

Nordic American Voices
Nordic Heritage Museum

Interview of Edith Carlquist

January 8, 2011

Everett, Washington

Interviewers: Mari-Ann Jackson; Abby Taplin

Mari-Ann Jackson: [0:02] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices Oral History Project at the Nordic Heritage Museum. Today is January 8th, 2011, and I'll be interviewing Edith Carlquist. We are at Normanna Hall, Sons of Norway, in Everett, Washington. With me is Abby...

Abby Taplin: [0:28] Taplin.

Mari-Ann: [0:29] Taplin. Welcome, Edith. We are happy to be able to interview you, and hear your story. Would you start by stating your full name?

Edith Carlquist: [0:41] Yeah. I'm Edith Carlquist. I was born and raised in Norway. I came here in 1947, when I was nineteen years old. I had an uncle; my mother's brother had been here for twenty years, and he came home after the war and visited all of us relatives, and he asked me if I wanted to come over here, to the United States. So, I said, "Well, yeah, I think I would like to." But I didn't want to come by myself.

[1:20] My uncle said, "Oh, would you like to ask somebody, or do you know of somebody that would like to come with you?" And I said, well, I'll ask my girlfriend that I was working with at the time. So, I did ask her and she said, "Yes, I would like to go to the United States." So, the two of us came, and my uncle guaranteed for us, and paid our way. [Laughter] And we had to go to Oslo, and get our papers, and get all of our papers ready to come.

[2:06] And I did that, and I left home, where my dad was working, at an insane asylum, at Dale in [inaudible 2:17] between Anagunsfjorn across from Stavanger and Sandnes. And I lived there from the time I was in the second grade. I did go to first grade, På Hana, Hana Dale. And when I... when my dad got a job... well, he was still working there, but that's when we got the housing to live there, so he didn't have to ride his bicycle back and forth from Hana to Dale.

[2:51] So, we had our own housing there, and I went... there was different things, we went to school there. There [were] only eight, nine kids going to school there at the time. My teacher was an old maid from Bergen, and she was not a very good teacher. And she told me she did not want me to teach me... they were still... they were already starting to teach kids in the fifth grade English there. But she didn't want me to learn, because she said that I wasn't able to learn it. [Laughter]

[3:43] But anyhow, that was my story. But anyhow, then in 19... I think I was about fourteen years old, we had some German soldiers come to our house, knocking at our door, and they said, "We're coming here to spend the night, tonight." And I told my dad, I said, "I don't know. That sounds kind of weird." But I said, you should call the doctor that was in charge of the hospital at the time, and he said "Well, there's nothing we can do; you'll just have to let them stay."

[4:30] And we didn't know what was going to happen. But they stayed in our living room, and slept downstairs in our basement, and upstairs... we slept upstairs; it was a two-story house. And it was kind of scary, but we... I guess, went to sleep; had to sleep. [Laughter]

[4:57] But anyhow, in the morning, the reason why they wanted to come there, they wanted to practice their maneuvers there. There was lots of hillsides there at the hospital where we lived, and that's where they practiced their maneuvers. And like I said, it was scary, but we lived through it.

[5:26] Another thing that happened was, there was lots of [grenades] falling down because they were shooting from Sula Airport, and across the fjord. And my brother, one time went out in the driveway, or walkway by our house, and saw this thing that had fallen down from the air, and it was a [grenade]. And he picked it up with his hand, and he burned his hand. So, but... that was one of the stories.

Abby: [6:06] Wait, so was that a bomb, or was that...?

Edith: [6:08] That was a [grenade].

Abby: [6:09] Was it rock?

Edith: [6:10] [Grenade?]

Mari-Ann: [6:12] Oh, a [grenade]. No, grenade.

Abby: [6:16] Grenade.

Edith: [6:17] Grenade, yes, uh huh. Yeah, and then another thing that happened- I'm not sure exactly what year that was, but there [were] airplanes flying right from Sula, around Sula Airport. And there was an English airplane that was going by, and the German soldiers, or Germans shot at that airplane, and the airplane fell down, right on top of the mountain, right above our house. And I never went up there, but my brother did go up there, and looked at what had happened. That was kind of scary.

