

Nordic American Voices  
National Nordic Museum

Interview of Gale Roo  
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Interviewers: Robin Knudson; Affa Sigurdardottir; Gordon Strand

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**Robin Knudson:** [0:02] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices oral history project. Today is January 18, 2020, and I'll be interviewing Gale Roo. We are at the National Nordic Museum in Seattle. My name is Robin Knudson, and this is Affa Sigurdardottir. So, if you would like to introduce yourself, and just tell us what you'd like to tell us, that would be wonderful.

**Gale Roo:** [0:35] My name is Gale Roo. I was born in 1947, the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, in Ballard. I lived at 3242 NW 65<sup>th</sup> Street. The house is still there. I moved ten blocks north. My parents lived on the north side of the street, and I got a house on the south side of 75<sup>th</sup>. They were very nice to me. They wanted me to get enough money to put a down payment on a house, because they wanted me to be stable. I was saving my money and saving my money even after I'd graduated from Pacific Lutheran. They wanted me to work and save the money, so I'd have enough money to buy a house. This was 1972.

[1:44] The people across the street were hermits. It was a mother and son, and the only way you could tell that somebody was home was there was a car in the driveway. We never saw somebody come or go. I saw the mom just a little bit. She would do this in the window. If somebody was looking back... just like that. So, I never really got to see her, but I got to see him sort of at a distance once in a while. Well, the son died. The mom was in a real bind. She doesn't know how to go shopping. She can't drive a car. She's stuck in the house.

[2:37] My parents did the shopping for her, and she must have really liked what my parents were doing, because when her daughter and son-in-law came from Minneapolis came to pick up the mom and take her home with them, they came across the street and said, "Mom would like you to have the house, \$10,000 cash. By the end of the week, go to a lawyer and get the house. We want to go home." They had a week off, because they arrived on Sunday night, which would be traveling distance from Minneapolis, leaving Friday night, and they were going to leave on either Friday or Saturday morning and go home.

[3:30] So, I think the guy had a week off from his job. Well, my parents didn't want the house, but they wanted me to have the house, and I got a house for \$10,000. It had to be cash. Afterwards, I found out that the house was worth somewhere between \$30,000-\$35,000, but the mom wanted to get rid of the house in a hurry. Some of it would have been taken up in real estate fees, but not that much. Maybe the son-in-law had different prices in Minneapolis that he was going by. But anyway, I

got a house, and I felt very good. None of my neighbors that I grew up with had houses. I did.

**Affa:** [4:22] How old were you?

**Gale:** [4:24] 23, I think.

**Robin:** [4:33] That's a great story, considering housing prices.

**Gale:** [4:39] Yeah. People tell me now that they want to loan me money, because my house is worth over \$1,000. I don't need them to loan me money. I'm quite happy. My maternal grandfather was born in 1860.

**Robin:** [5:05] As you go along, could you give us their name?

**Gale:** [5:08] Okay. Cornelius Asbervig. He was son number nine. What are the odds of getting the farm? So, he and two other brothers joined the Merchant Marine. This would have been the Swedish Merchant Marine. They checked out the East Coast, the Gulf Coast, and the West Coast, and they decided that Puget Sound was where they wanted to live, because they had seen the alternatives.

[5:50] My grandfather got land, which is more or less up the hill from Ray's Boathouse, starting at the railroad tracks, going to 32<sup>nd</sup>. One of the brothers got land where Ballard High School is. I don't know what happened to the third brother. The two brothers were gone when I was growing up.

[6:25] My grandfather had a Norwegian wife, which would be logical. But she died with two little girls about this big. This was before there were very many people in Ballard. You just couldn't go across the street and say, "Will you baby-sit my kids while I go to work?" He was in a bind. He got the first female for a wife that he could find that came more or less right off the boat. She was a wonderful grandmother to me, but she was Swedish. [Laughter] There was apparently a serious discussion in the house as to which language they were going to use. They came to a compromise. You can speak Swedish in the kitchen, and Norwegian in the rest of the house.

**Affa:** [7:36] What was her name?

**Gale:** [7:42] Hanna or Johanna. She went by both. She was from Värmland in Sweden. It was really way out in the sticks. It was more than half an hour off the nearest paved road. I think there were five houses in this little community. It was fine, except they couldn't understand my Norwegian, and they had to bring in one of their boys that had worked in Norway to translate Norwegian to Swedish and Swedish to Norwegian, but they wanted to see me. My grandmother died in 1949, quite when, I do not know. I was only two years old. There was this woman sitting in a chair, wearing dark clothes, and that is what I can remember of her.

**Affa:** [9:09] Did she and your grandfather have children together, or was it just the two girls from the first marriage?

**Gale:** [9:17] The two girls, and four more girls that I know of, and one boy.

**Robin:** [9:30] And one of those was your...

**Gale:** [9:32] My mother was the baby of the family. Three girls learned Norwegian. One-- she was a nice aunt, but she was above everyone else: she learned Swedish. My uncle learned how to open the cork on a bottle, and that was... He was a wild character. In a wooden boat, he went out in between Ballard and Magnolia, and dumped gasoline on the water and torched the water. And he was in a wooden boat. That was just one of the things he had done. There were many more. Everybody kept talking about this from different angles. You learn a little bit, and you don't care anymore. I knew what he was like. As long as there was a bottle someplace close, he was happy.

