

Nordic American Voices
Nordic Heritage Museum

Interview of Elisabeth Bodal
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Seattle, Washington

Interviewers: Gary London; Saundra Magnussen Martin

Saundra Magnussen Martin: [0:01] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices oral history project. Today is January 23, 2016, and I'll be interviewing Elisabeth Bodal. We are at the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle, Washington. My name is Saundra Magnussen Martin. My co-interviewer is Gary London. Elisabeth, would you start out by telling us your full name, your birthdate, and where you were born?

Elisabeth Bodal: [0:34] My name is Elisabeth Bodal, and I was born April 30, 1955. A long time ago. [Laughter] I was born in Svolvær, Lofoten, Norway.

Saundra: [0:54] And where is that located in Norway?

Elisabeth: [0:56] It's right north of the Arctic Circle. There is a chain of islands jutting off the coast there. And I'm from the first island of Lofoten, and the biggest place up there, which has all of 5,000 people in my hometown. It was a very good place to grow up. A really nice childhood. I was born ten years after the war. It was a really safe, and good, and a sheltered place to grow up, on a small island. My mom was from there, and my dad was from there, and my grandparents.

Saundra: [1:51] What are your parents' names?

Elisabeth: [1:52] My mom's name is Aud, and she was from the next island over, called Vestvågøy. And my dad was from the same island where I was born and raised. His name was Arne. Unfortunately, my dad passed away 30 years ago. My mom is still here. I just talked to her this morning. She's good.

Saundra: [2:21] Do you know how they met, since they are from different islands?

Elisabeth: [2:25] Yeah, she came to my dad's hometown for work. Then, obviously he was there, and they met, and then they got married, and then I came along, and then I have two younger brothers. They still live on the island.

Saundra: [2:46] What did your father do for a living?

Elisabeth: [2:48] He worked for [inaudible 2:51]. He worked for the government. The Civil Defense system. So, he was in charge of that whole region up there for the Civil Defense, which was in a time when we always talked about the Russians were going to come and get us. So therefore, we had a telephone in our house, because of his job. Not everybody had that, even at that time in

Norway.

Saundra: [3:28] So, that was very special.

Elisabeth: [3:30] At the time it was, yes.

Saundra: [3:34] Did your parents ever tell you children stories about what it was like during the war there?

Elisabeth: [3:43] Yes. My mom comes from the other island, which is a big farming community, and she said they really didn't notice so much, because they had food, and everything. My dad came from Kabelvåg, which is the town over from where I grew up. And there were lots of Germans, and they had lots of barracks, and places. And they had forts, and they blasted into the mountains. So, as children, we would play in those. In the mountain, we would walk in those dark hallways and get up to where they would shoot, you know. It was very exciting for us. Now they've closed them all off, pretty much, because they're falling, disintegrating.

Gary: [4:54] Did you hear stories of the Resistance?

Elisabeth: [4:57] No, not so much. My dad just told me he was a little prankster, and how they tricked the Germans, and played pranks, and stuff. That's pretty much... But I have a very good friend up in Svolvær. His name is William. He started collecting World War Two stuff. It was a hobby, and then it just grew and grew and grew, and he opened a museum in Svolvær. I could be wrong, but I would say it is the biggest World War Two museum in Scandinavia. He opened the museum, but now the government took over and they're running it. It's quite impressive. He is full of stories. He gave me a private tour when I was there in September. It's amazing.

Saundra: [6:03] That sounds fascinating.

Elisabeth: [6:05] Yes.

Saundra: [6:06] So, your grandparents lived on the same island, right?

Elisabeth: [6:09] Yes.

Saundra: [6:09] So, you grew up with close contact with your grandparents?

Elisabeth: [6:14] Yeah. I spent a lot of time with my dad's parents.

Saundra: [6:18] And what were their names?

Elisabeth: [6:20] Øyvind and Tyra. They were nice people.

Gary: [6:26] Farmers?

Elisabeth: [6:27] Pardon?

Gary: [6:28] Were they farmers?

Elisabeth: [6:29] No, basically my grandfather came from a family of teachers, but he was... What do you call it? He was in charge of the liquor store up there. [Inaudible 6:48], they called it. They only had one for the whole region there. So, he would ship wine with the bus to people. That's what he did.

Saundra: [7:03] So, since your maternal grandparents lived on another island, did you see much of them?

Elisabeth: [7:09] Yeah, we'd go there. We'd take the bus out there and go for a vacation. At the time, the bus— it was a journey of four hours or more. We had to take a ferry. It was just gravel roads. I'm dating myself. [Laughter] Gravel roads with one lane each way. But that's what it was. Today, I think you can drive out there in half an hour.

