

Nordic American Voices
Nordic Heritage Museum
Interview of Georg Pedersen
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Seattle, Washington
Interviewers: Brandon Benson, Gary London, Sandra Magnusson Martin

Gary: [0:06] London: Testing, testing. OK, we're rolling.

Brandon Benson: [0:10] OK. This is the interview of Georg Pedersen for the Nordic Heritage Museum's Nordic American Voices Project. This the thirteenth of March, 2010. My name is Brandon Benson, and I will be assisting Gary London and Sandra Magnusson Martin with this interview. We are at the Northwest Danish Foundation in Seattle, Washington.

Gary: [0:33] Thank you very much, Mr. Pedersen, for coming in today. We appreciate it greatly.

Georg: [0:38] Petersen: Thank you for having me.

Gary: [0:40] Yes. We have approximately now an hour and a half, and I think probably you'll have enough to tell us that we'll take most of that time if that's all right.

Georg: [0:51] Well... [laughs]

Gary: [0:52] We don't want to wear you out, but I know you have much to tell us.

Georg: [0:55] Sure, I'd be very happy to. I think I can...

Gary: [1:00] And I'll be putting some questions to you, but Brandon and Sandra are also free to interject questions at any time. So it's a collaborative effort.

Georg: [1:11] Very good.

Gary: [1:11] OK?

Georg: [1:12] Yeah.

Gary: [1:13] We'd like to begin with your telling us a little bit about your childhood in Denmark. I understand you were born in January of 1934. Tell us a little bit about your family.

Georg: [1:26] Well, I was born January 23rd in a little fishing village by the name of Rødvig, 70 kilometers out of Copenhagen. I was born during a snowstorm as so many other children were [laughs] in January in Denmark, and at that time we had some real bad winters, of course. But anyway, I came out of a family of four boys. I was the youngest. My oldest brother was 15 years older than me, and I was 10 years behind the other three. [1:57] My father was a commercial

fisherman and always had been, and he was a very active fisherman in town. My mother was a farm girl. Her name was Anna Hansen. They got married I believe in 1908 and built a home, and they stayed in that home until the day they died, 54 years of marriage.

[2:22] I have some real good memories of my childhood. In that town, everybody was talking about fishing. I wanted to be a fisherman, and everybody else in town wanted to be a fisherman. Of course, during the war years and so on, too, the schools were closed a lot. But at first it was a grade school--four grades. So my education was not very much. We still had a long summer vacation.

[2:49] The winters were very harsh at that time so that we had nothing to heat up the school with, and sometimes it would close, too. So I spent more time fishing than I actually spent in school during the war. But Rødvig was a nice little town. I had a childhood that is very [laughs] difficult for other people to repeat and to have. My mom and dad were working hard.

[3:18] My mother, not alone by she was having four boys, she also had to take care of the hired help that my dad had. So she had to cook for them and wash their clothes and stuff for them, so she had a full-time job. When my mother married my father, my grandmother said, "One thing is you'll never had to worry about you're going to starve because he's going to be a good provider. But you're going to have a hard time keeping him clean."

Gary: [laughs] [3:47]

Georg: [3:49] That was just a little bit of advice from Grandma...

Gary: [laughs] [3:52]

Georg: [3:54] ...and I'm sure that that was very, very true. But my father was a very hard-working man, and he had no education or very little education. He also had a lot of ambition--worked hard, played hard. Sometimes he would advance himself by becoming foreman for the fisherman association, the harbor, the road construction, the school, the bank. He was part of the conservative party in town. So he had a lot of ambition. He is also the one that actually went to Copenhagen to borrow the money to build a new harbor, and that was completed in 1943. [4:40] The royal family of Denmark at that time sent down the crowned Prince Frederick, who came down to town to open the new harbor, and a big party was held afterwards. My father became mentioned in--Frederick, who became the king later--his memoir because during the war it was very difficult to get cigars. At the party after the harbor was open, my father was sitting next to crowned Prince Frederick who became the king. And he gave my father a cigar.

[5:18] When he was going to lit that cigar, my father said, "No, I'm going to save this to a special occasion." Well, Frederick never forgot that. He put it in his memoir. [laughs] And of course, that was a big special occasion, but my father probably figured it should be saved for something else. My grandfather was a same type of person. I don't remember much about my grandmother. But my grandfather was an incredible guy, always in a good mood.

[5:48] At that time, my memory goes back to he was probably about 80, always sitting in a big chair when I walked by his house watching the boat coming in out of the harbor. Always waiting

for me to bring up a report--what kind of fish there was for the day and so on, too. If the catch was good, he would give me a dime. If it was not so good, I'd get a nickel.

Gary: [laughs] [6:12]

Georg: [6:13] Then sometimes on the way out, I had to set his radio because he had a radio with two knobs. That was very difficult for him, which knob was what. So I had to set his radio before I left, too. His memory was slipping a little bit, and I have a memory of him that I can never forget because he had a lady that came to cook and clean house for him. [laughs]

[6:41] The big meal was at 12 o'clock, and usually in the morning when the lady came to clean and cook for him she'll ask him what he wanted for dinner. Here's a man that had been through two wars. He knows when things aren't rationed and stuff, you can't get stuff and stock it up.

[6:57] So he would always tell her what he wanted. "Get me some pork chops. Make sure we have enough beer. Make sure there's enough schnapps. And by the way, I don't care what it costs as long as we can get it."

[7:09] Now he didn't have a clue that he didn't have any money. My father would go and pay all the bills at the end of the month. But that was a good understanding. I guess that's what a son is supposed to do anyway.

Gary: [7:19] Was your grandfather also a fisherman?

Georg: [7:21] He was also a fisherman. He owned the small ships, too, sometimes--sail ships, cargo ships.

Gary: [7:27] Was it your understanding that back in your family through the generations there'd been fishermen?

Georg: [7:33] Always fishermen.

Gary: [7:33] Always fishermen.

Georg: [7:35] And sailing. I have several people, too, that sailed a lot at that time. Like I said, when I finished school in April 1948 my father gave me two choices since there's no more education available. It would have been a waste on me anyway probably, so he gave me two choices: stay home fishing or to ship out. I told him I want to ship out. [8:00] He said, "Well, remember now, when you get out on those big ships, it is not going to be like working on the fishing boat at home. You're going to be in an adult world. They're going to be taken advantage of you. So in the beginning, you learn your job. Make sure you understand your job. Keep your ears and eyes open. After you learn your job, don't take crap from anybody. If you don't like it, come on home."

[8:25] So that was a good way to leave. So I had a good send-off. My father had no problem sending me off at 14, but my mother did. She thought it was a little too early. There was no question about it. I was taken advantage of when I came on the ship because they expected a lot

from us. It was not just working 12 hours a day. There was a lot more sometimes for very little money. You're always a gopher, and you're always made fun of.

[8:49] I learned very quickly, too, is that when you come from a small town, the city slickers, are even going to take more advantage of you than anybody else. So, from the smaller towns. So, I learned to talk like a guy from Copenhagen pretty quickly. [laughs]

Gary: [9:06] We want to talk about that, more. But, can we stay in your home town for a little while?

Georg: [9:11] Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Gary: [9:13] About how many people live there?

Georg: [9:14] Seven hundred.

Gary: [9:15] Seven hundred people.

Georg: [9:16] Today there's about two thousand. We really haven't grown that much.

Gary: [9:19] Mm-hmm.

Georg: [9:20] We were seven hundred, all fishermen. I had to commute to school. It was two kilometer. You walked, or you got up on a bicycle. In the winter time, you skied to school.

Gary: [9:32] Tell us a little bit about that school.

Georg: [9:35] Well, the school was actually very dull. It was the old-fashioned way of teaching. If you didn't listen, bam! You'll get it. [9:48] It was church. But, I talked this, all my friends later on. Like, in my case, now, I couldn't sing. So, I was not allowed to sing along. It was not a matter of, "Hmm. You can't sing? We're going to teach you how to sing." No. "You stand over here, when we sing." OK? So, we were a couple of guys standing over there. The male teacher, on the other hand, was a big "whang", every now and then.

[10:13] The female teacher, she was the meanest of the whole bunch. One time I was standing up in front of Italy, China. I was going to point out names of towns in Italy, and I happened to make a mistake. And she hit me on the head with a stick. And, believe me, I had a headache for about five years after that, but I never told anybody. But the school, that was just the system.

[10:41] And us guys had to walk these two kilometer every day, so we always stuck together.

[10:50] And one thing I'll always remember about that school, too, that was... See, first of all, there was not that much food around. It was during the war. And, we were doing good as fishermen, because we had fish. And my father would give the farmers fish, and then we'll get chickens and stuff, without the Germans knowing about it.

[11:10] But, there was one guy, one boy in school that was very poor, and my mother always made me bring extra sandwiches for him. And that was just the system. That's just how she was. She remembers everybody, and she was good to everybody.

[11:25] And so was my father. He was very generous. My father was an incredible guy. And, he gave me the freedom, typically, to get out into the world, and to live my own life, and to see and explore the world. And I'm very happy I never disappointed him. [laughter]

Georg: [11:42] And, I was back to see him a lot. [11:43] But, anyway, we had to have school every other day, in the beginning. Then, it was only four grades. And after that, I think, the last couple of years after the war, we went four days a week. There was two classrooms. So, the first classroom would be over here, and the second would be here. It was in the same building. The same room, actually.