[10:54] My uncle, my mother, and my aunt, all had jobs during the Depression and during the war. My uncle was too young for the First World War, and too old for the Second World War. They saved their money, however much they could save. They built a house and lived there until they all died, which was on 75<sup>th</sup>, between 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup>, on the south end of Sunset Hill Park.

[11:40] My uncle had worked for General Tire during the war and the Depression. They didn't have enough money to pay him in cash. He took stock in General Tire. Come the end of the war, seeing that rubber was rationed, everybody wanted to get tires for their car, or buy new cars if they'd never had one. So, his stock went [way up]. He could not get a loan from a bank, because he was not making enough money. So, he went to Merrill Lynch, and got a loan off his General Tire account, and built a house.

[12:34] They moved to ten blocks north from where I was born in 1951. I don't remember too much of it. I was four at the time. Other than, there was a place to play as the house was being built. I also remember very vividly... Kids do things that are a little bit stupid. Old pickup trucks didn't have the thing in the middle for opening the bed. They had two hooks on the sides. Well, I'm on the inside of the pickup truck, and I opened this side. Nothing happens. Well, gee, let's wait until we open this side. So, I've got this hand on the door, and I pulled the plug, and over I went. And I got pretty... It's slowly gone away, but I had a real good dent up here. You learn not to do anything stupid willingly.

[14:02] Of the old house, I remember there was a big farmhouse kitchen. In the middle of the kitchen floor was a trap door that went down into the fruit closet. As a little kid, going into a dungeon of some sort was heaven. I just waited and waited until they needed some sort of food, and then somebody would take me down into the dungeon. It was... wow.

[14:42] Another thing that I did that was on the stupid line—the front of the house had grass that was about this high above the sidewalk, and it went down on a slant like this. I kept trying to get my tricycle to go down that bank onto the sidewalk, so I could keep going fast. Well, that meant three more dents. Those came along in here.

[15:28] I can remember selling the black car, and helping my uncle wash the car before it was going to be sold. In my mind, I think it was a Chevrolet, but seeing that my uncle only bought Oldsmobiles, maybe it wasn't. But it seemed like it had the right stuff on the front of the car to be a Chevrolet. Also, I was only four years old. The car was one of those things that was interesting and important in life. My mother, my aunt and uncle and I lived on 75<sup>th</sup> between 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup>. It was half

a block to park.

**Robin:** [16:34] Were these siblings of your mother—your aunt and uncle?

**Gale:** [16:38] My mother and my aunt were siblings.

**Robin:** [16:40] Okay. And your aunt had married someone. Was he Scandinavian origin as well?

**Gale:** [16:46] He was called French-Canadian, but he came across the border from Manitoba to Duluth. French-Canadians were not there that much. The French that were there were Métis— "half-breeds." We have a very not-nice way of describing Indians. He was dark-complexioned. He was a very wonderful man.

**Robin:** [17:40] Do you know how he got to Seattle, or how he and your aunt met?

**Gale:** [17:48] His father was strong as an ox, and my uncle was very close to that. They worked as loggers. From the 1910s to the early 1920s, he was courting my aunt. His father came along with him in the cars, because tires weren't that good at the time, and you'd get flats. His father would go out and pick up the car. No jack. He would pick up the car with my aunt in it, and my uncle would change the tire, and then he'd put the car back. They were strong. I knew how strong my uncle was. I could see it. His father had died, but when he said that his father was stronger than he was, and explained this, I knew that he was strong. The cars didn't weigh that much at the time, but they weren't light.

[19:22] I grew up with a neighborhood full of kids. Let's say, the majority of them spoke Norwegian, or their parents yelled at them in Norwegian, and they knew how to respond. It was a fishing community. In the summer, all the dads were in Alaska. In the winter, this is before nylon nets, you had cloth nets. To be with my friends, we were in somebody's basement mending nets. I wasn't that good at it, but I was going to try. I could mend nets when the holes were about that big, and I'd save the big holes for the adults.

[20:27] The men never left the basement, because they could drink beer in the basement, but they couldn't upstairs, with a wife watching. To be a little bit crude, I think it was *forbundet* that they were using in Norwegian. They don't use "goddamn" as a normal word, but maybe because they had been in the United States for a long as they had, they had switched to throwing in English slang. They would tell me to go get "the goddamn hammer," or the "goddamn screwdriver," or goddamn this or that. Okay, that's fine. I thought they were saying, "get me the tool-hammer," or the "screwdriver-tool." I thought it was a tool. It went into my language that I was slowly learning. When I got to Pacific Lutheran, boy did they have a few shocks when they heard my language.

[21:56] My parents used Norwegian as a secret language, or they tried to. But I'd go off on the streets, and everybody yelled at their kids in Norwegian. I learned it in self-defense. Why I got the first name that I got, I don't know. My parents knew better, or they should have. I think it was a last-minute situation. I was supposed to have been a girl, but I wasn't. Either they just picked "Gale, we'll take that one," out of the wind, or they changed the spelling from "Gail," to Gale."

[25:58] When I was five to ten, I was getting my mail as “Miss Gale Roo.” when I graduated from Ballard High School, it was the middle of the Vietnam War, and the Army wanted me to join the WACS. When I went to Pacific Lutheran, they put me in a girls’ dormitory. After PLU, next up the ladder was the University of Oslo. The ceremony is getting in. graduation is not that important. The ceremony is getting in.