Saundra: [7:41] But it sounds like an ideal childhood.

Elisabeth: [7:44] It was good. Yeah. It was good.

Gary: [7:48] Did we get their names?

Elisabeth: [7:51] Oh, Ellen and Anton.

Saundra: [7:53] Can you tell us a little about your education on the island?

Elisabeth: [7:59] Yeah. I went to a seven-year grade school, and then you graduated, and I went on to what they called [inaudible 8:09] at the time. It was like high school, but it was optional. You didn't have to go, but I did, because I did good in school, and I liked it.

Gary: [8:27] Did you have to leave home to go to high school, or—

Elisabeth: [8:29] No.

Gary: [8:29] —was it located in the same community?

Elisabeth: [8:31] I did not, but one of my very best that I'm still super close to— she still lives up on the island of Skrova, right outside. It's half an hour by ferry outside of my hometown. She came to my hometown when she was 14 to go to high school. That's where we met, the first day of that high school.

Saundra: [8:58] So, children that came in to go to high schools from other areas— was there a boarding house?

Elisabeth: [9:04] No.

Saundra: [9:05] Where did they put them?

Elisabeth: [9:05] They rented a room from various people. People rented out rooms. I remember her first *hybel*, we called it, it was just a room with a bed, two chairs, and a table, and one burner, where you could cook a little something. Then they would go to a café for dinners.

Gary: [9:40] She became a close friend of yours.

Elisabeth: [9:42] Yes. And she still is.

Gary: [9:47] And you visit her when you're in Norway.

Elisabeth: [9:49] Mm-hmm.

Saundra: [9:57] Was your family active in the church there?

Elisabeth: [10:03] No.

Saundra: [10:04] What were some of the extracurricular activities you enjoyed outside of school?

Elisabeth: [10:11] We would go... We just played outside a lot. We would ski a lot.

Saundra: [10:21] Cross-country skiing?

Elisabeth: [10:23] Mm-hmm. Mostly. And some downhill as well.

Saundra: [10:28] So, what inspired you to decide to come to the United States?

Elisabeth: [10:38] Can you turn it off for a little bit?

[TAPE BREAK]

Saundra: [10:48] I asked what inspired you to decide to come to the United States, to leave your family and your home?

Elisabeth: [10:58] Yes. I left my hometown to go to Oslo, because there was no work. I went to school in my hometown to become a secretary. It was just a year thing. But there was really no work to get up there, and a lot of my friends moved to Oslo, so I moved to Oslo, too, with some friends, and got a job there.

Saundra: [11:33] That sounds like an adventure for you young ladies to move to the big city.

Elisabeth: [11:40] Yes, it was.

Saundra: [11:41] What year was this? Do you recall?

Elisabeth: [11:44] I was 19.

Saundra: [11:46] And how did your parents feel about you leaving?

Elisabeth: [11:51] I don't know.

Saundra: [11:52] They were okay?

Elisabeth: [11:53] They were okay. It's what a lot of people did, young people, because there wasn't much work up there. So, if you're going to... You know, it was basically...

Gary: [12:06] Did you have brothers and sisters at home?

Elisabeth: [12:07] Two brothers.

Gary: [12:08] Two brothers.

Elisabeth: [12:08] Younger ones. And they still live in my hometown. When I was 16, I met my [husband-to-be]. I didn't know at the time, but he was there. His family was from one of the islands up there. He was there for vacation. I was 16; he was 18. Anyway, it was just a little summer thing. Then he went back home, because he was still in school, and I was in school. Then when I was 19 and I moved to Oslo, and we re-met. Then we moved in together after a while. Then we decided to marry.

Saundra: [13:02] What is his name?

Elisabeth: [13:05] His name is Bernt Bodal.

Saundra: [13:08] And was he from Oslo, or he was going to school in Oslo?

Elisabeth: [13:11] He was from Oslo.

Saundra: [13:13] So, the family was there.

Elisabeth: [13:13] The family was there. But his mom was from Lofoten, so that's why he had relatives up there, and he was visiting that summer when I was 16. But then he had family that had immigrated to America, to Seattle. He had uncles that came in the late 1940s and 1950s. His mom came, and his brother, and then we came last. We decided we were just going to do this for a year. Let's just try it. Then we got married, because I couldn't go unless we were married.

[14:00] So, we got married in July 1978 in my hometown at my church up on the hill. Then we packed our stuff and went to America, to Seattle, a month later. We didn't have any money. All we had was a big crate with all our wedding presents. [Laughter] We shipped that off, and we borrowed a thousand dollars from one of his relatives so that we would have a little money when we came.