Gary: [12:10] Two different teachers?

Georg: [12:11] Yeah. Two different teachers. Not always. Actually, there was only three teachers altogether, so it kind of rotated.

Gary: [12:16] Mm-hmm.

Georg: [12:17] Took care of that. But, I can tell you, if you were not one of their pets, you were in trouble...

Gary: [12:23] Yeah.

Georg: [12:24] ...at school. So, that's how the system, that we didn't... [12:26] And I was the kind of a guy, I was a dreamer. I was sitting over by the window, see how the wind had changed, because I was going to go home fishing, you know.

Gary: [12:33] Yeah.

Georg: [12:34] Do my stuff. So, actually I really didn't get much out of it.

Gary: [12:39] Mm-hmm.

Georg: [12:40] And I do recall that we held back in the third grade. Then it dawned on me, "Hmm. I'm going to be 12 years old, and be still in third grade." So, I told that to my friends, two of them, my fishing buddies. And I said, "It's not going to look good, if we going to have to graduate from third grade, so we'd better get with it." And one guy, his name was Evan, he said, "What difference does it make, as long as we get out? We are not interested in all the stuff that they're teaching, that happened a hundred years ago..." We're interested in the future. [13:15] "We know how to read. We know how to write. We know mathematics, and that's what it's all about--money in and money out. All the rest of the stuff they can keep." And I thought about it many a time.

Gary: [laughs] [13:25]

Georg: [13:25] He had a point. That's what it's all about. But anyway, then he also said, "You!" He said, "You're going to get out in fourth grade because your father's on the school commission. It wouldn't look good for the teachers if you hadn't graduated from third grade. That means he's doing something wrong. So don't worry about you and don't you worry about me", he said. "I couldn't care less. End of the story." [laughter]

Georg: [13:48] We three guys really stuck together. The sad part is, Evan died probably about five years ago. I think I just said that, and the other guy, Jørgen, he's still alive. He became a fisherman.

Gary: [13:59] And still lives there?

Georg: [14:00] Still lives there. Yeah. Sometimes you'll have the people leaving town because they got married a girl from another part of the country. They moved to that town maybe, but most of the time they stayed. Most of the fisherman I could bet would always be at the inn.

[14:22] There was a very popular inn in town. It was a good place to eat. It was a good place for tourists to come from Copenhagen and spend vacations and some were on shore. So there would always be a lot of young women coming working at that inn. Some of them might end up getting married to fishermen, and they stayed. So actually, I would have to say that was a big plus for the city or for the town, whatever you want to call it.

Gary: [laughs] [14:44]

Georg: [14:47] But the school itself, I really have no good memories of it. And I don't think anybody else did at that time.

Gary: [14:55] No? Well, let's move on since you don't have any good memories. What did you and your pals do? It sounds like you had a couple of very good friends?

Georg: [15:02] Yes. Well, we would be fisherman. Now by the time I was six years old I had my own rowboat. My father gave it, but he also laid down the law. "You can only go out so far. You can only do this. You can only do that." But it was mine, and I had to maintain it and keep it clean and work with it. I'd be fishing most of the time. Probably by the time I was eight or nine, it was serious fishing, and up to 10. [15:26] Then we would get long lines for codfish in the winter, and in the summertime we'll catch flounders and shrimp. I would sell them and made money. Then in the wintertime, too, I would also trap mink. We had the wild minks. At that time they were very valuable actually.

[15:48] I caught one particularly in the woods, and I got almost 480 kroner for that. That's about \$100 at that time for that skin. But I was not supposed to catch them. So I had to have a letter from the farmers that this particular mink had been chasing after the chickens.

Gary: [16:06] Why weren't you supposed to catch them? They were protected?

Georg: [16:08] They were protected, but people still did it. If you were a farmer and you had wild minks coming chasing your chickens around, you were allowed to catch them. So I had a letter from the farmer before I sold this one and we docked it. But then also in the fishing, when I was about 12, I could then go out with the bigger boats. [16:32] My job would be when the crew went to sleep at night after the last haul, we would be drifting. There had to be one guy to be awake, and that would be my job to be awake and if a big ship came close by, and so to notify the skipper or put the searchlight on so they could see who it was.

[16:50] So I did a lot of fishing and I had completely forgotten. I have to be honest with you. When I shipped out, I came back after about eight years away from Denmark. My father said,

"Why don't you take that money you have in your bank?" I'd completely forgotten, and there was close to 20,000 kroner in the bank. That was money I had made myself.

[17:11] So it was pretty good.

Gary: [17:12] Impressive.

Georg: [17:13] Yeah, very impressive. Honestly, I must say that I never even thought about this money because when I came out on the ships and so on, I knew I was never going to go back. I knew that, so I'd never become a fisherman again..

Gary: [17:27] Can you tell us a bit about your childhood memories of special occasions, holidays, Christmas, Easter--whatever was important?

Georg: [17:36] Christmas was the big for us in my family, and New Years. Those were the two biggest holidays we had. Christmas was absolutely incredible in that little town. I have found out that that's not the way they do at other places too, at other places in Denmark. Because i think that we did more for it in our hometown. [17:54] Christmas Eve...actually before the holidays for four days. Christmas Eve was for the whole family. That's when you got the gifts. Then you had Christmas Day. The second Christmas day was for the adults. A lot of eating and a lot of drinking going on in those two days. Then the third Christmas Day was for the children.

[18:13] And what they did is down at the inn, they had once a big dance room and the fishermen in the morning always bought the tree or went out and got the Christmas tree themselves. Then in the morning they would decorate it. You have some of these single guys coming home from all over the country to help to decorate that tree because that's what he had grown up with. And he would decorate that. And then at six 'o clock in the evening, the tree would be lit of life, a light on it.

Gary: [18:47] This is Christmas Eve?

Georg: [18:49] Christmas...? No this is Christmas Day. Christmas Eve, I'm sorry, you have in your own home. There you had your own Christmas tree.

Gary: [18:57] Mm-hm.

Georg: [18:57] And it was always lit too. What Christmas Day was home, the second Christmas day was at home, the third Christmas day was down at the inn.

Gary: [19:07] Got you.

Georg: [19:07] And that's where you have the big tree. And people dance around it and people sing along. And then an hour or two later, he would take the tree and move it around the corner and there would be a dance for us kids where you could do whatever we wanted to do like music and dance. [19:22] But during the war there were no gifts. We didn't get any gifts during the war. One thing we was some more half rotten apples sometimes. You know so...But after the war, it wasn't long till we started getting gifts. Talking about not being able to give things. I have one

story. The certain story, that, I can never forget it's very important to me. It may not means anything to anybody else.

[19:45] But I recall my buddy, named... He was also a kid my age. His father was a fisherman. But he had two brothers, older brothers, who had came to America just before the war. They stayed here and stayed on American ships. But one of those guys was very, very good at sending home packages to mom and dad.

[20:08] And he would send coffee and things like that. And so I'm up at my friends birthday party. I'd be sitting there eating cakes and stuff like cocoa and all that we had and then Mrs. Larson said, "OK boys I have a surprise for you guys. OK." She said, "Lift up your plates." And we lifted up our plates and underneath was a big piece of Black Jack chewing gum from America. Well, I must have been chewing on that for two weeks.

[laughter]

[20:40] All of them for water. A glass of water that night.

[20:44] And I have...Of course I later on when I came away myself, and I met John who have been sending this home, and I said, "I don't think you realize how much that Black&Jack did to us chewing gum just by sending that home". That was a memory I could never forget either. But the... Even though we...I can't say that we really suffered during the war because we did have food. The Germans that were in town...The old army guys, they were not bad. But the young German SS., they were mean.

Gary: [21:21] So when did they come in to town?

Georg: [21:22] Well, actually they came in...the older guys came in the 1940 when we were invaded in April 9, 1940. And then the SS was in company but and later on the S.S. expanded all over the country. And then you had some of the Danish masses and they were just as nasty and part of it...and they would be...they stayed in a hotel. [21:45] And then again with my ambition at two in the morning before anybody, before daylight would come, I would be running down on the beach with a flashlight, to see if anything had been drifting ashore during the night, something I could use or that I could sell. At that time you would sell almost anything you had or could find, wood, anything.

[22:04] So I was down there walking on the beach very calm, there was no wind at the time. And they saw me up there and they had a couple German shepherds. And he put, he chased the dogs after me. Well I have to run out in the water and I guess right now the water is so cold because the dogs wouldn't even go out there. So I managed to run away from them, and then caused enough hell when I get home.

[22:27] But the German, the old timers I recall and he didn't like the SS group either. And I feel that some of these people, when I look back, some of the German army soldiers was way up in their fifties. He was sent there because Hitler had taken their farms, taken their occupation away from them, sent them in the army. And then the one come to Denmark, they were lucky compared to the one that went to the east of Russia.

[22:54] So they were not bad. But the SS themselves, they were not very nice. And we had quite a few people, three to four families who had not only helped the Jews go on to Sweden. And the SS notified the German Army in my own town. Said we gonna come down and grab those guys. But guess what, they want German soldiers they're gonna knock themselves over. Get out of here, don't ask any questions, go. Go to Sweden and don't come back. So when the SS came at midnight they were all gone. So it went both ways.