[23:39] By this time, I knew what was going to happen to me. I knew when they were getting into the R’s, I’d better get ready, and get into the aisleway. Everybody started to laugh, belly-laugh, I knew they’d called my name. I marched up and the head of the department is in his robes, and he’s got a pillow on his head, and he looks at me, and everybody is still laughing, and he looks at me and says, “Is your name really ‘crazy?’” All you can say is, “ja,” grab the paperwork, and go. You pronounce all the letters in northern Europe, so instead of “Gale,” it’s “Gah-la.” “Bad, crazy, or wrong.”

[24:39] My relatives changed the spelling of my name to G-E-L, so it was “Gale.” Yeah, they looked at my paperwork, and I was “Gah-la.” It didn’t bother me by this time. I knew it was going to happen. One step farther, my daughter wanted to have French girls in the house in the summer so she could learn French better. They all wanted to learn English. Finally, we got this one girl that stayed with us four summers. The other girls looked at my name and had gone “[laughs].”

[25:36] This girl had the courage to say, “In French, your name is a skin disease. I think in English it’s called scabies.” The older you get... I’m willing to say it out loud to anybody, because you could never use that against me. Somebody else, if I didn’t say something, there might be somebody who was Norwegian that could figure out what “Gah-la” meant.

**Robin:** [26:16] How did you get to the University of Oslo?

**Gale:** [26:22] From Pacific Lutheran. They pulled the strings to get me in along with other people.

**Robin:** [26:28] Why did you want to do that?

**Gale:** [26:30] Well, I had an idea of how to speak Norwegian, because I learned it in self-defense from all of the other parents yelling at kids in Norwegian. I figured, why not? I had taken Norwegian at PLU, and I wanted to see if it was going to work. Within reason, it could. I could function on the level of normal people talking. I couldn’t function in, let’s say, a mechanics language. For me, if you opened the hood of the car, what was inside was an engine. I didn’t know any of the other words. If you go into the kitchen, it would be, “What are we having for dinner?” Don’t ask me what this tool and this tool and this tool was. I didn’t learn those.

[27:38] What I did have to learn was a few words that had to do with political science, but that wasn’t too hard, because all of the professors at the University of Oslo at the time had gone to school somewhere outside of Chicago, so they were speaking a lot of English.

[28:04] What I learned from taking the class in politics, a year of it, the world didn’t start in the Atlantic Ocean and end in Vietnam. The world started in the Soviet Union and ended in the United States. Just a different way of looking at things. When I understood that, I could read the

newspapers and understand a little more of what they were saying.

[28:52] I met a guy that I would go skiing with that was in [Norwegian words]. He was going to be a preacher. So, I learned a pretty good chunk of God-talk in Norwegian. We would go skiing to a chapel out in Nordmarka. Because I did not know how to ski uphill, we would get there a little bit late. But they were used to that. They had amps outside so you could hear the sermon outside, because a lot of people came late.

[29:58] One of the most interesting churches that I went to in Norway was north of Oslo, just north of the Nordmarka. I was wanted, because I had wheels. I got a Volvo when I went over, and the other ones didn't. So, if we were going to go someplace, I got to go. We went to church in this town in the north end of Nordmakra. It was little old ladies with one foot in the grave. In walks about 15 Americans with some Norwegians that had brought us. We had three carloads. The priest must have figured, "Gee, I must have finally done something right. Look at all these people finally coming into the church."

[31:27] I was trying to follow the hymns, but they were not in the Roman alphabet. They were in the German alphabet, the alphabet that looks like the Waffen S.S. There were no notes; it was just all this gobbledygook. Some words you could see; some you had no idea what they were. I'm looking around, and it was the pulpit hymn. I'm looking around, and there's no pulpit. There's no priest. This church was built with... What do you call the area that's like this? On the outside of the house, you have two of those that go up?

**Robin:** [32:49] Gables?

**Gale:** [32:50] Gables. This place had three gables, one of which is right where the rail is for communion. Above that is a gable. I'm looking for the priest; where did he go? Did he need to get a glass of water before he started preaching? A window opened up in the gable like a cuckoo clock. You could not go to sleep in this church, because God is looking down on you. [Laughter]

[33:33] After that was communion. The communion chalices were about this big. It was gold-gold and silver-gold. They were not cheap. They had enough for what they thought were going to go to communion. Here's all these kids. I was brought up to go to communion. We keep coming up the aisleway. The priest has long run out of chalices for communion. So, he stopped for just a little bit, and he's trying to think, and then he starts up again. From below the communion rail, you could see what he's doing. It was like we were in a tavern, and they were cleaning.

**Affa:** [34:44] Cleaning the glasses?

**Gale:** [34:46] Yeah. So somebody else could have a beer. I had a good time while I was in Norway.

**Robin:** [34:55] How long were you there?

**Gale:** [34:56] A year with two summers. And I had been there before with the relatives. The first time I was there, I was quite a bit younger. I was with my relatives. They were having a meal before my mother and I were going to go home. They just kept putting food out. There's two ways of

looking at things. We eat until the plate is empty. If you didn't leave something on a Norwegian plate that said you still wanted more: you'd finished the dinner, and you were not fed what you should have for a proper meal. They wanted to know if I wanted more. I had finished my plate. Here, you're supposed to finish your food. And they wanted to get me more. No. We also had a glass of wine with dinner. I said, "I'm full up to here," and everybody started to laugh. "Full" means drunk.