Saundra: [14:47] Did both of you speak English at this time?

Elisabeth: [14:50] No. [Laughter] A little bit. Well, we had English in school, but it's totally different to sit and study at the desk than to come to a country and have to speak it. So, we came, and I pretty much understood everything, but I didn't want to say much, because I was afraid of

saying anything wrong, not saying the right thing.

[15:22] Then I think I had been here for like three weeks, and we met some people from my area that lived over in Poulsbo. I know it's bad to say this, but they had been here for like 30 or 40 years, and they couldn't speak Norwegian anymore, and they really couldn't speak English. [Laughter] It was sort of a mix. I remember I was listening to them, and then I thought, "If they can get by, I don't think I'm going to worry about it." So then I just let it go and started speaking.

[16:04] But I found also that Americans are very, very open and welcoming people. That's something I really liked from the get-go. [They are] including. I found also found that If I didn't know what to say, or if I didn't know the word, they were always very helpful, and helped me along, and tried to understand.

Saundra: [16:33] Well, that's so nice to hear.

Elisabeth: [16:35] Most people. There were a few that... Every now and then, it was like, "I don't understand you." But I decided those people aren't worth spending time with anyway.

Saundra: [16:45] So, what did you do when you came to... Did you come to Seattle?

Elisabeth: [16:49] Yeah. We came to Ballard. We came to North Beach and Ballard, and stayed there, and then he had a relative that had a fishing boat, that fished off the coast. He'd go to Neah Bay, and he fished off the coast. Sometimes they would deliver in Westport or Bellingham. So, he got a job there.

Saundra: [17:17] And you stayed in Seattle.

Elisabeth: [17:17] Yeah. But he was only going to do that for a little bit to make some money so he could get started. Really, what he did in Norway was he worked for a company that made amplifiers and speakers and mixing boards, and stuff like that. And he played in a band. He didn't make any money, but that's okay. It was his hobby. So he was going to do more of that. But you know, he started fishing, and money was good, and one thing led to another. He went up to Alaska.

[18:01] And then we had Thomas, our first one. I got pregnant right away after we got married. We had Thomas, and we came in 1978, and we had Thomas in April of 1979. By then he was fishing up in Alaska. Then he started fishing in crab boats and such. It was like the tail end of that big crab boom. He did that for a little bit. I stayed home and held down the fort. I took care of the kids and the bills and the yard and the house, and everything else.

Gary: [18:54] You said you expected to be here only a year?

Elisabeth: [18:57] Yes.

Gary: [18:58] Did there come a time where you decided you were going to stay, or did one year just sort of fold into another?

Elisabeth: [19:07] Sort of like that, yeah. I think really early on we really liked living here— kind of,

this is nice; we like it.

Gary: [19:24] Now, you said other family had migrated here— members of his family?

Elisabeth: [19:29] Yes.

Gary: [19:30] Were they in Seattle?

Elisabeth: [19:30] Yeah.

Gary: [19:31] So, you had a support network here of family members.

Elisabeth: [19:38] Yeah. And he started fishing, and then they started fishing pollock up in Alaska for the Japanese. By then we had two kids. Our daughter Ellen was born in 1981. He was gone a lot. I remember he would leave right after New Year's and be gone for three months.

Saundra: [20:15] That's hard when you have young children.

Elisabeth: [20:17] Yes. That's when I entertained the idea of moving back. Because it was lonely.

Saundra: [20:28] And when you're at home with children, you're not able to get out and meet people.

Elisabeth: [20:33] Right. But basically, there were a lot of other Norwegians in the same situation, so we kind of supported each other.

Saundra: [20:44] That's wonderful.

Elisabeth: [20:45] Because we were all in the same boat, so to speak.

Saundra: [20:48] And how did you meet people, this Norwegian group?

Elisabeth: [20:51] I just met them, because you know, it's like...

Saundra: [20:55] Were their husbands fishermen also?

Elisabeth: [20:57] Yes.

Saundra: [20:58] So, you had a support network with the wives.

Elisabeth: [21:01] Yes. That's right. And then they started fishing pollock. That was in the summer, too. I remember some summers when the kids were young, he was gone all summer. One summer, I took the kids and went to Norway and went to Lofoten for two months, because I didn't want to be alone all summer again. But it rained the whole time, so that was that. [Laughter]

Saundra: [21:40] How nice for your children, though, to get to know their grandparents.