Gary: [23:36] That's a pretty remarkable story.

Georg: [23:36] Yes it is. And well another thing too is that most people don't even talk about is, don't forget why did all the Jews get out of Denmark on such short notice. Because one of the men in charge of the German army, I can't remember his name now, was notified by Hitler when he would come get the Jews. Well, don't forget, he had been in Denmark as a student. [24:06] He had Danish friends that were Danish Jews. So he went around and notified people too. Don't ask any questions, just go. And the ones that didn't take it serious, two or three hundred are the only ones that got caught. Eight thousand got out of there. Like I mentioned earlier, my cousin William, he wrote a family in a route book from our home town up to Taillebourg, Sweden.

Gary: [24:33] Yeah, you said that was a round trip of about twenty miles.

Georg: [24:36] Yeah, but the idea is there are certain things that make the whole thing fit in that people don't really know about or talk about I don't know why. But I think it's important that us guys from Germany that somebody's all the time to help us out too. And yeah, sometimes it will come down to the harbor. We'll say here has anybody been listening to the radio from London, what's new because you don't get any news to the south you just get propaganda from Germany. But you have to be very careful about it, you couldn't just go out and you know if they had saw them. Yeah, so.

Gary: [25:20] So there was some tension between the old guards and these young SS guys.

Georg: [25:24] Yeah, big time. I guess you could say the older guys just tolerated them and that was about it. They'd have to take orders from them.

Gary: [25:35] So, was it Jews from Copenhagen that were sort of ferried through your home town.

Georg: [25:44] From all over the country and most from Copenhagen. The Jews were smart business people so most of them. I think like in New York, the big apartments, most of them are owned by Jews, you know. The Jews were smart business people. And don't forget the Jews were invited to Denmark in 1854 by the Danish King. [26:05] Because you were in Germany and you were good business people and the Danish invited the Jews to come up from Germany to teach the business. And another thing too, the potatoes came from Germany. And the Danish we went down and got the German, got them to come to Denmark and teach us how to grow potatoes. So, that was something that is a good connection these days, it's not all bad news, a lot of good news.

[26:33] Furthermore, I think everybody likes to trade with Germany because Germany [paid]. Some of these other countries you have to wait five or six months to get your money, the Germans always paid cash. The Germans had been very popular into World War Two I'm sure,

then after that, or it came earlier. You always have some bad feeling about it, but you can't help it.

Gary: [26:56] Were you aware of the existence of the Resistance when you were in Denmark?

Georg: [27:01] Not so much in my home town. Oh yes, we heard about it all the time but... See, we get all our news from the Danish radio in London. That's where they got it from. The radio that we got out of a radio station in Denmark which was propaganda because the Germans kind of controlled that. So, we got all our news. [27:17] We pretty well found out what was going on in the rest of the country. Then every town had a couple Nazi, they used Nazi's. We had only one guy now, who was a farmer in my area and that was the system the Germans had.

[27:40] If somebody killed him there would be ten Danes in my home town who would be killed. That was a system you set up everywhere and my father was on that list. So, that is how it is.

Gary: [27:52] So, there were a couple of home grown Nazi's and you mentioned this farmer...

Georg: [27:57] One, at least one.

Gary: [27:58] ... this farmer...

Georg: [27:58] At least one and up. An odd way to go. It was a very difficult situation to be in because don't forget, you had a lot of intermarriage with Germans. You had so many Danes that had dominated in Germany, had friends in Germany. Then Hitler, he was out there promising everybody a chicken in every pot. [28:23] But for my father there was no sympathy for the Germans at all. He was pretty well proud, he stood on it. It was a difficult time for Denmark. That was about I think... As I was saying in my home town there's only this particular guy and he hadn't never done anything except he assaulted, he stabbed a German so it was too late. They didn't like that.

Gary: [28:50] Any other war time memories that come to mind?

Georg: [28:53] Well, yes. We had some real bad ice winters during the war years. As a matter of fact, you had so much you could walk on the ice from here over here to Sweden. And down here from where I come from we had drift ice, a lot of ice, packed ice. Stuff like that. At that time German mines, there was always one mine that would be floating, the ice would crush them. [29:23] One winter there was 32 mines that actually exploded that night went down. So, the ice just crushed them together. That was a good mine sweeper.

Gary: [29:34] So, but the installation of those mines made fishing impossible didn't it, or at least very difficult?

Georg: [29:39] We had to feel for it. We had to peer out all the time and you were standing look out where ever you were on the boat, you were looking for mines. You could see them pop up and down, literally. Only at night you couldn't see them of course, then you had to take a chance.

Gary: [29:55] Any accidents or any injuries involving these mines that you recall?

Georg: [30:00] Not from my hometown no, but the other places, oh yes. A lot of places. And big ships would run into the mines of course. That's why I mentioned earlier, that's why I was down on the beach looking through the shore during the night, if any ship had sunk or something out there. [30:19] There was not always something to pick up there. One time I had picked up... I had been told by my dad never to pick up anything I don't know what it is. One time I picked up a long cylinder only about that big around, maybe ten inches long and it was painted red, white, and blue, different colors. When I picked it up it started ticking. Tick. Tick.

[30:42] So, I threw it but nothing happened. I never knew what it was and I didn't tell my daddy about it. [laughter] Again, some of these other places was way worse off than we were probably and by us having to fish, all of us had something to eat. But the war years itself, like I mentioned earlier, they bear witness on too. There was very little going to school. Once the war years were over then we we're going hmmm., now we have to go to work.

Gary: [31:25] Tell us a little bit about your brothers and what became of them.

Georg: [31:29] Well my brothers all stayed home fishing and they had no choice. At that time you know the, well the same true in this country, everybody had about a family of eight or ten. We were just four, four boys. My oldest brother he went to be a truck driver in the trucking business, my father said no. Ben, he wanted to ship out and become a mate. [31:52] My brother Carl, he wants to be a mechanic. My father says no. There's no future in this. You'll do much better by working here with me and were going to do the business together. He actually did very well, my dad did very well. But the idea was he had no choice. So I had a choice, because I was number four. And I guess one reason is I don't ever remember saying it, but my father had said that I told him one time that I'm not going to stay home when I finish school because three brothers can't get along.

[32:25] So how is four going to get along. I don't remember saying that, and another thing I don't remember he told me later on too I can't remember is he told me that, you start school when you are seven years old. So just before I turned seven I had been down working on my boat. And then my father said, your going to have to cut this out now because your going to start school pretty soon. And I had told him that absolutely not, I have no time for that. I don't remember that but he did.

[32:57] He was hard on us. But he was a hard worker himself. I can just imagine him sitting there writing reports. His spelling was lousy and he'd sit there at the typewriter with two fingers. He did it. But also he was very good at figuring money because he was always sitting with his little cash register just pulling time and getting numbers there. So he was good with that.

Gary: [33:24] Brandon or Sandra, is there anything more that you would like to ask about Mr. Peterson's time in Denmark?

Sandra Magnusson Martin: [33:31] How about did your family have a radio during the war and was that allowed?

Georg: [33:35] We always had a radio, oh yeah, that was allowed, yeah. No, that was before TV and such but like a radio we always did. Like I mentioned earlier my grandfather had a hard time with two knobs, you know.

Sandra: [33:50] So, the Germans didn't object to the citizens having radios?

Georg: [33:53] No, but they controlled what was being said. And I do remember at the end of, the radio, the last, the news came about ten or eleven o'clock in the evening and afterwards they did that German song Adiola Madelena. So I listened to it all my life, but I don't, that's just how it was then.

Gary: [34:16] Well, let's pick up then with your leaving town and moving out. What do you remember about leaving? You said it was very difficult for your mother particularly.

Georg: [34:28] Well, she actually didn't show it. But, OK, here for the very first, don't forget at that time in 1948, Denmark lost about three or four hundred merchant ships. And so they were trying to build up the merchant fleet again. So unemployment was big. A lot of people couldn't get a job. And some of those kids my age were unsure. You'd have to wait a long time to get a job. [34:52] Well, this all happened to be that I was two captains from my hometown and one of them was a friend of the family and he got me a job as a cabin boy on one of those steam ships right off the bat, so after I was out of school for a month I was on my way to the ship.

[35:10] And the ship was off in Helsingør at a dry dock. And I recall that I was very happy looking forward to getting up there and all of that. Until the very last day I was going to leave. My mother made my favorite dinner, Fricadello, and guess what, I couldn't eat. I guess I was so nervous about going away. And I told my mother don't come down to the railway station. I don't want you to come down and stand there and wave and cry. Of course, she did anyway, so [laughter] . Off we went. The very first ship was an old steam ship.

[35:41] It'll be in 1900. We live aboard. Cold Burner up and down Engine. Pretty rough. That was... When I saw my room, there was a small, tiny room. There were supposed to be four kids in that room. There is no way we can get dressed at the same time. I have nothing to compare it with so I didn't complain. But it was not very good condition, really.

[36:08] And then there was no running water. There was no heat sometimes so it was pretty rough. But then again, I liked it. It was a whole new experience and then at that time, sometime the mess boys and the cabin boy was in too had to wait until Mick the decision if you want to be deck in the ancient and an opportunity came. And the deck boy...

[36:32] There was only one deck boy in every ship and there was one mess boy and a cabin boy. And I was a cabin boy to start with. But out of that ones, there was only one that can join the sailors union and that was the deck boy. And sometime, you have to wait for a year or two to get an opportunity to become a deck boy.

