

Transcript of an interview with

Anna Karin Fredin-Bladh

by Christine Ogilvie

on 20th May 2006

Tape recording available 55 minutes

Anna Karin Fredin-Bladh

My name is Christeen Ogilvie and this is an oral history recording portraying the life and immigration experiences of Anna Karin Fredin-Bladh, known as Karin to her friends, recorded on 20th May 2006, in Karin's home, Jervois Street, Peterborough, South Australia. I would firstly like to thank Karin for allowing this interview to take place and will introduce her to you by providing a brief overview of her life and then allow her to tell us the rest of her story.

Karin is 54 years old and emigrated to Adelaide South Australia during the 1970's with her husband. She was born on June 11 1952 in Halifor Sweden and she spent her early adult life at sea with the Swedish Merchant Navy prior coming to Adelaide. She now resides in Peterborough with her daughter Kristina and her grandson Lachlan.

O.K then, I'll begin by asking Karin to tell us about her family life and her education in Sweden.

I was born in Hanefosh (??) up in the mountains of Sweden on the 11th June 1952 and I was born at home and I'm named after by godmother who was also my mother's midwife ... (comments on how recording works – not clear.) So there I was, born in the mountains, you got that didn't you? I had one older sister, Hanna. It's a small country town, a bit like 3,000 people. The big steel factory SKF made stainless steel there, they don't actually make the ball bearings but they make the big moulds out of stainless steel.

And what do they use those for?

Ball bearings, SKF ball bearings.

O.K.

Famous the world all over. And everyone, the whole town relies on the steel factory. Everyone's family, everyone works there. Maybe the odd teacher that doesn't work there, or whatever but there's someone in each family works in the steel factory.

So it is the basis of - - -

There wouldn't be a town without the steel factory. And dad worked in the steel factory together with most of my family I think, my auntie worked there, my uncles worked there.

Did your mother work?

She was a dental assistant, she always worked. She was a dental hygienist.

So you all had nice teeth then?

Oh, floss and froth and chewed the red tablets. Yeah, mum always worked. Dad was the youngest of nine so I have lots of cousins and aunties and uncles, they were a lot

older. Some of them, I think some of my cousins were almost dad's age, because he was the baby of the family.

So were you all close? You spent Christmas and birthdays and all those special things as a group or did you just - - -?

Some of them moved away, some of them were so old I remember but then I was young, so everybody is old when you're young (laughs). It always seemed like it.

So your friend got married and that's why you went home and you said that you didn't have any plans. What then made you join the navy?

Well I went up and stayed with dad because we moved down to ...?? when my parents got divorced. So I went and stayed with dad, my sister was up there too working in the steel factory. So I went up with dad and stayed for a while. And I didn't really know what I was going to do. And then one of my friends said, you know you can go to sea. And I said, 'Can you?' She didn't actually go to sea, I went to sea but she didn't. And I'd seen the movie Casablanca so I thought that would be nice. And to get a job at sea you have to go to a special job agency who dealt with jobs at sea. And it's called ...??? I went down and saw the man and he must have seen the sucker coming and he's going blah, blah, blah. And I said yes I would love to go to sea and I want to make sure I don't get seasick though. And he said we have this ship going to Casablanca and I'm going 'Oooh.' And of course I took it straight away, not realizing that the coastal traders are always full of drunks and no hopers and that's why no one wants to work on them.

So did you actually get to go to Casablanca?

Yes we did. I went to the Casbah but that wasn't much chop I didn't think. I bought heaps of big plates and trays and brass and stuff like that in Morocco. One of my crew members had his throat cut on the gang plank in Morocco. That was thrilling. We followed the blood steps, the blood splattered steps as we came aboard ship. He wouldn't go ashore to go to the doctor because he was Moroccan. And he didn't want to have stayed there and he wouldn't go ashore. He was really bleeding from the neck, but it couldn't have been too deep.

The ship wasn't like the French Foreign Legion where people actually joined up to get away from somebody or something?

No. It was Swedish, it was part of the other company that I worked for later on. They had three. Two of them used to take one with 3 ships in the series. And two of them took wine, actually went down and picked wine up. And we picked a lot of stuff up. I can remember in Morocco the shifty looking characters although they were on the wharf. They had those brown shoes where they step on the back and they have no shoe laces, with the caftans. A lot of them had squinty eyes, like one eye points one way, a bit like Marty Feldman, and half their teeth were missing. I'd think shifty, you wouldn't want to be a young blonde boy going down in the hold, I tell you. (laughs) I mean really!

So having been on a ship full of drunks - -

Not all of them were drunk.

And having lived your dream of Casablanca not living up to itself why then didn't you just get out of it or were you signed - - -

I thought I would work on a better ship, better class ship.

You hoped. So you had that option open to you. You weren't lumbered for life?

No.

Not your whole career on one boat, you could just hop off?

The captain was quite nice on the ship and he sort of took me under his wing. He was old and close to retiring age. He was a lovely man. And he would say why don't you do this and why don't you do that. And do you really want to go to sea. You know you can go do various things. So I did.

