Laura Marie Madsen Christiansen Foss Born July 1, 1905 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

PARENTS Peter Madsen and Dorthea Jensen. They were from Lolland, an island south of Copenhagen. They grew up in poor circumstances.

GRANDPARENTS Maternal - vaguely remembers her grandfather. His name was Lars Jensen. He died when she was quite young. Laura's grandmother died after Laura came to the US. Her name was Marie. Her grandparents lived on Lolland and never left the island as long as they lived. Laura's grandfather did odd jobs and had a little business of making brushes. They didn't have much land. They had some chickens but there wasn't enough room for a cow. Paternal grandparents - grandfather's name was Jorgen Madsen. Grandmother's name was Petrine. She was older than grandfather. Always sickly. Died when Laura was about eight. He lived with Laura's family from time to time. He worked on a big estate for a count. Grandfather was humble. Would bow for this count. Made barely enough money to feed his family. They had their own little house with a thatched roof.

PARENTS Father was the youngest of ten children. Only four of the ten grew up. The others died when very young. Sanitation wasn't good in those days. Laura's paternal grandfather worshipped grandmother. She was beautiful when she was young and he never forgot that. Laura's father went to Copenhagen as a young man. She doesn't know how her parents met. Father worked for the government. Was kind of a blacksmith for the military's arsenal department. Worked there until he retired. A very respected man. A wonderful person.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS Three boys and three girls in their family. Oldest brother, Harry worked for the government. Died in 1980. Laura describes why she thinks he was such a remarkable person. He visited them in the U.S. in 1970. Arthur was a year younger than Harry. He was a machinist. Died in 1961 when 59 years old. Laura was the third child. Sonja was born three years after Laura. She was a wonderful person.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS Sonja was a lot like Harry. She could accomplish a lot through it seemed as if she hadn't been doing much. She died of cancer at age 54. Frode, Laura's youngest brother, was born next. He is a retired plumber, living in Copenhagen. They have a summer home and an apartment, which they use in the winter. They grew up in a wonderful home. Lots of singing, music, and laughter. Father had a good sense of humor.

CHRISTMAS Their father would take them into downtown Copenhagen when all the street were decorated for Christmas. They loved to go window-shopping. Christmas Eve was exciting. They would have goose or pork roast with red cabbage, potatoes, and all the works. They'd have apricot pudding with whipped cream. They had a Christmas tree with real candles. There were little packages underneath the tree. They'd join hands and sing Danish Christmas songs. They would play with their toys on Christmas day. Sonja and Laura got dolls one Christmas. They were going to sew clothes for them but their mother said they would get infected fingers for sewing on Christmas. They didn't go to church on Christmas.

CHURCH AND SCHOOL Laura's family didn't go to church. Her mother felt they got enough religion in school. They had catechism and Bible studies. Said the Lord's Prayer and sang a hymn every morning before class. They didn't go to church but they were baptized and confirmed. Laura was fourteen when confirmed. She had a white dress and white shoes with high heels. They had company after church.

WORK Got a job working for a family in their home half a day. The man was studying to be a judge at the University of Copenhagen. They had a seventeen-day-old baby the day she started working for them.

SCHOOL (See also I-548) School had two shifts: 8:00-1:00 and 1:00-6:00. Boys and girls were separated (not in shifts). Had to curtsey in front of teachers. Boys and girls separated on play field by a board fence.

SUMMER Went to Lolland for 4-6 weeks to visit grandmother and aunt. School system paid the fare. People in the country would volunteer to take the children from Copenhagen in their homes for the summer. City children would get fresh air and learn about life in the country. The Foss children stayed with family but the school still paid the fare.

WORK (See also I-610) describes her job working for the family she mentioned earlier in the interview. Cleaned. Helped take care of the baby. They lived on the 4th floor. Had to go to the basement for supplies. People living in the building had to clean the stairwells.

REASONS FOR IMMIGRATING TO U.S. Her father's sister lived in Seattle with her husband, Hans and Marie Pedersen. They had visited Laura's family once. Laura planned on coming back to Denmark. She left for America at age fifteen. A family living in the US came to Denmark for a visit. They were contacted and asked to look after Laura on her journey. Laura's aunt had money in a bank in Copenhagen, which she allowed Laura to use. This aunt was quite well to do. At the last minute, it was decided that a cousin from Germany would come too. Things were still bad in Germany in January 1921 because of WWI so Greta went to America as well. She was 16 years old. Laura never realized until long afterwards how much her mother didn't want her to go. At age 15, she was too excited to think about it. Her mother couldn't go to the ship to say good-bye. The rest of the family went with her to the boat.