[36:53] Well, again, the Captain was from my hometown so I became a deck boy after four months and in October 1948, I joined the Danish Sailors Union and I was told at that time that I was the youngest at age of 14 who would ever qualify to join the union. And then he told me, he must have felt sorry me. He said, don't forget now. You don't have a voice.

[37:15] You can't collect unemployment until you are 17. I couldn't care less as long as I was in the... But I never collected on unemployment so that was top thing on my mind.

Gary: [37:27] Tell us about the different responsibilities of these people, the cabin boy, the mess boy, the deck boy.

Georg: [37:35] Yes. The cabin boy. I have to clean the offices, captains daily. And then the captain... Well, actually, there is something that I have never seen before and never see again. The captain's real quarter was backed off with the owners stayed back in port. And then on the sea, he would live up on a little room on a native bridge called the pilot house and that was actually a room special for the pilot. [38:03] And so, I have to clean his room, too and his room back there. And then the engineers and so on too. And then, I had to help the cook clean in the galley, peel potatoes and I call one time, the mess boy was off. I had a day off and I was in there shriveling the offices, mess hall. And the second mate came in late with his wife.

[38:32] And asked to get some food. OK. So, I was then washing the dishes. With me, the water was clean, my hands was cleaned, OK? So, when he came in and order these... The only thing I did was I took my dish towel to dry off my hands. And he saw that and he came on, whacked me. He said, "Don't you ever clean your hands and dry it up on your dish towel."

[38:55] I had only one dish towel. I'm still looking for that guy but I'm sure he is dead now. But anyway, so that was that and then in addition to that as a cabin boy. I could not understand later on why he would do this to me. I had to get up, the chief makes us watch at four o'clock. The second engineer went to wash engine at four o'clock. I had to get up at three o'clock to make coffee for those guys.

[39:20] And then I have to bring it up on the bridge on a tray. And the ship was rolling stuff for high. It was dark, no flash light, no nothing. And then on the engine hall, slippery ladder. I don't understand why they would do it there. Then, in addition to that, when I became a deck boy, no, as a captain boy. I had another job. Since there was no running water in the office there, except for a little sink; the water, I had to pump it up from a big tank in the bottom.

[39:51] I stood there and pumped for about an hour every day, to bring the water up into the holding tank, so you had running water down in the rooms.

[39:59] That was another big job I had. They when I became deck boy, I felt like I had accomplished something, and now was a part of the sailors. I still stayed in my same room up there. Then, I started cleaning up for the sailors, served them meals, and worked on deck for, about, an hour.

[40:17] Then, in addition to that, I would also bring up the food. The food was all the way back aft. We had no refrigerator, except an old ice box; a wooden box with ice blocks in it. The steward would prepare the cold cuts, and stuff like that, and I would have to carry it up, all the way up, forward.

[40:37] And the galley was mid ships. And in the galley, were very good cooks. Ship's cooks have always been good. The galley was right next to the bunker hatch, where the coal came in. And we always took bunkers down in underwear.

[40:52] So, we would seal off the galley, where we took bunkers. But there would be so much coal dust coming in. So, when you were eating your dinner that day... [slurping sounds]
[laughter] ... you could feel the coal dust in your meal. And that was just part of it.

[41:08] But the biggest job I had, most people wouldn't even believe it. The captain lived back aft. And he had a bathtub with no running water. So, my job was to pump up, when he was going to take a bath. Thank God, he didn't do it, too often. [laughter]

[41:25] I had to pump the water from a tank, and then carry it over to a big funnel so the water would run down to his bathtub. After half an hour of that, [pumping sounds] pumping down on the arm, "It must be full by now", there'd only be that much down there.

[41:40] Then, when his bathtub was full, he'd be able to take a bath. He had a steam pipe, so he could warm the water up. That's how it was done. And that's how we washed our clothes, too. We had a bucket of cold water. You'd put soap in it, and then; underneath the steam pipe, to wash the clothes.

[41:57] So, that was my adventure on the very first ship. And then, the law, too, was the fact that; at that time, to become an ordinary seaman, I had to be 16 years of age. That was the law. So, I had to sail as a cabin boy, again, later on, too.

Gary: [42:13] Yeah.

Georg: [42:14] Then, when I was 16, that's when I got a job as an ordinary seaman on one of the East Asia company ships. That's when I stepped into the real world. When I came out to Asia, I just fell in love with it from the very beginning. [42:27] But I saw all these beautiful girls with long black hair, and brown eyes, I said, "I'm going to stay here." [laughter] I spent a lot of time out in Asia, really. And I still love it, today. But I had a lot of good times and good memories.

[42:41] And that particular ship... the East Asia Company, at that time, was a company with a lot of parties, a lot of drinking going on. I never liked beer until I came on there. Because, everybody else was drinking beer, so, after a while, I couldn't just sit there. So, I also started drinking beer. When I was 16 that was when I really was able to step into the adult world.

Gary: [43:05] Yeah.

Georg: [43:07] And that was a big step for me. I sailed for the East Asia Company for one year, and then, the last five years, I spent out in Asia with Maersk line. I came to the United States, too, but mostly, Asia. [43:22] My very first time in New York was in 1949. I was cabin boy on that particular ship. Denmark was trying to get some foreign currency behind them. So, therefore, a seaman could only draw 50 percent of their wages in foreign currency.

[43:43] The rest had to be in Danish money. So, when I came into New York, I had ten dollars. That's all I've got. At that time, you had a lot of people all over the world, you could say, more or less; business people selling clothing to seafaring people. And they would come down and pick you up.

[44:00] So, in New York, they came down to pick us up to drive us kids up to the store. And I saw a jacket there, absolutely, a beautiful jacket. And guess what? It costs 10 dollars. So, that's what I had to pay for it. [laughter]

[44:14] Then, we decided to walk back to the ship. But by now, I didn't even have enough to buy a Coke, or ice cream, or anything. Would you believe it, on the way back to the ship, I saw the same jacket, hanging in the window at another shop for eight dollars.

[44:27] That taught me a lesson right there. [laughter] That was just how it was.

Gary: [44:33] Now, where did those first ships you were on, run?

Georg: [44:37] The first ship was running around in Northern Europe, Denmark, and mostly Belgium. And Belgium was absolutely a paradise, in comparison to the rest of Europe, at that time. You had so much more available. You had good clothing available. You had imports from all over the world, coming to Belgium. [44:56] And that was our shopping port. And a lot of money was made on the black market, at that time. A lot of money was made on the black market. Good connections; people would buy. At that time, if they would buy cigarettes, you were king.

[45:10] If you went ashore anywhere with two packs of cigarettes, you were king for the day. They were worth more than gold. So, we sold cigarettes, and then, the paper for people to roll their own cigarettes. There was good business in that, too.

[45:24] Now, I heard a lot of people do this things on the ship, saw two people do, and how they were making money was on too. I saw them too. So, I figured, I'm going to get into this, too. So, I bought a carton of cigarette paper.

[45:38] Sure enough, we came into Copenhagen, and a man came down; well dressed and everything else. He said, "Do you have any cigarette paper for sale?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I'll be interested in buying it. I have a customer that will buy it."

[45:52] Hmm. OK, I didn't know any better. That's the only time I had ever been taken, I guess. Anyway, he said, "I'll come down tonight. We'll take a taxi, and I'll bring you to this guy who wants to buy it."

[46:07] He said, "Be very careful walking out because the customer's watching your ship all the time. This, we know. Sometimes, the customer will come three times in one day, shaking the ship down."

Gary: [46:17] Yes.

Georg: [46:18] "But we seemed to always be able to outsmart them." So, it worked. But anyway, here I am, in the evening after work. He wanted one carton of cigarettes. I got it out through the gate. And the guy is out there. We took a taxi. [46:34] And he said, "OK, I'll negotiate the best price for you that I can get." OK, so we drove up to the front of a big apartment building. And he went in there. I sat there, and I sat there, and I sat there. Hmm?

[46:48] And the taxi driver said, "Do you know what's going on?" I said, "No." Well, here's what happened. I went in that ship. He had walked in through this building with my carton of cigarette papers, and walked right through the other way.

[47:02] So, that was the end of my career as a smuggler, right there. As a matter of fact, that's the only time I've really been taken. That was right in Copenhagen; all these years.

Gary: [47:12] Yes.

Georg: [47:13] But this is part of growing up. You learn all these tricks.

Gary: [47:16] Sure.

Georg: [47:18] But the big thing, too, is at that time in Antwerp, I would always buy clothing. And I would buy prunes, stuff for my mother you couldn't get other places, and a cigar for my dad. So, all the money I made in the beginning, I spent sending home to my parents. [47:35] And one time I came back from Spain on a ship. And I had two cases of oranges. Wow! My mother came into Copenhagen, herself, to make absolutely sure they got home. So, that was oranges for the kids in town, and stuff like that, that I had brought home.

[47:52] That was a big thing. I had never even seen a banana. I had no idea what a banana tastes like, either, until I came off sailing.

Gary: [48:00] So, how often did you get home?

Georg: [48:03] That ship, it would go home, once a month.

Gary: [48:06] Uh-huh. So, you used to go back to your home town?

Georg: [48:10] Only once. I didn't have that much time off, really.