And when you went on your first boat did they give you any training or a little book to read? Or you just rocked up.

No, no. I was a mess girl, I was waitressing food out to the crew and food to the officers. And I had to do the dishes. I didn't have to clean thank god. It took me all my time to drag the food in and out, all the time. And you worked split shifts, you worked mornings, you worked lunch, you worked dinners. It doesn't matter when you report to work, you all eat all the time.

Did they ask you if you could even cook?

I didn't cook, the chef cooked.

O.K.

No, there was a chef on every ship. The merchant navy sails on its stomach, just like the army. There's nothing more important when you are at sea than the food. That's all you've got to look forward to, was the food.

So when you changed off of that later on from off that to another boat is that what you did on the next boat?

No I had to - - - I tried to get a job on the crew as deck boy or cadet but it was really hard to get a job as a girl, because they were all boys and I was knocked back by all the shipping companies. You really had to work hard to actually to go away to sea as a seaman. And after having several knockbacks, and one of them Trans Atlantic, they had wooden curtains anyway, they actually told me that there was no way I could go on the crew because while there's naked sailors. And I go what naked sailors, and they go ohhhh, - those communal showers. Naked sailors running up and down the hallways all the time. I mean I never saw a naked sailor run up and down the hallway, anywhere.

Would it have bothered you?

No, I just thought it was pathetic. Like they had wooden curtains. They didn't have real curtains, they had wooden cut outs in the port holes that looked like curtains painted. They were not a cheapskate company. You know all the people that worked in the old ships Trans Atlantic. They were the only shipping company with wooden curtains. No one told me about the naked sailors. You could go and work --- (oh, I'm eating, not clear what is being said). You could go and do basic seamanship course in the four masted barque Viking. And if you did well on this basic seamanship course which was 6 months you were guaranteed a spot with a shipping company because they always took the five top, cadets from the Viking were guaranteed jobs. It wasn't really hard to be the top student there I have to admit. It was quite easy considering a lot of them were JD's and they were sent there. In Sweden they have always sent the bad boys have gone to sea to straighten themselves out. And they have. And they still do.

JD's are juvenile delinquents?

Yeah, a few JD's were court ordered actually to go do this basic seamanship course and then go to sea and get straightened out. And there were three girls, three other girls, and we were all top. As I said it wasn't hard. The class, when the rest of them are 16 year old JDs. Some of the boys tried to hide but a lot of them were just, they were there because they had to, not because they really wanted to. But it was a lovely old ship the Viking, beautiful, beautiful ship. And one actually went to Port Victoria in South Australia. They had a little thing when you went down the beach in Port Victoria which used to be one of the biggest wheat ports in South Australia. They had the names of all the largest sailing vessels that used to come in, like the P series. And the Viking was there too. And I really liked it seeing how I worked on it, to go and stand in Port Victoria and see an outline of the four masted barque Viking. I thought that was great, I really did. It only took about 2,000 tonne and 36 crew and that's all they took. That's all they took, that sailing ship, 2,000 tonne. Not much is it?

Hardly viable really is it?

And we never paid that much. No wonder they were sailing back and forth all the time. So there I was it wasn't hard. I was top student, I got all my little boatie's books you know you get and things like that. And I also got a job. So it was pretty good. I was pleased with that.

And you only stayed on the one boat after that, ship?

I stayed - - - that was, god. The Kaiser, I was on there for, oh god, I did three years to go to navigational college. So it was 3 years seaside. When you did the basic seamanship course that was classified as 12 months, which was an old bonus even though you only did 6 you got double time, because it was like a special course. So I did almost a year, then I had my time on the Viking which was another 12 months, then I went to - - - I've forgotten what I worked on. That's terrible. Oh, the Lake Eyre was my first boat, my first ship as a deck boy. Then I went to Australia. A freezer ship

we got meat from, from Australia usually to America, like Maccas, Maccas meat sailed a lot on the Lake Eyre.

Maccas being McDonalds?

Yeah. The best to be minced in America.

So they always had a lot of Australian content the McDonalds?

Oh, yeah, they had their own too, but we had our own Maccas meat, most of it was Maccas meat. And we had a bit of tuna and we had a bit of general cargo, it was a good ship. It was old fashioned and really hard work. But it was a good ship and good people. And we had a carpenter on there that hadn't been off the boat- - -

Tape 1, Side B

So right, where were we? We were talking about McDonalds for Maccas. So where did the boat take you then? Around the world or - - - ?

No, on that ship I mainly worked in the Far East, this was Japan and all over the Far East, Thailand, Australia and America.

So was there anywhere that you really wanted to go?

I would have loved to gone to South America. The Lake Eyre was a banana boat, it was a free ?? Banana boat and I always wanted to go and get the bananas but they never had any bananas when I worked on it unfortunately. It only had meat and we had like stuff like tuna and a few other things.

And where did you take the things that you picked up from Australia?

To America and Japan or the Far East. Australia, America and the Far East, Australia over and over and over again (laughs).