Elisabeth: [21:44] Yes. And they really appreciate Norway and Norwegian culture. But we can talk about that later. Anyway, then we got an opportunity to buy into Aleutian Spray fishery. He became a captain after a while. Then we got to buy into the company a little bit. He did that for a while, and then American Seafoods... We made friends with Kjell Inge Røkke, who started American Seafoods at the time— he and his then-wife Kari, and we became friends. We got the opportunity to buy into that company. That's when he stopped fishing in Alaska. That was in 1991, I believe.

[22:44] Then he didn't go on the boats anymore. He would go to the office and run the company, the business part of it, and that kind of thing. By then, Kjell Inge had started investing in other things, and focused on Norway and spent a lot of time in Norway, where he eventually moved back. Then Bernt would run the company. Then they expanded. That's when we started to expand, big time, buying up other people's factory trawlers.

[23:27] It went really fast. Everything went fast. By then we had Alex. He was born in 1989, the youngest one. So, we had three kids. I don't know how I did it, but we did. I would go with him on business trips a lot, especially when he would meet bankers to get the loans and such. Then we started hosting business dinners at home. That was a whole new ballgame, but it was fun. I enjoyed it.

Saundra: [24:15] You like entertaining?

Elisabeth: [24:16] I do. I still do. I like to entertain. We would entertain business and bank people. We would go on business trips, and I would go with him on a lot of these trips. Even if it wasn't a business trip, if it was a so-called vacation, there was always an agenda, and always an underlying business purpose. But that's okay. I knew. And it got us places.

Saundra: [24:55] Well, sometimes that's how you become successful.

Elisabeth: [24:57] That's how you become a success. I would say pretty much, we lived the American dream.

Saundra: [25:04] It sounds like it. So, did your children— did you teach them to speak Norwegian at home?

Elisabeth: [25:14] Yes, because being that we were both Norwegian, we spoke it amongst us, you know, unless there were Americans present. Yeah, they understand everything. The boys speak [Norwegian] only if they have to. They can get by. Our daughter speaks it fluently, pretty much.

Saundra: [25:49] Wonderful.

Gary: [25:50] How do you account for the difference between your boys and your daughter in terms of their level of fluency?

Elisabeth: [25:57] I don't know why that is. She just kind of— she speaks my dialect from up north. Because [my husband] and I have very different dialects, being that he grew up outside of Oslo. Well, he was gone a lot, you know. He was not there very much, which was maybe okay, in retrospect.

Saundra: [26:30] So, once the children were in school, what did you do with your extra time? What did you enjoy doing?

Elisabeth: [26:38] I had enough taking care of everything. I was more or less... I was alone most of the time, so I took care of— I cut the grass, I did the gardening, I cooked, I took care of the kids, the bills, everything else. I was a little social. Then I liked to exercise for my own enjoyment. And ski. Yeah. But there wasn't so much time for me in those days. Then when we started expanding the business, it took a lot of my part, too, which I didn't mind. I enjoyed it. It was interesting. But maybe too interesting at times. That's okay.

Gary: [27:40] Too interesting?

Elisabeth: [27:41] I don't know. It was just busy. But that's okay.

Saundra: [27:47] So, what kinds of customs did you bring into your home from Norway for your children?

Elisabeth: [27:55] Yeah... I have to say, I have a little granddaughter. She's two, and she spent the night with me last night, and I'm teaching her a little Norwegian.

Saundra: [28:09] Oh, that's great.

Elisabeth: [28:10] She can say a few words, and she can count to ten. I think it's important to teach the next generation.

Saundra: [28:20] Yes. To value their heritage.

Elisabeth: [28:23] Yes, to value. And I have to say, when the kids were little, growing up, you don't know if they value it, or if... You know. But as they got older, it's very important, and they're very proud of being Norwegian. And they really like some of the food and the customs. Like Christmas, for instance, I do it very much in the traditional Norwegian way.

Gary: [28:57] Can you describe that for us?

Elisabeth: [28:59] Yeah. We celebrate Christmas Eve, like they do in Scandinavia. That's the big evening. And we dress up. They dress up nicely. We make a really good, big meal for my family. It consists of *ribbe*, which is pork with a rind on. And I make sauerkraut, and sausage, and meatballs, and then we have rice pudding with [inaudible 29:38]. And then we make some Norwegian cookies. Every year with my daughter now, we make krumkake and lefse. We make lefse for Christmas.

[29:57] Then we have a nice dinner, and then we always have the almond that we put in the rice pudding. Whoever gets the almond gets a marzipan pig. Just silly little things, but it's important. Then we play some Norwegian Christmas songs, like [inaudible 30:22]. Just, I guess, it reminds me of my childhood. They seem to appreciate it.

Saundra: [30:33] What happens on Christmas Day?

