

NPS-6/KARLSSON

NPS-6

ANNA KARLSSON AND EDWARD KARLSSON  
BIRTH DATE: 1886 AND UNKNOWN  
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 21, 1973  
RUNNING TIME: 55:39  
INTERVIEWER: MARGO NASH  
RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: DeWITT NURSING HOME, NEW YORK CITY  
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 3/1995  
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1995

SWEDEN, Stockholm

ANNA KARLSSON : 1923, age 37 PASSAGE ON: *STOCKHOLM*  
EDWARD KARLSSON: 1935, age 21 PASSAGE ON: *DROTTHINGHOLM*  
U.S. RESIDENCE: NYC 150 ST.

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: This interview was conducting in a nursing home an the recording is filled with extraneous background noise such as other people talking and moving in the room, furniture being moved, messages delivered over an intercom system, elevator bells, etc. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 6/23/1995.

NASH: Today is August 21, 1973, and I am visiting with  
Mrs. Anna . . .

ANNA: Yeah.

NASH: Anna Karlsson.

ANNA: Yeah.

NASH: And her son, Mr. . . .

EDWARD: Edward.

NASH: Edward Karlsson. And we're in the DeWitt Nursing home where Mrs. Karlsson is living. And we're going to begin

now. Mrs. Karlsson, uh, Mrs. Karlsson is from Sweden, and came to this country in 1923. And now we're going to try to get the story of her experience as an immigrant.

Mrs. Karlsson, what year were you born?

ANNA: What do you mean, I was born?

NASH: What year were you born?

ANNA: 1886.

NASH: 1886.

ANNA: Yeah.

NASH: And how old were you when you first came to this country?

ANNA: How old was I? Thirty seven. I am old.

NASH: Yes. And what were you doing before you, where did you live?

ANNA: Oh, I live in Sweden.

NASH: And what town was that?

ANNA: I live. You know, in '23 I was living there in (?), (?).

NASH: Uh-huh. And what was the name of the province that you came from?

ANNA: Well, no, it isn't the same name.

NASH: What was it?

ANNA: We have the same name. Karlsson, Karlsson.

EDWARD: No, no, no. She asked you where you lived when you went to the United States.

ANNA: Oh, where I lived?

NASH: In Sweden.

ANNA: I lived in Stockholm.

NASH: In Stockholm.

ANNA: Yeah, in Stockholm.

NASH: Uh-huh. And did you work before you came to the United States?

ANNA: Work? Yeah, I worked. I had my home for working and I sew sometimes.

NASH: Uh-huh. And you . . .

ANNA: Since I did lots of sewing.

NASH: Why did you come to the United States?

ANNA: Why? Because it (?) my trouble.

EDWARD: You tell her your trouble, a little bit of it at least.

NASH: What are your troubles? ( she laughs )

ANNA: Yeah, troubles.

NASH: Could you tell us a little bit about the reasons that made you decide to come to the United States?

ANNA: What?

NASH: The reasons why you came to the United States?

ANNA: Yes, because I run away from, from trouble.

NASH: Oh, you were going away from trouble.

ANNA: Yeah. I got away from trouble. That's what I want.

NASH: Okay. Could you, you don't want to talk about what the trouble was.

ANNA: Oh, there is not, the same troubles.

EDWARD: You can tell just what happened. You can tell, uh . . .

ANNA: He runs away, you know, the man. He wants to go . . .

EDWARD: That's your husband.

ANNA: Yeah. He wanted to get a divorce.

NASH: Oh. So you had . . .

ANNA: Yeah.

NASH: You were divorced in Sweden. Uh-huh.

ANNA: We had only that boy. We had only that boy.

NASH: Only that boy. That boy is Mr. T.C. Karlsson, sitting beside me, who is considerably older than "that boy."

( they laugh )

ANNA: Yeah. No more.

EDWARD: Time has gone.

NASH: Time has passed.

ANNA: That man, he wants, he don't know what he want.

NASH: Your husband, your ex-husband.

ANNA: Yeah. He don't know what he want. He was cranky.

NASH: Cranky. ( she laughs )

ANNA: He was not, he didn't like to have a home. No. Well, he was cranky over there, (?). Well, so he tried to get

a divorce.

NASH: So you decided to come to the United States.

ANNA: Yeah.

NASH: And you sailed on The Stockholm. Is that right? The oldest ship, The Stockholm?

ANNA: Yeah, oh, yeah. The Stockholm, yeah.

NASH: And could, do you remember the trip? I understand that it was a very difficult trip for you.

ANNA: The ship?

NASH: The trip was a very, was there a storm, some kind of a storm on board the ship, the weather was very bad?

ANNA: Well, I was alone. (?)

EDWARD: She asked you if it was very difficult on board because there was a very bad storm. Do you remember that?

ANNA: Yeah. No, no, well, everything went good for me, but I was alone. That was a very good thing, I was alone.

NASH: You were alone.

ANNA: Yeah, and I . . .

EDWARD: (Swedish ) there was . . .

ANNA: Oh, that's why we get the storm. And that was (?), and the lice. There was a man that happened to be on the ship, been on the sea many, many years. They (?) man. He was . . .

EDWARD'S WIFE: Sailor.

NASH: There was a seaman on the ship?

ANNA: Yeah. He say, "I have never been in such a storm."

NASH: Really.

