

CARL ELVING  
INTERVIEWED BY EDWARD E. & GERTA SONBERG  
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ROCKLIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

. . . . . (STARTED IN MID SENTENCE)

BY THE TIME I WAS BORN, WHY EVERYBODY WAS FINNISH, YOU KNOW,  
MY MOTHER WAS FINNISH.

"SO YOU WERE BORN IN FINLAND?"

YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT, YEAH-

"WILL YOU TELL US WHERE YOU WERE BORN?"

IN . . . . FINLAND.

"WHAT KIND OF COMMUNITY IS THAT?"

IT'S A CITY ABOUT 22,000, 23,000 PEOPLE.

"WHAT MADE YOU COME TO THE UNITED STATES?"

IT WAS KIND OF TURMOIL TIMES IN EUROPE. FIRST, WORLD WAR I WAS  
GOING ON. I HAD AN AUNT FROM CANADA. SHE WANTED ME TO COME  
WITH HER. I WAS TAKING CARE OF PACKING AND STUFF. SHE HAD  
TWO KIDS AND NEEDED SOMEBODY TO LOOK AFTER THEM; HER SUITCASES  
AND THINGS. ON MY FATHER'S SIDE I'M SWEDISH.

"DO YOU REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE SHIP THAT YOU CAME ACROSS ON?"

YEAH, BERGENFJORD. I TOOK IT FROM OSLO, NORWAY.

"WHAT YEAR WAS THIS?"

1917, IN DECEMBER.

"HOW DID YOU GET MONEY TO COME TO THIS COUNTRY?"

I GOT IT FROM MY AUNT, SHE BOUGHT ME A TICKET.

"DID YOU HAVE TO PAY IT OFF?"

YEAH, I PAID IT OFF AS SOON AS I WAS ABLE TO PAY IT. IT TOOK ME ABOUT TWO YEARS.

"THIS WAS JUST BEFORE THE WAR, IT WAS WHILE THE WAR WAS GOING ON? WAS THERE ANYTHING IN YOUR FAMILY THAT YOU COULD SAY, WELL, THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE WAR TO MY FAMILY THAT YOU WOULD CARE TO TELL ON THE TAPE?"

NOTHING HAPPENED WHILE I WAS THERE BUT I LOST MY SISTER IN THE CIVIL WAR 1918. SHE DIED IN THE CIVIL WAR.

"DID ANYTHING HAPPEN ON THE WAY ACROSS? THAT WAS A TERRIBLE TIME TO BE SAILING."

I KNOW. WE WENT WAY UP NORTH FROM OSLO. THERE WERE U BOATS IN THE NORTH SEA SO I GUESS WE WENT NORTH OF ICELAND. IT TOOK US ABOUT ELEVEN-AND-A-HALF DAYS., THAT WAS A FAST SHIP. IT WENT SUCH A LONG ROUTE BECAUSE OF ALL THE U BOATS.

"WHERE DID YOU LAND IN THE NEW WORLD?"

IN ELLIS ISLAND IN NEW YORK.

"WAS THERE ANYTHING AT ALL THAT HAPPENED TO YOU DURING THE TIME THAT YOU WERE AT ELLIS ISLAND?"

NO, NOTHING HAPPENED THERE. I GOT THERE EARLY IN THE MORNING. THAT AFTERNOON A FERRY BOAT TOOK US TO NEW YORK AND WE GOT ON A TRAIN.

"DID YOU SPEAK ANY ENGLISH AT THAT TIME?"

NO, NOT A WORD.

"WHAT ABOUT YOUR AUNT?"

SHE SPOKE A LITTLE OF IT. IT WAS HER SECOND TIME. WE WENT TO CANADA FIRST. I WAS THERE TWO YEARS.

"IS THAT WHERE YOU LEARNED TO SPEAK ENGLISH?"

I DON'T SPEAK IT RIGHT YET.

"OH, YES YOU DO."

I LEARNED SOME THERE AND SOME HERE.

"DID YOU HAVE ANYTHING HAPPEN TO YOU BECAUSE YOU HAD DIFFICULTY WITH ENGLISH?"