So was there rough weather and typhoons and that?

Oh, we had lots and lots of bad weather and storms.

And did they scare you, like the first one?

No, not at all. They were exciting but not - - - but there's nothing you can do anyway, you are stuck there. But a bit hard to sleep, to eat. I remember in one storm in the hallways, you just sort of prop yourself up against one wall and put you feet against the other wall, and then you sit. The chef usually makes something called storm soup which is like a sloppy stewie sort of thing. He just puts everything in one pot. In the galley the stoves have like little fences and you can actually sort of move the fences and make them smaller and you can actually sort of secure the pot to one spot.

So was the idea behind the stew was that everything was in one pot?

Yes, so it was safe, you can't cook or do anything like that. You just leave the mess wherever it is. Whatever falls over can stay there until it calms down. There's no point putting it back.

So you had like, was it a Swedish cook being like a Swedish Company.

We had milk, like Swedes like a drink of milk, obviously we didn't get fresh milk --- on the coast line. Otherwise they would make their own and add butter and they make it in big 50 litre containers and just leave it in the cool room. We had all the provisions come from home.

So there was nothing strange that you wouldn't eat or you were never hungry because - - -

One ship I worked on though, I think that was the Lake Eyre too, had Chinese, at one stage we had a Chinese chef and a Chinese mess. I was in the 4-8 watch which meant that I really didn't have dinner like with everyone else, because I was on watch when they had dinner. And I had breakfast, because breakfast was always at 7 o'clock or 7.30 so I had breakfast after I finished my watch in the morning. And it was good with the Chinese because they were allowed to eat their own food. And so I used to eat Chinese which was great because I could go down and eat early with the crew. They ate before the ship started which was in the mess. And they cooked and cleaned and served, which was great.

So on the boats was there like a mix of nationalities?

Yes, mostly Swedes, I had Polish, Argentinians and Moroccan, Finnish, Norwegian. Who else did I sail with? That was it. Oh, we had a couple of Latvians too.

So no one Anglo-Celtic background? No English, or Australians?

No, no. The English were a bit funny they were class conscious, they wear uniforms all the time and things like that and they're a bit weird.

So you didn't have to have a uniform or anything like?

Now and again when we had the pilot. Now and again we'd have the odd captain that would demand that we spruce up. We'd have to like go down there and look for it. And wash it. No I didn't have to wash it, we never wore it.

And were there other women on the boats that you were on?

No, the radio officer ... one ship I was on my own but the radio officer was usually a woman, the messmen were usually women.

So when you were on the boats, did you ever go home?

No, I never - - - after I had that crappy boat to Casablanca I never worked on a ship that went to Sweden - I always had to sign on elsewhere. Actually when I came to Japan I was with Hokaido, I was the first female that had ever hit the coast of Japan

working on deck. They actually had a big interview with me, one of the big, big papers.

In Japan?

In Japan in the Sunday supplement. Lots and lots of photographs. And the shipping company was really quite pleased with it. Because I wasn't going to do it but they'd sent the two journalists. And I said yeah all right then I'll do it. It was photographs of me and photographs of me on watch with officers on ... I was in the watch with. And when the article came out, we had long since left Japan but they sent several copies to the company's office and they sent several copies to the company's headquarter. They sent copies to *Skan Dutch* which was in Holland, the head office. And they sent some over to the ships. It took a while before I got a copy so I could see myself. And I was like no kidding and laughing. Oh, the things I was quoted, honestly, I came across as a total sap (laughs).

And what did you want to come across as?

Well I didn't want to come across with quotes like, 'I only went to sea to see beautiful sunsets.' I've never forgotten it. Oh, god it was ghastly.

Did you say that though?

Well that would come up in conversation, but that wasn't the reason I went to sea to see the sunsets. I think it was just like the Japanese slant on things. I got a really good dinner out of it. The two guys took me out, because all Japanese have expense accounts, all of them. And they took me to this really good sukiyaki restaurant in Tokyo, it was really, really nice. So it was well worth it just for the food if nothing else.

And you never had to face them again anyway.

No, no I had their cards for years in one of my address book. I don't know what happened to it. I did save the paper for years. I don't know where it is now.

So obviously you met Sigge in the navy?

Yep.

Was he from you area at home? You hadn't known him prior to meeting - - -

Oh no. He was chief officer and I was on his watch when I was a cadet.

So you were on the same boat all the time before you got married or on different boats?