ANNA: And he had been there for many years. There was, I never dreamed that we would come through. No, I can never dream that we would come through.

NASH: But you did. ( she laughs )

ANNA: Oh, that was terrible.

EDWARD: What was it the captain said at the end of the trip?

ANNA: Oh, the captain, then the people race, they race to the captain, "Oh, thank you, the captain!"

NASH: For getting them through.

ANNA: Now he say, the captain say the very wise word, "I have not done it," he say. That was it. (?) more than me. How you go ahead. I heard the captain say he have no strength.

EDWARD: A higher power than he.

ANNA: He said that the iron boat fill up. It was a terrible storm, a terrible storm, yah.

EDWARD: Were you able to eat anything along that time?

ANNA: What?

EDWARD: Were you able to eat anything on the whole trip?  
( Swedish )

ANNA: No, no. I didn't eat a thing.

NASH: How many days were you on the boat?

ANNA: What?

NASH: How many days were you on the boat?

ANNA: Oh, we have to be, oh, ten, ten days.

NASH: Ten days.

ANNA: Yeah. Eight or ten days.

NASH: And you were in third class.

ANNA: Ah?

NASH: You were in third class.

ANNA: Oh, yes, third.

NASH: Yes. Was it very crowded? Were there many people in third class?

ANNA: Oh, yes. (?) ( she laughs )

NASH: How many people were sleeping in the same room?

ANNA: No. We actually, was four.

NASH: Four. So it was you and your son . . .

EDWARD: No.

NASH: Oh. Excuse me. Your son wasn't with you the first trip.

ANNA: We were four.

NASH: Who were the other three people in the same room with you? Do you remember?

ANNA: We kids sleep. They're young, they sleep, and it was so cold without the, and I could not sleep. I went with

these other people. They didn't (?).

NASH: Oh. So you were the one who suffered. ( she laughs )

ANNA: (?), you see.

NASH: Uh-huh. What else do you remember about the trip?

ANNA: Huh?

NASH: What other things do you remember about the trip?

ANNA: About the trip?

EDWARD: ( Swedish )

ANNA: ( Swedish ) Oh, we had the good food, the good food, if you could eat. ( Ms. Nash laughs ) But I couldn't eat, I could not eat.

EDWARD: ( Swedish )

ANNA: They say to me I should go eat, so I should feel better. I come out, and I, food away. I couldn't when I saw that, nay.

EDWARD: She couldn't get that. When she tried to go out on the deck, as she explained, but it was too difficult for her. So down they went back to her cabin. Did you talk to

any people on the ship?

ANNA: No, (Swedish). I was, I loved, I loved to be alone there.  
I didn't talk much to people.

NASH: So you came to New York. And what happened when you got  
to New York? Could you tell us about the inspectors?  
Did they examine you?

ANNA: Oh, no, no. I was standing and one there standing, and  
far away there was another there. And there was, there  
was a lady from the church. She answered to them, they  
ask, "Where is your husband?" they told me. "Oh, he is  
in Sweden." But then he get so mad, this man, and he's  
getting into her, and say, "If her husband is in Sweden,  
(?)." "Dead?" she said. "He is dead. He is dead."

NASH: He said? You mean the inspector?

ANNA: She said, she said that.

NASH: Oh, she said he's dead.

ANNA: Yeah. Oh, he's dead.

NASH: Why did she say that? Miss Johnson said that.

ANNA: She goes on saying it, that he was dead. Dead for me.  
I never saw him any more. ( there is a disturbance of

the microphone ) ( break in tape )

NASH: Uh, in 1923, Ms. Karlsson, when you came here, I understand that you were examined by the doctors.

ANNA: Yeah.

NASH: While you were on the ship, before you went to Ellis Island.

ANNA: Yes, yes, they did. So many of them got off, and he said, the doctor, "Don't you know," he says. He saw many was not very clean, you see. Well, no.

NASH: I don't understand.

EDWARD: Uh, he was looking in their heads, for instance.

ANNA: He was surprised that I was clean. ( she laughs )

NASH: Oh, he was looking for lice.

ANNA: Yes, I was clean.

NASH: And you were clean. And what else did, what other things, were there other parts of the examination? Was it, did it take a long time, the examination?

EDWARD: Did he look for anything else?

ANNA: Yah.

EDWARD: The doctor.

ANNA: You know where we comes from, (?).

EDWARD: No, by the doctor, before you came on.

ANNA: Nay, nay, nay, nay.

EDWARD: Did he look in people's eyes?

ANNA: Nay, nay, nay. He was nice there, but he look in the hair. ( she laughs )

NASH: So they, somebody wanted to know how much money you were bringing with you to the United States.

ANNA: Yes. Yeah, I had to have four hundred.

NASH: Four hundred dollars.

ANNA: I have to have four hundred.

NASH: Four hundred Swedish, kr . . .

EDWARD: ( Swedish )

ANNA: Yes.

NASH: And how did you get, did you have to get onto another

boat when you went to Ellis Island? Do you remember how you went to Ellis Island?

ANNA: Get the (?). ( Swedish )

EDWARD: Followed the crowd.

NASH: You followed the crowd.

ANNA: Yeah. I go in there, you know, that little boat.

NASH: There's a little boat that went to Ellis Island.

ANNA: Yeah, there's a (?), yes, yes. That they don't do that now.

