

Nordic American Voices
Nordic Heritage Museum

Interview of Marianne Forssblad
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Bellevue, Washington
Interviewers: Gordon Strand, Sandra Nestorovic

GS Today is November 26, 2008 and we are here to interview Marianne Forssblad, former Director of the Nordic Heritage Museum from 1979 until 2007. Let's stop.

SN [0:02:14] Marianne could you give us a little history about growing up in Sweden and you family life as a child.

MF Well I was born in Gothenburg - or Goteborg as we call it in Swedish - and have a brother and sister and lived with my family there and went to school there. My father was involved in the maritime business. He was the head of the Swedish Shipowner's Association so we traveled a lot and so did my mother even later on. So we all got the travel bug as children and we liked to go places. Ever since I was about fifteen they sent me to various places in Europe - especially to England to learn the English language properly.

I went to school in Gothenburg in the regular school system. In those days it was different from what it is today. It was first four years elementary and then four or five years intermediate and then four or five years in what we called "gymnasium." Then it was the same thing as the last two years of high school and two years of college..two years of college - right. Nowadays the education system in Sweden has changed a bit so it's not the same as it was then because this is many, many years ago.

As I said I liked to travel so I spent every summer abroad especially then in England and in ?? France. Then my last year of gymnasium I was of course toying with the idea of what could I do. I had various ideas. One thing was that I wanted to go into the Foreign Service. I wanted to become an ambassador. So to speak. So in order to that I decided to spend one year in the United States and I applied to the Swedish American Foundation for a scholarship and I did get it. So I came to the United States in 1957 to go to college in Virginia. It was a four-year college for women. Nowadays it's ... also men are attending at least in the master degree department. But in those days it was truly a women's college and after my first year I realized I could get my BA in two years so I asked my parents if I could stay another year which I did. So after two years I got my BA from Hollins College in 1969 and it was a lot of fun and of course I had all the time been taking political science and history because this I thought would be really good for my future diplomatic service.

But I met an American and we got married only two days after I graduated. Got married in Lexington, Virginia because he went to Washington and Lee and then that summer we went back to Europe and traveled all over Europe for three months. Of course my idea of getting into the Foreign Service and studying law in Sweden at that time then disappeared because now I was a young married woman and had to go back to the United States after the summer with my husband.

I wasn't very keen on going to the Midwest and so – he had already applied to law school so went to Texas. Well as an aside he was from the Midwest, he was from Missouri. That's what I said he belonged to the Midwest.

But anyway we ended up in Texas. And I continued my studies there and studied international law and I don't know why I did that but maybe I could use it one day. But after he was finished with his studies, his legal, his law degree, we decided to go to Sweden and stay for a year which we did. We went there and stayed in Gothenburg where we met a very nice American family. And that family happened to be from Seattle. And that's how we ended up in Seattle afterwards. Because they told us in glowing terms about the wonders of Seattle and by that time I had totally dismissed Texas. I thought it was a horrible place. The heat, the heat and I didn't like Texas at all. And I didn't like the Midwest and the East Coast was out so by elimination we chose Seattle.

And we came here in the very end, I think December, January '64, around that time, '64 and that's when I regard, this is when I came for good to the United States at that time. We settled here and he looked for a job and he got a job at a law firm that now no longer exists. It was then called Bogle, Bogle and Gates. And he was a young lawyer with the rest of the young lawyers there and I was the young wife. I did not work at that time which in a sense I missed but I was also pregnant. And then I had my first child here in Seattle. I later had another one. My son Lars Erik is the oldest of my children. I associate a lot with the young Swedes that were here at that time because Boeing had been in Europe and had recruited – that was in the '60s – and had recruited of Swedish engineers that came here. And we formed a kind of circle of friends and did a lot of things. But I had no idea of working for a museum or doing anything like that. I did have thoughts of going back to the university. I had my BA and my Masters but thought of continuing.