[7:05] But I guess there [were] Germans all over, and when I was fourteen, I guess, I did go to church, and I was confirmed at a Lutheran Church in Stavanger, and I had to go on a train, and buses, and there [were] always Germans around, wherever we went, and you didn't know what was going to happen to you, when they were around like that. But we lived through it. So, that was... I guess part of my story.

Mari-Ann: [7:51] Will you go back to your family? Did you have siblings?

Edith: [7:59] Yes. I'm the oldest in the family. I have a brother that's two years younger than me, and I have... Well, there's five of us. Anyhow, my youngest sister, I'm sixteen years older than her. In 1950... I came in '47. In '52, my mother and my one sister and brother came over in 1952. And they... my dad got a job working... he worked here in Everett at Nord Door for awhile. But he did live in Bellingham, and my sister and brother... youngest sister and brother, they went and graduated from Bellingham High School, so they lived in Bellingham for quite a few years.

[8:52] But my other two brothers went out on the ocean and went sailing in the Merchant Marines. So, they were... but they did immigrate and come to the United States, too, so our whole family is here. But I don't know, that's I guess, part of my story.

Mari-Ann: [9:19] Yes. What were your parents' names?

Edith: [9:22] Martha and Magnus Erga. E-R-G-A was our last name. And there was a farm, På Jaeven. You know where that is? At Klepp? Between Klepp and Bryne. That was where my dad was from. And my mother and dad actually met at the hospital, because my dad was working there, and my mother was working there. So, that's how they met, there.

Abby: [10:01] And how long did you live at the hospital?

Edith: [10:05] From the time I was in the second grade until I was fourteen, fifteen years old, because that's when I started going to work. I had different jobs. I worked at a sardine factory for awhile. I put the herring and sardines in the can, and... [laughter]. And then after that I worked at different hospitals, and at an old people's home, in the kitchen, cooking and doing different things, until my uncle came, in '46, and I came in '47. And the way I went... by train from Sandnes to Oslo, and from Oslo...

[Break 11:03 – 11:06]

Mari-Ann: [11:07] When were you born?

Edith: [11:09] I was born May 16, 1928.

Abby: [11:21] And how many children do you have?

Edith: [11:23] Three. Three daughters. And I got three son-in-laws. [Laughter] They're all married. And like I said, I have two grandsons and four granddaughters, and now I have two great-grandsons and two-great granddaughters, and one on the way. [Laughter]

Mari-Ann: [11:50] Oh, my. Good. So, you said that you started working when you were fourteen, fifteen years old?

Edith: [12:00] Mm hm.

Mari-Ann: [12:02] Does that mean that right after elementary school you went out and started working?

Edith: [12:07] Yes, yes, uh huh.

Mari-Ann: [12:10] So, you did not go to *videregående skole* or anything.

Edith: [12:12] High school, no. I did go to middle school.

Mari-Ann: [12:18] *Framanskole*?

Edith: [12:19] *Framanskole*, yeah, for one year, in Stavanger. And I had to take the boat that went every day from Dale to Stavanger. And then I walked from there to the school. And then I had to walk from there after school down to the train depot, take the train from Stavanger to Sandnes, and then I took a bus from Sandnes, home to Dale.

Abby: [12:48] That's quite a commute.

Edith: [12:50] Yes, it was. I did go to eighth grade, is what we called it in those days.

Mari-Ann: [12:59] Yeah, yeah.

Edith: [13:01] I had to do the same thing when I was confirmed, when I was fourteen years old. That's... I could have brought my confirmation picture, but I didn't think of that. [Laughter]

Abby: [12:16] So, you were canning sardines?

Edith: [13:19] For a while. And then I worked at an old people's home, and hospitals. And then when I came over here, my uncle lived in Montana, and he had a grocery store there. That was in November of '47. And he decided that Montana wasn't a very good place for us two young girls. So, he had some friends that lived in Ballard, so he decided... I also had another uncle that came a few months before me. My uncle that asked us to come over... they were brothers.

[14:05] Anyhow, they decided to take us down to California so we could see the Redwoods, and then they drove us all the way up California, and Oregon, the coast, and then Washington coast, and then we got to Ballard, where the people were living that he knew. And they asked what kind of work we would like to do. And my uncle asked them if we could stay there until we got a job, and we didn't know how to speak any English at all, when we first came here.