NASH: No, they don't use it at all. Well, what was the first thing you saw when you came to Ellis Island? Do you remember the first thing that you saw?

ANNA: The first thing I thought?

EDWARD: Yes.

NASH: You saw, you looked at, at Ellis Island.

EDWARD: The first thing you saw when you came to Ellis Island.

ANNA: Oh, well, then. It was all the people, they was (?) after on a bench, and we should answer. We should answer it.

NASH: You should answer?

ANNA: Yeah.

NASH: While you wait . . .

ANNA: How much money we have and sit. That's what we had to do.

NASH: So you, how long did you have to sit there?

ANNA: Oh, not so long. Not too long.

EDWARD: What happened when you tried to listen for your name?  
( police car sirens can be heard in the background )

ANNA: Huh?

EDWARD: How did you manage to hear your name when it was called?

ANNA: Oh, then I just come in, and I come out (?). And I was standing there so that I should hear my name. Then there was a black, ( she laughs ) they got the colored people (?) that were standing in the middle . . .

NASH: (?) A colored man, uh-huh.

ANNA: In the middle there . . .

NASH: Was that the first time you saw a colored man?

ANNA: I could, oh, I could not hear my name. I could not, not before I come (?). Then I could hear what he say.

NASH: You went closer to the man. You went very close to him, and then you could hear. Uh-huh. And the questions that they asked you when they finally called your name? What happened? After they called your name, what happened to you?

ANNA: No, they were Swedish.

EDWARD: (?)

ANNA: Just my name.

NASH: Oh, just your name.

ANNA: Just my name.

EDWARD: The same as she was telling before about before, she went to this man and he asked her where her husband was. You remember that we just told you.

NASH: Right. Oh . . .

EDWARD'S WIFE: That was who met her . . .

EDWARD: Mrs. Johnson met her.

NASH: And this woman, Miss Johnson, she was, where was she from, the person who met you when you finally were ready to go to the United States?

EDWARD: Who was Mrs. Johnson?

ANNA: She was a Swedish lady. She was married . . .

NASH: Miss Johnson was the Swedish lady.

ANNA: They were a married couple, Johnson.

NASH: And she was from your church. Is that right?

ANNA: Yes. I meet them in the church.

NASH: And what was the name of your church?

ANNA: Just what I said, the Adventist church. That was the church, the name of the church. Seventh Day Adventist Church.

NASH: Are you still a member of that church?

ANNA: Huh?

NASH: Are you still today a member of that church?

EDWARD: Are you still a member of that . . .

ANNA: Nay, nay, nay, nay, nay, nay. ( Ms. Nash laughs ) Nay,

nay, nay.

EDWARD: It's a long time ago.

ANNA: Nay, nay, nay. Far away.

NASH: Nay, nay, nay. Far away. ( she laughs ) So you stayed with Miss Johnson the first night.

ANNA: Yes, yes.

NASH: And then after that . . .

ANNA: Mrs. Johnson was upset. (?) is what Mrs. Johnson said.

EDWARD: But you stayed with her the first night.

ANNA: Yes. I had to sleep with her the first night, yeah.

NASH: And then after that what did you do? Where did you go to live?

ANNA: I had to try to get a job, so she was with me to the office, you know, (?).

EDWARD: The employment office. You know which employment office it was?

ANNA: Huh?

EDWARD: Which employment office was it? Was it . . .

ANNA: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

EDWARD: Was it Mrs. Hedland?

ANNA: She was with me that (?).

EDWARD: Was it Mrs. Hedland's office?

ANNA: Nay, not this, not this. I was in the office, American.  
I was down there.

EDWARD: It was an American employment office?

ANNA: Yes, yes. I come there, I come there.

NASH: And what was the job that you first got?

ANNA: You know, do everything.

NASH: What was everything?

ANNA: Yeah, yeah, the thing is, what do you call them? What  
did you call them?

EDWARD: Handyman. ( he laughs )

ANNA: Huh?

NASH: You did everything where? In a house?

ANNA: Yes, yes.

EDWARD: No.

NASH: No. Did you . . .

EDWARD: It was, then the Swedish, one of first . . .

ANNA: Oh, that was Long Island. That was . . .

EDWARD: That was your first job?

ANNA: Oh, yes. (?) that woman. She was not a (?). She hurt me.

NASH: She hurt you, this woman.

ANNA: Yes. She was (?) to do that.

NASH: Why did she hurt you?

ANNA: ( Swedish )

EDWARD: You'll have to tell the story in English. It was at this laundry place.

ANNA: Huh?

EDWARD: It was at this laundry?

ANNA: Yes.

EDWARD: And tell . . .

ANNA: I was there one week, I think.

EDWARD: Tell when it was. Was it . . .

ANNA: I couldn't, I couldn't work there.

EDWARD: Was it cold?

ANNA: Ooh, yah. Winter, winter I froze, yeah.

EDWARD: Tell it in English. It was very cold, your hands were very cold.

ANNA: Yes, yes, yes.

NASH: From washing? From washing, or from the weather?

EDWARD: Did you have to wash, or what did you do?

ANNA: No, not washing. I was hanging, hanging out, out in that weather, hanging in the cold weather.

EDWARD: And what happened with the clothes in the cold weather.

ANNA: What?

EDWARD: What happened to the clothes in the cold weather?

