**Kate**: Good morning? This is the 23rd of June and I am in Port Townsend, Washington. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service.

Today is as I said the 23rd of June. And I am in Port Townsend as I said in Washington, at the home of Alma Swanson who came from Sweden in 1914 when she was 16 going on 17 years old.

Why don’t we begin by you giving me your full name and your date of birth please? What is your full name?

**Swanson**: Alma Augusta Margret Carlson

**Kate**: Alma, Augusta Margret Carlson. How do you spell Carlson?

**Swanson**: C-A-R-L-S-O-N.

**Kate**: C-A-R-L-S-O-N. Alright and where were you born?

**Swanson**: In Ramsult Sweden.

**Kate**: Could you spell that?

**Swanson**: R-A-M-S-U-L-T.

**Kate**: And what was your birthdate? What was your birthday? When is that?

**Swanson**: 22nd July.

**Kate**: The 22nd of July. What year were you born?

**Swanson**: Isn’t that strange I can’t think of that.

**Kate**: You have written down here 1896?

**Swanson**: That’s right.

**Kate**: In 1896?

**Swanson**: Yeah I will be 98 this year.

**Kate**: Very good, 1896. What size town was your town again? How big was the town that you were born in or lived in?

**Swanson**: It was a farm. The name is Askersund

**Kate**: Askersund could you spell that for us?

**Swanson**: A-S-K-E-R-S-U-N-D, Askersund.

**Kate**: Right and your farm was the village. What did it look like? Could you describe the place that you lived in when you were a child? You lived in a farm did you?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: Could you tell us about it how big was the farm?

**Swanson**: It was quite big and if I remember it we had only two bedrooms.

**Kate**: In the house?

**Swanson**: Uhuh.

**Kate**: What was the house made of?

**Swanson**: Wood.

**Kate**: A wood house. You say quite big, could you tell me how many acres would be big? Can you remember any of that? How big it was? And what did you grow on that farm?

**Swanson**: Most some potatoes and rye.

**Kate**: Potatoes and rye. What was your father's name?

**Swanson**: Victor

**Kate**: Victor.

**Swanson**: Carlson

**Kate**: How do you spell Victor?

**Swanson**: V-I-C-T-O-R.

**Kate**: V-I-C-T-O-R and what was his occupation?

**Swanson**: He was a farmer.

**Kate**: A farmer. What did your father look like? Could you tell us how tall he was? Or his hair color? Do you remember? What about his personality and temperament? What kind of person was he your father?

**Swanson**: He was very nice.

**Kate:** Very nice person and how was he nice to you?

**Swanson**: How what?

**Kate**: How was he nice? In what way was he nice to you?

**Swanson**: Well he treated us real nice and took us places especially the 4th of July.

**Kate**: When he got to this country in the 4th of July he took you places?

**Swanson**: Mmmmh.

**Kate**: We will get to that in a moment is there a story about your father that you remember? Anything about home that you tell your children?

**Swanson**: No I don’t really remember.

**Kate**: How about your mother's name?

**Swanson**: Hilda.

**Kate**: Hilda and what was her maiden name

**Swanson**: Perstdota.

**Kate**: Perstdota, how do you spell that?

**Swanson**: P-E-R-S-T-D-O-T-A.

**Kate**: Alright and what was her occupation?

**Swanson**: Housewife.

**Kate**: She was a housewife and what did she look like?

**Swanson**: I thought she looked wonderful.

**Kate**: What color of eyes did she have?

**Swanson**: Blue.

**Kate**: And how about her hair?

**Swanson**: Black.

**Kate**: Black hair blue eyes. Was she a tall woman?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: How tall would you say, taller than you?

**Swanson**: Oh yes.

**Kate**: Taller than me?

**Swanson**: About your size.

**Kate**: 5'7 or so?

**Swanson**: Mmmmh.

**Kate**: And what was her personality and temperament? How was she as a person? What was she like as a person your mother?