[14:49] We did go to school in Montana, a little grade school for just a couple weeks... two months, I guess it was. [Laughter] To learn a little bit of English. I don't know if we learned anything, but... that's where we did go to school there, so... But when we came to these people in Ballard, we said we'd been working around hospitals and old people's homes. So, they called Firland Sanatorium. Have you heard of Firland Sanatorium?

Mari-Ann: [15:26] Mm hm.

Edith: [15:27] Both of us got a job washing dishes there in the afternoon shift, and they had housing for us there for us, too, so we were able to stay there. Then there [were] people that we worked with, they said, “Oh, you should go to Denny Park Lutheran Church in Seattle.” So after we learned a little bit more English and were able to take the bus downtown, from Firlands, we got to Denny Park Lutheran Church, and we met quite a few newcomers there.

[16:11] And then they said, “Oh, you should go dancing at the Swedish Club, the old Swedish Club.” By the bus depot, downtown Seattle. [Laughter] And that’s where we both met our husbands. [Laughter] And my husband’s parents were both born in Sweden, so we met in February, and we got engaged in March, and we got married in November, 1950. [Laughter]

Abby: [16:45] And you’ve been married ever since.

Edith: [16:47] Yeah. Sixty years.

Mari-Ann: [16:50] And what is the name of your husband?

Edith: [16:53] George Harold. But he goes by Hank. But Carlquist is his last name.

Mari-Ann: [17:00] Mm hm.

Edith: [17:03] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [17:07] Where did you live, then, after you got married?

Edith: [17:10] Oh, we lived... rented a house not very far from Firland Sanatorium. But then after awhile, we moved from there and bought a house in Mountlake Terrace. And we lived there for five years, and we... my husband was working at the machine shop in Seattle at the time, but then he got a job working at the Shell Oil Refinery in [Anacortes].

[17:51] And we moved to Mount Vernon, and that’s where all three of our daughters graduated from high school, in Mount Vernon. And we did buy a ten-acre farm, so we raised our kids on this ten-acre farm, and we had a few cows, and we had a donkey, and we had a pony, and my daughter had horses, and was in 4-H with the horses. [Laughter]

[18:22] But they all graduated from Mount Vernon High School, and our oldest daughter studied music, and we got her a piano when she was eight years old, and she started taking piano lessons, and she started teaching piano lessons from our house after she knew more about that. [Laughter] So then she went to school in Minnesota, St. Olaf College, for one year. And then she decided she’d come back to Washington, and she graduated from Western Washington College in Bellingham.

[19:07] So, then after that, she got her first job working in Roseburg, Oregon, and that’s where she met her husband. [Laughter] So, they had two kids, and they’ve been teaching. They taught in

Norway at the American School in Stavanger for two years. And then they went to Malaysia, and they went to Jordan, and they've been teaching. Now they're in China teaching, in the American schools.

Mari-Ann: [19:44] Wow.

Edith: [19:44] And we've been able to go and visit them a lot of different places where they've been teaching. I was able to go home to Norway when they were there. I showed them around different places over there. [Laughter]

Mari-Ann: [20:01] Did you go back and visit at Dale *sykehusten* too?

Edith: [20:05] Yeah, oh yeah. I had to go back there and see. But, like now, there's no patients there at all anymore. I guess they must have medication for the patients now so they don't have to be in a hospital like they used to.

Mari-Ann: [20:25] I think they live in their home communities now, in group homes, small group homes, and so on.

Edith: [20:32] That could be.

Mari-Ann: [20:33] Yeah.

Edith: [20:34] But I think it would be better for them to be in a hospital, I think, where they could... because there's a lot of bad things happening. Those [kinds] of people don't realize that they're doing bad things. Stealing, and killing people. It's not very good, but... that's what happens I guess. They do have more medication for those [types] of people, too now, so they can get some help from the medication.

Abby: [21:14] Were you ever scared living near the hospital, of the patients?

Edith: [21:20] No, not really. No. There [were] a few patients that [were] able to be out and mingle with all of us people. But it wasn't... scary, no. But we had... we had a croquet place, where we used to play croquet. [Laughter] And we had a good time, growing up there, I think.