Elisabeth: [30:36] Then we have a big breakfast, like a Norwegian, Scandinavian smorgasbord with hot chocolate and rye bread and smoked salmon, pickled herring, that kind of stuff. Brunost.

Gary: [30:54] I noticed you didn't mention lutefisk.

Elisabeth: [30:57] Oh, I eat lutefisk. [Laughter] I love it. My kids, not so, except my oldest one, Thomas, he's a chef. And he loves some of the Norwegian traditional dishes, and he likes lutefisk now. He can make a lutefisk meal pretty good with all the fixings. So, that's good.

Gary: [31:25] So, if one were to go into your home, would one notice that it's Norwegian? What signs would there be?

Elisabeth: [31:37] My home is not so particularly Norwegian. But I have knickknacks... I guess, yeah.

Gary: [31:53] Did you and the children frequently go to Norway when they were growing up?

Elisabeth: [31:58] Yes, we did. We'd go to Norway quite a bit. Not every year, but we did go a lot.

Gary: [32:09] To your hometown, primarily?

Elisabeth: [32:10] Yes, primarily, and then we would go to Oslo, too, because he had relatives in Oslo, and we had friends. But for the most part, we spent it up north.

Gary: [32:21] What did the children like to do when they were in Norway?

Elisabeth: [32:24] Fish. Just play outside. I remember when they were little, younger... There is kind of a difference between here and Norway, because I grew up in such a small community. We would just go out the front door in the morning and come home for dinner, and nobody worried about it. That's just what we did. And we would just meet other kids. Whereas over here, when they grew up, I had to arrange all the play dates, which was a new thing for me. But it is what it is.

[33:18] We came to Norway, and I remember we were going to go to the little candy store called [inaudible 33:26]. Thomas said, "Okay, Mama, are you ready?" And I said, "No, you can just go." And he looked at me like... "I can just go?" I go, "Yeah, it's okay. You can just go." And they were so happy. You could tell. The freedom that you just unfortunately couldn't do here at a young age, anyway. So, that was a difference.

Gary: [33:58] It felt a lot safer there.

Elisabeth: [34:00] Yeah.

Sandra: [34:02] Did your parents ever have an opportunity to come here and visit?

Elisabeth: [34:06] Yes, they came. My mom has been here I'm sure 20 times.

Saundra: [34:11] That's wonderful.

Elisabeth: [34:12] She came last year for Christmas. She has turned 80. And she just traveled all by herself, and spent Christmas with us. My dad was only here once, because he passed away at the young age of 56 of a heart attack. So, he was only here once. And he liked it, too. But he was funny. He was of that generation in Norway of meat and potato. So, he thought the food was a little odd. We at salad, and he goes, "Salad is okay, but I don't need to eat a whole bowl of salad, all the green stuff they feed rabbits." It was just different. But he liked it.

Saundra: [35:04] So, you said your children enjoyed fishing when they were in Norway. Did they ever fish here with their dad, or was he sort of out of the fishing part of the business by the time they were old enough?

Elisabeth: [35:15] Yeah, he was out of the fishing. He was more running the business. No, they didn't fish with him. They never went to Alaska.

Saundra: [35:29] You said that the children had so much more freedom in Norway in a smaller community. When you were living here, did they take the bus to school? Children don't seem to walk to school anymore.

Elisabeth: [35:47] No, they don't. Fortunately, we lived pretty close to the grade school at the time, so they would walk. They would just walk together and with the neighbor kids. But then we moved later, so it was a little further. We had to walk through the woods, and then I would walk them to school and pick them up. When they got older and started high school, obviously they took the bus. But grade school, I would walk them to school.

Saundra: [36:22] Where were you living, and what high school did they go to?

Elisabeth: [36:25] We lived out in Shoreline, because a lot of Norwegians lived in Ballard, the older generation. And the younger ones had moved out to Richmond Beach and Innis Arden and that area, and Edmonds. So, we lived in Shoreline and Richmond Beach, and then Innis Arden. They went to Shoreline School District, Shorewood High School. Except when Alex started high school, he went to Seattle Prep, and I would drive him and pick him up until he got his license, which I didn't mind. It was a long drive, but it was a good school.

Saundra: [37:12] Very good school.

Gary: [37:12] What are the children doing now?

Elisabeth: [37:15] My oldest one, Thomas, lives in Ballard. He has a house up by Swanson's Nursery and that area. He's a chef, and he works in catering, mainly. And our daughter works for Amazon in HR. She hires people for Amazon. She's married and we have a little grandchild, and another one in five weeks.

Saundra: [37:51] Oh, exciting.

