENSON: I guess blue, because I have blue eyes, yah.

MOORE: How tall was he, about?

SWENSON: Oh, he was a middle-aged man, you know, maybe a little taller than this fellow.

MOORE: So about five foot seven, five foot eight. Yeah, yeah. Okay. And what, what about his personality, your father?

SWENSON: Well, I wasn't, I wouldn't know. He, well, he was pleasant, he was a pleasant man, and we liked him very much, yah.

MOORE: And what was his temperament? Was he, he was pleasant, and what else about him? How would you describe your father?

SWENSON: Well, I don't know how I should.

MOORE: Do you have a story about your father?

SWENSON: Well, he worked in the mine in Butte, Montana.

MOORE: That's why he came here.

SWENSON: Yah.

MOORE: And what was your mother's name?

SWENSON: Emma Frederika Lindell.

MOORE: Lindell. How do you spell Lindell?

SWENSON: L-I-N-D-E-double-L.

MOORE: And what was her occupation?

SWENSON: Housewife.

MOORE: Uh-huh. And what did she look like?

SWENSON: She was a very pretty woman.

MOORE: What color hair did she have?

SWENSON: She had blue eyes.

MOORE: She had blue eyes, and what about her hair?

SWENSON: Well, she had light hair.

MOORE: Was she very tall?

SWENSON: Yeah. She was tall, much taller than I am. Yeah.

MOORE: And so what were her chores around the house? What did she do at home?

SWENSON: Well, she did housework, and they had cows and they made, they had lambs, so they used to make wool from the . . .

MOORE: Sheep, yeah.

SWENSON: Yeah, from the sheep, yeah.

MOORE: Yeah. And is there a story about your mother that you remember, something your mother did when you were a child? Do you remember anything special about your mother?

SWENSON: No, I can't say exactly.

MOORE: What about brothers and sisters?

SWENSON: Well, I had a, we were five sisters, and two brothers, but one brother died, got scarlet fever. He died when he was five years old, yah. Yah. And . . .

MOORE: Could you name them all, your brothers and sisters, in order?

SWENSON: Yeah. John Eskel and Alfonse. I don't remember the second name. Alfonse, yeah.

MOORE: And who, and how about your sisters?

SWENSON: Vera, that came with me to this country. Then Alice. She's up there. And Alfreda, but she died. Yeah.

MOORE: And . . .

SWENSON: Then Judy. After years, Dad been in America for seven years, he had a law suit, and they wouldn't give in, finally they did. And then he came right away to Finland, as soon as that law suit was finished, yah.

MOORE: What about your house back in Finland? What did it look like, your house? What kind of house did you live in?

SWENSON: Oh, we lived in a big house before Mother bought, when her parents died she bought their house, and then we moved from that big house, and she sold the farm and everything, yah. And then we moved to the Lindell's house. My . . .

MOORE: When did you do that? How old were you?

SWENSON: Oh, well, that, I guess, I was in, nineteen or something like that.

MOORE: The house that you grew up in as a child, a big house, how big was that big house? Was it wooden?

SWENSON: Well, it had, but two bedrooms, and then in another (Finnish), they called it, you know. And it was roomy, yah.

MOORE: And how, and so did your grandparents live with you?  
Did your grandmother and grandfather live . . .

SWENSON: Yah, but they died.

MOORE: Did they live with you?

SWENSON: Yeah, at first, yeah.

MOORE: All right. And what type of house was it? What was  
the house made of?

SWENSON: I suppose of wood.

MOORE: Was it a color? Do you remember the color of your  
house?

SWENSON: ( she laughs ) Well, I can't. I don't remember. If  
they had painted it, I cannot remember that.

MOORE: What, did you have a garden? A garden?

SWENSON: No. They had too much work to do, you know, to have  
any garden, no.

MOORE: Yeah. Did you keep animals? You said you had sheep.

SWENSON: Oh, yeah. They had sheep and cows, and horses, yah.

MOORE: Did you have chickens?

SWENSON: And chickens. We had our own chickens.

MOORE: Anything else? Pigs?

SWENSON: That I can't remember. Maybe they had it, but I can't remember.

MOORE: All right. Who did the cooking in the family? Who cooked in your family? Who cooked the meals?

SWENSON: Well, my mother.

MOORE: Did you help your mother?

SWENSON: Oh, yeah. Whenever I could, yeah.