Gary: [48:13] Yes.

Georg: [48:14] Because, don't forget, again, we we're always treated that nice, really.

Gary: [48:21] Yes.

Georg: [48:22] But it was very difficult to get any time off. But I didn't complain. I didn't know any better. I was happy. That was just part of the job, be there. But then, later on, I was gone a lot longer. [48:35] Then, in 1951, I shipped on the Danish ship named, "Matilda Maersk." Then I stayed away for about seven years, before I came home. But in the beginning, it was Northern Europe and it was incredible. I have some pictures of my ship at home, "Maersk", in my book. It's very difficult for people who are going to sea today, to understand how that ship functioned. Big difference.

Gary: [49:04] So, effectively, you left Denmark when you were 14, except for some relatively brief stays?

Georg: [49:12] Yes. In 1948, that was my first year at sea. I did go home for Christmas. I got off that ship, and then I went home for Christmas. Then, right after Christmas, I figured, I better... before the holiday is over with... go back to Copenhagen and get a ship. [49:36] And I managed to get a ship on New Year's Eve like a Pier Head Jump; a ship that went to sail. That's the one that went to New York. That was my last Christmas at home, actually. 1948.

Gary: [49:53] Huh. Tell us then, about your movement from Cabin boy to Master.

Georg: [50:00] Well, my seven years I sailed... I sailed a total of 48 years. The first seven years was on the Danish ship. There I advanced very quickly from Cabin boy to Able Bodied Seaman. I was actually sailing as an Able Bodied Seaman when I was 18 years old, which was pretty good. [50:19] Then, I was on a ship that was sailing out of Asia; just around and around. First of all, I have to tell you, when I came to the United States the first time, I knew I was going to come back. My mind was made up. This is where I want to come. This is where I want to live. I made up my mind when I was 14. This is it.

Gary: [50:41] Despite the fact that you'd fallen in love with Asia, too?

Georg: [50:44] Yes. At that time, America was a big maritime nation. 30 percent of all the ships were flying the American flag at that time, maybe, even more. So, there was a huge opportunity in this country. [50:56] When I came here in 1955, we had 2,200 ships under the American flag. 2200. Today, we don't have any. That's a different story, of course. There was a huge, Merchant Marine in this country. Big opportunities. Big opportunities.

[51:12] But anyway, when Denmark, I used to East Asia company, and so on, I made two trips under... I had one year's sea time on that ship. Then I got this job. There's one thing that really made a big impression on me, at that time, and I still think about it.

[51:30] I was in Copenhagen in the end of 1950, looking for a job. I stayed at the seaman's house, right across the red light district. The red light district was a pretty rough place, at that time. It was incredible, what was going on in that place.

[51:49] So, in Denmark, you only had to be 16 years old to drink. But I didn't like to drink, but I always sat in there and listened to what was going on. If you didn't bother anybody and you sat up in a corner, they didn't bother you, either.

[52:03] But something happened, that time, that always made an impression on me. There were three girls... prostitutes, as you call them... sitting at the bar.

Gary: [52:13] Yeah.

Georg: [52:13] Two of them were well dressed and good looking, and then there was one, not too nicely dressed, and not too good looking. I never will forget. This guy came in, sat down at that table, and bought those two good looking ones a drink, but nothing for this one. And I never forgot that.

Gary: [52:33] Hmmm.

Georg: [52:33] I figured, "I hope I don't grow up to be a jerk like that."

Gary: [52:36] Yeah.

George: [52:36] And I still think about it every now and then. [laughs] These are, probably, things that don't mean anything to anybody else, but it means a lot to me.

Gary: [52:45] Yeah?

Georg: [52:48] But anyway, coming to New York, my first ship, where I got off in New York, and I sailed out of New York, was a Danish ship on the Danish Sailor's Union. At that time, the immigration was very lenient to us getting on and off, because some had sailed on an American ship during the war. [53:04] So, when you came into an American port, the first thing you had to do was, you had to go to the U.S. Public Health and then the Immigration.

Gary: [53:13] Uh-huh.

Georg: [53:15] Public Health was always checking for venereal disease, and the U.S. [Immigration] was for your passport. And then, they always asked, "Do you want to get off this ship?" And you could say yes or no. Well, the Danish contract... I had signed on, on that ship in 1951; an 18 month contract. I had only been there for 18 months. [53:41] No, it was an 18 month contract, and I had only been there for 11 months. So, we came into Portland Maine, and the ship was going to go back to Europe, and I wanted to go to Asia.

[53:53] So, I was asked by the Immigration Officer, "Do you want to get off the ship?" "Yes." And the Chief Mate said, "He can't get off. He's on an 18 month contract, and he cannot get off the ship."

[54:06] The Immigration didn't even listen to him. He asked me again, "Do you want to get off the ship?" "Yep, I want to get off the ship." He looked at the Chief Mate and said, "Go and get the Captain."

[54:16] So, the Captain came running down the steps; 10 foot tall. [laughter] He said, "He can't get off the ship, Captain." "This kid is getting off the ship, today. Pay him off, today." End of the story.

[54:29] Then he told me, "You can't stay here in Portland, Maine. You have to go to New York, and you have to go and register with Immigration in New York. And you've got to go and register with the Danish Sailor's Union, in New York. And you've got to make all the calls. You're not allowed to work in this country, but you have to ship on another Danish ship, or Scandinavian ship." The Norwegians and the Swedes, we all were hiring, all together.

Gary: [54:52] Uh-huh.

Georg: [54:52] So, I preferred the Danish ships. I wanted to make sure that I got home, and not going out to Asia, and I did. But anyway, from the very first time in New York, I fell in love with New York. [55:06] At that time, you had to be 18 years old, to drink. The bars were open to

four o'clock in the morning. Then they closed from four to 6. Then, they were open again. The movies were open. You could go in for a movie and sit there for 24 hours if you wanted to.

[55:25] They kept on running, and running, and running. For 50 cents, you sat there all day. So, I learned a little English from the movie, too. But, I just fell in love with New York. I knew that, that was going to be my home town, some day. And I did live there.

[55:40] Actually, try to picture; when I got off the ship in Portland, Maine, I didn't speak very good English. So, one guy helped me to go up and buy the ticket. And all the way down to New York, I was wondering, "Hmmm, I hope I'm on the right train. I hope I'm going to get off at the right place."

[55:56] One lady said, "Just don't worry, that's the end of the line. You can't miss it. When you get to New York, you'll know you're in New York." And I understood that. At that time, you stayed in rooms close to the Union Hall. There were always some ladies, renting out rooms for eight dollars a week.

Gary: [56:14] Eight?

Georg: [56:16] At that time, a glass of beer costs 10 cents. If you bought three glasses of beer, the fourth one was free. So, we had a ball. My 300 dollars lasted a long time, though. [laughter] You could go out and buy dinner for a dollar. [56:31] But anyway, then I shipped out of New York and came out to Asia and stayed out there for a while. Then I decided, no, it was time to immigrate to the United States. So, I did not want to go back to Denmark.

[56:42] But that was exactly what you were supposed to do. You were supposed to go back to the American Embassy in Denmark, to apply. But I didn't want to go back, because I knew if I went back, they'll draft me in the Navy.

[56:55] So, I figured that if I had to go in the military, I'll go into the military, here. I went to the American Embassy in Hong Kong [to apply for a visa], and he said, "Oh, yeah, it can be done, but it's going to take longer. You've got inspectors that are going to take, at least, two years to get to."

[57:10] "OK, that's alright for me." So, I applied. They were very, very helpful. Two years later, I got my Visa, and I came over on a Danish ship to work in San Francisco. And the immigration officer, he saw my big envelope with my x-rays and medical files, and all that stuff.

[57:30] And he looked at my Visa, and he said, "Hmmm. Has anybody ever told you that when you enter the United States as an immigrant, you're supposed to come as a passenger, not as a crew member?" [laughter]

[57:44] I said, "Nobody ever told me that." So then he said, "Remember, if anybody ever asks you, you came on the Jeppesen Maersk as a passenger."

[57:52] We got so many breaks and immigration is always good to us. Then when I came here I have to say we had some Danish ships. I had an uncle in Boston. My uncle in Boston was a longshoreman. He was my father's older brother and had shipped out as a young kid.

[58:18] Then at that time he was working as an able bodied seaman on *Frederick VIII*, it was the real Scandinavian American line at that time was a Danish steamship company called DFDS United Steamship Company, and they had that name. They were the one operator for huge passenger ships running immigrants from Scandinavia to Boston and New York. My uncle was on there as an able bodied seaman in 1908.

[58:52] At that time he was allowed only to draw two dollars against a salary because the captain, he knows if he gave them five dollars they would all jump. So, my uncle stayed there two trips, he had four dollars when he jumped. But that time, immigrants were welcome. Shortly after he put up his right hand he was a U.S. Citizen right off the bat.

[59:16] Then later on my aunt came from Norway. She was a young girl, she was 16 years old, just on her own as a third class passenger on the *Hellyg Oluf*, which was one of those four ships I've just mentioned now. She did not get off the ship in Boston, she went to New York.

[59:36] An immigration officer in New York said, "You would have been better off to get off in Boston." So here's what are you going to do? Because there's a huge, huge [Norwegian] population in Boston now. So, we're going to give you a ticket, a train ticket back to Boston in an effort to go and see these people." And that's what my aunt did.