Elisabeth: [37:53] Yeah. They live on Queen Anne, and that's where I live, too, now. When I

decided to leave my marriage, I didn't want to live out in suburbia by myself. When Alex went to college, I just decided to move back into the city. I didn't want to be one of those people. I didn't want to live on acres by myself. No. So, anyway, they live on Queen Anne, too, so I'm pretty fortunate in that respect.

[38:42] And Alex, the youngest one, lives in Los Angeles, and he is now doing Berklee School of Music, the online program, and he is graduating this year. He wants to be in the music industry, not playing, but more in the production management, business side of it.

Gary: [39:10] Was he part of a band growing up?

Elisabeth: [39:14] No, but he took piano lessons. He just likes music.

Sandra: [39:19] I was actually going to ask you about the children and their musicality, since their father was interested in music and in a band. It sounds like one of the kids got that from his dad.

Elisabeth: [39:33] Yes.

Gary: [39:36] Was your husband able to pursue his musical interest to any extent once you came here?

Elisabeth: [39:43] No... Later, after I left, so to speak. Then he became a wannabe rock star.
[Laughter]

Sandra: [39:57] Are you musical at all?

Elisabeth: [40:01] No. Back to that question—yeah, when we had built up the business and he had some extra money, then he started playing.

Gary: [40:24] So, what do you miss most about Norway?

Elisabeth: [40:29] The people. Relatives and friends. But I remember in the first years when we came, and he was gone, and I was alone with little kids, I remember I was so homesick, and felt lonely. I wanted to move back. But then there was a part of me— no, I don't want to move back, because I like this country.

[41:00] And I like people in this country, because they're so friendly. Easy. But I miss my family and friends. But when you think about it, I was pretty lucky, because you can go on an airplane and go and visit. Think about 100 years ago, or so— you left, and, well, you left. I don't know about that. But you do what you have to do, you know.

Gary: [41:38] Do you ever entertain the idea of moving back now?

Elisabeth: [41:41] No.

Gary: [41:43] Of course, you have your children and grandchildren.

Elisabeth: [41:45] Yeah. I have my life here. I like to visit. Again, I'm fortunate I can go whenever I feel like it. I'm lucky that way. But no, I go, and I'm there for a couple weeks, or three, and then I'm good. I'm good. I eat all the dishes that I crave, including pan-fried fish tongues. Yeah, that's a must when I go back. Up in Lofoten, that is. I know it sounds gross to other people.

Saundra: [42:28] I didn't know fish had tongues.

Elisabeth: [42:30] Oh, yeah, they do. The big codfish. You know, where I'm from, it's a fishing community. The cod come in from up north to spawn in January, February, and March. So, that's what everything is built upon on those islands. Those codfish are huge in the wintertime when they're ready to spawn. They're big. They have big tongues, and they're good pan-fried. Anyway, I just crave certain dishes. Mostly seafood. I get those. I see my friends and family, and hike, and fish. And I'm good to go back. Then when I come back to America, I'm happy I live here. I feel at home.

[43:30] But there were many, many years—I should add this. There were many years where I felt I didn't belong anywhere. And I have talked to other people that immigrated who feel the same way. Because after a few years, you go home and visit, and you really don't belong there because you've changed, I guess, and get accustomed to other things.

[44:09] But then I really didn't belong in America, either, because I don't know everything. I didn't go to high school here. I didn't go to prom. I didn't even know what prom was when I came. You know, stuff like that, just growing up there, I didn't have that history. I felt different, I guess you could say. It's not a bad thing. I felt like I was in between, but I don't feel like that anymore. No. I feel at home here, but I also feel at home when I go back there. And that's a nice thing to have.

Gary: [44:53] Absolutely.

Saundra: [44:54] Wonderful.

Gary: [44:56] Are you involved in any ethnic organizations here— Sons of Norway, or any of those organizations?

Elisabeth: [45:03] No, I'm not. I just go to Ballard for Syttende Mai. That's about it. [Laughter] I was involved with the Nordic Heritage Museum for a while, and it was nice, but the timing of my life wasn't good. But I've been involved with PNB, Pacific Northwest Ballet, for years.

Gary: [45:27] How did that interest come about?

Elisabeth: [45:29] Well, I just like ballet. I like the music. I like the movement. I like everything. I started going to the ballet, and then I got to know some people. Now we're involved. Yeah.

Gary: [45:46] Did you ever take ballet yourself growing up?

Elisabeth: [45:48] No. I wanted to, but I didn't have the opportunity. There was no such thing.

Gary: [45:54] And your daughter?

Elisabeth: [45:56] She did. She danced at Barclay-Shelton in Edmonds from the age of four until she graduated high school. So, I was happy for her that she had the opportunity to do that. We didn't. There was no such thing.