[36:30] Out on the family farm, it is on Rennesøy, which is in the Stavanger Harbor. I was out there one time during harvest. Everybody works, even the wife that does the food. She's out there doing her share, or more. Everybody works. Dinner comes at 1:00. You have breakfast, dinner, supper. I would get up at 5:00 in the morning, and my uncle is just coming back in from fishing. We're going to have fish, because if you can sell everything you have on the farm, that's great, and the fish are free.

[37:30] The first day was fish. The next day was leftover fish. The third day was fish balls. The fourth day was fish pudding. This fish pudding jiggled. It wasn't solid enough. I just couldn't eat that stuff. I had a hard time eating this jiggling fish that didn't look like fish at all. It came to the plate in a cake pan that had the hole down the center.

**Affa:** [38:20] Oh, yeah. It's like a Jell-O...

**Gale:** [38:23] Yeah. A semi-Jell-O consistency. That didn't look like food to me. [Laughter] Apparently, I was the kid from the family that actually worked on the farm. Other ones came out to have a good weekend. I enjoyed being there. They wanted to give me a piece of land so I could live there with them. I'm sure they just wanted help on the farm. But I wanted to come home after a while.

**Robin:** [39:15] Was it easy for you to speak Norwegian with them?

**Gale:** [39:20] Yeah. They got used to me, and I got used to them. It was that you had to come up with the right words. You couldn't throw in an English word here or there, because these people didn't... they may have gone to school and had some English shoved down their throat, but they lived out in the country, and they didn't speak English. I think they could have maybe read a newspaper, but they didn't do that. If you could get a Norwegian newspaper, why fight with English?

[40:05] The next generation down that was younger than I am—they could speak English. But not their parents and grandparents. So, I had to dig up all the words in the back of my mind to get through. You had to learn farming words. This farm is relatively unique in that it faces southwest. It's on the water. So, the sun bounces off the water onto the potato patch, and there's a cliff in back of the potato patch. So, the sun bounces back off of the cliff from the water.

[41:12] On a good year (a normal good year) they're planting potatoes at the end of February. They pull out the first potatoes in the country under the ground that go to the king and to the hotels in Oslo. So, they get a little more money than most places do. On a good year, they can double-crop potatoes. So, it is sort of unique. I'm told that my grandfather kept saying this farm was the Garden

of Eden, continually, to everybody. He never got to go back, so my mother wanted to take me.

**Affa:** [42:04] Was he the only one of the siblings who came?

**Gale:** [42:07] No, there were three.

**Affa:** [42:08] Oh, you said three brothers came. Sorry.

**Gale:** [42:11] The third sibling immigrated to the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, to a town called either Provo or Provost. I have to look at a map. It's on the border, halfway between Calgary and Edmonton, north and south-wise, but it's over here. The letters that were kept from them had to do with how cold it got in the winter, and how many animals died because of the cold.

**Robin:** [42:58] Do you have any idea how long the family farm has been in the family?

**Gale:** [43:13] They have a book about the history of the island. The book starts in either 1603 or 1605. That is because the Danish king wanted the tax. He wanted to know everything about everybody, and it was put in the book. People were in the area, and I make the assumption they were my relatives, back to the 1350s, which was the Black Death. That is where history stops, because everybody that was literate died. So, there are no records. I even had the next generation write their information into the book, because there was about this much dead space for the farm. Let's come back to the States. I graduated from PLU.

**Affa:** [44:52] Tell us a little bit about growing up in Ballard at that time, what it was like.

**Gale:** [44:56] Okay. I'm at the south end of Sunset Hill Park. So, there was a park we could play in. we had enough boys in our neighborhood to field a full football team, with substitutes. There were three girls. Two of those girls belonged to Stan Nelson, Jr., of Nelson Chevrolet. He would take the oldest girl and I to school in the mornings. We either played on 75<sup>th</sup>, between 32<sup>nd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup>, or in the park.

[45:51] When our parents weren't looking, we'd hop the fence and go down the bank to the railroad tracks, because there was a swamp down there that had frogs. We would collect frogs and bring them home. My parents would look at me and say, "You have a choice." I'm filthy. "You can be washed off with the hose before you come in, or you take your pants off and come in, and we'll wash your clothes later." It didn't matter. We had fun going to get frogs.

**Affa:** [46:39] How was it going down that steep embankment?

**Gale:** [46:41] I was a kid. We knew the few places that you could go down that steep embankment. If the embankment was like this, we knew how to go down like that in certain places. Our parents didn't know how to do that. [Laughter] That was the one place we could hide from our parents.

**Robin:** [47:12] What elementary school did you go to?

**Gale:** [47:17] Webster.

**Affa:** [47:23] That was the old museum.

**Gale:** [47:24] Yeah. And James Monroe Junior High. Then we joke, after James Monroe, you graduated to the big house, Ballard, because Monroe is the reformatory.