**Swanson**: How?

**Kate**: What was her personality your mother?

**Swanson**: She was very happy all the time. Everyone loved her.

**Kate**: And what chaos did she do around the house? What did she have to do?

**Swanson**: The usual things.

**Kate**: Cooking?

**Swanson**: Cooking, cleaning and washing clothes.

**Kate**: And do you remember any stories or anecdote about your mother. Anything that-funny story or anything you remember?

**Swanson**: No not really.

**Kate**: How about brothers and sisters?

**Swanson**: There was 12 of us.

**Kate**: 12? And who was the oldest?

**Swanson**: My brother Carl.

**Kate**: Carl? And who was next?

**Swanson**: Emma.

**Kate**: Emma?

**Swanson**: Carl, Emma, Eric, Maria, Edba

**Kate**: Edba?

**Swanson**: Yes. Elsa, Alma

**Kate** Alma is you?

**Swanson**: And Neils, Spence, and harry and Elba.

**Kate**: Mmmh, so you were in the middle?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: What was the age difference between the oldest and the youngest? How many years between you? Carl and Elba? How many years between?

**Swanson**: 13.

**Kate**: 13 so every year there is a new child. Let’s go back to your house. You said it was two rooms that you remember and it was a wooden house. How was it heated?

**Swanson**: With wood.

**Kate**: With wood and was there a garden?

**Swanson**: Mmmmh.

**Kate**: What did you grow in that garden?

**Swanson**: Everything.

**Kate**: Everything you needed?

**Swanson**: Mmmmh

**Kate**: And what furniture did you have in the house?

**Swanson**: What you usually have.

**Kate**: What was that because it’s different in Sweden than it is in Bulgaria. So what was usual for the furniture? You had two rooms? How did you get 12 children in two rooms? Did you have beds?

**Swanson**: It was two stories.

**Kate**: Oh two story house?

**Swanson**: So it had bedrooms upstairs.

**Kate**: So I see downstairs there were two rooms and what rooms were they?

**Swanson**: Kitchen and dining and living room.

**Kate**: Kitchen and dining and living room. And what about the kitchen, what did that look like? How did you cook your food, on what type of stove?

**Swanson**: Wood stove

**Kate**: A wood stove. And did you have a table in your kitchen?

**Swanson**: Mmmh

**Kate**: How did you eat your meals all of you?

**Swanson**: It was a large kitchen.

**Kate**: So you could all fit in there to eat? Did you eat together?

**Swanson**: Oh yes.

**Kate**: How many meals did you eat a day?

**Swanson**: I suppose three.

**Kate**: Three and all the children together. And did you have animals?

**Swanson**: Oh yeah.

**Kate**: What kind?

**Swanson**: We had two horses and two-three cows, chickens.

**Kate**: And did you have a horse cart? How did you get from one place to another to the nearest farm? How would your mother or father drive there?

**Swanson**: Horse and baggie.

**Kate**: Horse and baggie. What about your grandparents? Did they live with you?

**Swanson**: No.

**Kate**: No, did you remember where your grandparents lived?

**Swanson**: No I can’t remember.

**Kate**: Who did the cooking in the family?

**Swanson**: Mother.

**Kate**: Did the children help with the cooking?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: Did you help cooking? What was your favorite food?

**Swanson**: I remember at Christmas I remember they had lutefisk and it was good.

**Kate**: And what other things did you have at Christmas special? What was Christmas like? Was it a big holiday?

**Swanson**: Mmmh, it lasted 13 days [Laughter], we really celebrated.

**Kate**: Like how like what did you do gifts at Christmas? Did you give gifts at Christmas?

**Swanson**: Oh yes.

**Kate**: Or did you have a Christmas tree or-

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: What about food besides Lutefisk, what else did you eat for 13days?

**Swanson**: Well, if I remember we had turkey.

**Kate**: Turkey? Especially in this country you had turkey?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: What about-did you know your grandparents on either side at all? Did you know any grandparents?

**Swanson**: No not really.

**Kate**: Who are you closest in the family? Who was your favorite person? Did you have anybody that you liked best in the family?

**Swanson**: I loved them all.

**Kate**: And do you have any stories about your brothers and sisters? Any good stories about things they did?

**Swanson**: No I don’t remember.

**Kate**: Okay hold on. What about your religious life, did you go to church?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: What type of church was it?