Mari-Ann: [21:51] So you have been back several times?

Edith: [21:53] Yes, about four times.

Mari-Ann: [21:55] Mm hm

Edith: [21:57] We did go on a cruise. We flew from Seattle, Sea-Tac, to London, and we spent two nights, two days in London, and then they bused us from London down to Dover, and we got on the cruise ship there, and then we went all the way up to the northern parts, where you said... I think you came from? And all the way up and all the way down and Stavanger was the last place

where they stopped in Norway, but we did go back to London... or, down to Dover again. So, we've done a lot of traveling, and gone different places, and gone on cruises and different trips, and seen a lot.

Abby: [22:52] Do you keep any Norwegian traditions, like with your kids growing up?

Edith: [22:57] Oh yeah, we did. Well, every Christmas I would make every kind of cookie. [Laughter] And I always put my Norwegian flags on the Christmas tree. [Laughter] We always did. I always sang Christmas carols to the kids when they were growing up. So...

Mari-Ann: [23:26] You have kept your language intact. Did you teach Norwegian to any of your children?

Edith: [23:33] No. I really didn't. No. They know a few words, but my youngest daughter... Well, first of all, my cousin's daughter came and lived with us for a year and went to Everett Community College. And after she finished school here, college here, then... Our youngest daughter is the same age as my cousin's daughter. She went back to Norway to stay with my cousin's family back there. And she worked at... they owned a factory building things that they... big machinery for potato digger-uppers. [Laughter] In Nærbø, I don't know if you've heard of Nærbø.

Mari-Ann: [24:30] Oh yeah.

Edith: [24:31] Yeah. She lived there for a year and worked at the factory there.

Mari-Ann: [24:37] She must have learned some Norwegian then.

Edith: [24:40] Yeah, she did. Oh yes, she did. And my oldest daughter does know some, too, because they lived in Norway for two years, so they learned some. But we, like I said, we have two grandsons and four granddaughters, and our youngest [grand]daughter is going to college in Portland now, and when she graduates... she'll graduate this July, or June, or whatever, then all six of our grandkids have graduated from college. So, I'm really proud of them.

Mari-Ann: [25:20] Mm hm.

Edith: [25:22] Just that our kids were able to pay for their college education is really good.

Mari-Ann: [25:31] Yes.

Edith: [25:32] So.

Mari-Ann: [25:33] Good.

Edith: [25:34] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [25:36] And do your children keep some of the Norwegian traditions, as well?

Edith: [25:40] Yeah, I think so. Yeah. I think they do, yeah. My youngest granddaughter has taken up Norwegian in college now, and she's really interested in the Norwegian culture. I told her she should join the Sons of Norway in Portland where she's living and going to college. She's also working at some kind of a job down there, too, while she's going to college, so she's doing good.

Mari-Ann: [26:16] Busy young woman.

Edith: [26:17] Yeah, she is. Yeah, well, four of them are married, and our fifth one is getting married this June or July. She's going to get married in Mukilteo at the lighthouse.

Mari-Ann: [26:38] Oh, good.

Edith: [26:39] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [26:40] How nice. Very nice.

Edith: [26:41] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [26:47] Can we go back to the war a little bit? Were you aware of any kind of resistance to the Germans? Underground resistance when you were growing up?

Edith: [26:59] We heard a lot about it, you know, while they were there. We didn't have... weren't able to have a radio because we were not allowed to have a radio. And we always had to have our windows, blinds, dark so nobody could see where we lived, I guess, was the rules. But like I said, they were always around us. But at the hospital here, they had to hide their buses. They were afraid that the Germans were going to come and steal our buses. But they never did, that I know of.

Mari-Ann: [27:56] Were any of your family members involved, on the Norwegian side, or on the Nazi side?

Edith: [28:05] No. Not as far as I know. I never heard of it. But... kind of scary to see them all over the place, the soldiers. One thing that happened right when they came into Stavanger and Sandnes... I had an aunt that lived in Sandnes, and they decided to come and stay with us because they were worried about living in a city, that something was going to happen to them. But they wanted to stay there, but... nothing actually happened, so they moved back into town.