Only on one. I saw him on - - - . When we got married, we didn't see each other a lot, and we hadn't seen each other for 6 months. And the captain said - - - oh, we were in Taiwan and we were in ?? for ages, we had this funny cargo from the east coast of America on that ship. It was poisonous rocks, kind of metal, I don't even remember

what they were called. They were a funny cargo, they smelt like onions. We picked them up on the east coast of America, they didn't actually release a gas but if you were in the cargo you always had to go down with two of us. And one of us had to look out for the other crewman because it depleted the oxygen, these rocks and you could actually succumb to the lack of oxygen. And once you feint you could just die down there. It wasn't poisonous or toxic as in it had toxic fumes, we had these rocks, this metal, the rocks were big lumps, that just completely sucked up oxygen somehow and you had to be really careful and that there was adequate ventilation all the time and things like that for this cargo. And that's what we took to Taiwan. When we got there they didn't have proper ways of unloading it, so it was quite interesting. And they told us that we would have to be there for 41 days. We thought it was great. The shipping company was tearing its hair out because it's pricey, it was expensive to be in port. And we thought this is all right, 41 days. They were digging it by hand. We couldn't get over it. They didn't actually have anything, they were down there with shovels and mats and shovelling it on the ship mats and dragging it out. And we said we can see 41 days coming up, we really can. And that's when the captain called me up and said you know what's coming into port, don't you. And I said no. And he said your husband is coming in, his ship is coming in. And I said really? So I thought that was really exciting. I hadn't seen him for 6 months.

Did you have any contact while you were on different - - -

Oh we used to just write, it was a bit different then, there were no satellite phones or anything. We'd ring now and again but we usually just write care of the shipping company and they would just forward the mail.

So when you saw him again was it just like exciting?

Yes it was, he came over on a bike, so he donkeyed me back to his ship. Being a chief officer he had more entitlements than I had. And that was interesting.

So he had the whole time, how long was he there?

Oh, it was a container vessel so he didn't have much time, because he was the chief officer and he had to work. He took about four hours off to come over on his bike and pick me up. So he took me on his handle bars and biked over to his ship, the quickest way on the wharf.

So where were we?

Oh, gosh, being dinkied down to the boat. Then we came ashore in Taiwan. And that was my last ship, it was the Queensland that I worked on then, which was a bulk carrier, a black ship. And then I came back to Australia to West Lakes, where we moved, when we came to Australia. The reason we came to Australia was, when I was at navigational college, I started my first year of three years, and Sigge came home and said that the shipping company had offered him to go to Australia, and sign on and off out of Australia, on his container vessel that he was working on as a chief officer. He said no, because I was at navigational college and had another 2 years to do and I said, 'Oh don't be stupid, it would be great to go'. It was only for two years.

It would be great to come to Australia for two years, and so I talked him into it and so off we went, so here we are.

Going back a few years, if it was only for two years, and it was just another part of your travels and you'd planned maybe to go back to Sweden or live somewhere else in Europe or England or somewhere?

No. We were, I was just going. I didn't realize then, that I was going to be retrenched the next year from the shipping company and it was just a big adventure then I thought. I couldn't see why we shouldn't go and live somewhere else for a while.

You were both still working for the company and obviously would have been working on different vessels like you always had, so before you came to Australia did you find anything out about Australia?

No, I'd been here with the Lake Eyre, in and out all the time.

So you didn't have, or perhaps you did have, preconceived ideas about Australia?

No, not really. You had dog racing, because everywhere you went with a ship in Australia as soon as the dog races started, or the normal races, you weren't allowed to use any power tools, like you couldn't, especially pneumatic tools you use on a ship to get rid of rust, and the wharfies always had lots to say about it was too loud, so they couldn't hear the radio.

So your idea about Australian men then was, prior to living here, was that they were all into racing?

Well the wharfies were. No, I thought Australia came across as pretty nice, they had nice wharfies.

And the weather contributed after living in the cold while you were a child?

No, I thought that it was going to be nice and warm but I didn't really think much of it, I just thought - - - that it was going to be exciting.

So you're on your own with Sigge, and then you arrived here. If you'd had to live in a hostel or something like that, if they'd said that you had to find your own accommodation and you didn't have an actual house to go to, would you have changed your mind, or having lived in the kibbutz would that have - - -?

No, I don't think that would have worried me not when you sit in a kibbutz where you have no money and you smoke Nadiv cigarettes and you can't smoke vertically because the tobacco falls out.

You had a house lined up, you had work, you had everything here that you'd had - - - ?

The furniture they moved, we were lucky they moved us out, trips home.

So it really wasn't a drama?

Yeah, but it wasn't supposed to be forever, it was to be for two years maybe, not for long, we didn't emigrate, we just came out for a while.

Then you arrived, and Sigge went out back out to sea and you had no family here?

No - - -

Friends?

Well I didn't really know anyone. There were a few Swedes and I watched a lot of TV when I came out. I watched a lot of Hogan's Heroes. I'd never seen Hogan's Heroes in my life. We didn't have Hogan's Heroes and I watched Mash. I thought Mash was really good and I watched Mike Willisee and that's when Mike Willisee interviewed that politician that I just thought was so disgusting and I couldn't work out how any one in Australia could vote for such a terrible person and I watched in amazement at that fat slob, sat there with egg on his tie and he was disgusting and I sat and watched this guy and I thought that is just terrible, how can anyone vote for someone as disgusting as that and it wasn't until over twelve months later that I realised that this was Sir Les Patterson. (laughs) He wasn't a real politician!!

(both laughing)

I've never forgotten that. I can still remember sitting and looking and thinking 'Oh you are just obnoxious, that is disgusting'.