**Swanson**: We went to Sunday school.

**Kate**: In Sweden?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: How far was the church from your house?

**Swanson**: About a mile.

**Kate**: A mile. How far was your nearest neighbors?

**Swanson**: A quarter of a mile.

**Kate**: A quarter of a mile. And what type of church denomination were you, Lutheran or? What religion were you?

**Swanson**: Lutheran

**Kate**: Did you say prayers at night, every night, before meals

**Swanson**: My mother always did.

**Kate**: Your mother always did huh? We already said describe Christmas, you said Christmas was your favorite. Did you have other animals you said you had cows and chickens and you had horses did you have pigs?

**Swanson**: Yeah.

**Kate**: And did you eat any of the animals for Christmas?

**Swanson**: Yes we slaughtered a pig.

**Kate**: You slaughtered a pig for Christmas. How about music did you sing?

**Swanson**: Yeah.

**Kate**: What special songs?

**Swanson**. Yeah.

**Kate**: And school then did you got to school in Sweden?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: At what age.

**Swanson**: Well I started school at six.

**Kate**: At six and where was the school located where was it?

**Swanson**: That’s strange I can’t remember.

**Kate**: It will come back to you. It will come back. You have to wait a bit sometimes but tell me about your school? How was it organized? Did you have many students in the classroom? How many were in each class?

**Swanson**: Oh there was a lot of them. I remember the teachers name was Ms. Hallman

**Kate**: Hallman?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: And when you say a lot of them, how many will that be students about would you say? Was it crowded?

**Swanson**: Yes.

**Kate**: It was a crowded school huh? And do you remember any playmates any friends?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: Could you name any?

**Swanson**: Oh yes. I had a girlfriend by name Sarah.

**Kate**: And what was your favorite subject in school?

**Swanson**: I liked it all.

**Kate**: And did you learn any English before coming here?

**Swanson**: No

**Kate**: Did any family member know any English?

**Swanson**: No.

**Kate**: What about playing? Did you have any games? What did you do for entertainment?

**Swanson**: Well, living on the farm and having all that work to do there was no time for play.

**Kate**: So you did a lot of work, farm chores.

**Swanson**: Yeah.

**Kate**: Do you have any stories form your childhood that you tell your children? Anything?

**Swanson**: Not really.

**Kate**: Okay, how did you come to America? Who decided to come to the United States?

**Swanson**: Well I had a sister that came here first. She was 13 years older than I and that [unclear 00:15:32] we wrote letters back and forth. And someone there told mum I want to go. She says, “No, you can’t.” She said, “It’s bad enough to have one girl over there.” So then I went to my dad. He said, “Oh mum let her go.”

So this people sent me the money. It costs 75-I think 75dollars to get to the city I were and you had to have another 75 with you. So if you when they questioned you about certain things, if you didn’t pass that test then you had to go back home.

**Kate**: Now what was your sister doing here, your older sister?

**Swanson**: She was a cook for rich people.

**Kate**: And you were very young, you came by yourself?

**Swanson**: Mmmh

**Kate**: You did the whole trip by yourself?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: How old were you 16?

**Swanson**: There about.

**Kate**: What were you going to do here when you got here?

**Swanson**: Well, I was looking for work in private families

**Kate**: And did you have work before you came?

**Swanson**: Yeah

**Kate**: Where?

**Swanson**: You mean when I got here?

**Kate**: Before you got here, did you know you were going to work somewhere? Did you have a job before you came here?

**Swanson**: No not really because there was so much work to be done on the farm.

**Kate**: So you decided that you wanted to go?

**Swanson**: Mmmh

**Kate**: Why?

**Swanson**: Well, I just had the urge to go.

**Kate**: And why did you have the urge? What did you hear about America?

**Swanson**: When my sister wrote and then too my parents were very poor. So I thought if I came over here I could send then money which I did and I think that one dollar made seven crowns. So that helped.

**Kate**: So what did your sister write to you in her letters about America? How did she describe it? What did you know about America before you came here?