[28:58] But there wasn't so, you know... for us that lived so close to Sula Airport, there was a lot of things that could have happened even where we lived, as well as in town. But we didn't have as many bad things happen as there was in the northern part of Norway. They did a lot more killing and bad things up there. Did you end up interviewing Inger Dow?

Abby: [29:35] Yeah.

Edith: [29:36] Oh, you did.

Mari-Ann: [29:37] She was here this morning.

Edith: [29:38] Yeah, she's a friend of mine.

Abby: [29:41] Yeah.

Edith: [29:42] She's from the Trondheim area.

Mari-Ann: [29:43] Yeah.

Abby: [29:44] Yeah, she had a lot of interesting stories.

Edith: [29:46] Oh, yeah.

Mari-Ann: [29:48] Good.

Abby: [29:50] So, did the Germans stay in your living room just one night?

Edith: [29:54] Just that one night, yes. They were going out and practicing, like I said in the hillsides there, right up in front of our house. Not that they heard anything, shooting or anything, but I don't know exactly what they were doing but... they left the house.

Mari-Ann: [30:25] Did you see Germans, then, in this small community where you grew up? Did you see any Germans around, or after?

Edith: [30:30] No, not exactly. Just the ones that came that one day is all we saw.

Mari-Ann: [30:39] Hm. So, you were sort of isolated from the rest of the city.

Edith: [30:50] Yes, oh yeah.

Mari-Ann: [30:56] Good.

Abby: [30:57] Do you remember either the day the war started, or the day it ended?

Edith: [31:01] Oh, that's... I don't remember so much about the day that it started, but that was another story I was going to tell. I was in... do you know [inaudible 31:15 – 31:16]? Sunde? You know where that is?

Mari-Ann: [31:20] Mm hm.

Edith: [31:21] I had an uncle and aunt that lived there and had a farm there, in Vats. And I was there. My aunt was having... was sick and was having problems, so I went in there to work and to help her on the farm. My cousins and I, we were out in the fields planting potatoes, and there was somebody down below on the street, or road, hollering... he was riding his bike, hollering to us, and said, "The war is over!" That day.

Mari-Ann: [32:00] Wow.

Edith: [32:02] That was really... a nice feeling. I never will forget that.

Mari-Ann: [32:12] So was there a reaction among people...

Edith: [32:15] No...

Mari-Ann: [32:16] ...that you were aware of?

Edith: [32:17] No, I wasn't aware of anything there because we were on the farm, and we didn't talk to too many people, or see too many then. I didn't stay there too long. I don't remember how long I actually did stay there, but at that time I was going back and forth quite a few times, though, to help her and to work on the farm with my cousins.

Mari-Ann: [32:49] Was there any bombing in Stavanger, or of the city?

Edith: [32:53] No, not that I know. No. There was way up where you were. What year did you come?

Mari-Ann: [33:02] I came in 1959.

Edith: [33:05] Oh.

Mari-Ann: [33:06] So, I was in Norway all during the war.

Edith: [33:08] Oh yeah, uh huh. So, how did you feel about it?

Mari-Ann: [33:14] Well, we saw Germans all the time. Our house was in a little village and it was basically surrounded. Our house was surrounded by Germans, so we were very, very much aware of them.

Edith: [33:29] Oh, yeah. It wasn't too much fun.

Mari-Ann: [33:35] No.

Abby: [33:38] Did you have food shortages?

Edith: [33:40] Yes, we did. Yes. That's another thing I would say is, if the war had lasted too much longer, I think we would be... we would have been out of food. Don't you think so, too?

Mari-Ann: [33:56] Mm hm.

Edith: [33:58] Because there was no food available. I don't know how come. I don't know why the Germans would eat all the food, but we were not able to get food from other countries, I guess. That must be...

Mari-Ann: [34:16] The war machine, I think, took most of it, actually.

Edith: [34:20] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [34:27] But if you were on the farm, then, did the farm supply...

Edith: [34:33] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [34:34] ...food for the hospital and the patients?

Edith: [34:36] Yes, some of the food was... they had a bakery, and they made their own bread, and stuff like that. But I'm sure they had to get food from other places, too... it wasn't... they weren't able, because there were seven hundred patients there, when I lived there.

Mari-Ann: [34:59] Wow, really?