Saundra: [46:14] So, you said you're involved with the ballet. Do you volunteer?

Elisabeth: [46:19] No, I was on the board for a while. Now I'm just on the advisory board, because I didn't want to do that anymore. I didn't want to have that big of a commitment. I feel like it is time in my life to do whatever it is I want to do.

Saundra: [46:37] Yes. Freedom.

Elisabeth: [46:38] Freedom. I just want to live my life. I just do what I want to, which is a good thing to be able to.

Gary: [46:51] So, at this point, what else do you enjoy doing?

Elisabeth: [46:56] I enjoy traveling. I like to travel to Norway, but I like other places, too. I love Italy. I like outdoorsy things. I like to hike. I like to go to the health club and work out. I like to ski. I was up at Snoqualmie a couple weeks ago and cross-country skied. It was beautiful. Great. I love to cook, and entertain.

Saundra: [47:41] And now you get to enjoy being a grandmother.

Elisabeth: [47:43] Yes. I spend a lot of time on that. [Laughter] I do spend a lot of time on that.

Saundra: [47:47] That's wonderful that your family is close.

Elisabeth: [47:53] It is. Yeah. It's really good. She's pretty cute.

Gary: [47:59] And what do you see ahead?

Elisabeth: [47:41] Ahead? For me? Just a good life. I just enjoy my life. I'm lucky, fortunate to have three good kids, and grandchildren, and good friends. I have enough money so I can travel. We have a pretty comfortable life. I just see good things. I just see I'll keep doing what I'm doing. Life is good.

Gary: [48:37] Do you have any relationship to the business now?

Elisabeth: [48:41] No, I do not. No. He wanted me to stay as a partner, but I opted out. It was better for me. I didn't want to be involved, which has turned out to be a pretty good decision on my behalf. But I sort of knew that. But I do talk to him. He is the father of my children. I mean, I don't have to, but...

Gary: [49:20] And the business, I assume, continues to do well?

Elisabeth: [49:27] Yeah. It is a good business if you run it right.

Gary: [49:33] Yeah. So, you don't miss your involvement in the business?

Elisabeth: [49:38] No. I miss the people. I miss all the good people that worked there that were so dedicated, and worked so hard, and nice people. But I still see a lot of them. I do. So, it's okay. But that was the biggest part when I left. I missed the people. I would go with him to business dinners— anything, on the boats, even. And I found it exciting and fun. But I'm fortunate that I have a pretty nice social life anyway on my own. So, it's okay. It has worked out. And America has been good to us, I have to say. There are a lot of good things about Norway, too, but I wouldn't want to live there.

Gary: [50:39] So, what changes have you observed in Norway over the years since you left?

Elisabeth: [50:48] They have become more Americanized.

Gary: [50:52] In what respect?

Elisabeth: [50:53] In every respect. They always criticize America. They go, “[inaudible 51:00] It's America.” And then they do the same thing. They even have Halloween now. They never had Halloween before. I hadn't even heard about Halloween when I came here. And they have lots of things American, which is okay, but in a way— even the language has changed a bit.

[51:29] Because when I read Norwegian papers, or magazines, or books or watch TV, I go, this is an American word and they give a Norwegian ending to it. Words that didn't exist. It's not a Norwegian word. And I don't especially like that, because I think it's better if Norway could be Norway. America is great, and America is America, but I think Norway should just— I don't want them to lose their ethnicity, if you know what I mean. And I see that they're doing that somewhat.

Saundra: [52:18] Is part of that the influx of immigrants from other countries coming into Norway?

Elisabeth: [52:23] That too, I would think. Yes.

Gary: [52:27] So, that is certainly one major change in Norway since you left. Much more diverse country now.

Elisabeth: [52:35] Yes. And that's okay. But with Norway, it doesn't work as well as it does in America. Because in America, everybody came from somewhere, and we're very accepting of each other, because we all came from somewhere. Well, you guys were born here, but still, your heritage is from elsewhere. There are a Native Americans...

Gary: [53:13] Indigenous people.

Elisabeth: [53:17] Yeah. But in Norway, there were only Norwegian people. When I grew up, there were no people of color in my region. I was seven years old when we went to Oslo on a summer vacation, and it was the first time I had seen a black person. I was seven. And the first Pakistani guy came up to my hometown... I think I was still living there. The late seventies? I don't know.

[53:54] And that was okay. He was a nice guy. Everybody liked him, and he worked hard. Then they kept coming, and then it was not so cool anymore for Norwegians. I don't think they're so accepting. They criticize America for the way we treated the black people, but they are not much better when it comes to people of color. When they move into their own backyard, they are not so accepting anymore, I don't think.