[59:58] So, my aunt came as a young girl got a job in 1914 the war had just started, World War One. Then later on she met my uncle and they got married and had four children. But my uncle was a remarkable fellow. I've never met anybody who was so positive as him.

[60:21] Never talked about the bad days, never even got enough of the hardship that he had during the depression talk to. Only talked about good things. He sailed for ten years on American ships and then he became a longshoreman.

[60:35] In Boston the Irish were pretty well dominating the whole Boston waterfront. So, when a walking boss in the old days was out there looking for crews, longshoreman, he would be standing up there calling names. Then all the longshoreman would gather around a big platform and the walking boss who was doing the ship would pick, and we'd only hear [names like] Murphy, Killian, Kennedy.

[60:57] But a name like Pederson you were way down at the end of the list. So, my uncle he always got the dirty jobs and the half jobs, but he never complained. I have one good story I could never forget about, 1957 I decided I am going to do something for my uncle. He'd never been back in Denmark since he left in 1908.

[61:24] My uncle had never been in Norway since he left, so I'm going to take him back there, and I did. And I'm very, very happy I did. Prior to that, my uncle he was ready to go, he wanted to go. My aunt did not want him to make the trip and I could not understand what was wrong.

[61:40] She said, "Georg, can you see? I don't have a passport, I'm not an American citizen, I'm not a Norwegian citizen." So that's a problem, yup, big problem. So, I figure I'm going to go down to the immigration office here [in Boston], because I know quite a bit about people and the cut off they come.

[62:00] I met the immigration officer and I told him the story. He said, "When did she come?" I said, "1914." "Hope. Bring her down". Anybody who came to the United States prior to 1922 can become a citizen anytime.

Transcription by CastingWords

Georg Pedersen Part 2

Georg: [0:00] Pedersen: Finally convinced her that he can't deport you, no question. So anyway, so I made an appointment and the same immigration officer, I had his name and I made sure that he was going to be there and he said, "I'll take care of her." So he came down there and he interviewed my aunt and he said, "Do you remember the date you came?" She said, "Nope, I don't remember. But I know it was November and I have a picture of the ship, the *Hellyg Oluf*, " and the immigration officer said, "That's all I need." It was end of the year 1918, fourteen, and then end of the year and he had, I'll never forget it, he had a huge library of books that big of crew lists from all these immigrant ships. I bet you today you couldn't find them on the computer but he had an index, he even had the Olaf, took it out, went through it and sure enough it here was her name.

Interviewer: [1:04] Good heavens.

Georg: [1:05] Yeah. So anyway, she got a date she was going to come down and became a citizen with a whole bunch of people and off we went. But I have another funny story about that I really think of often too, my aunt and uncle, now they had a rough time during the Depression, feeding the children and stuff like that, there wasn't much work available.

[1:26] And at that time it was very important for the ladies to get a new hat at Easter time. So here they are, one day my aunt have another Norwegian lady friend over for coffee and they're sitting there in the living room having coffee and then my aunt's friend ask her, "Are you going to get a new hat for Easter this year?" And she said, "No, no we can't afford it." Well. My uncle happened to hear that. So my uncle went out there and said, "What do you mean you can't afford it. Of course you're going to get a new hat for Easter. Here's ten dollar." That would get a good hat. OK, well fine. Then as soon as that lady she left, my uncle came back and said, "Give me back those ten dollars, you know we can't afford a new hat." [laughter] But he wasn't going to lose face. That was just how he was.

[2:20] And then another thing too is I remember, we had the biggest breakfasts you could ever think of. Here we are just him and my aunt and he'd done shopping down at the Italian market. He came back, well you would think he had a family of ten kids but there was just the two of them so you'd eat well at that house. Then when I was there too, I had a home, he gave me a home. So it was very, very good memories.

[2:45] And then when I came, I stayed with them and had to apply for my green card, comes by itself and had to wait for that, it took about six weeks and then I had to apply for my seaman's papers and I had to go through draft board. And I did do all that. And that took about four

months. And during those four months I was working as a longshoreman. My uncle took me down there. But again it was the union members over here and then the non-union men were standing over there. The union was closed so you couldn't get in. So, it was not that many job and any job you got was always the dirty jobs and so on too. And I didn't complain about that either but again there was a lot of Murphy, Killian, McNabb, and after awhile you get to know them and they start calling me the North Sea Irishman and then I was one of them so I did OK.

[3:39] And after that I went to New York, I wanted to join the sailor's union of the Pacific, the main office was in San Francisco but they had a hiring office in New York, also. And I was considered myself being very, very lucky to get into the sailor's union of the Pacific.

[3:55] I mean I met a lot of Scandinavians and that was actually founded by probably one of the most prominent Norwegian maritime men around, Andrew Fawcett. He spent his entire life doing better conditions for seafaring people. He was born in Norway and came to San Francisco in 1885 and did an incredible job for the organized labor since '02. He's the one that got the Jones Act in. He was very conservative and he worked mostly with Republicans and he managed to get the Seaman's Act of 1915. And he managed to get the Jones Act, which is you have to be an American ship carrying cargo from one American port to another.

So that was an incredible union. It had the best reputation of any labor unions in America, really. And at that time, when I came, the man that was in charge was also Norwegian, his name was Harry Lundeberg. Another remarkable. Another conservative union leader was [inaudible 4: [4:39] 57] because if you were here at that time you were democrat or you were Communist. He was fighting the communists on the waterfront. Very conservative. But nobody ever mentioned him as being a Republican he always, because to be a good union man at that time you figured you had to be a.

Interviewer: [5:12] A Democrat, yeah, yeah.

Georg: [5:12] It's just how things were and I guess they really haven't changed that much. But.

Interviewer: [5:18] Were you ever active in the union itself? Ever hold any positions in the union?

Georg: [5:24] No, not really. No. I had no interest in that. No, I want to sail. I was never a politician, I would be no good as a politician, well actually, that's not really true, I have, I was a union convention delegate a couple of times. To me it seemed like a big to do over nothing and very costly so I never had any interest in any of that. They all did it. And I'm very happy I didn't.

[5:46] But I had a, I made a very good living. The shipping was pretty tough at that time and the man that was in charge back in New York his name was Morris Weisberger and one thing I didn't know was that during the war back in New York, the sailor's union at Pacific had a hiring hall on Broad Street in Manhattan. And the Danish Sailor's union was right up on top. So the Danish would ship upstairs or downstairs, it made no difference, the pay was the same, the Danish ship at that time was American, under the American flag paying American wages. But sometime if we had a hard time to crew up the ships, like going on the convoys at the moments and stuff like that, he always called up and the Danes to take the job. So he, actually when I came in there to join the union he said, "Well, I really can't do it because shipping is bad."

Because after the Korean War a lot of people went around looking for a job. But then he said I have promised myself not to forget you guys from Denmark after the war so I'm going to give you a trip card to get started. So I got a good start.

[6:57] My very first year I was on two tankers, I had, after the first year getting off and saving my money from those two tankers, I had five thousand dollars in the bank. A very good beginning. And it's been uphill ever since. So then after that in the sailor's union I also worked out of companies here in Seattle I had, Weyerhaeuser, the only company that had their own ships, we worked in Portland Tower, we had our own ships and we were carrying lumber from the Pacific Northwest to East Coast and then we would carry steel coming back from Baltimore. So I worked there. And then I was going to become a citizen and picked up and did that.

[7:43] Actually on the F.E. Weyerhaeuser, this is actually what changed my life. I was very happy, sailing as an able-bodied seaman. And, I had really no big plans about being a captain, or anything like that. But, there happened to be a chief officer on that ship, by name Lancaster. He was from San Francisco. And he took a liking to me.

[8:02] "Pete," he said, "you're wasting your time, sailing as AB. Better go and get a license. Now, you have to be a citizen first. I have to get your citizen papers, then go to navigation school." Well, there was no way. It was way above my head. But, every day, every day, he kept on and on, telling me. And then, after listening to that for a couple of months, went, " Now, maybe I should give it a try."

[8:24] So, the first thing, after I had five years on the green card, I could become a U.S. Citizen. When I became a citizen, before that, I also had a booklet, of the things I was supposed to know, to pass the test for citizenship.

Interviewer: [8:38] Sure.

Georg: [8:39] For citizenship. So, I'm sitting there, studying one day on the ship, in my book. Now, don't forget. I was always reading in my spare time, because I had to learn English myself. So, I was always reading something.

[8:51] So, one day, I'm sitting there, reading the questions that I can expect to get for citizenship, and this, my watch partner came in, a guy by the name Bill Soyano. He said, "What are you reading?" I said, "I'm getting ready for my citizen papers, and the questions they're going to ask me."

[9:08] "Citizen papers. Don't even bother. Don't bother. You're never going to make a good citizen in this country."

[9:15] "Wow. What did I do? Is he mad at me? What do you mean?"

[9:20] He said, "Oh, no, no. You'll never make citizen here. You have two strikes against you. One, you don't like peanut butter. Two, you don't know a damn thing about baseball."

[laughter]

Georg: [9:29] Never make it. Don't even bother. Well, at least I know he was not mad at me. So then, when I went on tour, another very interesting situation.