**Affa:** [47:44] Were you pretty much free to just play and bicycle anywhere? Traffic wasn't like it is now.

**Gale:** [47:52] No. When I got older, one of the places that I went to was Haller Lake, which is east of Aurora, and maybe at 120<sup>th</sup>, 125<sup>th</sup>. We would go swimming there. We would also take our bicycles down to the Locks and go over to the other side of the Locks, and ride our bikes in Fort Lawton when it was still Army. Sooner or later, a Jeep would come along and say, "You've got to get out of here." Okay. The next week, we'd try it again. They knew us. We were not the kind that made any damage. So, they just sort of nicely got us off the property, and we came back again. It was far enough that we went every place in between that was possible.

[49:05] We didn't have to go far; we had Golden Gardens down below us, and a park up on top. From the park you can see how many people are down below, and is it worth going down to find somebody play with, or do you just leave it alone? And is it high tide or low tide? And if it's low tide, you might be able to find something interesting.

[49:41] Where most kids grew up with slingshots, our neighborhood had slings and knew how to use it. Nobody bothered our neighborhood. One of the fathers had a basement full of nuts that were this big that he just wanted to get rid of. That was ammunition. If something this big is flying at you at high speed, you back off. Nobody bothered our neighborhood. This is when there were semi gang-wars in between neighborhoods. Nobody bothered our neighborhood. We were armed.

[50:36] There was an old boat on Shilshole about where A Dock is now. If you were a little bit careful, you could walk up the side of the boat and get in through the prow, the porthole that was closest to the front of the boat, and you could crawl in. There were three of us down there, and there was no marina, so we weren't bothering anybody. Except, there were five high school kids that were on this boat throwing rocks at us. Out came the slings.

[51:47] We just backed up far enough so we knew how far they could throw rocks. When we were just a little bit farther away than that, we knew that's time to start throwing rocks at them. And they started to disappear, because what we were throwing was big, and it was coming fast. There were three of us, and one crawled through the porthole and started working his way up while we were giving him cover. I was the second one, and there was a third one. At the back of the boat, we watched these guys jump into the cold water.

[52:40] Where the condos are now, there are some pilings out in the water, and that's where they swam to. They're sitting on these pilings, shivering. And we smiled and then we left. We did see them one more time. They came down our alley. The three of us were in our backyard, and being nice angels that we were, having fun, talking to my mother and my aunt and my uncle, who were working in the garden. And they walked down the alley, still dripping wet.

[53:39] They're cussing and swearing something fierce. My aunt starts to tell them you shouldn't cuss and swear. It's not Christian to do that. We're trying to tell her to keep her mouth shut. There's five of them and only three of us. Keep your mouth shut. She kept on the with the lecture. Finally, they said something like "go to hell," to her, and kept walking away. Then we never saw them again. But they'd been looking for us. But we knew the bank, and we knew how to go all the way along the bank in the woods, and they couldn't find us. Growing up was fun.

[54:34] After I graduated from PLU, it was in a little bit of a Depression, and jobs were hard to find. My uncle couldn't get me a job with his company, or any of the other places that had aluminum fittings, aluminum piping.

**Affa:** [55:04] What was it that you studied at PLU?

**Gale:** [55:08] [Speaking Norwegian]. Political science. We always had a supply of aluminum pipe. My uncle would bring home pipe that was about this big around. This was the good old days, before you have pop cans and you could do this. Well, this is where you had to have either a church key, or a can opener. We would take four or five of these pop cans, and we'd take the tops off, and they would fit right over the piping that we had filled up, up until about this far. There's a pipe like this, and it's filled up with dirt, and then it's about this big for an opening. We had a vacant lot next to us, and my parents could look and watch what we were doing.

[56:32] My mother and my aunt were a little nervous, but my uncle thought my neighbors were very creative. We would put two normal firecrackers in this little area, put the can on top, and it functioned like a mortar, up and then down. It wasn't going fast enough to hurt anybody, but we could aim and keep firing our mortars. This was right next to the house, so if anything had happened, my parents would have seen it, and would have come screaming out to catch whoever might have gotten hurt. They came slow, and you could see it coming, and you moved. Even if you didn't see it coming, it wasn't going fast enough to hurt you. What else about growing up?

**Affa:** [57:43] How was Ballard High School?

**Gale:** [57:46] It was sophomore, junior, senior. I did quite well. In fact, it was too easy. I did not learn study habits. My grades went quite a ways down when I got to PLU, and I had to study. I enjoyed being at Ballard. I had a... What's a fancier word for arithmetic?

**Robin:** [58:33] Algebra?

**Gale:** [58:34] Yeah. The math teacher was at James Monroe, and he got to go to Ballard High School, so I had him for a long time.

**Affa:** [58:48] Do you remember his name?

**Gale:** [58:50] No. I had the guy for six years of math. He knew me, and he knew that I was good at math (not anymore, but I was at that time) to the degree that the guy that became my roommate at PLU and I would sit in the back of the room and play chess while he was talking about math. He

would try and say, “Gale, can you tell us what the answer is?” I’d look at it very quickly and tell him the right answer. It bothered him that he couldn’t catch me.

[59:40] I was in the band. I started out playing cornet or trumpet. I knew that I was never going to get good at that, so I switched to a tuba, and I had fun playing the tuba or sousaphone. I was the “D” at the back of the marching band for “BALLARD.” I was the first one into the music room, and I picked the ugliest sousaphone that they had, because it was the smallest one. I gained about five pounds over everybody else. They had to carry that extra weight. I grabbed this little thing. Nobody can really tell how much noise you’re making, or if it’s right or not, but I could tell how much the sousaphone weighed, and I wanted the smallest one. Everybody else got the new ones that looked good. I got the one that didn’t weigh as much.