THE TRIP TO AMERICA 12 days on the ship. 5 days from New York to Seattle on train. The German cousin managed to learn a quite a lot of Danish. They sailed on a Danish ship, Frederick VIII. Traveled 2nd class. They were with the Nielsen family. Laura shared a cabin with the Nielsens and Greta shared a cabin with someone else. They weren't used to afternoon coffee with homemade pastries. The trip was quite elegant. There were many Poles traveling 3rd class. Thought they were dressed funny. Those traveling steerage brought their own food. Cold and stormy in January. Laura got seasick. Greta didn't.

ARRIVAL Didn't have to go to Ellis Island like most of the immigrants did. They got the New York o January 18, 1921. They were excited to see the Statue of Liberty and the skyscrapers. It was too cold in New York to be out very long. The Nielsens took care of their papers, passports, and money. They had no problems. At age 15, Laura was too young to live in the US alone. She had an affidavit from her uncle saying that he was responsible for her.

TRAIN TRIP Doesn't remember going from the boat to the train. They had to wait in Chicago for a few hours to catch the train to Seattle. Remembers the Nielsens taking them to a drug store. She had her first ice cream soda there. She was surprised. Drug stores in Denmark are strictly pharmacies. Remembers Mrs. Nielsen speaking English in the stores. Thought she'd never learn to speak that well. Had her first baked potato on the train. Had several hours in Ogden, Utah. The Nielsens took them to show. It was a silent picture called 'Love.' Came to

Seattle on January 25, 1921. Her uncle met them at the depot. They had a nice house on 10th Avenue North, a block off Broadway.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF SEATTLE It was raining when they came, but at 15 years of age, she didn't pay much attention to the weather.

SCHOOL The neighborhood school wouldn't take them. They spoke no English. They had to go to Pacific School on lower Broadway and Jefferson. This school had a class for foreigners. This class had Chinese, Russian, and Greek students. Greta and Laura didn't sit next to each other at school so they developed their own sign language to use in class

SCHOOL Both Laura and Greta had had good education in their home countries but they had to start from scratch with the English language. It was more difficult for the Chinese who had to learn a whole new alphabet.

Laura stayed in Seattle for two months. It was decided she would stay with an uncle, Olaf Madsen in Mount Vernon. His wife was from Texas. She was a crude person. Laura's aunt was not very healthy. She was probably a little irritated with the girls. She was wonderful in many ways, but she had no patience.

MOUNT VERNON Laura's uncle was good natured. Laura could speak Danish with him. His wife Laida (?) was a 'hot-tempered Texan.' Laura had to try to speak English to her. Laida (?) didn't like Laura to speak Danish to her uncle. Laura would try to help with the housework. Laida was a sloppy housekeeper. If Laura made the house look nice, you'd never be able to tell the next day.

RETURN TO SEATTLE Two months later, Aunt Marie was really sick. She had diabetes. This was before insulin. Laura's cousin, who was a nurse, quit her job at Providence Hospital and stayed home to take care of Aunt Marie. Her food had to be weighed. She was hungry and couldn't have enough to eat. She was cranky. Laura was needed there. Aunt Marie bossed Laura around and took advantage of her. Greta was sent to Mount Vernon and stayed with a younger family. She had a lot of fun up there. Laura's first summer in the US wasn't too great. Still, she wasn't ready to go back. She thought she'd stay here for a couple of years. She never complained in her letters home.

TRIPS TO DENMARK First trip back was in 1930. Her mother told her she knew what Aunt Marie was like. She thanked Laura for not complaining.

FIRST JOB IN THE U.S. Got a job in the fall of 1921. Took care of a 2 year old and helped with the housework. They had a daughter in high school and an 11 year old son. She stayed with them for a year. His name was Russel. He worked for the Seattle Water Department. Ate dinner with the family. Remembers the first time she had cream style corn. Still doesn't care for it. Her aunt and uncle insisted she go to night school so she went to Broadway High School twice a week. They always tried to separate Greta and Laura so they didn't let Greta take English as Laura did. Greta took sewing. They both had class from 7:00pm to 9:00pm twice a week. They looked forward to their reunions on 9:00pm. They'd go to a nearby bakery and eat a dozen cinnamon rolls. Laura envied the Russel's daughter. She would come home from high school with friends. They'd play the piano and sing while Laura was in the kitchen peeling potatoes.