Edith: [35:00] Yeah.

Abby: [35:01] All through the war?

Edith: [35:02] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [35:02] Oh my goodness.

Edith: [35:04] Yeah. It was amazing. Like the house we had, we had a kitchen and an electric stove, and stuff, but we had... an outdoor toilet. We didn't have a bathroom in our house, so we had to go outside for that.

Mari-Ann: [35:32] Mm hm.

Edith: [35:35] But other than that, we lived through it.

Abby: [35:41] And could you talk a bit about why you decided to come to the U.S.?

Edith: [35:47] Well, the only reason I came here was because of my uncle that asked us if we wanted to come here, and that was... you know. So how did you happen to come?

Mari-Ann: [36:05] I came to study.

Edith: [36:07] Oh.

Mari-Ann: [36:08] Yeah. And ended up staying.

Edith: [36:11] Oh.

Mari-Ann: [36:12] So, when you came, did you intend to just visit, or did you come with the intention of immigrating?

Edith: [36:20] No, we, you know, came just to stay maybe five years. You know, that's what we thought we would stay... five years, and go back. We got our immigration, you know, so we were able to stay. So, when you meet your spouses, you... [Laughter] ... sort of have to stay, I guess. Get married and have kids; that's what happens.

Mari-Ann: [37:01] Good.

Abby: [37:03] Do you have any other stories or things that you'd like to tell us?

Edith: [37:06] I can't think of anything. I can't think of too many other things. I did... I don't know... I had my daughter write it on her computer... I don't know if you're interested in reading this?

Abby: [37:22] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [37:23] Oh, yes.

Abby: [37:24] Yeah, we'll put it... we'll make a file and put it in your file.

Mari-Ann: [37:29] And is this a copy of a photograph?

Edith: [37:32] Yeah, uh huh. I have another copy.

Mari-Ann: [37:36] May we keep this?

Edith: [37:37] Sure. Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [37:38] That would be very, very good.

Abby: [37:39] We'll also put that in your file; that'd be great.

Mari-Ann: [37:42] Yes, that's great. Good.

Edith: [37:44] That's interesting that you're that interested in it.

Mari-Ann: [37:47] Yeah. I'll show you on the map where my... My home is... here is Harstad, which is the bigger town, and then right across the island there is my village. It's so little it isn't even listed on the map.

Edith: [38:12] Well, I think we might have stopped there when we went up to the Norcap.

Mari-Ann: [38:19] Oh, did you go to Norcap?

Edith: [38:20] On the cruise.

Mari-Ann: [38:22] Yeah. It usually stops. You stop definitely in Tromsø, I'm sure.

Edith: [38:27] Oh yeah, yeah, we did.

Mari-Ann: [38:29] And probably also in Norcap.

Edith: [38:30] Yeah. I remember stopping there. In Trondheim we stopped. And... Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [38:39] Bergen, probably also,

Edith: [38:40] Yes, uh huh.

Mari-Ann: [38:45] Well, are you a member of the Nordic Heritage Museum?

Edith: [38:49] I was. For quite a few years. But we didn't keep up with our membership.

Mari-Ann: [38:58] Okay. Well, I would like to present you with a little packet, with some passes to the museum and a little bit of a brochure.

Edith: [39:09] Oh, thank you.

Mari-Ann: [39:11] And we are in a very exciting period with the Nordic Heritage Museum right now.

Edith: [39:16] Yeah. When are you rebuilding?

Mari-Ann: [39:18] Well, we are in the capital campaign phase now. We have purchased the property on Market Street between 26th and 28th. And the target date for breaking ground is next year. So, we hope that everyone that is interested will help us get to that point. But anyway, do come and visit the museum, and in the meantime, thank you very much for giving us your story.

Abby: [39:50] Yeah, thank you so much.

Edith: [39:53] I want to show you... I'm a member... I've got my name on the thing down in the...

Mari-Ann: [40:05] On the runestone...

Edith: [40:06] Yes.

Mari-Ann: [40:07] ... at Shilshole Bay?

Edith: [40:08] Yes.

Abby: [40:08] Oh, cool.

Edith: [40:12] Yeah. I've got so much stuff here... I had it here.

END OF RECORDING.

Transcription by Alison Goetz.