MOORE: And what was your favorite food as a child?

SWENSON: ( she laughs ) Rice pudding. ( she laughs )

MOORE: And what was meal time like? What was the meal time? Did you all eat together?

SWENSON: Oh, yes. We had a long table, yeah.

MOORE: And describe the kitchen. What was the kitchen like?

SWENSON: Well, it wasn't a special kitchen. It was a big room, and then, and a big table. ( she laughs ) ( there is

a disturbance with the microphone and a scraping noise is heard ) It was no special kitchen, no. You did everything so many, many years ago.

MOORE: Yeah. And so, how was your house lit? What type of lights did you have in that house?

SWENSON: Kerosene. There was no electricity then.

MOORE: How about water? Where did you get the water? Was there running water?

SWENSON: They had their own well.

MOORE: You had your own wells.

SWENSON: Yeah, our own well.

MOORE: And what about heating? How was the house heated?

SWENSON: Well, fire in the fireplace.

MOORE: Uh-huh. In the central fireplace? In the main fireplace? In the middle of the house?

SWENSON: No, on any corner, yah.

MOORE: Okay. And where did your grandparents live? Were they nearby, your grandparents, the Lindells?

SWENSON: Yeah. Well, they lived, they lived, they had their own little bedroom, you know. And . . .

MOORE: Oh, the ones that lived with you. How about your other grandparents? Where did they live? You had, your father's parents and your mother's parents.

SWENSON: My father's, see, this is my father's, uh . . .

MOORE: Parents.

SWENSON: Parents, yes.

MOORE: Who lived with you?

SWENSON: Yeah. And I can remember yet when they died, yeah.

MOORE: Oh, what happened?

SWENSON: Yeah, they died.

MOORE: How old were you?

SWENSON: Oh, I couldn't remember that. But I know my brother, he was five years old when he died, and I liked my brother very much. Yeah. Yeah. And then I had to tell you about the kerosene lamps. An incident that I can never forget. You know, I started to go to school when I was about twelve years old, and I started to

get toothache. And then I had some medicine, and I thought it was put that medicine on it and then try to see if I could go to sleep. And the kerosene lamp was on the chair right beside me. And evidently I must have hit the lamp with the cover, and it exploded, and there was fire. And then I, I had gone to school and learned about Jesus Christ, and I thought he was up there and pointed up. And I hollered at Mother, and Mother, I met her on the threshold. And she had, took a pail of water and hit it, and the fire went out. We could have been burned to death. My sister Alice and I slept together. We could have been burned to death, but God took care of us, yeah.

MOORE: Wow. And your other grandparents, now, you said about the kerosene lights. Anything else happen that you remember like that, as a child? Anything else?

SWENSON: About what?

MOORE: Do you have any other stories like that? That's an interesting story, that one.

SWENSON: No, I have nothing, no.

MOORE: You still remember that one.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: Yeah. What about your grandparents, your mother's parents? Where did they live?

SWENSON: Oh, they lived in that house that she bought after they passed away.

MOORE: Now, how far from your house was that?

SWENSON: Huh?

MOORE: Now far was that?

SWENSON: Oh, maybe three, no, three miles, not hardly that much, yah.

MOORE: And who were you closest to in the family? Who were you favorite to? Who did you like the most?

SWENSON: Oh, I liked them all. ( she laughs ) But, of course, my mother, naturally.

MOORE: Yeah. And what do you remember about your grandparents? Which grandparents did you like best?

SWENSON: Well, I couldn't, yeah. One incident, a person, see, then they used to go to the town that was four miles, and buy some stuff, you know, and they went with

horses. And then my brother Alfonse slipped, and he fell off, and then he got hurt so bad, so they had to take him to the doctor right there in town, and Staurengen was the doctor's name. I can remember, yeah. ( she laughs )

MOORE: And was he okay?

SWENSON: Yeah. So then he got over it, but he got scarlet fever, and he passed away, yeah.

MOORE: What about church? Did you go to church?

SWENSON: Yah, it was so far, you know, just for Christmas, you know.

MOORE: How far away was the church? How far?

SWENSON: Oh, well, maybe I would say three miles. And we had a sled all, what do you call it? ( she laughs )

MOORE: You'd go by sled.

SWENSON: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MOORE: What about, did you pray, say prayers at night before you went to bed? Did you learn to pray?

SWENSON: Oh, yes.

MOORE: And did you pray every night before . . .