(laughing) When we were talking before - - -

Culture shock!

We were talking about what you expected of people and you were saying that you thought Australia would be more egalitarian.

Oh, yes much more egalitarian, classless and in a big, well I thought it was going to be yeah, classless and egalitarian but it isn't at all. Far from it!

And did you think those things from something you had read when you were a child?

Oh no, yes! Broken Hill, because we learned about Broken Hill in Swedish schools, about the unions, the power of the unions.

The big protest marches?

No!

Strikes and everything?

No, just that Broken Hill, no not the strikes, we never really heard much about them, we just knew about the powerful unions in Broken Hill and how Broken Hill was a union town. I knew that even before I set foot on a ship.

So you had preconceived ideas that maybe the rest of Australia operated that same way?

I probably did, and I suppose the wharfies they were, working on the ships. I mean we just got sick of the strikes and the shipping company, I don't know what it is today but when I came to Australia, with the ships, you couldn't get strike insurance in Australia. Everywhere else you could have strike insurance, but not here, and I mean in Melbourne there were like twenty seven different unions and if the carpenters weren't on strike the plumbers were. One ship I actually worked on had a stop work meeting because one of the wharfies in Melbourne, left a jacket in the hold and he wanted one us to climb down and get it and who ever crewmen he asked told him 'to get stuffed, get your own jacket', so they had a stop work meeting and then they went to the deck officer or chief officer and said 'we want one of your crew to pick the jacket up', and the chief officer said 'you pick your own jacket up', and they just walked off so we had to go down and pick his jacket up, because on a ship, they had some ridiculous reasons. I mean that was just petty. On one ship, this is on the freezer ship too, we had to, when you climb up and down the ladders in the hold, we had to tape all the rungs because otherwise they refused to, they wouldn't go down the hold unless the rungs were taped, because they were iced over. I mean tape doesn't stick to ice. It was just as slippery because the tape would just roll around and it made no difference, did it? But we had to tape every rung in five levels so they could climb up and down and they could actually go to work. Like I said, with the radios and things like that, I was well aware of the strikes on the sea front. Things have changed a little bit but only because they have closed so many ports, they don't have the traffic like they used to. I mean Brisbane was always the slowest port. In Brisbane they had this equality of - - - . What do they call it? Work place equality! Everyone took a turn doing things, because crane driving has always been classified as a really good job on the wharf. Therefore in Brisbane they all decided that everyone should have a go at the crane regardless of whether you could drive a crane or not. They had the slowest, six containers an hour whereas in Adelaide they could do eighteen containers an hour because they had crane drivers and all they did was they sat in cranes but in Brisbane they shared.

Time sharing arrangements (laughs).

Oh look, it was just, some of those things were just stupid.

So here you are on your big adventure and you're sitting in your house while Sigge has gone to sea, watching Hogan's Heroes and Les Patterson - - -

(laughs) I didn't know it was Sir Les, I didn't know!!!(laughs)

What went through your head 'oh this is only for two years' or,

No

Hell, what have I done?

No, no not at all. No, I used to scoot, I lived in West Lakes I'd go shopping at West Lakes and write letters home about the cheap mince and the cheap petrol and go to the movies, go out to restaurants you know, hang out with the other Swedes and I also went - - - was it West Lakes?, No, yes, it was in West Lakes I think - - - yes, I thought that I wanted to get to know some Australians, I mean there is no point sitting in Australia and hanging out with a bunch of Swedes. (laughs) I mean hello, you might as well!

It sort of defeats the purpose.

Yeah, you might as well stay home, so I went into Adelaide, I can't remember which street, it was one of the ones, Grenfell I think, anyway and they had this 'Good Neighbour' thing happening there. And so I knock on the door of the Good Neighbour place and that was in the - - - we got all the literature from the embassy in Stockholm about various things.

So you had it sent out to you?

Yeah, no, they gave it to us when we got our permanent residency at the embassy in Stockholm. We got a lot of literature on Australia, like 'Australia Today', and 'What to do in Adelaide' and blah, blah, blah and just standard stuff, I think they give it out to everyone who gets permanent residency or is thinking of going or whatever and I thought I would go into Adelaide and see if I could make some Australian friends. So I point myself into the Good Neighbour Council and they didn't want to know me, they weren't interested in people like me who could speak English (laughs) and could obviously travel or bus by myself.

They didn't explain to you that you did not have to not speak English?

It didn't say that in the brochure, they just weren't interested. I thought maybe they just wanted to sit there you know like Harris Scarf staff, like why shop, while they are so happy talking amongst themselves. (laughs)

So you found the Good Neighbour Council were just - - -

They didn't want to, they were not good neighbours.

And their brochures were sort of a bit misleading do you think?

Well, they did say that, from memory I mean, I don't have it anymore, but from memory it did say that if you were new to Australia and you wanted to meet people and well, I just assumed, that it would be for someone like me who didn't have any Australian friends. I mean I had Swedish friends and I think that if I hadn't been the person that I am, that I am quite happy to go out of my way to meet people, but if you are a bit timid and you go and approach an organisation like that and - - - don't speak English, how can you go? I mean what's the point? If you can't speak, can't read the

brochure, can you? I mean you are not going to show up, so obviously I was under the impression that they didn't want to see anyone, they were quite happy sitting there.