**Swanson**: Not really but she was very satisfied here.

**Kate**: And what did she tell you about America? Did she say anything about her conditions of work? Or did you have any notions in your head about what was going to happen to you?

**Swanson**: No.

**Kate**: Okay, so you went to your father and your father said to your mother let her go. What happened after that?

**Swanson**: Well, I got my ticket. The people in that city I wanted me sent me the money. So when I got there. They lived on a big, big farm and at noon which was the big meal, I had to help Martha to serve the dinner.

**Kate**: Your sister, the same people as your sister? Help Martha? Who is Martha?

**Swanson**: That’s the people that I went to work for.

**Kate**: Okay so you got your ticket and did they give you a party, goodbye party or what did you pack? How did you get ready?

**Swanson**: Well I didn’t have much clothes, that was no problem.

**Kate**: Oh alright. But did you take anything special with you here?

**Swanson**: I remember that my sister wanted some records to play.

**Kate**: Swedish records.

**Swanson**: So I brought some of those.

**Kate**: What about anything special to remember home from, did you bring anything with you?

**Swanson**: No.

**Kate**: And did your mother ever like the idea that you were going to go?

**Swanson**: No

**Kate**: Did she tell you? That she didn’t want you-

**Swanson**: Yeah, I didn’t like to hurt her but after I came here and send her money, and then she didn’t mind too much.

**Kate**: And so alright. The night before you left, did they give you a big dinner? What happened?

**Swanson**: Well everybody friends and everybody was there.

**Kate**: For you because you were leaving?

**Swanson**: Yeah.

**Kate**: Did you think you would ever go back?

**Swanson**: I went back twice.

**Kate**: But to live? Did you ever go back to live?

**Swanson**: No.

**Kate**: But when you let, did you think you were going to come back?

**Swanson**: No. I wasn’t sure.

**Kate**: And what was the feeling at 16years old, taking off like that?

**Swanson**: Well, I remember getting into Ellis Island and I saw the Statue of Liberty and then I thought what in the world am I doing here.

**Kate**: [laughter] and what was the Statue of Liberty like to you?

**Swanson**: But then I decided to go to unemployment office and get work. I was lucky I got work from two elderly people. They were awfully good to me.

**Kate**: And where was this?

**Swanson**: In Dore city Iowa. And I remember that one time she had ordered, she always came in the kitchen and ordered glasses on the phone and I can’t remember what it was but I misunderstood her and I served something else.

She got real angry but the man sat on the other end of the table and she sat here. She got so angry that she took the spoon and threw at him and he didn’t like this so he took and put some on his plate and then, I really felt bad I was crying I thought this is it. I thought they were going to fire me and I went out in the kitchen I was crying and the old man came out there.

When he saw my tears he go like that , “No, no, no tears” and then he took out his purse and gave me a 50cents [Laughter] so then I called my sister and I told her and I said, “I am sure that they’ll fire me.” She said, “You damn fool, make another mistake and you get another 50cents.” That kind of shook me up.

**Kate**: [Laughter] lets go back a bit to the boat trip. Where did you get on the boat?

**Swanson**: Well we couldn’t board a boat in Sweden so we had to go to Oslo Norway.

**Kate**: How did you get there to Oslo?

**Swanson**: By train.

**Kate**: So you went by train?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: You went alone?

**Swanson**: Mmmmh.

**Kate**: And what do you remember from that train trip?

**Swanson**: I remember that the conductor was a Negro. And I had never seen-

**Kate**: Not in Oslo, in Oslo?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: So you had to leave the boat from Oslo.