When I became a citizen, I was in New York. And, at that time, it took us about three, four months from the time you applied. And then, your name was posted different places, if anybody had anything against you becoming a citizen [inaudible 9: [9:38] 50] .

[9:50] So, my final day, and I am going for my citizen papers. And there's a huge immigration office, with a lot of small booths. And I was at my space between what was happening in there, and what was happening here. I'm sitting there, waiting for my immigration officer to come, and I could hear the conversation next door.

[10:08] And there was a lady, sitting in there, crying. I believe she had a German accent, Eastern European. An immigration officer told her, "Stop coming here for citizenship. We're never going to make you a citizen in this country. You have a green card. You can stay as long as you want to. But, you are not going to become a U.S. Citizen. You have two children. You have never been married. We don't accept women like that in this country." Wow. Big difference than today, And that was exactly what it was, and she left. But, that was the system then.

[10:49] Then, after I became a citizen, I went to navigation school, and joined the Masters, Mates & Pilots, and I'm still a member, around 40 some more years later, 46 years later. I worked my way up as a Third Officer on American Export line, back in New York. Later on, I came out to San Francisco.

[11:08] I got married in '61, the same year I became a citizen. I left for San Francisco, because we had a daughter. That was the first child. Actually, we have a daughter and son. And figured, I know it's not a very good place to raise a family. So, it's either going to New Jersey, or San Francisco. So, we picked San Francisco.

[11:36] Then, I came out of San Francisco, and I sailed out of San Francisco for about 20 some more years, and worked my way up to Chief Mate. And then, later on, I went and got a Master's license. Got a job with Sea-Land, which was a container company. We were the one that actually started the container, with shipping.

[11:58] And I recall, upon containerization, because without it today, we would never have... Well, a container ship is the one that actually supply whatever you buy at Home Depot. Today, they all come from China in a container. If it hadn't been for that old Livingston that went out up in our cities today. Because in the old days, everything was hand-stowed. Half of the stuff was damaged, by the time you got to it, and the other half was stolen. You know. It was a rough time around the waterfront, in that time.

And then, in 1957, I was able-bodied seaman on the John Weyerhaeuser, and I happened to see, it's the first container ship coming in, dock. What a [inaudible 12: [12:30] 40]. It was the Sea-Land. They called it Gateway City. The Gateway City came in there, with 260 containers on board the ship, came in, with their own crane, they discharged them, filled up, load the full load. And then, they sailed out of there 12 hours later.

[13:00] And I was watching that operation, I realized, " That's where the future's going to be." And so, it was the big talk around the ship. And everybody said, "Aw, it'll never work. The longshoremen's going to make sure that it don't work. They're going to make sure a ship like that is going to sink. The longshoremen union will never go along with that." But, they did.

And then they also said, too, is that the [inaudible 13: [13:20] 23] and the longshoremen aren't going to get along with the Teamsters and everybody else. They're going to lose a lot of work, and that. Never work. Somebody said, "It's just a fact." It's going to last a couple years, and then going to disappear. Well, it didn't.

[13:36] So anyway, that particular ship, the Gateway City, the very first container ship, I later became Chief Mate on that in 1978. And we scrapped it in Hong Kong, that trip.

And, I have a picture, where I'm standing there... There was a mixed feeling. When I posted the sailing board, I have to post the time the ships sail. When I posted the sailing time, for the very last time, it was a mixed feeling. Because that ship changed the entire world, and the entire industry.

And on the way back from Bangkok, to Hong Kong, two days out, we got stopped. Not stopped, but we saw a boat coming, with about 50 Vietnamese refugees, [inaudible 14: [14:05] 23] was 51. And the captain said to go down and talk to them. OK. To tell them they can have all the food they want, they can have all the fuel you want, but you take them onboard.

[14:35] So, I went out on the boat, and I found a guy that was the spokesman. And he spoke very good English. He said, "Well, we have been out here for five days. A lot of ships sailed by us. We're out of food, and the engine is not doing very good, " and all that. But, I looked at these small babies laying there, and out of among them, there was 22 children. I went up and I told the captain, I said, "Cap, we can't leave them here." And he said, "Oh, I know."

[15:02] And I went down the gang work, get the spokesman, who could talk English, get him up there. And then just let one person up at a time. So we get the name, and I'll do everything right, so we have the documentation. And we brought that whole bunch to Hong Kong, and it took us two more days. And they slept in containers. The women and children slept in the spare rooms, and the men slept in the empty containers. So that was a good deed I did, the very last trip too.

Interviewer: [15:27] Wow.

Georg: [15:28] So,

Interviewer: [15:30] Wonderful story.

Georg: [15:30] Yeah, yeah. And I have pictures and all and I even have all their names too. But I've never been able to locate any of them. But that time, but even in those camps they stayed there about two years.

Interviewer: [15:46] Two years, yep.

Georg: [15:47] Another time too I was captain on a ship sailing between the Philippines and Hong Kong and Taiwan, just around and around. And one day steaming to [inaudible 16:00] the second mate he said to captain he said, "Captain, there's a man standing out here on deck and he's not one of the crew members."

[16:09] "Oh." So I went down there, sure enough, he was a Vietnamese who got away from the camp, he was in a camp. He's sitting there for two years, and happened to get away from the camp, happened to see there was an American flag on the ship so he figured I was going to go to the States.

[16:26] And of course we didn't. So, but then again I was able to do a good deed for him because he had a brother, he had no documentation, no papers whatsoever, but he had his brother's phone number in his hand, written in his hand and he was in Los Angeles. So I contacted that number. Nope. Nobody there.

[16:43] Then I got Sealand involved, there was a lady in the office that I know would go out of her way to do things like that so I had heard her contact and find an address so I kept on, he stayed on the ship for about 10 days and then I had to bring him back to the camp. But I said, "I'm not going to give up on you."

[17:02] And we located his brother. He had moved from Los Angeles to Atlantic City. So I made contact and after that those two had to work together, you know. So. But that's just the...

Interviewer: [17:14] All kinds of unexpected things when you're a seaman, huh?

Georg: [17:17] Always, always, that's what make it exciting. That's, the whole world actually been incredible to me. There have been, there have been a lot of good experiences.

Interviewer: [17:26] So how did you get to Seattle, Mr. Pedersen?

Georg: [17:29] OK, I, after San Francisco, OK I was going to tell you why I came to Seattle, real estate opportunities. When I came, in '66 I moved to San Francisco, bought my own house a couple of years later, then I start investing the rest of my money in real estate fixer upper. So I'd be on a ship about three or four months, my wife would find a piece of property and when I got off the ship, we would buy it and upgrade and sell it, or hang onto it.

[18:01] And we did that for a long time and made very good money in that. And then the real estate in San Francisco went up, up, up, up and then we were supposed to move up here in '86, I figure, "Well, I think this is the top for the San Francisco real estate market so we'd better move to Seattle now."

[18:19] So I sold at the top and came up here and bought at the bottom. So I did good. That was the main reason I came here. And then also I liked Seattle and my ship, at that time I was on a ship sailing from Seattle to Alaska.

Interviewer: [18:32] Yep.

Georg: [18:34] So that was the main reason I came up here. And then Olga liked it, I'm not moving her, I'm staying. So.

Interviewer: [18:41] How did you meet your wife.

Georg: [18:42] My wife I met back in New York. And she was actually, see this is the second time around for me. I was divorced after 28 years of marriage. My wife, first wife is from Kentucky. And guess what? She was heading for Denmark. She was getting a job as an x-ray technician in Denmark, Somebody introduced me to her to tell her about Denmark and what she could expect when she went there. So we started dating and then pretty soon we fell in love. We got married. And we had two children together and we had a very, very good life and then I don't know, just kind of we grow apart. I guess she really was getting a little fed up with me going out to sea to go sailing and all that.

Interviewer: [19:24] Sure.

Georg: [19:25] So we decided we'd split up and we split up the real estate we had here. By then we had quite a bit here. And she was well taken care of, I made sure of that. And then I was single for about five years. Then I got tired of that.

And then I'm thinking, I really don't know that much about Denmark. When I'm in Denmark I just go to [inaudible 19: [19:41] 49] , Copenhagen and my home town, I want to see the rest of the country. So I figure if I can find a lady who's interested in going to Denmark with me and drive around Denmark for about a month, it would be perfect. So I'm a member, by then I'm a member of Northwest Danish foundation and I'm a member of the Danish Club.

[20:12] So at the Danish Club I met Nina, and she had just come back from Denmark. She had just gone through a divorce, too. I've been single for about a year so I met her and I said, "Have you been in Denmark this year?"

[20:27] "Yeah. I've been there twice and I'm going to go again."

[20:29] "Wow."

[20:30] I said, "Is your husband coming along?"

[20:31] "I don't have a husband." "Is your children coming along?"

[20:34] "I don't have any children."

[20:35] Well I'm thinking now, so I figured, "Wow, would you be interested in going to Denmark and making a trip like."

[20:43] She said, "Well, we'll see about that." Well at least it wasn't a "no." So I got her phone number and I start calling her and I call her and we start dating and four months later we fell in love, we got married, I never had it so good. We've been married for 15 years now. And the funny part is, not the funny part but the same part is that she has also done the same thing as I had done, buying real estate, fix them up and held onto it.

[21:08] So we had a lot in common plus we both Danish and it just doing real good. We really appreciate one '96 six by the time I got my money and all that and she made a trip with me to Alaska on a ship before I retired.