SWENSON: Every night, yeah.

MOORE: How about at table, before you ate? Did you say grace?

SWENSON: Huh?

MOORE: Did you pray before your meals?

SWENSON: Oh, yeah. Just before we started to eat, we just crossed our fingers and prayed.

MOORE: And what was your favorite holiday? What was your favorite time?

SWENSON: Well, I suppose, Christmas, yah.

MOORE: And why?

SWENSON: And Easter too, yah, yah.

MOORE: And why? Why did you like Christmas and Easter?

SWENSON: Well, I don't know. We used to get little presents, but they were very small. ( she laughs )

MOORE: Like, what would be a present? Do you remember any

presents you got? Do you remember any? Do you remember any present you got when you were a child?

SWENSON: A mug, a mug that I used to like to drink milk in. But we couldn't have no coffee before we were seven years old. Not a drop of coffee, no.

MOORE: ( she laughs ) And did you eat any special food at Christmas?

SWENSON: My mother used to bake for three days, all kinds of bread. Limpa [ph] and hardec [ph] and coffee bread, Swedish coffee bread, yeah. And then we could have that for breakfast, when Mother had that baked fresh, you know. And we thought that was beautiful, yeah.

MOORE: How about rice pudding?

SWENSON: Yeah, rice pudding, yeah. Oh, that was our favorite, yeah. Oh, yeah.

MOORE: And how did you, when, did Santa Claus come?

SWENSON: Oh, we didn't have a Santa Claus, no, no. I can't remember that at all, no.

MOORE: How did you, did you go to church on Christmas?

SWENSON: No.

MOORE: To church?

SWENSON: That was too far, and we had no way of getting. No, we couldn't do that. We were small children, see. And then we had no heating system in the church at that time. Of course, now they have electricity, but it was so cold. No, no.

MOORE: What about, I was just thinking of something I was going to ask you. Let's talk about school life. Oh, no, wait. Midsummer is what I want to ask. What about midsummer?

SWENSON: Yah. Well, I can't remember anything, because we can, we didn't celebrate midsummer. I can't remember at all.

MOORE: Okay.

SWENSON: No.

MOORE: All right. And what about school. Did you go to school in Finland?

SWENSON: Oh, yes.

MOORE: And where was that school?

SWENSON: Oh, that was close where we lived, just a few steps, yeah.

MOORE: How big was the school?

SWENSON: Oh, well, I couldn't say.

MOORE: Was it more than one room?

SWENSON: Oh, yeah. Well, it had like a little apartment where the teacher was going to live. And just a big room, then, and then seats for the children, yeah.

MOORE: What was your favorite subject in school?

SWENSON: Writing.

MOORE: You liked writing?

SWENSON: Yeah, I did write. And now I can't write or read or anything.

MOORE: Oh. Was the school, how many children were in that school?

SWENSON: Oh, that I couldn't say.

MOORE: Was it crowded?

SWENSON: No, not too crowded, no.

MOORE: Do you remember any of your teachers?

SWENSON: Oh, yes. With the first teacher was Victor Grahner [ph]. And then he died, he got pleurisy and TB, so he died. Then we got another teacher. His name was Vittishkoog [ph], yeah.

MOORE: And do you remember any of your schoolmates, your playmates, as a child? Do you remember any of the names of children that you played with?

SWENSON: Oh, yes. They were neighbors. Adelly Fosbelly [ph] and her two sisters, Esther and that's all I can. And I remember once my uncle Edward had given my cousin and me a set of dishes, small cups and saucers. And then when we were playing once, and she put her hand on that and broke everything, and I came home crying. Yeah. ( she laughs )

MOORE: What did you do for entertainment? What did you have for games? Do you know any . . .

SWENSON: We had no games.

MOORE: No?

SWENSON: No, no.

MOORE: And do you remember, do you have any other stories, when you were small, of things that happened to you? Do you remember anything that you can tell us that you tell your children?

SWENSON: Just that whole story when I almost burned up, you know.

MOORE: Now, how did you come to America? Who decided to come? How did you come to the United States?

SWENSON: We took a horse and buggy to Gamlakarleby, it was called. From there to Helsingfors.

MOORE: And whose idea? Who wanted to come to the United States? Who first said?

SWENSON: My daddy.

MOORE: Why?

SWENSON: Because he said, "There's nothing for you here, but you can advance yourself when you come to America, yah."