So the brochure only came in English when you got it?

Yeah well it did, I read it.

It didn't come in a Swedish version?

No, they were all in English.

So if you were an Italian?

Yes, well how would you?

Or if you couldn't speak English?

Well hello, so how then would you know? I mean you can't very well go to the Good Neighbour Council if you can't speak English and you can't read the brochure.

That's right. And they were, according to the brochure, supposed to make you feel comfortable enough to find friends or point you in the direction of a coffee club?

That's what I assumed it would be, that they would be more of a liaising thing saying 'Well, what are you interested in? What do you like doing? Oh, you can go and do all of these different things'. That's what I thought I would get out of there.

And Joe Smith or - - - ?

Yes, would say 'well if you like doing this, then why don't you join the library as you like to read? Or the book club? You know there is Friends of the Art Gallery?' I assumed that's what they would be doing, but they didn't, they didn't really want to know me, so there you go. They were crappy good neighbours, they weren't good neighbours at all. They were crappy neighbours. (laughs)

So it makes you wonder then why they even bother to put the literature out. Maybe you caught them on a bad hair day or something?

No, I did wonder, because I actually made an effort to go into the office and they really were not, and the reason was that obviously I didn't need help because look, well here I was and I spoke English

And a few others.

Well I just couldn't get over it. I thought well 'there you go. So much for that'.

So what did you do then? Apart from, being a bit confused.

No I was just trying to think what I did. I didn't start to Swedish school until much later. I'm trying to think what I did do, how I met Australians. I know one of my friends, Swedish friends, was married to an Australian, and another one Hans had an Australian girlfriend. I can't remember what I did do when I lived at West Lakes. Shop I think?

Met up with strangers while they were having coffee on their own?

No, I can't - - I know when we bought the house, I'm trying to think, Sarah was born in seventy nine, and it was seventy eight. We would have bought the house not long after, I don't think we stayed long in West Lakes.

So where did you move after that?

Up to Magill, we bought the house in Magill. And I remember when we got that house. Maybe I looked at a lot of houses. I know when I got my licence I kept impressing, because when I went and got my licence from the Henley Beach police station, and I drove around the block while I was telling the policeman how lovely Australia was. (laughs)

Of course you did!

(laughs) And what a beautiful country it was and how nice the beach was, so I drove around the block and I got my licence. (laughs) I can remember driving around Adelaide with a UBD on the steering wheel and I used to check for the airplanes coming in, so I always knew where I was from the airport, because it is all central, especially when you lived at West Lakes.

So you'd learn to work it out? Where north and south was? And which way they would come in if the wind was blowing in the wrong direction. I would have used the city.

You can't see the city from half the streets when you live out in the western suburbs.

I suppose.

But you could see the airplanes come and go all of the time. But once you work out north and south, I'm pretty good on directions.

Of course you are!

So once you work out where north and south is, you might get lost, but you know where you should be going. You just kind of drive around.

But did you get lost very often?

In the beginning I did, because I sort of lost tracks, because I can't, like in Sweden you don't have a grid like Adelaide, which is so square. Streets at home, they're old cities and they grow, whereas Adelaide had the forethought of a city planner from the

beginning and everything was well laid out in a nice little grid system, and sometimes that's confusing because they all look the same the buildings all look the same.

And the parks?

Yeah, and if you don't know if it was Henley or Grange, you know like really sometimes you wouldn't know which one you were driving on, and signage was a bit - - - not too good in those days.

Could you have imagined driving in Sydney if you'd lived there?

Oh well, I suppose I would have gotten used to it. In Melbourne it bowled me over when they do that funny turn, you go to the left and you turn right, which I thought was very odd, really odd.

And in Sweden do they drive on a different side of the road or the same side?

No we drive on the right hand side of the road.

So did that?

No, not really - - - I'm just trying to think if I had any trouble. I know once in Sweden, when I turned left I went on the wrong side of the road and I think Sigge once, he only turned right and just kept driving on the right hand side of the road. You know but I think it's when you do things and there is no other cars, when you're on your own, and that's when you just - - -

You do it.

Your concentration lapses, where as with other vehicles you just, if you see other cars, you just go in the right lane by itself.

It just sort of automatically happens. What about food? Obviously, you grew up in Sweden, you were on Swedish vessels, with Swedish food (in unison) and you come to Australia and there were no Swedish supermarkets.

Yeah, lots of things were the same, but a lot of foods were different, and I think that what throws you, is that Australia is so alike that you expect things to be more alike. Whereas, if I had gone to Africa I would have expected everything to be different, but when you come here you don't expect anything to be that different, but it is, and you don't notice that. The holiday passes, the honeymoon is over and you think oh Jesus Christ, look at that mustard, they don't even have real, well you don't, you don't have real mustard in Australia at all, or proper ketchup. It's getting better.