ANNA: Coats?

EDWARD: The clothes.

ANNA: Oh, the clothes. Oh, they got stiff, you know. You know, they freeze, they freeze, they get stiff, so cold it was.

EDWARD: And what else was it you had to do? You had to fix the furnace.

ANNA: Oh, I should cook her dinner. I should cook dinner for her and I didn't get a bite.

NASH: How long did this situation go on?

ANNA: Oh, no, I was one, I think one . . .

EDWARD: Was it one month?

ANNA: And then they want me to go high up in the room, I never have fire, there I should sleep. I should lay down and sleep. There was (?). I come, I thought I come to, people was crazy! Yes.

EDWARD: How did you manage to leave there?

ANNA: Oh, I, at home I had (?). The (Swedish) . . .

EDWARD: You have to tell in English. What did you do? What did you do?

ANNA: I took my clothes on the arm and run to the next house.

NASH: Ah.

ANNA: Yah, I talk to that lady, so I went there.

NASH: And what did you say to the lady?

ANNA: That I could stay there, one week, till I get the job,  
she follow me into, into New York.

NASH: Who did? The woman from the laundry followed you?

EDWARD: No, no. The lady, it was the lady which, to whom you  
ran that helped you to come to New York.

ANNA: Oh, yes.

EDWARD: The next door neighbor helped her to come to New York.

NASH: And what happened to you when you came to New York?

ANNA: When I got, oh. ( she laughs ) It was terrible. I was  
sitting there in the station. The (Swedish) . . .

EDWARD: Pennsylvania Station?

ANNA: I forgot what was it called? The station that they have  
there.

NASH: Subway station?

ANNA: Buses and things.

NASH: Bus terminal?

EDWARD: Suburban station?

ANNA: (?) No, there I was sitting. And I, ( she laughs )  
I sat there, and I had a paper, thank God I had a paper  
in my hands with what's my name. That was the only thing  
I had. So I ask a couple of men to help me. A place  
back home a man helped me to get to (?) through that paper,  
through that paper.

NASH: Did you have any money?

ANNA: Through that paper, he helped me (?).

EDWARD: Where were you going?

ANNA: You then, he, I come to Johnson's, Johnson's.

NASH: Oh, back to . . .

EDWARD: Oh, I see.

ANNA: Come to Johnson's. So I knew that I would get paid two  
dollars for that trip, in that . . .

NASH: Taxi.

ANNA: I remember that. So I come to them.

NASH: And then . . .

ANNA: And people, you know, when you go, the (?) that you helped me to take the trouble. They don't want you. It's very hard to come to new people. Very hard.

EDWARD: Did they help you to get another job?

ANNA: Yah, they (?) a job, too.

EDWARD: Who helped you to get another job? Did anyone help you to get another job?

ANNA: Yeah. That people, the office, the working office.

EDWARD: Employment office.

ANNA: Yeah, I get in that office, that place there, yes. Where was that? That was in city.

NASH: In . . .

ANNA: In city. They have the (?), and I think . . .

EDWARD: 150th Street.

NASH: 150th Street?

ANNA: Yeah.

NASH: In Manhattan?

ANNA: In New York, see.

EDWARD'S WIFE: It was a better area then.

NASH: I can't imagine . . .

ANNA: So, I had a little girl to take care of, and I should do everything, you know, to keep her.

EDWARD: General housework.

ANNA: For the misses was out working. So I should take care of the home and that girl.

NASH: How did you like that job?

ANNA: Oh, how did I . . .

EDWARD: Oh, that was on the West Side?

ANNA: ( she laughs ) There was nothing to like. ( they laugh )

EDWARD: Was that on the West Side?

ANNA: ( she laughs ) Yes. Nay, nay, nay. There was nothing to like for me.

EDWARD: Was that Riverside Drive?

ANNA: Yes. That was then. ( she laughs ) Ay, yay yay. I had it hard to get what I want.

EDWARD: Was that where you met your best friend?

ANNA: What? ( she laughs )

EDWARD: Was that where you met your best friend, when you were out at Riverside Drive with the girl? Did you meet Stina there?

ANNA: Yes, I was working there, and there was two children. I had to go every day and work. And then I (?) Stina come there and had two children. But she was with Swedish people, she was with Swedish people.

NASH: And you were with what type of people?

ANNA: And I was (?), at least we can talk. You saw (?).

EDWARD: How was it that you met her?

ANNA: (?)

EDWARD: No, you . . .

ANNA: To remember it, to remember each one.

EDWARD: You . . .

ANNA: (Swedish)

EDWARD: You were going there with this girl, and someone told you that there was a Swedish woman who had some children, too, and she was sitting on a bench there, and then you started to talk to her. Isn't that the way it went?

ANNA: No. (Swedish)

EDWARD: Okay. Well, you tell that the way you remember it.

EDWARD'S WIFE: In English.

ANNA: Well, I just met her. We heard, we hear them talking Swedish, and then we started to talk with each other, yes.

NASH: And you became friendly with her ever since that time?

ANNA: Oh, yes, yes. We, then, yeah. And we didn't do anything more than just a little while can we talk and a little while can we meet. You don't have no time ( Edward coughs ) to run around. Nay, nay, nay.

NASH: Did you ever get any time to run around at all? You were . . .