[21:32] And then I really figure, "Hmm, " just before we got married, then I figured she was, well I'd better make up my mind you know because then somebody else comes and grabs her. Then I was heading north on the Sealand Tacoma, we had a real bad weather, storm one after the other and I fell off my bed several times and lay on the deck and figured, "Why am I here?" So that's when I retired and called it quits.

Interviewer: [21:58] That was it.

Georg: [21:58] That was it, after 48 years.

Interviewer: [21:59] Wow.

Georg: [22:01] And I'm very happy I did, now I can still sit in Magnolia and watch the ship come in and out of port and that's good enough for me.

Interviewer: [22:05] Yeah.

Georg: [22:07] But, if it hadn't been for the Danish Club I would not have never met Nina so I'm very grateful for that. That's why we have special occasion I make sure I pay for the drinks. [laughter]

Interviewer: [22:21] So tell us a little bit about your involvement in the Foundation and the Danish Club. Are you in the Brotherhood, too?

Georg: [22:28] Yeah, I'm in the Brotherhood, too, yeah. Well, OK for the first, I support everything. I'm also a member of the Swedish Club, I want to support everything. I subscribe to all the Danish newspapers. Anything having to do with Scandinavia, I support it.

And of course we been part of the Nordic [inaudible 22: [22:43] 42] and we want to make sure that little tradition we have is really being kept and maintained. So I started here, so I went to work party and did a lot of painting and had and had another fellow seaman by the name of Kaj, he and I, any seaman, that's part of your job, you learn how to paint. [laughter] And you never finish the paint job.

Interviewer: [23:07] That's right.

Georg: [23:08] ...if you finished at one end you could start at the other and you know. So we both liked to paint and we volunteered here to paint and we did a lot of painting until about three or four years ago and that's when I fell off the ladder and I gave up a lot better because I didn't fall very far but I still broke my ankle. So then at the Danish club I happened to, I never really said, like I said, again, my ex was from Kentucky, I never had any really Danish connection except going to Denmark.

[23:34] Then somebody invited me to a Danish men's Christmas lunch in 1991. And there were three requirements- you had to be able to speak Danish, you were not allowed to drive, there was Nordic American Voices

a lot of drinking going on and no smoking. There were three things that you were not allowed to do.

No driving because of the drinking of some beer because the Danish Christmas parties have a lot of it, so I had a ball. And people were telling jokes. As a matter of fact it was right here, in this building right here, the table was right here and we had a absolutely had a ball. And it was a lot of fun. And it started at 12: [23:56] 00 and lasted about six o'clock at night. And then next year happened to be a show again I came here. Then somebody, as a matter of fact I think it was Paul Larson, the guy that had the Danish bakery?

Interviewer: [24:24] Sure.

Georg: [24:25] Larson's bakery? He told me about the Danish club. And then there was a guy by the name of Sven Russel who worked at a university, He gave in an application I believe and become a member of the Danish club. And we're still members you know. But again, we're not as many as we used to be. And the Danish club was started mainly by, it was, they were actually a men's organization in the beginning.

[24:52] The reason that this is why they started up is because there was a Danish Consul here who at that time in the forties and fifties had a lot of diplomats coming from Denmark. So he wanted a small group of people for them to meet.

[25:05] So they were kind of for the Consul's support for when these people came. So that was why it was mostly men in there. Then when one of the men died, the wife said, "You mean to tell me I can't come here anymore?" So that was when it happened, started accepting women.

Interviewer: [25:22] Yeah. So in your own home, what Danish traditions have you maintained?

Georg: [25:30] Christmas. I have a very Danish Christmas.

Interviewer: [25:33] And tell us about that.

Georg: [25:34] Well the Danish Christmas is of course, the Christmas tree, actually the first week in December we put up the Christmas tree and then you're starting, you're getting slowly into the excitement.

[25:46] And then we have, always when the children were small in my home in San Francisco and so too when the kids were small we had a, very Danish, the Christmas presents was, half of them was Christmas Eve and the other half was Christmas Day.

[26:01] So half then half after. And the big dinner we always had Christmas Eve and then a special for friends and so on through Christmas Day.

Interviewer: [26:14] And what do you fix? What do you have?

Georg: [26:16] Well, let me put it this way, I'm for tradition because my father's favorite meal was duckling, roasted duck so when your father's favorite meal is roast duck, that's what you get. And that's what we had on any special occasion in Denmark was always duck and that's what I have, too.

[26:36] Or sometimes you have goose, but the goose is a little harder to cook, a little more difficult. And by the way I am the cook at home and I like to cook. So the, then birthday parties we had frikadeller, this is a Danish meatball, always had that and that tradition I still cook.

[26:53] And as a matter of fact I have over 200 recipes of frikadeller, I've been making frikadeller dinners right here in this room in here and I made a presentation about frikadeller, how it was created, and how it started and who were the first ones that come over and so on, too. I have all the history behind the frikadeller.

Interviewer: [27:12] So is that a Danish invention?

Georg: [27:14] No. The Danes like to take credit for it. The Germans like to take credit for it. The French like to take credit for it. Everybody wants to take credit for it. However, I wrote to the Patent Office in Washington, D.C., frikadeller. Can the name frikadeller be patented? No it could not be patented. You can call your business Frikadeller World, whatever you want to do, but Frikadeller cannot be patented, it's a German word.

[27:38] OK. It can be used by anybody. Then I happened to find in Denmark, in a library, I happened to find some old books, "History Behind Food, " and guess where the frikadeller came from and the Swedish meatball the same way? China. In the 1450's the Dutch seafarers was out in China, trading with Asia and we were introduced to the spicy meatball.

[28:04] Of course you couldn't bring the meatball back but they brought back the spices, salt and peppers and all spice and stuff like that and then when they came back to Europe they start making and the Germans start calling frikadeller. I believe they the very first one that came up with that name, frikadeller.

[28:22] So, but the history goes back to China, spicy meatball. Just like everything else we buy today is from China.

Interviewer: [28:28] Made in China.

Georg: [28:30] Incidental on that, all the flowers we have here too came from China too, which is incredible.

Interviewer: [28:36] But you're, you're often the cook, huh?

Georg: [28:38] I'm the cook.

Interviewer: [28:39] What other Danish things do you like to cook?

Georg: [28:41] I eat a lot of fish. We love fish.

Interviewer: [28:42] A lot of fish?

Georg: [28:43] Yeah, then I use my own imagination sometimes, I come up with new dishes and that's kind of fun. But,

Interviewer: [28:49] How 'bout your kids? Have they maintained any Danish traditions in America?

Georg: [28:52] No, not really.

Interviewer: [28:53] Yeah.

Georg: [28:55] No, they really didn't. My son tried to but no it didn't work out that way at all. And they're not interested I could never get anybody of those kids to join organization like this one. They have no interest in it. They're busy doing their own things. You know 44 and 45, the grandchildren there is no interest. They like to go to Denmark, that's about, that's about the extent of it.

Interviewer: [29:15] Sure.

Georg: [29:16] So.

Interviewer: [29:18] Does your wife speak Danish?

Georg: [29:20] Yeah.

Interviewer: [29:22] Yeah.

Georg: [29:23] Yeah, that was remarkable.

Interviewer: [29:24] So do you speak Danish at home?

Georg: [29:26] Nina speaks, Nina, my wife now is born in Denmark,

Interviewer: [29:29] Right.

Georg: [29:30] And we speak about 70 percent English, thirty percent Danish I guess.

Interviewer: [29:33] Danish.

Georg: [29:34] But my very first wife, due to the fact she was heading to Denmark to get a job, she went and took Danish classes and I think she took only 10 Danish classes and guess what? She learned a lot.

Interviewer: [29:46] Is that right?

Georg: [29:47] I was impressed. That somebody from Kentucky could just pick it up by taking 10 lessons from a Danish lady in New York.

Interviewer: [29:53] That is impressive.

Georg: [29:54] But Nina, she's born in Denmark, too, my present wife.

Interviewer: [29:58] I gathered that.

Georg: [29:59] We have no children so...

Interviewer: [30:01] You've got two.

Georg: [30:01] I have two, first marriage.

Interviewer: [30:03] Well let's see if Brandon and Sandra don't have some questions. Yes it is.

Brandon: [30:08] I don't.

Sandra: [30:08] I don't.

Interviewer: [30:10] Neither one of you have any questions?

Georg: [30:12] OK, well, OK, come up with anything with this.

Interviewer: [30:13] Any parting remarks?

Georg: [30:18] Parting remarks?

Interviewer: [30:19] Parting. Anything.

Georg: [30:20] Well, only this, that United States have been very, very good to me and I, the people have been very, very good to me in the United States and I'm forever grateful. I think the whole world have treated me fantastically well. I have nothing to complain about and I feel like I'm on top of the world.

Interviewer: [30:38] Well it sounds to me like you've been good to the United States and to the world in return, so.

Georg: [30:43] Well, thank you.

Interviewer: [30:44] Yeah.

Georg: [30:45] Thank you very much.

Interviewer: [30:45] It's been wonderful to talk to you today.

Georg: [30:47] Thank you very much.

Interviewer: [30:47] Yes, thanks for your time.

Georg: [30:49] Sure, sure. Yep.

Interviewer: [30:50] OK.

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