**Swanson:** Mmmh.

**Kate**: And when you got on the boat in Oslo, do you remember seeing the boat for the first time?

**Swanson**: Yeah

**Kate**: What was it like?

**Swanson**: I think the name never trust United States.

**Kate**: The boat?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: And how big was it?

**Swanson**: Very large.

**Kate**: And did you stay overnight in Oslo? Did you have to sleep there?

**Swanson**: Yes.

**Kate**: Do you remember where you slept then?

**Swanson**: Some hotel.

**Kate**: And what kind of conditions in the hotel? Was it nice hotel?

**Swanson**: Very nice.

**Kate**: Now the boat. What type-what was it like on the boat where did you sleep in the boat?

**Swanson**: We had a special cabin.

**Kate**: How many-whose we? Who’s with you?

**Swanson**: I had friend.

**Kate**: And she went over too, to the United States?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: So your friend Sarah from childhood came too? No, alright. Did you travel on the train? Now what was Sarah going to do? What would Sarah do? Did she work? Okay let’s back up, so you went on the United States boat and you had your own cabin. Are you okay?

**Swanson**: No, I have a terrible [unclear 00:25:57].

**Kate**: When you first saw the Statue of Liberty?

**Swanson**: Well I thought it was beautiful but at the same time, realizing that I was in America, I couldn’t speak the language, I felt frustrated.

**Kate**: Now you got tot Ellis Island what do you remember about Ellis Island?

**Swanson**: Awful lot of people.

**Kate**: And very crowded and were they polite to you? Were they nice to you in Ellis Island?

**Swanson**: Oh yeah.

**Kate**: What happened there? How long were you there?

**Swanson**: I t took several hours before we got a train.

**Kate**: Did you have a medical evaluation?

**Swanson**: Yeah.

**Kate**: What did they do?

**Swanson**: They examine my eyes, my chest and my ears.

**Kate**: And did they ask you any questions at all?

**Swanson**: Not really.

**Kate**: And were you ever freighted that they would send you back?

**Swanson**: Yeah.

**Kate**: You had 75 dollars with you?

**Swanson**: Mmmh

**Kate**: You were on Ellis Island anything else happen did you eat there? Did they give you food?

**Swanson**: Yes.

**Kate**: Were there other Swedes, people from Sweden? Were there other people from Sweden?

**Swanson:** No I can’t remember.

**Kate**: How did you do this without understanding English? You don’t know [Laughter], so the you went on your first job which was with this family right? Tell me a little bit about the rest of your life what happened? Before that the family that you lived in how big was he house? The one you first worked in

**Swanson**: Where what?

**Kate**: The big farm you said? Was it a farm?

**Swanson**: You mean where I worked when I came here?

**Kate**: Yeah.

**Swanson**: That was in the city.

**Kate**: And who were the people?

**Swanson**: It was just a couple. No children.

**Kate**: What did you do exactly?

**Swanson**: Well I had to clean the house, do the cooking, and wash the dishes.

**Kate**: And how did they treat you?

**Swanson**: She treated me real nice. When I did what I was supposed to do but when I misunderstood her and didn’t do what she wanted, then she was really cross with me.

**Kate**: But how did you understand when you didn’t speak English?

**Swanson**: Well you just had to do the best you can.

**Kate**: And how long did you stay there in that house?

**Swanson**: Not very long. I didn’t like.

**Kate**: How long was that, a year?

**Swanson**: About a year.

**Kate**: And then where did you go?

**Swanson**: Well I got another job.

**Kate**: What was the best job you had?

**Swanson**: Well I always did house work.

**Kate**: And was there one family that you stayed with for a long time?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: Who were they? What were their names?

**Swanson**: I can’t remember.

**Kate**: That’s okay. Tell us a little bit more about your life then did you marry?

**Swanson**: Mmmh

**Kate**: And have children?

**Swanson**: Mmmh

**Kate**: How did you meet your husband?

**Swanson**: Well it was during World War One and he was in France and I had a sister here as I told you. She didn’t have time to write so she asked me to write and because I didn’t know English, I remember I sat up one night writing a letter to him. It was 12oclock at night. And then I wrote underneath I said, “Please Axle tell me how many mistakes I made.” And he wrote back and he said the only mistake I made was-I said something about we had an awful lot of rain. And in Swedish it’s Reining. So then I felt pretty good about that.