With multiculturalism?

Oh Christ yes,

And you were saying how everything tasted like lamb.

Oh, it did taste like lamb. I swear they put sheep in everything. But I'm used to it now and I don't notice, but I used to complain about the sausages all the time at West Lakes and the butchers got sick of me. But we had our own special butchers. There was one on the - - - oh, what's it called, that road? Ah it goes right down past the airport.

Tapleys Hill Road?

Yeah, Tapleys Hill. Tapleys Hill had a German butcher, and there was one in, he's still there, actually in Findon, and there's another one up on Portrush Road and no kidding, when you go to the one on Portrush, - - - Glynburn Road, it's at the end of Glynburn Road and when you go there on a Friday, I swear people come from miles around. Because these people would buy boxes. It's choc a block, and ten deep, it's just full of Germans, Hungarians Swedes, Danish, Norwegians.

And they make it the traditional way?

Oh. They have pork and stuff and they have proper, you can get pork fat and proper Kassler and proper sausages, proper Fritz!

Sausages without lamb?

Proper Fritz! You know Fritz is not bad here, but its not right, but they do proper Fritz. They do, as they make their own. They have the best meat when you go there, especially the one on Glynburn, people go in and they get hundreds of dollars worth and they just stock up.

It's not the sort of thing that really goes off though?

No, Kessler and things like that, you can keep it on your bench top and slice it and eat it. Sausages were the same, but I think they either buy for the neighbourhood or these people come from like up here, and they only go so often. Good butchers though.

So in Sweden you don't eat lamb at all? Or at the time you didn't?

Southern Swedes eat a bit of lamb I think.

Mostly beef?

Pork, pork's the biggest - - - it's expensive, people eat very little meat at home. I know friends of mine, ah (laughs) she's married to an Australian, and they were home in Sweden visiting her parents, and they have Australian friends that came and I think that because they have Australian friends and because of her husband Bob, the parents had bought lamb chops and they cooked these lamb chops. Swedes don't dish up, they just have platters, and even when you have a normal meal at home, the food is in the middle of the table and everyone serves themselves. Briggy's parents put these chops out and passed the platter around, and the Australians must have thought that there were going to be more chops (laughing) and they took all the chops and there were no chops left (laughing) for anyone else. At home you only get two or three, but you know how little they are, loin chops, and they must have put six or eight of them.

Probably cost them a weeks pay!

Oh no, they must have thought there would be another platter coming out and then they realised there wasn't going to be another platter and that that was it and I mean Australians just don't get you know two chops each a loin chop it's just not a serve here, she said it was really embarrassing because no one else got any and they were just sitting there looking because you cant put them back once they're on your plate. (laughing) Ah it was so funny.

So everyone else had to pretend they were vegetarians?

Yeah they just said, 'Oh well' never mind', they were just so embarrassed. Australians would assume that, they wouldn't think that there was two each, that that is like a serve.

So with things, compared to over there from what you remembered, from living there and from what your family told you, were things here cheaper?

Oh heaps cheaper, mince at home was five dollars per kilo and mince here it was fifty cents per kilo. I could fill the car up, the Holden, took me thirteen dollars, I could fill the tank up it was just so cheap and I couldn't get over it. I went to West Lakes and got two trolleys and it cost me eighty five dollars, I still remember that, and I had brooms and you know just stuff like that, buckets and things like that in it, to go home and clean the unit and I couldn't get over how I could get two big trolley loads.

So you were still getting a Swedish level of pay and living here?

Yeah, and then you devalued, so it was great, so we got a pay increase, seventeen percent we were only here for I reckon for eighteen months. When did Australia devalue? I reckon eighty they devalued, oh it could have been seventy nine or seventy eight when they devalued, could have been seventy eight anyway, Australia devalued the dollar by seventeen percent so up went our wages which was great (laughing). Instantly we had a seventeen percent pay increase so that was rather good.

So you were here for a while and not on a ship, and then you went back out on a ship?

I was here, I came in December seventy six and I think I was in Australia for - - - I know Sigge was home over Christmas and he left again in January, he wasn't home very long when I came out. Wait on - - - I came out on his ship so he must have been here for, he must have been home for at least three months I reckon - - - he would have been, because I came out, I was going to fly out but I really wanted to, I wanted to fly the Concord and because they were going to fly me out to Australia, I said if you buy me a ticket on the Concord to America, I can go out on a ship I'll join up with Sigge's ship as a passenger and they wouldn't buy me a Concord ticket, lousy buggers! - - - (laughs) well I did save them all that money not buying me a plane ticket to Australia, and so I came out in December seventy six and I did come out on Sigge's ship because I can remember sailing into Sydney harbour with the blue trees and I was fascinated and I was standing on the ship, because you go right through and

the port is not far away, the container port is not far away from the bridge and opera house and the Botanic Gardens where all the blue trees were and I had never seen blue trees in my life.

Gums?