MOORE: And who, how did he pay? Who, did he go first? Did

your dad go first?

SWENSON: No. He took Vera and me with him.

MOORE: Oh, he took two daughters, then.

SWENSON: And we were five other girls from Terjarv. So they used to call our bunch "Forsell's Children." They were not his children, but they were immigrating, too, you know.

MOORE: So he took, it was your father and seven girls? Your father took you and your sister.

SWENSON: Yeah, and all these other girls, too, yeah.

MOORE: From the town.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: So they all went with your father to America.

SWENSON: Huh?

MOORE: Did you all come together here?

SWENSON: Yeah. And then . . .

MOORE: What happened to your mother? She stayed home?

SWENSON: She couldn't come. She was not well. And then, of course, it was the war time. And then when Daddy came home, naturally then she had another child. So the little girl was only two years old, yeah. And my mother was not well, so she couldn't go. And then it was war time. We couldn't have no correspondence for three years. I thought I'd go crazy. I used to cry all the time.

MOORE: When you were here.

SWENSON: When we came to America.

MOORE: Oh. So you couldn't . . .

SWENSON: We both, we got work in New York, my sister and I. Yeah.

MOORE: Let's go back a bit. Okay. So your father said he got the fever to come. He wanted to come to America.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: And what did your mother think about this plan?

SWENSON: Oh, we, I don't know. Because when we parted, you know, we cried our eyes out. It was terrible to leave Finland.

MOORE: And what did your dad tell you about America? What did he tell you?

SWENSON: Oh, he couldn't explain anything, because, no. He didn't explain much, no. But then, anyway, he said, "You have better opportunity in America." Yeah. And we went to evening school right away.

MOORE: To learn? You went to evening school, why? Why did you go?

SWENSON: We, in New York there.

MOORE: Oh, I see, in New York. Now, did you know any English before you left? Did you know English when you were in Finland? Where did you learn English?

SWENSON: When we, when we went to Butte I called, wrote to my daddy. We stayed ten months in New York and worked, and then I wrote to Daddy, "I'm crying every day. Please, can we come to Butte?" Where he lived.

MOORE: I see.

SWENSON: So, naturally, he sent money to my sister and me, so we went.

MOORE: Okay. Well, let's walk back a little bit. So do you remember leaving Finland? Do you remember packing things to go to America?

SWENSON: Oh, we didn't have much to pack, no. It was so little clothes.

MOORE: Did you bring food?

SWENSON: Yeah. We brought some food with us.

MOORE: What did you bring? Do you remember what food?

SWENSON: Butter. ( she laughs ) And bread, yeah.

MOORE: Bread and butter.

SWENSON: Yeah, butter. And then we had that, in our place, when we traveled. And, you know, the Russians, they came in and examined things. And then Daddy, Daddy, he knew the Russians called bread "klebba." "Klebba, klebba," he said. Yeah.

MOORE: When did the Russians come in? Where? Where?

SWENSON: Well, they were there in Finland. You know, they, Finland was on the Russia. And I remember when they couldn't have, even have Finnish flag up they were so,

it was terrible. And I remember once, that was afterwards. I went to Helsingfors. That was in Finland, you know. To take a little correspondence course, you know, in bookkeeping, yeah. And then I remember when I went to school I saw an old man with white hair, and he stood up, when they were able to have the Finnish flag up, and he wiped his face. Tears ran down his cheek. Yeah, it was touching. Yeah.

MOORE: And what year was that?

SWENSON: Well, let's see now, what year could that have been? We left '18, '19, '20. It could have been '22, yeah.

MOORE: And what, do you remember the civil war in Finland? Do you remember the civil war?

SWENSON: No, I don't remember any of that. Nothing at all.

MOORE: Okay. So now we're back to, your father wants to go to America, and you had to pack things. You packed bread and butter. Did you take anything special with you from home?

SWENSON: Not, we couldn't, no.

MOORE: You couldn't.

SWENSON: No. We could take so little as possible, yah.

MOORE: And who paid for you to go to the United States?

SWENSON: Daddy.

MOORE: He saved money?

SWENSON: He, well, he got some when he, when the law suit was finished he got the money, so then he paid for my sister and me.

MOORE: Which law suit are we talking about? What law suit?

SWENSON: Well, because he fell in the mine and they didn't think that he would live because he was hurt so bad.

MOORE: Now, in the mine where?