[1:00:50] Once each year, the marching band would make a mess out of the show at halftime. Every year, we could not spell “HELLO” right. The “O” was always on the wrong end of the letters. So, everybody would get a laugh out of that. The “O” had to take whatever instruments they had and run to the other side of the word. You understand? It was “O HELL.”

[1:01:57] We would take the train to Spokane to be in the Lilac Parade. We would take the *Princess Marguerite* to go to Victoria to be in Canada Day, or something like that. I don’t know if you’ve been in Spokane, but... What’s the hotel? The old... Well, we stayed in that hotel. This is before it had been remodeled.

**Robin:** [1:02:52] Oh, the Davenport.

**Gale:** [1:02:53] The Davenport. Yes. We got cheap rooms. It was a fancy place.

**Robin:** [1:03:02] A lovely place.

**Gale:** [1:03:03] Even with it being old. It’s now remodeled and older.

**Gordon:** [1:03:07] What year is this that we’re talking about at Ballard High School?

**Gale:** [1:03:13] 1965, 1964, 1963, I think. And 1962, because you’re dealing with four years.

**Gordon:** [1:03:23] Yeah. That’s when we graduated.

**Gale:** [1:03:31] So, I enjoyed Ballard High School.

**Affa:** [1:03:32] What did you do after you finished PLU, after you finished university?

**Gale:** [1:03:39] I ended up working for the Union Pacific Railroad, and the Northern Pacific Railroad, the Great Northern Railroad. I was there when it turned into the Burlington Northern. I was in the Burlington Northern Passenger Division when Amtrak was taking over. Amtrak wanted me, but I had Burlington Northern seniority. They wanted me to start from zero, seniority-wise. They couldn’t get anybody to do that.

[1:04:27] So, we got our Burlington Northern seniority. It was a hard decision. On the Burlington Northern, I would get something like Tuesday and Wednesday off working graveyard. Amtrak was Monday to Friday, day shift. It was a tough choice. [Laughter] I had to take maybe 50 cents a day reduction in pay, but I had a life to live again.

[1:05:08] I worked with Amtrak for 25, 26 years, and then I went back to a real railroad to retire. I don't have social security; I have railroad retirement. It's what they based social security off of; it predated social security, and it's much better than social security. Something that I don't think social security has: let's say I worked for the railroad and you worked for the railroad and we're married. At the end, I get a pension, and you get half of it. You get a pension, and I get half of it. That means between the two of us, we get three good pensions.

**Affa:** [1:06:11] Wow, that's good.

**Gale:** [1:06:16] And the railroad retirement is solvent. Social security is not, but railroad retirement is solvent. Both railroad retirement and social security were close to bankrupt because the country needed enough money to pay for World War II. It was for good reasons why they became insolvent: war was on. Railroad retirement gets a little extra money; it's called a ton tax mile. So, every time you see a railroad train going by that's freight, it's taxed, and that's my pension.

**Affa:** [1:07:08] What did you do with the railroad? Or different jobs?

**Gale:** [1:07:14] I was a clerk. That meant that I got to stay at home. Very seldom did I have to go out on the road. I did every once in a while, but I got paid for that. When I was working graveyard, I was marching up and down the tracks, counting boxcars. There's about this much room in between the cars in the yard, and you hope that a train doesn't start while you're in between. I'm counting cars over here and putting down the numbers. If this one started to move, there's not too much room to jump.

[1:08:00] Underneath the Dravus Bridge, on the Magnolia side, there was always a party going on: a bonfire, and a lot of drunks having a party. Every once in a while, you'd start hearing gunfire. I was in a small shack close to the roundhouse at the north end of the yard, and I always wondered, what would I do if somebody came to the door as a complete jerk that's bigger than I am, because I've never been a really big person.

[1:08:47] Even though I had a radio and a telephone, and I knew the company cop was packing a pistol, and my chief clerk had a pistol, they couldn't get there in time to help me out. So, I came to the conclusion, I'm going out the window. I'm just breaking the window headfirst, going out. I never had to do anything like that, but the parties kept right on going. So, I was nervous about that.

[1:09:24] At Amtrak, for quite a while, I had a nice job, or at least on paper it looked like a nice job, where I kept clean, and I got to talk to the passengers. Really, what it meant was, when the train from Chicago came in, the people would come in, and I had to be there to take care of problems. It's a 47-hour trip from Chicago to get to Seattle. Picture what you would feel like if you were the unlucky one that had to be in front of, beside, or in back of a family with a screaming brat that does not stop, all the way.

[1:10:34] The kid is not used to whatever is happening to him, and is voting his displeasure, but he has made life miserable for a lot of people. I had a little training on how to put up with that as the people would get off the train and come running to me, because I was the first one they could find. They wouldn't tell me about their problems; they would scream their problems to me.

[1:11:15] I could handle the first one in a week. We were trained to not let some of that stuff bother you. The second one, I'm starting to get just a little nervous. Two in a week, that's really bad luck. The times that I got three in a week, I'd go over and tell my boss that I'm going to be gone for a few days. And I would head for the southeastern corner of Oregon.