ANNA: No, I had not. I had not. I had never been that way.  
I will never go from house to house. ( she laughs )  
I don't like that.

NASH: So eventually you became a citizen. What year did you  
become a citizen?

ANNA: Oh, I was here five years. I was here five years.

EDWARD: How long did you stay at that job?

ANNA: Oh, at that job . . .

EDWARD: When did you get the job in Douglaston?

ANNA: Oh, in Douglaston, then I come there, I come him, I come  
home. In Douglaston I get the fine home. I was alone  
to take care of all that big house. And I did.

EDWARD: Who were the people there?

ANNA: Oh, yes, yes. But that mister, he was, you know, the  
legality, uh . . .

EDWARD: A lawyer?

ANNA: Yeah, a lawyer. And then that lady, she went out of the  
house every day, to the city! She went to the city.  
So I was alone. I had to take care of that house alone.

So motheraybe she call, they called home and asked if I have enough things, (?). Have you seen me (?). I am so (?) in the telephone.

EDWARD: You liked it there?

ANNA: There I like it. There I like it, but I was alone, and I could do . . .

NASH: You liked to be alone.

ANNA: I could do my work, what I want to. See?

NASH: So you had a son who was in Sweden at this time. Your son was still in Sweden.

ANNA: He come over when he was twenty-one here. ( gesturing to Edward ) That is the son.

NASH: Yes. ( they laugh ) And did you start, and you were writing him all this time, telling him about America? You were writing him letters?

EDWARD: You wrote letters home.

ANNA: Yes, yes.

EDWARD: I was with my grandmother.

ANNA: I know you say, you say I wrote letters that way. That

you have a mother in America, that say that I can come over. That's why you write to me. ( she laughs )

NASH: You say that I . . .

ANNA: (?).

EDWARD: It probably was that . . .

ANNA: I want to come over.

EDWARD: It's easier to come over by anyone who has relatives in the United States at that time.

ANNA: He want to come over.

EDWARD: See, a long time ago. They changed immigration rules, quite a lot since then.

NASH: So you decided to go back for a visit to Sweden.

ANNA: Yes, I was visit home. I was (?).

EDWARD: But you became a citizen while you were in Douglaston.

ANNA: Oh, yes. I took everything here, I was working here. All my papers was clear. Everything I had (?).

EDWARD: How did you, how did you take your citizenship papers?

ANNA: Huh?

EDWARD: What happened when you were taking your citizenship paper? Who helped you with that?

ANNA: Oh, the citizen papers.

EDWARD: Yes.

ANNA: They weren't any trouble.

EDWARD: Well, do you remember going to the court?

ANNA: Nay. Oh, the last one, the man, the last one. When they say that this is the, what they call the man, this is finished now.

EDWARD: Final appears.

ANNA: Yes, that is him. Then we had to . . .

EDWARD: Did you have to do anything? Did you have to read anything?

ANNA: We had, to, uh, no. We have to (?). I had my papers finished, you know from the bottom to the top. I had nothing to say.

EDWARD: Did you have to read?

ANNA: Huh?

EDWARD: Did you have to read any English or anything?

ANNA: Oh, I did. ( she laughs ) Then I come to the last one, that I should read English. So I'm starting to read loud and clear. "Oh, no," he says, "go. Go away. You can read." He don't want me to read more, see.

NASH: Because of how well you read.

ANNA: Oh, that's the way. I was so good. ( she laughs )

EDWARD: Did you know any English when you came to this country?

ANNA: What?

EDWARD: Did you know any English when you came to this country?

ANNA: Nay, nay, nay, nay. I had been alone.

EDWARD'S WIFE: That had been five years . . .

EDWARD: Did you learn English by yourself?

ANNA: Yes, yes. I do everything, I am that kind of person that I do everything myself.

NASH: How, were there any special ways that you taught yourself English?

ANNA: Oh, everything myself. I'm starting to read the papers,

the daily papers. I took them with me up on my room.

When I was up there and I read all the (?) and I read,  
I read, I read.

NASH: Did you have a dictionary? You had a dictionary.

ANNA: I learned it, I learned it.

NASH: No dictionary.

ANNA: No. When I was alone. I want to do everything myself.  
I am what they call it, (?). ( Swedish )

EDWARD: Did you learn to speak English? What did you ask . . .

ANNA: (Swedish)

EDWARD: Do you mean to say self-made?

ANNA: Yes, yes. I come to school, I ask teacher about him,  
from the school. Then you go over here? So I ask that  
teacher. I ask the teacher about my boy. And he has  
a very good word about my boy. So then I say (Swedish).

EDWARD: Yes.

ANNA: Yes, (Swedish). Oh, that was (?) from me.

EDWARD: The teacher said that her little boy was very independent.

( Mrs. Karlsson laughs ) That it was inherited from . . .

( they laugh )

NASH: His mother.

ANNA: Yah. Oh, (?) ( she laughs )

NASH: Okay. Let's go back now to, you went to Sweden, and you told your son about how it was in the United States. And what do you remember your mother, what do you remember of that visit when your mother came back?

EDWARD: Well, I had just finished school in that particular town where my grandmother lived, where I grew up. And, of course, my mother came visiting, and that was, that was in 1931. And it was, of course, very interesting to listen to all her tales about the United States and about her life, and about what happened to her in New York, and on Long Island and other places.