SWENSON: In Butte, Montana.

MOORE: I see. Okay. But who, how did you get from Finland to the United States?

SWENSON: Huh?

MOORE: How did you get your passage from Finland? Who paid for you from Finland?

SWENSON: My daddy.

MOORE: I see. Okay. So he came to get you.

SWENSON: Yeah. Well, he stayed home for three years in Finland after he got through with that law suit.

MOORE: I see. So he had gone ahead and come back. I see. Okay. He took you together. How did you get from your home?

SWENSON: With horse and buggy.

MOORE: To?

SWENSON: To Gamlakarleby from there to Helsingfors. And then to Norgi.

MOORE: Now, to Helsinki you went by how? Train?

SWENSON: Yes.

MOORE: Yes. And then a train to the boat.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: What was the name of the boat? Do you remember?

SWENSON: Bergensfjord.

MOORE: Yeah, good. Bergensfjord, okay.

SWENSON: And it was so light it was rolling, rolling, and we got so seasick. I don't think they had, this left when we landed Ellis Island, yah.

MOORE: ( she laughs ) Now, what was it like on the boat? Where did you sleep?

SWENSON: Oh, they had places for everybody, small places.

MOORE: Did you have your own cabin?

SWENSON: Yes. My sister and I had, and Daddy had one, too. And then one day Daddy had an old sea captain with him. Then he asked that sea captain, "Would you please go and see my daughters? I know they are seasick, yah." So then he came and knocked on the door. He said, "Girls, I want you to get dressed, and I'm going to take you up on the deck." "No," we said, "we can't. We are so sick." He said, "Well, I'll come next time, and if you are not dressed, I'll just take you and put your coat on and come up on the deck," he said. So he did, and that's what happened. He put our two coats on, and took us up on the deck. And we were there only maybe a half hour or a little

longer. And from the fresh air we started to feel good, and I started to sing. And I remember the song I sang.

MOORE: What was it?

SWENSON: ( She recites the words of the song in Finnish. )  
Yeah. And from that day we were not sick any more.  
We were up on the deck every day, yeah.

MOORE: Could you sing it? Could you sing that song?

SWENSON: I have no voice left. ( Ms. Moore laughs ) That has gone in me up in the air. And (?) can't sing. I have a pretty good singing voice, yeah. ( she laughs )

MOORE: You took singing lessons?

SWENSON: Huh?

MOORE: Did you take singing lessons?

SWENSON: I can't sing nothing any more.

MOORE: But when you were younger did you take lessons?

SWENSON: Yeah. And I remember once we had an outing, and then the schoolteacher he noticed that I had a good voice.  
I was about twelve years old, or maybe thirteen. And

he said, "Dagmar, won't you sing us a little song?"  
And we were both boys and girls on an outing, yeah.  
So then I sang, "(She recites the words to the song in  
Finnish.)" ( they laugh ) ( they applaud ) I still  
can remember those words, yeah.

MOORE: And, all right. So your father came to Butte,  
Montana, and he was in a mining accident.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: And then he came back home to Finland for three years.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: And with the money from the settlement, you were able  
to go together.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: All right. And, so, you're on board, and you're  
seasick. You were seasick, and then the captain, the  
sea captain helped you.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: Okay. Do you remember what the food was like? Were  
you able to eat?

SWENSON: Well, I don't know. I had pictures of the school. I can't say it. Just a regular building, a big room, with seats for the children, yeah.

MOORE: Okay. Do you remember on your boat trip from Finland to the United States?

SWENSON: Terrible! Because, you see, it was wartime, and they were afraid we would be on the mines.

MOORE: Oh, the mines, yeah.

SWENSON: We were, I was so nervous all the time. Terrible nervous, yeah.

MOORE: Was everybody nervous?

SWENSON: Everybody was nervous. We thought we would die.  
( she laughs )

MOORE: And did you see any mines? Did you see . . .

SWENSON: No, no, no.

MOORE: Okay. So, when you, do you remember, how long was this trip from Finland to the United States? How long?

SWENSON: Oh, boy, let's see now. Seven or eight days. Yeah.

It took a long time.

MOORE: And do you remember seeing land, United States, for the first time?

SWENSON: Yeah, that's right.

MOORE: Do you remember?

SWENSON: I saw the Statue of Liberty. My, my. That was wonderful, yeah.

MOORE: And that was the first thing you saw?