[1:11:50] Do you remember where the ranchers came to Burns, Oregon and were bitching and moaning about water rights? Well, I was about 50 miles south of there, in a little town called Frenchglen. If you counted all of the people in the outside suburbs of Frenchglen, with the population, you would come up with maybe 30 people. There was just nobody there.

[1:12:27] I would sit by the Donner und Blitzen River and just watch this thing go by. Watch it go by, and have breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and a glass of wine with dinner, and it would take me about three days for the head to clean out, because that stuff bothered me when I had too much of it. It happened.

[1:13:00] Donner und Blitzen is because the cavalry outfit that was exploring southern Oregon (this is after the Civil War)—I assume that the officer could read and write, but the troopers couldn't. The only one that could read and write was a German. They got to this river in thunder and lightning, and that's what this guy named it. It's not "Donner and Blitzen," it's Donner und Blitzen." That's where I would go. The next town had 17 in it. The next town south was on the Nevada border, and it also had 30 in it. I was away from everything, and the world could go by, and I watched it in the river.

**Affa:** [1:14:18] Did you have a cabin there?

**Gale:** [1:14:19] No. I'd just put up a tent. I still like to go camping.

**Affa:** [1:14:26] How did you find that place?

**Gale:** [1:14:28] All my life, I have sort of poked down this road, down this road, down this... "I'll never go back to this one." Down this road, down this road... "Well, this one's a real good one." You know. I learned where things were. I know that southeastern Oregon doesn't have any people in it.

[1:15:00] If some people get mad and do something stupid, I'd rather go off and let the head clear out. Something that's in southern Oregon, east of Klamath Falls, is a geyser that works in the spring and the first part of summer. It doesn't work very well in the fall, because the water is all gone. I was quite surprised to see a geyser.

[1:15:32] I also learned that you do not want to go out to the desert or anyplace cold in a union suit.

Think about it. How do you go to the bathroom? How do you change your drawers? You have to take the whole thing off before you can get down to where you want to go to work. I found a roadside rest area. They had heat enough to keep the water pipes defrosted. So, I had to change clothes in a hurry there. But it was still cold.

[1:16:22] Outside of Frenchglen, in the winter, there are golden eagles. They're quite a bit bigger than bald eagles. They would sit on the top of the telephone poles and wait for lunch to come by. At first, we would take pictures of them just sitting on the telephone pole, but there were so many of them that we finally only would take pictures when we would start to scare them off of the telephone pole, and you'd get the picture of them pulling up the wings just before they're going to jump off. That was much more fun than just watching them jump off the telephone pole. There's nobody there. I enjoyed every minute of being in this place, and letting my head clean out.

**Affa:** [1:17:30] Do you still go there?

**Gale:** [1:17:32] I go to eastern Oregon. depending on who's with me, and what they want to see... I haven't been there in a few years, but I've been to a whole lot of other places in eastern Oregon. I went to the geyser last fall. Are any of you familiar with the Columbia River? Do you know where Hood River is? At the south end of Hood River, I think it's just outside of the river, is a gorgeous hotel. It's called the Columbia Gorge Hotel, and it was built in 1920-something. Let's say it's old-style money, is what it looks like. And you get very good service.

[1:18:35] It's right on the edge. It has the number two highest waterfall in Oregon. Multnomah is higher. The unfortunate thing is, it goes right off the edge of the hotel, so to see it, you sort of have to look over the edge. It's the kind of place where, if you're having an anniversary, an important one, or if you're in serious trouble with the spouse, it's a place to go.

[1:19:13] Giving an idea what the dining room is like, the first time I was there, they had filet mignon with Béarnaise sauce. The second time, they didn't have the Béarnaise sauce on the filet mignon, but they had it on something else on the menu, so, sure, they would put it on my steak. The third time it was there, it wasn't anywhere. I was telling the waiter how much I liked this hotel and what they had done for me. It came out that I was missing the Béarnaise sauce. The guy walked away and told me, "I'm talking to the chef." I got filet mignon with Béarnaise sauce. Just an idea of what the place is like. It looks like it should be a lot pricier than it is. It's out of the range of the cities, but it is what would be a pricey place. And I found it just by poking along.

**Affa:** [1:20:42] What's it called, again?

**Gale:** [1:20:43] I think it's the Columbia Gorge Hotel. It's a wonderful place.

**Affa:** [1:20:53] I was going to ask you about your family. Do you have children?

**Gale:** [1:20:57] My mother, aunt, and uncle are dead. I was an only child, but the relatives of all of the other people in the family had kids, and they all lived in Ballard, so I had family close by. I have one daughter. Darling ex was from Sweden. After my daughter was born, she had her green card safe, because she had her child here. I was divorced. She wasn't very bright. She was the type that

she would only trust a woman for doing anything. She had a woman lawyer. But this woman lawyer didn't know what she was doing, either. My lawyer pulled a few strings.

[1:22:26] It ended up that I was injured at work. I don't know how the State of Washington injuries work, but it's railroad retirement. I was out of work for about ten weeks, and they had to pay me at least my wages, plus pain and suffering. I didn't get... it wasn't wages; it was pay in lieu of wages.

[1:23:11] My child support was based on one, cost of living increase, or, if I got a big change in my wages, I could choose which way to adjust my child support. But I got injured. I was off work for ten weeks. They have to pay me at least my wages when they settle, and I got quite a bit more. So all of a sudden, my years' wages went [up] and it was going to be done on what percentage your wages went up. But it also went down. But her lawyer couldn't see the down part. It was only up, which happens to almost everybody.