Gary: [54:33] So, even in your relatively small town, region, there are now a number of immigrants who have moved in?

Elisabeth: [54:40] Yes.

Gary: [54:41] Primarily—

Elisabeth: [54:43] Primarily Pakistanis, and I think now from Africa. There are a lot from Africa. They are nice people. They just want to do well in life. They want the same thing we do. But I wouldn't want to be an immigrant in Norway. No. I don't think that's easy.

Gary: [55:12] Do you think your attitude towards migrants, and more specifically, immigrants, to Norway is influenced by the fact that you were an immigrant yourself?

Elisabeth: [55:26] Maybe. Probably.

Gary: [55:28] Yeah.

Elisabeth: [55:29] Yes.

Gary: [55:31] You said you read the Norwegian newspapers and kept up with news in Norway?

Elisabeth: [55:38] Yeah, somewhat, to a certain extent. For years, like I said, I felt in between, like I didn't belong here or there. So, I tried to read the Seattle Times and keep up on stuff in this country, and then I tried to that with Norway as well. But I found that after a while, I was like, you know what? This is where I live. This is my life, my home. I'm going to just focus more on this. It's more important. And then I just get tidbits from Norway. I can't keep up with daily life over in Norway. It just didn't work.

[56:25] So, I just get the basic. I keep up a little on politics and the important stuff. But I don't know who the TV personalities are anymore, or celebrities. And it doesn't matter to me. But I like to watch TV in Norway when I'm there. I really enjoy watching Norwegian TV, because they have very good programs. They have some very nice nature and history that I enjoy. Really educational and interesting shows.

Gary: [57:11] What was your response to the Breivik massacre?

Elisabeth: [57:18] It was a terrible thing. It's not the right way of handling it, but there are some underlying issues that I think they need to address or should have addressed before this happened, which he took upon himself to do in a matter that nobody should ever even think about. So, it's very, very sad.

Gary: [57:53] And very, very unusual for a place like Norway.

Elisabeth: [57:58] Very unusual for Norway, which is such a peaceful country. They may fight on Saturday nights when they go to the dance and get smashed, but basically as a whole, the people are peaceful.

Gary: [58:16] Yeah.

Saundra: [58:18] So, do you see any changes that they have made in response to that shooting, as far as discussing the population, discussing the issues, or trying to...

Elisabeth: [58:39] I'm not sure. I don't know.

Gary: [58:47] What makes you most proud to be Norwegian?

Elisabeth: [58:58] I just am. For a lot of reasons. I'm just proud to be... It's a beautiful country. Beautiful scenery. People are nice. Friendly, mostly. They're a little more reserved than we are in this country, but when you get to know them, they're nice people. Most people are nice, anyway. But just growing up there—I'm happy I grew up there. It was a good place to grow up. And the heritage, and the food. Just the whole culture.

Gary: [59:59] What kind of image do you think Americans have of Norway?

Elisabeth: [1:00:04] A pretty good one, I think. Because I remember the first years I was here, and people... I thought this was so cool, and I thought, oh, I like it, because they would say, "Where are you from?" I'd go, "I'm from Norway." "Oh, my great-grandma came from Norway." Or, "My great-great-grandfather [came from Norway] and I always wanted to go." And I thought, "Oh, my God, this is so exciting." It still is, but it's like... pretty good. I think they view Norway as a peaceful, nice, country. Everyone there has pretty nice lives. It's very expensive to go there, to live there, but they all have pretty good lives. They do.

Gary: [1:00:54] Do you think Americans have some misconceptions of Norway, or do you think their perception is pretty accurate?

Elisabeth: [1:01:03] I think the perception is pretty accurate, it seems to me. Yeah.

Saundra: [1:01:19] Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you would like to add to your interview?

Elisabeth: [1:01:26] No, I think that pretty much covers it.

Saundra: [1:01:30] Well, we really appreciate you coming in today and sharing your story with us.

Gary: [1:01:35] Anything you expected to be asked that you weren't asked?

Elisabeth: [1:01:39] No.

Gary: [1:01:47] Yes, thank you very much.

Saundra: [1:01:50] We really appreciate you coming in sharing your story with us today.

Elisabeth: [1:01:53] Yeah. It was fun. I hope I did okay. I hope I covered most of—

Saundra: [1:01:57] Everybody does okay. Anything is okay. We just want to hear your experiences.

Elisabeth: [1:02:03] Yeah. My experience as an immigrant to America has been really good.

Gary: [1:02:11] Yeah.

Elisabeth: [1:02:12] Yeah.

END OF RECORDING.

Transcription by Alison DeRiemer.