DIFFICULTIES Missed the fun and laughter they had in their home in Denmark. Her aunt would have dinner parties but the people there were older. She wasn't around many young people. Everything was serious. There was no laughter. The sky was the limit when her aunt bought food, however. Goodies, fresh fruit, things they didn't usually get in Denmark. Laura's aunt could be very demanding and quite impatient. Laura and Greta were afraid to not complete the tasks she requested of them. Laura gives several examples of this. Once she sent Laura to the butchers a few blocks away. She'd often expect them to be able to do things even though they didn't speak English. She wanted 12 loin pork chops and wouldn't let Laura write it down. Laura forgot it by the time she got the butchers. He started naming things, When he said loin pork chops, she remembered

CHURCH Many of the young Danish girls working as housekeepers would meet at the church on Thursday afternoons, their day off. Laura started going to this church the first Easter after they had come to Seattle. The Nielsens invited them since Laura's aunt didn't go to church. The sermon was in Danish. Then they started going to a Danish Society for young people. The fellows would come to the church on Thursday evenings after work. All clean fun. Wouldn't interest young people today. This group was organized by the Pastor Alfred Sorenson. Theresa, Hjarne's first wife went to these meetings. Later, Hjarne, Laura's second husband came too.

SOLVANG, CALIFORNIA Greta and Laura heard about the Danish folkskole in Solvang. They wrote to Pastor Christiansen, who was in charge. He said they could stay there for half-price if they helped in the kitchen. It cost $200 for the school year (October - March) for room and board. They paid only $100. Pastor Christiansen picked them up at the depot in Solvang. It was all work and no play. They were up before everyone else. Cleaned the halls and steps. Set the tables for breakfast and while the others were in class, they did the dishes. Very little they could take part in. After two weeks, they talked to Mrs. Christiansen, who had decided that they could clean her apartment as well. He said they'd have to hire a full-time girl to clean and they could go to school. Greta and Laura had a lot of fun after that. Had lectures, gymnastics, folk dancing, handicrafts, Bible classes, ***etc.***

MEETING FIRST HUSBAND He had attended the school a year before Laura. While Laura was there, he was doing carpentry for a contractor in town. There were some cottages behind the school where he and some other young men were living. They boarded at the school. His name was Harald Christiansen. Laura saw him on weekends and in the evenings. He was Danish. Was orphaned at age nine. Worked for a family. Eventually came to the US with a cousin. He did very well for himself here. He worked for the government. Was in charge of all the different shops at Pier 91 in Bremerton, Washington (carpenter shop, paint shop, etc.) until he was discharged on a medical. He was a diabetic and had had several heart attacks. He knew Laura would go to Seattle after school was out so he went there to find work., Laura worked in California until she had enough to pay Pastor Christiansen back and then returned to Seattle. She and Greta worked in homes in Santa Barbara. They ended up owing $200 because when Laura's aunt found out they weren't working, she decided not to pay the $100 for their room and board at school. Laura earned $50-55 per month. She had to earn the fare home and she still owed $75 to Pastor Christiansen.

GETTING ENGAGED Got a job in a home from Grunbaum Bros. in order to pay the $75. Got engaged to Harald and he paid the $75. She wouldn't get married until she earned $75. Bought bedding with the money.

WEDDING Married April 8, 1925. Her parents silver anniversary. Married in the basement of the parsonage, which was cozy. Church on Spruce Street wasn't built yet. Friends decorated parsonage with wild cherry blossoms. Laura's aunt outfitted them for the wedding. Her aunt was generous. Her apartment was on Queen Anne Hill so she gave Laura and Harald a reception there. Had a happy marriage.

CITIZENSHIP Took out first papers in 1930 because she was going to Denmark for a visit. Paul, her oldest son was 2 years old then.

TRIPS TO DENMARK (See also II-253) Laura and Paul were gone for five months. Traveling took more time then. Took train to New York and boat to Copenhagen. Laura's parents were still living. People in her neighborhood had flags out for her homecoming. She'd been gone for ten years but things hadn't changed much. Her sister who was seven when she left, had become a young lady.

CHILDREN Paul, director for a long term foster care program in Seattle. He married a third generation Danish girl. She speaks Danish. They have three married children. Norma, four years younger than Paul. She married a high school teacher. They have a son and a daughter. Both of Laura's children live in Seattle.

CHURCH (See also II-557) Very active in the church. Harald was president of the congregation when the church was at its old location. The new church is across from Woodland Park. Laura is active in a circle. They take care of wedding receptions. Give dinners and luncheons. They have a friendship group for Danish ladies. They meet in each other's homes. Their group is getting smaller.

Laura and Harald lived in a house down by where the freeway is now. They lived there for over 30 years. Had a contractor build the house Laura lives in now. They'd lived in this house for 10 months when Harald died of a heart attack. She lived there for five years alone. Then she married Hjarne.

TRIPS TO DENMARK (See also II-253 and II-906) 1930, Laura and Paul. 1948, the whole family went to Denmark. They took the car along. 1965, Harald passed away and Laura went alone. Flew both ways. Met Hjarne over there.

DANISH TRADITIONS They have Danish meatballs at times. Danish desserts, fruit pudding and soups. Chopped parsley and gravy. Liver paste. Open-face sandwiches. They spoke Danish in the home. Norma speaks Danish quite well. Paul doesn't speak as quite as well.

Speaks Danish.