NO, I NEVER HAD ANY TROUBLE AT ALL. I'VE BEEN LUCKY THAT WAY. I'VE NEVER BEEN BASHFUL, SEE, THAT'S ONE THING THAT WAS IN MY FAVOR.

"DID YOU EVER TAKE ANY SCHOOL CLASSES OR ANYTHING?"

NO, BUT I WAS READING DICTIONARIES ALL THE TIME, ABOUT FOUR INCHES THICK.

"WOULD YOU TELL US ABOUT SOME OF YOUR WORK IN CANADA?"

I WORKED MOSTLY IN THE LUMBER CAMPS. BY THE WAY, I VISITED THAT MALCOM ISLAND YOU MENTIONED TO MR. WILSON. I WAS OVER THERE THREE MONTHS. WORKING IN THE LOGGING CAMP.

"WHAT IS THE CONCEPT OF THAT ISLAND?"

WELL, IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE SOME KIND OF COMMUNITY AFFAIR, GOT THE WHOLE ISLAND FROM THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT . . . . THEY BROUGHT IN THESE FINNS.

"FINNISH MEN AND WOMEN?"  
FAMILIES AND SINGLE PEOPLE.

"DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING OF YOUR EXPERIENCES UP THERE ON THE ISLAND?"

THEY HAD DANCES THERE. THEY HAD A HALL THERE, STORE AND A HAIL, THAT'S ABOUT ALL, AND THE SCHOOL, THAT'S ALL THEY HAD.

"WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK INTO THE UNITED STATES?"

WELL, IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN CANADA, IT'S NOT SO HOT. I KIND OF FIGURED . . . (MULTIPLE VOICES)

"WHEN DID YOU COME TO LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES?" WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOU DO?"

I WENT TO DELUTH AND I WORKED IN THE LUMBER CAMPS AS A LUMBER JACK.

"DID YOU EVER MARRY?"

YEAH, I'VE BEEN MARRIED.

"WOULD YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR WIFE, HER NAME?"

I GOT MARRIED IN 1934 IN RENO. I WAS MARRIED UNTIL 1975. MY WIFE PASSED AWAY. WE WERE MARRIED 41 YEARS.

"WHAT WAS HER NAME?"

HANNAH.

"WAS SHE FINNISH?"

YEAH.

"TELL ME, DID YOU BECOME A CITIZEN?"

YES.

"WAS THERE ANY PARTICULAR REASON YOU WANTED TO BECOME A CITIZEN?"

I KIND OF FIGURED ON STAYING HERE WHEN I CAME SO I FIGURED IT WOULD BE BEST.

"HOW MUCH CONTACT HAVE YOU HAD WITH FINLAND THROUGH THE YEARS?"

FIRST FOUR YEARS I WAS WRITING ALL THE TIME AND SENT MONEY AND THEN I KIND OF SLACKED OFF AND I DIDN'T WRITE FOR ABOUT 30 YEARS. IN THE FIFTIES I STARTED WRITING.

"DO YOU STILL WRITE?"

YEAH.

"DO YOU HAVE ANY FAMILY OVER THERE?"

YEAH, I GOT A SISTER AND THAT'S ALL.

"DID YOU EVER GET A CHANGE TO GO BACK?"

No.

"DO YOU TAKE ANY FINNISH NEWSPAPERS?"

YEAH, I TAKE ONE, IT'S A WOMAN'S PAPER . . . . .

"SO YOU STILL SPEAK AND READ FINNISH?"

YOU GOT TO BE PERFECT IN SOME LANGUAGE, YOU KNOW.  
I'M NOT SO GOOD IN ENGLISH.

"WOULD YOU TELL US THE KIND OF WORK YOU HAD IN FINLAND BEFORE  
YOU CAME TO THE UNITED STATES?"

I WORKED IN THE PAPER MILL THERE, DRIVING A HORSE, HAULING WOOD.

"I UNDERSTAND THAT THE LUMBER CAMPS IN MINNESOTA AND SO FORTH  
WERE PRETTY ROUGH PLACES."