NASH: What stories do you remember in particular?

EDWARD: Well, this one where she had to leave, run away with her clothes, of course, is very dramatic, ( he laughs ) in the winter, and how she had to do these things. But the thing that she liked to talk most about was how pleasant she thought it was in Douglaston where she had this

apparently quite affluent family to take care of, and she had a chance to be out on the large grass lawn they had, sunbathing and going to the beach in Douglaston where she, as a member of that household, was able to have a pass in those days, and this she found very pleasant, she liked to swim very much. And we, the story there was that she liked it very much in . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

NASH: So she worked in a household, about her experience with the other maids and the other servants in the household.

Apparently there's a lot of conflicts between people who were employed in the household.

EDWARD: Now you can tell about that story when you were in Washington and had, working on starting that new household there. Do you remember that?

ANNA: Oh, no. I should be cook there.

EDWARD: Yes. What did you do?

ANNA: Oh, aye, aye, there were lots of people. There were thirty people in the help to cook for. I couldn't stay there! I wasn't . . .

EDWARD: Well, how did you do? You went out everywhere and got the pots and the pans and all this . . .

ANNA: Oh, no, no, no, no. I (Swedish).

EDWARD: Yes. But how did you start?

ANNA: (Swedish) I went into the lady and say I want to live.

EDWARD: No. But before you had to . . .

ANNA: No, I cook, I cook.

EDWARD: You had to go around town getting all the things started.

ANNA: Oh, yes. I have to cook. First, when I come, I have to go with the chauffeur taking all the, uh, cooking, all the cooking . . .

EDWARD: Utensils.

ANNA: For the cooking. I had to do that. And then I . . .  
( she laughs )

EDWARD: You had to get all the food?

ANNA: Nay, not the food. The (?). (Swedish)

EDWARD: You have to speak English, you know.

ANNA: You see? I had to . . .

EDWARD: Tell about how many meals you had to make each day. You had to make many meals each day?

ANNA: Yes, I think about seven meals.

NASH: Seven.

ANNA: Oh, my.

NASH: Did the same people eat all seven meals?

ANNA: Yeah, nay, the (?). ( Ms. Nash laughs )

EDWARD: Who ate all the meals?

ANNA: Oh, that was for the help, for the people that was there at night. There would be another food, another food.

EDWARD: Did anyone help you to do these things?

ANNA: (?)

EDWARD: Who helped you?

ANNA: ( off-mike voices heard in the background ) Oh, well, you have to work. You have to work, that's all. That's what I had to do. I went, twelve o'clock at night I went up to the wife. They had five stairs up there I should

(?), just come up, and then I had to go down again for to be finished.

EDWARD: When did you start in the morning?

ANNA: Ay, yay yay. I had to start at five or six o'clock. Oh, there I work and I work. I had work, I tell you, in my life.

EDWARD: Who helped you there? Did anyone help you there?

ANNA: What?

EDWARD: Did anyone help you?

ANNA: No. I ask them. They promise me I should get the help (?). It never come. I worked myself to death.

EDWARD: Did you have any, were there any butlers or maids or people like that in that job?

ANNA: Yeah. They were sort of a (Swedish).

EDWARD: You must talk English. It was a . . .

ANNA: It was a big, big room for the people, for their food. Big, big room. I should cook food for them, the help. Nay, I get tired of thinking of working.

NASH: You get tired when you think about it? ( she laughs,

Edward says something unintelligible ) Uh-huh.

( addressing Edward ) Well, why don't we go on to your trip to the United States, and what made, what were you doing, well, you said that you had just finished the military. ( voices can be heard in conversation in the background on the tape )

EDWARD: I had started doing some artwork for various stores and for some newspapers and magazines. And the last time I could leave was in March, so we had . . .

NASH: Why do you say that was the last time?

EDWARD: Well, it, I was getting past my twenty-first birthday. I had to get all the papers clear before I was twenty-one.

NASH: In order to become . . .

EDWARD: A citizen easily, as one could in those days, you see, because my mother was there, in the United States. So it was arranged with tickets and everything by March the 6th, I believe. So I came to the United States in early March, and it was a fairly small ship of the Swedish American Line, Drottningholm. And we had also quite a good storm there, but it was apparently not as dramatic as my mother's. And I was, felt perhaps a little bit of seasickness, but I managed to be around and enjoy the

good food.

NASH: Did you, at that time had you any kind of experience with the war that was coming, any effects that you had felt in your life, any political changes?

EDWARD: Well, there wasn't, of course, any particular war going on then at that time. Hitler had taken over the reins in Germany in '33, I believe. But as far as any war being on the horizon there was, of course. Everyone was at that time happily appeasing Hitler, and there was no indication that any war was coming on.

NASH: And that had played, so that played no role . . .

EDWARD: It played no, it played no, uh, role at all. One was warned for the labor conditions in the United States, however, at the consulate, that it was a printed piece of paper one got, and when one talked to people there, that there was a very severe depression in the United States at the time. And everyone was told that it would be very difficult to find any employment. So that was, of course, a consideration.

NASH: But did this, it didn't affect your thinking too much?