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: And were you on deck? Were you waiting to see it?

SWENSON: No, no. See, we got off the deck. We got out of the Bergensfjord then, yeah, oh, yeah. And Daddy, he took care of everything, yeah. He could, you know, he spoke English, so it was so easy when he, when he could help us. Yah, oh, yah.

MOORE: And you saw the Statue of Liberty. And what was your feeling?

SWENSON: Oh, well, I couldn't say that.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

MOORE: What do you remember after the Statue of Liberty?  
What happened then?

SWENSON: Well, I don't remember. I think, but I, my girlfriend came to visit me, and we went, and she took me, so we went up in the Statue of Liberty. And I, of course, I was in my, I was around thirty-five years old then, and I, I was afraid I couldn't get down. Gee. I said, "Never again will I go there."

MOORE: ( she laughs ) All right. Now, on the boat, back on the boat. You saw the Statue of Liberty.

SWENSON: No, no. Not before we got out, out of the Bergensfjord.

MOORE: Yeah. After that you saw, okay.

SWENSON: Oh, yes.

MOORE: And then what happened after that? You saw the Statue of Liberty. Did you see the buildings in New York?

SWENSON: Oh, I can't remember anything.

MOORE: Do you remember Ellis Island?

SWENSON: No, I can't remember anything like that, no.

MOORE: You can't remember being examined by the doctors?  
Were you examined by the doctors?

SWENSON: Oh, yeah, I suppose so.

MOORE: Do you remember any of that?

SWENSON: No, I don't remember any of that, no. I'm sorry.

MOORE: No, that's okay. And so did you stay on an island at  
all? Do you remember?

SWENSON: We stayed with friends.

MOORE: Once you got to, okay.

SWENSON: ( she coughs ) To New York. And then they put an ad  
in the paper so we could get to work, yeah. And, I  
tell you, it didn't take long, because we got, I tell  
you, about five, five girls, yeah. Daddy had left  
them already for Butte, Montana. He took my sister  
and me and bought us some clothes, so we got nice  
dresses, you know. So when the ladies would come in  
and interview us, yeah.

MOORE: And what type of work did you want?

SWENSON: Housework!

MOORE: I see. And where in New York? Do you remember?

SWENSON: Oh, I can't remember that. It wasn't too far, up on the hill where my friends used to live. So then we got one day out of the week, you know, to come and visit our friends.

MOORE: And how did it feel being away from home?

SWENSON: Terrible. I cried every night.

MOORE: You did?

SWENSON: I was a crybaby, yeah.

MOORE: And your sister? How does she like it?

SWENSON: She wasn't such a crybaby as I was, no. But I felt so bad to leave Mother at home, you know.

MOORE: Were the people nice to you?

SWENSON: Oh, they were nice. The lady, her name was Meyers. She used to come up and put her arm around me. And I can remember she used to say, "I'd like to be your mother." Of course, I remember when she said,

"Mother." Yeah. ( she laughs ) Yeah.

MOORE: And then, so you wrote your father? How did you get to Montana?

SWENSON: He sent money to Vera and me, my sister and me.

MOORE: But why did you go to Montana? Because you were homesick?

SWENSON: Because I was so, we said, "Daddy, please! Can we come and be with you?" And then we had a cousin there, too. Otto Forsell. That was our cousin. So he sent money right away. Yeah. And then we stayed with my uncle. His name was Victor Forsell, yah. Oh, yah.

MOORE: And so you were in Butte, Montana. When did your friends, how long did you stay in Butte, Montana?

SWENSON: We got a letter after three years. A friend of mine sent me a letter from New York that the family is coming, the rest of the family is coming, the American papers are ready. So that, I got that. So then Daddy said, "No, we can't take Mother to Butte. It's too high climate. We must move to Seattle." So that's what we did. We moved to Seattle. So that's where

the rest of the family came. They came in May, and it was beautiful weather then, yeah. And . . .

MOORE: Do you remember seeing your mother for the first time?

SWENSON: Yeah. And then we rented a house. It had three bedrooms, yah, on Minor Avenue, yeah. So we lived there, my sister and I. We, my sister started to go to school to learn to be a beautician, yah. So that's what she did. And I, I worked in for a family to do the type housework. Yeah, oh, yeah.

MOORE: And do you remember you said that you missed Finland, you couldn't have contact during the war?

SWENSON: No, that was awful.

MOORE: Yeah. And did you hear anything?