SURE, THAT'S RIGHT.

"CAN YOU TELL US A STORY?"

I DON'T KNOW, SOME OF THE CAMPS I WORKED AT HAD 200 MEN. HAD ABOUT 60 MEN IN EACH BUNKHOUSE. THEY HAD THOSE BEDS, ONE ON TOP OF THE OTHER. TWO MEN SLEPT TOGETHER ALL THE TIME. THAT'S THE WAY IT GOES.

"WHAT KIND OF FOOD DID YOU GET?"

FOOD WASN'T VERY GOOD, NO BUTTER AND NO EGGS AND A LOT OF BEANS.

"WELL, YOU GOT A BREAKFAST?"

OH YEAH, WE WAS EATING ALL THE TIME. THAT WAS OUT IN THE STICKS, YOU KNOW, 40-50 MILES FROM NOWHERE.

"DID THEY BRING FOOD TO YOU?"

THEY HAD A RAILROAD, THEY TOOK LOGS EVERY DAY, HAULING A WHOLE TRAINLOAD OF THEM, TO THE SAWMILLS FROM THE CAMP.

"WHAT KIND OF PAY DID YOU GET TO BEGIN WITH?"

IT WASN'T MUCH, IT WAS SO MUCH A MONTH AND YOU HAD TO WORK 26 DAYS TO MAKE A MONTH. IT WAS ABOUT \$60 A MONTH AT THE FIRST JOB I HAD. IN THE EARLY TWENTIES IT WAS ABOUT \$26 A MONTH; A DOLLAR A DAY AND BOARD. THERE WASN'T ANY MONEY TO BE MADE THERE.

"HOW LONG DID YOU STAY WITH THAT KIND OF WORK?"

NOT LONG. A COUPLE OF YEARS. I USED TO WORK ON THE BUILDINGS IN THE SUMMERTIME. I MADE MORE MONEY THERE. THESE CAMPS ONLY OPERATE WHEN THERE IS SNOW ON THE GROUND.

"THESE BUILDINGS THAT YOU WORKED ON, WHAT KIND OF BUILDINGS WERE THEY?"

WHEN I WORKED IN DELUTH THERE WERE BRICK BUILDINGS. I WAS HELPING BRICK LAYERS.

"THIS MUST HAVE BEEN ABOUT WHAT YEAR?"

1920

"WAS THERE ANY KIND OF UNION AT THAT TIME?"

NO, NO UNIONS AT ALL.

"DID YOU EVER JOIN A UNION?"

OH YES, LATER ON.

"DID YOU EVER TAKE ANY LEADERSHIP IN YOUR UNION?"

NO, I NEVER DID.

"WHAT ABOUT, HAVE YOU EVER RUN FOR ANY KIND OF OFFICE?"

OH, NO.

"ON THE SCHOOL BOARD . . .?"

NO, NOTHING LIKE THAT.

"WHAT KIND OF ORGANIZATIONS HAVE YOU BELONGED TO?"

I BELONGED TO THE CIO, THE AFL.

"WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS?"

I BELONGED TO THE FINLANDIA CLUB . . . .

"WHEN YOU FIRST MARRIED YOUR WIFE, WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WERE YOU ABLE TO HAVE?"

WE WERE RENTING. I WAS UP IN THE LUMBER CAMP . . . WE WERE RENTING A CABIN.

"DID SHE STAY AT THE CABIN WHILE YOU WENT TO WORK?"

YEAH.

"THERE WAS NO OUTSIDE WORK FOR HER?"

NO, SHE DIDN'T WORK.

"WOULD YOU TELL US ABOUT SOME OF YOUR ACTIVITIES IN THAT CABIN, WHAT DID YOU DO FOR RECREATION?"

WELL, WE HAD THE RADIO, NEIGHBORS ALSO . . . AND THAT'S ABOUT ALL.

"WERE YOU FAR AWAY FROM STORES AND DOCTORS?"

NO, NOT VERY FAR. ABOUT 3 MILES, I GUESS.

"HOW DID YOU GO FROM THE CABIN TO THE STORE AND SO FORTH?"