EDWARD: Well, it was always possible to get back to Sweden again,

of course, inasmuch as I had fulfilled all obligations as far as military service was concerned and all other things that might be difficult, cause any difficulty coming back. So, of course, I ( he clears his throat ) so there's no harm in trying. So I came over here, and, and I had met some friends from, who were, uh, people from the section, the section that was in Minnesota, people from Minnesota who were traveling in Sweden at the time, and they had, of course, advised me a deal, a good deal about the United States. And they were somewhat surprised too that I wanted to go to the United States under these depression conditions, but they also gave me some people I could get advice from when I came to New York. So I did meet some people here and decided this was a good place. Of course, I knew English quite well.

NASH: I'd like to go back to the trip. You started to say something about food on the ship?

EDWARD: Yeah. I did enjoy the food. I wasn't that seasick, and there was a bit of a storm, and it had, I remember that people I talked to were very much worried because there were extremes inundations in the United States, and they, when they landed they found out they could not take,

regular train service was interrupted towards the Midwest. The lines were washed out and so forth. So they had to go a roundabout way, taking buses and things.

So there apparently was, had been quite a storm just then, and when I came to New York there were large snow banks all along the streets, and there was all kinds of garbage piled up on the snow banks. It looked quite like a messy town, you might say, after all this, which seems to be the impression most people have when they come from Europe to New York, although I would say this was an extreme case.

EDWARD'S WIFE: But you didn't go to Ellis Island.

EDWARD: But I did not go to Ellis Island, no.

NASH: You just got off the ship . . .

EDWARD: Yes, yes, that's right. And the immigration authorities met us outside the quarantine. There were people who had any sicknesses or others, they were taken off there.

But apparently I was healthy, and my mother said I was clean. I didn't have any head lice or anything like that.

So there was not the slightest problem to land. But then after a while I got a job in an advertising agency and followed that line until the war, actually, when I

got employed as, I had also did some work for the Swedish paper and through that knowledge of Swedish I was employed by the Army Service Forces in the language division, preparing language books and military dictionaries and such things in the Office of War Information doing work for the Scandinavian desk, which was transmitted to Sweden for, you might say, propaganda purposes, tell about the United States and what it was doing in the war, and so forth. But after that I went back to the advertising art again. And . . .

NASH: Had you gotten back to Sweden?

EDWARD: Well, it took quite a while. It was in '69.

EDWARD'S WIFE: '67.

EDWARD: It was '67, the first time after I left that I came back to Sweden. And it has changed a great deal, I suppose, but one still can recognize the things. It did, started to change before I left, so the change wasn't that great.

It became the ( a chair can be heard scraping the floor on the tape ) great middle way just about the time I left.

NASH: The great . . .

EDWARD: Middle way, yeah.

NASH: What does that mean?

EDWARD: Uh, this was a phrase coined by an American author, Marquis Child, who went to Sweden in those years, in 1936, and wrote very favorably about the Swedish social conditions. They tried to take good care about all the Swedes from the cradle to the grave, you see, and this caught everyone's fancy in those days. And President Roosevelt sent a special commission to study this in the United States, and he said that this inspired actually the social ( a chair can be heard scraping the floor on the tape ) development in the United States from those, at that time. So Swedes felt they were doing fairly well with their social development. ( unintelligible female voice off-mike can be heard ) Yes. Of course, during the, during the war I met my wife. We were on, air wardens together, and we met in the dark, so to speak.

NASH: Scanning the sky? ( she laughs )

EDWARD: Well, yes. Most of the time, it seems to me, we were going to cellars to see that they had reasonable shelters and things, but anyhow, that's how we met. And I . . .

NASH: What neighborhood was that?

EDWARD: It was right around here. I seem to have been living here all this time. So has my mother.

NASH: If I may say so, this is the Upper East Side ( disturbance with the microphone ) that we are talking about.

EDWARD: And eventually we got married, pretty soon, I guess. ( to his wife ) When did we get married? In '44? ( he laughs ) And some children arrived. We have three of them. All are grown up and are in various parts of the country at this time.

NASH: What are your children doing?

EDWARD: Well, one has, the eldest has just graduated from Columbia Law School and has a position with a law firm in Washington. The second boy has accepted a scholarship to get his Master's in French in the Berkeley University in California, and our youngest daughter is in Boston, I guess it is, a suburb of Boston? Where she, presently she is saving money to study, continued study, she is a graduate of Vassar, to study sociology. ( voice off mike ) So we . . .

EDWARD'S WIFE: She's still finding herself in Cambridge.

NASH: Mr. Karlsson's wife says she's still finding herself in

Cambridge. ( she laughs ) That's a good place to look.

EDWARD'S WIFE: ( voice off mike ) . . . to Sweden a lot earlier than we did. It was the matter of children, any education, why we did not return to visit Sweden in the 1940's as we had planned. It wasn't until 1967 that my husband returned and then I first got to see his home country.

EDWARD: ( referring to his wife ) She comes from Maine, and the section of Sweden where I come from is very much similar to Maine, and I always said that if I could blindfold her in Maine where she was born and move her to my section in Sweden, she wouldn't be able to tell the difference, including such things as in her home town there they have signs saying, "Moose Crossings," which we discovered they have exactly the same and the same type of roads in Verblam [ph] where I, we came upon them while driving in Verblam [ph], which was really, really similar.

NASH: Are there many Swedes living in Maine?