SWENSON: Nothing at all till we got, I got that letter that the American papers have come, we can come to America now, my mother wrote, yeah.

MOORE: And how did you feel about that?

SWENSON: Oh, we got so happy. I didn't cry after that.  
( they laugh ) No.

MOORE: And do you remember when your mother came, do you remember?

SWENSON: Oh, yeah.

MOORE: What was it like?

SWENSON: Oh, it was so, we all hugged, you know. We all, yah. It was beautiful. But the sad part was it was too big a change of climate. She got pleurisy and got TB, took sick, and stayed in bed. The doctor, our doctor's name was Silverbury, and he wanted to put her in the hospital. Mother said, "Please, don't send me to the hospital. I don't understand what people talk." So we said, "Mother, you don't have to go." So Alice, my younger sister, she took care of my mother, stayed home, and Vera and I went to work, yeah. That's how it started, yeah.

MOORE: And how long did your mother live then?

SWENSON: She lived till Easter Eve. She passed away on Easter Eve. And, boy, it was sad, yeah. Very sad.

MOORE: And who took care of the youngest children then? Who took care of the children, then? When she passed away, what about your youngest sister? How old was

she?

SWENSON: Vera?

MOORE: Your youngest sister, the little one?

SWENSON: That was another story. She got some pain in her leg, some kind of disease, so Dr. Silverbury, he said we have to send her to an orthopedic hospital. And there she was for three years, my sister. She had a disease, some kind of disease. Then my, let's see now. Now I got mixed up. I got mixed up. My sister got some work in New York. She worked for a family called Wood. She was a governess, yeah. And then she wrote to me to Seattle and said, "My," Oskar Niland was the one that sent me the letter that the family could come to America. So then, now let's see. ( she laughs ) Now, how was it? Then my sister said, "Niland read me the paper that a professor an experienced doctor is coming to New York from Austria, and he will do bloodless operations." So then I went, I went took Judy out of the Mt. Sinai Orthopedic Hospital, and we went to New York, and Judy had that operation, yeah. But . . .

MOORE: Did she get better?

SWENSON: It's a long story, so I can't start it. Her life was so sad, the whole life, so I can't start to . . .

MOORE: Explain.

SWENSON: Tell her any more, no.

MOORE: Well, you, then, did you go to school in the United States at all? Did you go to school here?

SWENSON: Yeah, a little bit, soon as we came here to Seattle, we started evening school right away.

MOORE: And what were you taking? What classes? What type of school?

SWENSON: We had to start from ABC's. ( she laughs )

MOORE: And did you learn English here?

SWENSON: Yah. And then, you know, my sister and I, the first thing we got, we got a place in a hotel to make up beds, you know. Yeah. And the schoolteacher that we had in the evening was living in that hotel. And then she took Vera and me three times a week for extra lessons because she saw how eager we were to learn, yeah.

MOORE: And so you, how was learning English for you? Was it easy to learn English?

SWENSON: Well, it was, it wasn't so hard as I thought it would be, no. But we loved to learn, yeah.

MOORE: And do you remember making any mistakes in English?

SWENSON: Oh, I can't remember that, no. Yeah. ( she laughs )  
Yeah.

MOORE: And so . . .

SWENSON: But, you know, to pronounce, you know, I still have an accent. I guess I can't help that, no.

MOORE: It's a nice accent.

SWENSON: Yeah. ( she laughs ) Well, anyway, so . . .

MOORE: So you went to work. Now, how did you meet your husband? How did you meet your husband?

SWENSON: Through correspondence, the same Oskar Niland. So I had been married twice. I was Niland for sixteen years we were married, yeah.

MOORE: With whom?

SWENSON: Oskar Niland was his name.

MOORE: Oskar Niland, right. And then he wrote to me and said, well, after Mother died, he said, "Why don't you take a trip to New York and get a little change?" Because I cried all the time. I was such a crybaby, yah. So then I went. I went to New York. And I started to work there. And then, finally, he was a painter, you know, yeah. When he lived in Portland, Oregon, he had his own business. He was, and he played with the Portland Symphony Orchestra. He played second violin, yeah. He liked to play, you know. Yeah.

MOORE: So you lived in New York.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: And he lived where?

SWENSON: Well, we lived in New York.

MOORE: Oh, you both lived in New York.

SWENSON: I lived in New York till my first husband passed away.  
We were married for sixteen years.