WE HAD AN AUTO.

"WHAT KIND OF CAR DID YOU HAVE?"

MY FIRST ONE WAS A DESOTO.

"THAT MUST HAVE BEEN AN EARLY DESOTO.

YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT, I GUESS, A 1935, I MEAN, A 1929, THAT'S WHAT IT WAS. I GET MIXED UP ON DATES.

"DID YOU HAVE A FAMILY?"

NO, WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHILDREN.

"YOUR WIFE LIVED UNTIL 1975. YOU ARE LIVING HERE IN THE SACRAMENTO AREA?"

YEAH, I'VE BEEN HERE 35 YEARS.

"DID YOU STAY WITH THE WORK IN . . . .

NO, I CAME DOWN EVERY WINTER FOR SEVERAL WINTERS. ABOUT THREE OR FOUR WINTERS, WENT DOWN TO PISMO BEACH. IT'S BETWEEN LOS ANGELES AND SAN FRANCISCO, KIND OF A SUMMER RESORT TOWN.

"WHAT DID YOU DO THERE?"

NOTHIN. I WAS ON UNEMPLOYMENT FROM THE STATE.

"WELL, THEN YOU WERE LIVING A RESORT LIFE."

"NOW, YOUR WIFE WAS FINNISH ALSO. DID SHE COOK FINNISH FOODS?  
DID SHE HOLD TO THE OLD WAY?"

NO, NOTHING LIKE THAT. SHE COOKED MORE AMERICAN FOOD.

"WERE THERE CERTAIN DISHES THAT SHE COOKED?"

SHE WENT TO COOKING SCHOOL WHEN SHE WAS A YOUNG GIRL. WAS A  
PRETTY GOOD COOK.

"WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE?"

ROAST BEEF, I GUESS.

"WHAT ABOUT ANY FINNISH FOODS DID YOU REALLY ENJOY?"

I DON'T KNOW IF THEY GOT ANY GOOD FOOD. I DON'T LIKE THAT  
STEW TOO MUCH.

"DID YOU HAVE ANY PEDDLERS COMING BY YOUR CABIN AND IF SO,  
WOULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THEM?"

THEY USED TO SELL WATCHES AND SUITS OF CLOTHES AND THINGS LIKE  
THAT. EVEN FINNS CAME. THEY USED TO MAKE THE ROUNDS OF ALL  
THE MINING CAMPS, LOGGING CAMPS YEARS AGO.

"WOULD YOU TELL US A NAME?"

I CAN'T REMEMBER A NAME ANY MORE.

DID THEY WORK OR DRIVE?"

THEY HAD A CAR. YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT.

"HOW DID THEY SLEEP ON THE ROAD?"

THAT'S SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW, MAYBE THEY SLEPT IN THE CAR.

"I WAS WONDERING IF YOU INVITED THEM IN?"

No.

"HOW COME YOU CAME TO CALIFORNIA?"

THE CLIMATE, I GUESS, HAD A LOT TO DO WITH IT. IF YOU HAVE EVER BEEN TO MINNESOTA IN THE WINTERTIME, YOU WOULD SURE WISH YOU WERE IN CALIFORNIA.

"WHAT YEAR WAS THAT, THAT YOU CAME FROM MINNESOTA?"

WELL, I CAME HERE SEVERAL TIMES BUT 1926, I GUESS, THE LAST TIME.

"HOW DID YOU COME OUT TO CALIFORNIA?"

WELL, I DON'T KNOW, FREIGHT TRAIN, I GUESS.

"YOU CAME WITH A FREIGHT TRAIN?"

WELL, I SHIPPED OUT FIRST TO WORK ON THE RAILROAD. WHEN THE TICKET RAN OUT, I HOPPED ON A FREIGHT.

"THIS WAS NOT UNUSUAL IN THAT TIME?"

No, no. THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE. THAT WAS THE MAIN SPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, GOING FROM COAST TO COAST.

"WOULD YOU MIND TELLING US MORE ABOUT SUCH A TRIP. THAT'S SOMETHING TODAY THAT YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT. WHAT WOULD ATTRACT THEM TO BE YOUNG AND TO GO ACROSS THE COUNTRY?"