No, Jacarandas, Just before Christmas - - - November, they were all in full bloom, it was beautiful, and I made a special trip right down to go and check out those blue trees because I didn't have to work so I was off I was just because, I think I took - - - did I take a taxi? I could have walked it wasn't not that far away - - - I can't remember, but I spent the whole day in the botanic garden, I could not get over those blue trees. Never seen blue trees in my life. It was really a specky sight, it really was.

So when you came - - -

- - - into Sydney.

And then you came to Adelaide from Sydney?

Yeah, the ship went to Adelaide. And our furniture well didn't come with us, must have come before in a different ship or container, oh I don't know how it came out. Well it was all in the unit, a lot of it wasn't unpacked all the candles wilted that first Christmas, taught me not to put candles in the window in the Australian sun (laughing). Have a lot of candles for Christmas at home but not in the windows in the sun, that wasn't a good idea.

You didn't need to light them they were all just...

No they just went like that (displays a wilted look) they just melted and bent. Well that just doesn't happen at home even in the high summer you can have candles in the window and nothing happens to them but of course it is not eighty degrees is it in the window?

How did you cope with the heat?

Oh, it didn't worry me we had air conditioning anyway in the unit.

And you had been up in Asia and all that anyway.

Yeah, no it wasn't too bad, from memory.

And little tricks like not putting candles in windows?

Oh, it was funny, (laughs) really funny because you couldn't get a lot of the Christmas stuff and you couldn't get proper golden syrup, still can't get proper golden syrup, it doesn't taste the same when you make things, anyway it's all right but it hasn't got like it should have.

So your cooking experiences were a bit different too with different tastes or textures, flour, tastes like the golden syrup could alter what you thought you were making?

Yeah because it is cane sugar and at home it is beet sugar and it tastes different and golden syrup has got a totally different flavour and you can't make like when you make Swedish lollies like Christmas lollies it doesn't taste right with the golden syrup from here, you need the beet sugar golden syrup.

So you're whole cooking experience, or your tastes maybe would have to have changed or you would have had to have source something like those other butcher shops?

Oh, I can go to Ikea now!! (laughs) I can get proper Swedish lollies and proper chocolate.

And reacquire your Swedish taste buds?

Oh no, you never lose that, you occasionally think oh, this is so nice.

So they have a full restaurant idea there at Ikea? Where you can go in?

I don't know, I haven't been yet. No I haven't been there. Swedish meatballs and fish balls that's why I'm hanging out. (laughing) Swedish fish balls, I really am.

I went past there the other day it's huge, absolutely huge.

Andrew's been a few times, he went to stay with my sister. He really likes it. He goes down there at least twice a week and buys Swedish food.

So there is a lot of Australians acquiring a taste for Swedish food?

He spent a year at home, Andrew, so he already had that. Swedish lollies I'm hanging out for, now I can get Swedish lollies I tell you, yeah. (laughing)

So, you'd been here for a while and then you went back out onto a ship as you were obviously still employed by the company,

The Queensland, yeah.

And then you and Sigge parted ways?

That was after Sarah was born, yeah.

And you decided to stay here. Did you have an option of going?

Yeah, I could have gone home but I decided to stay. It's funny that how he always wanted to stay because he liked to play golf and he was the one who was so keen on Australia and I was the one that wasn't keen and I was the one who stayed. Funny isn't it?

So, in those early years when he had gone and you were still here, did you ever have those thoughts about, like, really I should go home. You didn't miss your family? I mean obviously you did but to the point that...

Oh no but you don't, you don't actually when you've been gone long enough, things change.

You had worked away a lot too, so you were used to them not being at your backdoor probably. I just wondered if you'd felt like ---- (what am I trying to say?), you were here in a strange country but it wasn't so strange.

It wasn't strange then ...

But there was just you and, what, or was, there something that really made you want to stay? Or were you just happy with how your life was going along? Do you know where I'm coming from?

Yeah.

I mean some people would have just said 'bugger this' I'm going home to familiarity or I'm going back out on the boats or I'm going to do this but,

No, No.

You didn't have thoughts like ...

I think when I went home before with Sarah, when she was little, she was three months old, I used to quite loathe Australia, especially Australians who were uncouth and didn't shake hands you know, had no style and this! (throws her hand up) (laughs)

Well that's where I'm coming from so why?

(laughing) Well we used sit around and talk about Australians how Australia would be great without the Australians, wouldn't it? (laughs)

Last one turn the light out?

Oh God, (laughing), we used to really pick on Australians, in Swedish mind you, and I think all the Swedes, I don't know a single Swede apart from Sigge, I don't know a single Swede who has gone home, all my friends they have all stayed here. You make a new life for yourself and I think - - Swedes, once they make their bed they kind of stay in it, if you know what I mean, they don't chop and change, and because I've heard about so many Poms, they go back and forth all the time and you know you can't go back, because whatever you go back to, its not- - - what you come home to, is not what you left.

No, it never is.

So you just, get on with it I think.

Well, I reckon well leave it at that, you've done very well, thank you.

You're welcome.

End Tape One – Side B

End of Transcript.