EDWARD: Oh, yes. We have just discovered that there is quite a lot. This past week when we were on our vacation we visited what is known as New Sweden up there, which just

had a one-hundredth anniversary. But there are several other sections there known as Stockholm and Besmalan [ph] and Jamflan [ph], which are very much Swedish settlements. And they still speak Swedish, even if they are third or fourth generation Swedes, they are a great deal of Swedish community life up there, keeping up Swedish traditions.

NASH: Do you keep up Swedish traditions in your family?

EDWARD: Well, I guess we have, to a certain extent, although our children so far have not been particularly interested in Swedish traditions. But my mother, of course, kept up Swedish traditions of Christmas and other things that she had brought from Sweden. Of course, in the Swedish circles around here they do keep up these traditions very much. Swedish folk dancing, Swedish Christmas, Swedish Lucia.

NASH: What is Swedish Lucia?

EDWARD: Uh, it's an old tradition that is, uh, a feast on the 13th of December. The, what they call the Queen of Light is being given a traditional welcome on that particular day because the old Swedes had the idea that this was the darkest day of the year, probably much farther back

than this particular tradition of Lucia, which is, of course, borrowed from an old Italian saint with the name of Lucia. They say was brought over there, home to Sweden, by the old Vikings, and it lived on in certain sections of Sweden. But this girl is dressed in white with a red sash around her middle and a crown with lighted candles on top of her head, and she comes with a tray with coffee and good buns, Lucia buns. And in Sweden the idea is that she comes very early in the morning and she sings her song, waking up the people giving them this in bed, so to speak. And she has, usually, a few followers along, young girls, also help her sing and carry whatever further refreshments that they might want to wish, and a couple of boys who are known as star boys, with a staff with a star on following along, representing, I assume, those who took care of the horses and so forth in those days. The song indicates that the, yeah. They sing, the boys sing one song called, well, the Santa Lucia is not part of that, but they have another song that goes with it that is known as "The Staff And The Stable Boy," and presumably these boys are stable boys. So they are putting together quite a lot of tradition in these things, and lately this has become quite popular here in New York, too. So last Lucia was celebrated on ( a chair scraping

on the floor can be heard on the tape ) Fifth Avenue where, at the time that the mayor had blocked off Fifth Avenue from 57th Street south, and they were ( there are repeated scraping noises, and also a bell heard in the background on the tape ) each year the Swedes select a girl, these days with the help of the popular press, for the Swedish Lucia, and she was over here at that time, and appeared together with several local girls, Swedish local girls here in New York on Fifth Avenue, and sang their songs, and also at the World Trade Center.

NASH: And what time is this holiday?

EDWARD: The 13th of December. And all the Swedish organizations around here select their own Lucia. And go through these festivities was singing and coffee and Lucia buns and so forth.

NASH: And you were a reporter, is that right, a reporter for The Swedish North Star?

EDWARD: Well, I am listed as the associate editor of the papers, but I do, yes, indeed, a lot of reporting, take a lot of pictures. And my wife is very good at developing and printing pictures, so it's sort of a family affair there.  
But there are many other people who contribute to the

paper from their local organizations and so forth. So it's quite a community affair, all these many things that go on.

NASH: How far do you send the paper, how far are the subscribers living?

EDWARD: Well, they live practically all over the country, but most of them are along the East Coast from Maine to Florida. There is another Swedish paper in Chicago, and one in Seattle, and another one in Austin, Texas, and one in California, two in Canada.

NASH: Are there many Swedes in Canada?

EDWARD: It is quite a few. The Winnipeg area, I believe, has particularly many around there. And I would think there are some on the east coast of Canada too, it seems to me. Was it Toronto? ( he coughs )

NASH: Well, what's in the future for you, Mr. Karlsson?  
( they laugh )

EDWARD: Oh, dear. Well, of course, we will naturally continue with our little print shop, and we continue with the work with the Swedish paper, but we have gradually become very much involved and interested in what certain sections

of the Swedish community is doing for tracing and finding information about the immigration, especially from that section of Sweden where my mother is coming from. They have what they call an immigrant registry in that particular town. And the director of that is very much interested to develop a closer bond between those Swedes, there were a hundred thousand of them, who immigrated to the United States from that particular province between the years of 1850 and 1920. And, as a matter of fact, there were a million and a quarter Swedes who came to this country between those years, and that's about almost a quarter of the Swedish population in those days.

So there are a great deal of interest in the Swedes who went to the United States, what happened to them, and where they, their descendants are now and what they are doing. So we are quite involved in finding as many (Swedish), as they are called, from this province. And, actually, we have started a special little organization which we call the Friends of (Swedish), to encourage the cultural exchange between these two sections in the United States and Sweden. And we do quite a bit of work together with them in this particular regard.

NASH: ( addressing Edward's mother ) Mrs. Karlsson, is there anything that you would like to say on this tape, any

last thing about your memories of coming, or your feelings about coming to the United States?

MRS. KARLSSON: You (?) with some relatives.

EDWARD: (Swedish)

MRS. KARLSSON: (Swedish) I want to stay here.

NASH: You still want to stay here.

MRS. KARLSSON: Oh, yes. I want to stay here. ( Ms. Nash laughs )  
I don't want to go away now.

NASH: Okay. I don't think you will. ( Ms. Nash laughs )

MRS. KARLSSON: I like it very much. I think that's very much, I like it here.

NASH: That's good. All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Karlsson and Mrs. Karlsson.