**Kate**: So Axle, this is the man you wrote? In World War One did he turn out to be your husband?

**Swanson**: Mmmh

**Kate**: From the letter?

**Swanson**: Pardon?

**Kate**: Because you wrote him letters?

**Swanson**: Yeah we got kind of acquainted that way.

**Kate**: And he was Swedish?

**Swanson**: He was born here.

**Kate**: But was he Swedish too? So he understood Swedish?

**Swanson**: Yeah.

**Kate**: And where was he from? When he was born where was he born? What state?

**Swanson**: In Port Townsend

**Kate**: Here in Washington? Now did you stay out-how did you get to Washington state?

**Swanson**: Because of my sister. She wrote and asked me if I could come spend Christmas with them.

**Kate**: Which sister is this?

**Swanson**: My sister Emma.

**Kate**: Emma who came here?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: So you came out to Washington, and you ended up here because Axle-that’s wonderful and did you have children?

**Swanson**: Two boys.

**Kate**: And what are their names?

**Swanson**: Vernon and Harry.

**Kate**: And how old were you when you married?

**Swanson**: 22.

**Kate**: And how old were you when you had children?

**Swanson**: Vernon was born in 1924.

**Kate**: And what did your husband did for a living?

**Swanson**: He had a wood business.

**Kate**: Doing what in wood?

**Swanson**: He sold wood.

**Kate**: He sold it or sorts it?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: And when you look back over your life now, what were the best things- first of all I am going to ask you did you have any tragedies, did your family have any tragedies there or here?

**Swanson**: Any what?

**Kate**: Tragedies, anything bad happen in the United States.

**Swanson**: No.

**Kate**: When you look back over your life, how do you feel about coming to the United States now? Was it a good decision?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: Did you have-were you very homesick for your family?

**Swanson**: I was at first.

**Kate**: How long did that last about? And so now when you are older you think it was a good decision to come here?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: And did your mother ever think it was a good decision?

**Swanson**: Yes she finally did.

**Kate**: And do you still have family in Sweden now?

**Swanson**: Yes

**Kate**: And you said you went back twice to visit?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: What years? When did you go?

**Swanson**: 1948.

**Kate**: And that was a long time after. You waited 30years to go back. What was it like to go back?

**Swanson**: It was wonderful.

**Kate**: Was it? Was it everything changed?

**Swanson**: Oh yes.

**Kate**: If you were to advice young people of everything what would you give as advice.

**Swanson**: Well off course it’s up to each person. But my advice would be to go.

**Kate**: To go where you want to?

**Swanson**: Mmmh.

**Kate**: Well, I will like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for talking with us today and for giving us this interview. Right, this is Kate Moore, in Port Townsend, Washington with Alma Swanson on the 23rd of June 1994 signing off for the Ellis Island, 24th sorry, of June signing off for the Ellis Island oral histories project.

This Kate Moore for Ellis Island again and we have a postscript for this. Tell me about what-when they asked you in Ellis Island about where you lived what they did?

**Swanson**: They wanted to know my destination and I told the Dore city Iowa. So they asked the people name. So I gave it to them and then they pinned this thing over here.

**Kate**: A tag?

**Swanson**: And for every station that we passed between Ellis Island and Iowa. There was only one piece left here

**Kate**: So it started as a long piece how far did it go down?

**Swanson**: Pardon?

**Kate**: How big was that tag how far did it go?

**Swanson**: Oh it was way passed down my knees.

**Kate**: It was all the train stops on it?

**Swanson**: Mmmh. I remember we traveled at night and we had a thunderstorm.

**Kate**: On the boat?

**Swanson**: Mmmmh and it was scary and heavy. We’d sob.

**Kate**: What happened doing that storm? Were you sick on that storm?

**Swanson**: Yes.

**Kate**: It was frightening?

**Swanson**: Yap.

**Kate**: Is it still one of the more frightening things that ever happened to you now when you look back?

**Swanson**: The what?

**Kate**: Is it the one of the most frightening scary things that’s happened to you?

**Swanson**: Yeah.

**Kate**: And what about the other people? How did they take that storm?

**Swanson**: Well, just like.

**Kate**: Well I would like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for talking with us. Again this is Kate Moore on the 23rd of June 1994 in Port Townsend, Washington with Alma Swanson for the Ellis Island oral history project.