AN ADVENTURE, YOU KNOW, SEE NEW SCENERY, SAVE MONEY SO YOU HAVE MONEY TO BUY SOME DRINKS,

"WAS IT DANGEROUS?"

NO, IT WASN'T. OF COURSE, THEY HAVE THOSE RAILROAD POLICE, SO YOU HAD TO WATCH FOR THEM. TELL THE OTHERS WHICH PLACES TO BE CAREFUL,

"DID YOU EVER GO TO ANY OF THE HOBO CAMPS?"

OH, YES,

"COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THEM?"

WELL, THERE WAS NOTHIN TO IT. FINDING A PLACE WHERE THEY WERE COOKING SOMETHING FROM THE STORES, OR WHATEVER THEY HAVE . . . .

"WHERE WERE THESE HOBO CAMPS LOCATED?"

YOU KNOW, YOU GOT THESE RAILROAD YARDS. IT WAS DOWN THERE NEAR THE YARDS, ON THE FAR END. SO NOBODY BOTHERS YOU, YOU KNOW,

WHAT WAS THE FIRST CAR YOU OWNED?"

THE DESOTO, YOU KNOW, IN RENO.

"HOW DID YOU LEARN TO DRIVE?"

TO TELL THE TRUTH, I DIDN'T DRIVE, THE WIFE WAS DOING THE DRIVING.

"HOW DID SHE LEARN TO DRIVE?"

SHE HAD A CAR BEFORE.

"DID YOU EVER LEARN TO DRIVE A CAR?"

NO, I DIDN'T.

"I WAS WONDERING, WOULD YOU TELL US ABOUT ANY MUSIC, INSTRUMENTS OR SINGING IN YOUR HOME IN FINLAND?"

I DON'T KNOW IF THERE WAS ANY SINGING OR MUSIC. MY MOTHER WAS VERY RELIGIOUS, SHE WENT TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY. SHE WAS SINGING WHILE SHE WAS COOKING.

"DID YOU EVER LEARN ANY SONGS?"

NO, I NEVER DID.

"YOU COULDN'T SING ONE FOR US?"

NO, I CAN'T. I DON'T HAVE THE VOICE.

"DO YOU REMEMBER SOME SAYINGS IN FINNISH? WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR HOW YOU SPEAK FINNISH. COULD YOU SAY SOMETHING FOR US, EITHER A POEM OR JUST SPEAK SOMETHING?"

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

"WHY DON'T YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL?  
DO YOU REMEMBER THEN?"

YEAH, IT WAS 1908. IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.

"JUST SAY IT IN FINNISH."

CARL SPEAKS IN FINNISH . . . . .

"COULD YOU TELL US WHAT IT WAS IN ENGLISH?"

I WENT TO SCHOOL WHEN I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD. THAT WAS IN  
1908.

"HOW MANY YEARS OF SCHOOLING DID YOU HAVE?"

IT WAS FOUR YEARS. THAT'S WHAT MOST OF THE FINNS DID. I GOT A  
DIPLOMA FROM A GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

"WERE YOU INVOLVED IN ANY OF THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES BEFORE  
WORLD WAR I?"

(MULTIPLE VOICES . . . . .)

I WAS ONLY A KID.

"NOW, YOU SPOKE EARLIER OF YOUR SISTER DYING DURING THAT WAR?  
WAS IT A SAD THING FOR YOU TO TALK ABOUT?"

YEAH.

"ALL RIGHT. THEN, WE WON'T TALK ABOUT IT.

I DON'T CARE TO MENTION.

"HAVE YOU EVER SERVED IN THE MILITARY?"

NO, I NEVER DID. I MISSED ALL THE WARS.

"YOU WERE ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES."

THAT'S RIGHT. I CONSIDER MYSELF LUCKY.

"WE DO CERTAINLY THANK YOU FOR TALKING TO US TODAY, MR. ELVING. THANK YOU VERY MUCH."

YOU'RE WELCOME.