MOORE: Where in New York did you live?

SWENSON: In Bronx.

MOORE: In the Bronx? Where in the Bronx?

SWENSON: It's terrible now. We were home and I wouldn't want to live there for anything.

MOORE: Do you remember the address? Do you remember . . .

SWENSON: Yes, Ogden Avenue.

MOORE: Ogden.

SWENSON: It was near the Yankee Stadium.

MOORE: Yes, yes, yes. I lived there, too.

SWENSON: Oh, yeah. ( they laugh ) Yeah.

MOORE: Near Yankee Stadium. Did you live in a Finnish cooperative house?

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: Varma.

SWENSON: We had three cooperative houses, yeah.

MOORE: Do you remember Varma? Varma Cooperatives? Varma? Never mind. On Gerard Avenue, one cooperative was

there.

SWENSON: Oh, yeah, I guess so.

MOORE: Yeah, never mind, it's all right. ( they laugh ) All right. So you lived sixteen years in the Bronx. Okay. And then what happened? Did you have children?

SWENSON: No.

MOORE: No.

SWENSON: No. But when, but then when my husband died, I was a widow for almost seven years, yeah. And then Karl Swenson's wife died, and then we sang in the same church choir and the Ring The Bell Choir, so we knew each other.

MOORE: Where? In New York?

SWENSON: In New York, yeah. And then, so finally we got married. I got married the second time, yeah.

MOORE: Do you remember Ematra House in Brooklyn? Do you remember the Ematra? Ematra House in Brooklyn? The Finn Hall. Do you remember the Finn Halls?

SWENSON: Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah, I heard, I remember the name.

Oh, yeah.

MOORE: How about, okay. So you lived, and then you lived in New York, and you married again.

SWENSON: Yeah.

MOORE: And then what happened?

SWENSON: Well, then, after a few years my husband said he had never had a vacation. So then he took a vacation, and we took a trip to the West Coast, and my big sister Vera, she lived here in Seattle, yeah. So we, we took a train to New York, yah. Yah. And we were, of course, then he went to Portland, because he used to work there and play with the orchestra, so he wanted to see Portland again. So we went there too, yah. So I have had kind of an interesting life.

MOORE: And how did you end up here, then, living?

SWENSON: Yeah. And now live here, it's the best place.

MOORE: When did you move here?

SWENSON: I have lived here for eighteen years now. Can you imagine! Never thought I would live till ninety-nine.

MOORE: And when you look back, when you look back at your life, the conditions in Butte, Montana, when you moved from Finland, were they better in Butte?

SWENSON: Well, of course. It was better here, yah.

MOORE: How? Why? Why was it better?

SWENSON: In every way. I like the climate here. You know, my husband said, "I have lived in many places." He lived in Boston, he lived in all kinds of places. He said, "Seattle is the best place of all, yeah." Yeah, that's right.

MOORE: You lived in California, too?

SWENSON: Huh?

MOORE: Did you live in California?

SWENSON: Yah. We lived in California for how many years now? From 1950. He, my husband bought some stock in a plywood mill, yeah. And then he worked there, too, yeah. And I just kept cows, yeah.

MOORE: Did you like California?

SWENSON: Oh, yeah. I liked California, yeah.

MOORE: When you look back on your life, you're ninety-nine years old. You've lived in so many places. How do you feel about your decision to come to the United States? Was it a good decision?

SWENSON: Absolutely. It was a good decision, yeah.

MOORE: Have you ever wanted to go back to live in Finland?

SWENSON: I have, I have been three times back to Finland, yeah.

MOORE: And how was it to go back?

SWENSON: Huh?

MOORE: How was it when you went back?

SWENSON: Oh, it was fine, but I wouldn't want to live there, no.

MOORE: Why not?

SWENSON: Well, because it's so much better here in America.  
( she laughs ) Yeah.

MOORE: So we'd like to thank you, on behalf of Ellis Island, for letting us talk with you.

SWENSON: Yeah. ( she laughs )

MOORE: And we'll send you a copy of this.

SWENSON: Yah, okay, thank you very much.

MOORE: Thank you, thank you.

SWENSON: I'm glad that you could bear with me.

MOORE: No, "bear with you," you are a great narrator. ( Mrs. Swenson laughs ) This is Kate Moore in Seattle, Washington, on June 26, 1994, for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.

SWENSON: Yah. ( she laughs )