[1:24:27] That meant that my child support went up, and there was nothing she could do about it, because she had signed the paperwork. It worked out fine, because my daughter didn't seem to want to be with mom; she wanted to be with me. Which was fine. When she wasn't with me, she was with my mother, aunt, and uncle across the street. She had family, and she liked it. My daughter got her bachelor's from Western, Master's from the UW, and last year she got her doctorate from Washington State. She has been teaching English in China.

**Affa:** [1:25:28] What is her PhD in?

**Gale:** [1:25:31] It's for teaching English to foreigners.

**Affa:** [1:25:34] Oh, okay.

**Gale:** [1:25:38] She got a master's and doctorate in English. She knows English to teach. She also has a science background. So, she's wanted in China. I liked it better when she was in Hong Kong--even with the stuff that's going on... Here's Hong Kong Island. The mainland is Kalun. There is a mountain range, and she lived and worked on the other side of the mountain range. Here is where the problems are. There are little things going on out here, but not anything that you worry about. I wish she could get a job there again. She gave that up to get her doctorate.

**Affa:** [1:26:44] Where is she now?

**Gale:** [1:26:45] She's outside of Shanghai by about an hour. An hour on the bus; she doesn't have a car.

**Affa:** [1:26:55] Have you ever been to see her in China?

**Gale:** [1:26:58] In Hong Kong, not in China. She took me to China once. We went to where the Terracotta Warriors are, so I got to see the real thing. It was funny; we're in China, and the first person that I met that was Caucasian at the Terracotta Warriors was Danish. The second group of people I met was a busload of Swedes. And the third was two Norwegian kids. Am I hearing what I think I'm hearing? This is China. Are you sure that's the noise you think you're hearing?

[1:27:58] Amongst the people there, I checked on the French of... “you have scabies.” They said, “Yeah, that’s what the word means.” So, the French girl wasn’t just messing with me. China... they don’t do things right. If you are in the city that the Terracotta Warriors are close to, and you’re on the highway, they have three lanes. If you’re in this lane, and you want to go forward, you have to be careful, because this guy will make a left turn in front of you. Not once or twice... If you’re on the highway, and you’ve got three lanes, there could be two cars here taking all three lanes, or you could have five cars going down three lanes. Huh?

[1:29:19] When there was a typhoon that was a level 9 typhoon (10 is the biggest) while we were in Xi’an, they had English newspapers done from Chinese. To help out the drivers on their lives, they had underpasses and overpasses for the main intersections so that they weren’t as apt to do anything stupid. Well, we had the typhoon, and nine people had died in the Peking area because they drove into the lower one, and either they didn’t put drains in there, or they didn’t clean out the drains, because they drowned. It’s a little bit hard to think of people drowning on a freeway.

[1:30:39] In Hong Kong, they drive British, so we have been trained to look which way when cars are coming? You step off, you look this way when cars are coming. You’re supposed to look that way in Hong Kong. You just don’t do it, and you have people honking their horns at you.

**Affa:** [1:31:08] In London, they print it on the street. When you step off the curb, there is a big sign that says, “look left.”

**Gale:** [1:31:19] Even when I know that’s what I’m supposed to do, it’s up here. You look this way. You just naturally look that way. I really enjoyed Hong Kong. Xi’an was interesting. But Hong Kong, I could actually live there.

**Affa:** [1:31:47] How long has she been in China?

**Gale:** [1:31:49] One year in mainland China. The town starts with a “T.” It’s on the peninsula that is aimed at the North-South Korean border. It was when China was all divided up between the European powers. This was in the German enclave. You can buy the same beer even in the States, in Seattle. It’s done in the same brewery.

**Robin:** [1:32:26] Tsingtao? Yeah. I like that beer.

**Gale:** [1:32:29] Tsingtao. Here, it’s decent. In China, it’s bad.

**Robin:** [1:32:35] Interesting.

**Gale:** [1:32:38] Because I had consumed it here, I said, “Yeah, I like that beer.” Boy, did I make a mistake. There’s a little story about Tsingtao. The First World War, Britain wants to get rid of the Germans in Asia because they could get to Singapore and clog up the streets, and keep things from making it to England to help for the war. That meant you would plug up Australia and New Zealand, getting to the front, or bringing supplies. They don’t have enough money to get rid of the Germans, so they pay the Japanese to get the Germans out of Tsingtao. Some of the fleet got out,

but the smaller boats stayed, and the Army stayed, because they couldn't get everybody out.

[1:33:53] Well, there was a parade of the Japanese marching into Tsingtao with all the Germans saluting the Japanese officials as they come in. At the rear end of the parade is a small British contingent. As they come in, where the Germans saluted the Japanese coming in, they saluted the British. The general went in to see the Japanese general and said, "What are you going to do about that? That was not nice at all." And just kept going. The Japanese general said, "What do you want us to do, have the parade over again?" In effect, shut up.

**Robin:** [1:35:00] Well, I think we're at the end of our time, but thank you so much.

**Gale:** [1:35:07] I hope my salute didn't ruin... [Laughter]

**Robin:** [1:35:11] No, it didn't ruin it. Thank you so much.

**Affa:** [1:35:14] Thank you.

END OF RECORDING

Transcription by Alison DeRiemer.