Well as life goes on things happen and I was divorced. At that time I had started to study library science actually at the University of Washington. And I got my Masters of Librarianship at the UW. And I was looking at what I could do - thinking of maybe being a law librarian or something similar since I had studied international law and some law courses. But then as it turned out I was recruited by the Scandinavian Department to teach and be a kind of TA and continue in that department instead. So I started towards my studies towards my masters in the PHD course so to speak, in that track. In the ??track I guess they call it. Got my masters and continued studying.

Then I met another man, a Dane, Sven Rossell and so we were together. We were a couple and we had my daughter Eva. And she was born in 1976. At that time I had become involved a little bit with the Scandinavian community. I had met Gordon Ekvall Tracie and he invited me to various events, dances and so on. And I was interested in 1976 when they had the bicentennial celebration in Seattle. So at that time I became interested in the story of the immigrants. Before that I had interest in other things and not necessarily about the immigration issue. I never even thought about it. I had been involved in what I called the newer immigrants, all those people that had come, doctors, researchers, etcetera, and etcetera. I think it was my time in the Scandinavian Department that opened my eyes for the influx of Scandinavians in Washington State.

Then while I was at the University of Washington I was recruited by the Seattle Art Museum to become a consultant on an exhibit that they had, the Art of Norway. I became responsible for their education program and went around giving lectures in the Northwest and up in Alaska [0:12:01] on Scandinavian art, especially Norway, not the rest of the countries really but you always put in context. That again increased my interest in the immigration issue because I put on a symposium and we talked about this, we talked about immigration, and I was given the task of writing a little history of the Norwegians in the United States – a very short, four-page thing, to give them an overview why there were so many Scandinavians in this area especially Norwegians. And then when I got involved in the community naturally there was talk about building a museum. I was at that time teaching at the University of Washington and I was recruited by Sven Gilje who is really one of the founders of Nordic Heritage Museum. And he asked me to be involved in this. I remember he came to my office at the University of Washington and I was very enthusiastic and I came to some of the meetings. They also had also an evening where they showed a little bit about the heritage that Karla Wulfsberg, that was her name then, I can't remember it now. But Karla had done some research and programs on the Scandinavians in this area.

I saw then what's possible and I met Leif Eie who was very much ?? with Sven Gilje and others. And very instrumental in getting the museum started. Leif Eie is the one who went around and looked at various buildings for the museum. And they were building all over the geography here. And finally they found this empty school and actually the person that heard about it was Randi Hansen, a sister of Elsa Ellefsen who for many years was our wonderful cook in the kitchen. She advised and called Leif about the school that was empty. By that time there was a Nordic Council. [0:14:42] that had been established with only the idea of founding a museum and they went to the school district and gave a bid. Actually it was Leif Eie, I think, who proceeded to meet with the school district and actually carry this ? that the Nordic Council was very interested in using the school as a museum. And I know that at that time Carl Helgren, Egon Molbak and others were very, very much involved. As it turned out the Nordic Council, the Scandinavians were the only ones interested in the building. It was a rundown

building, very rundown building and I remember the first time I came there in early '79 and I saw it. It was rather dismal. It was dark and, of course, the entrance was not where the entrance is today. It was at the front. We still have doors there and it says "Nordic Heritage Museum" in small letters above the door facing 67th Street. But we thought it had potential. But as we were the only ones that gave a bid we realized that the bid that had been given was too high. So we started to negotiate and ask that it be given for less money and since there were no takers it was agreed.

And if my memory is right I think that the first year we only paid \$300 a month in rent to the school district. [0:16:41] And of course then we also had the big huge parking lot and there was a playground on it too but not like the playground today. It was not at all like. It was just a huge parking lot, playground and then there were a few bars for kids to play on, etcetera, etcetera. And there was, I think, a sand pit, with some rubber swings on it. We took away all of those things which did not make the neighbors very happy. But we felt that they were not safe at all because they had been used for some time. Then as I said the building was rundown, a lot of broken windows which, you know, is now a legend – how many there were. There must have been about 90 broken windows. In the auditorium there was not the floor that we have today. But it was a dark brown linoleum floor directly, I think, on the cement. Very hard. The kitchen was not like it is today either because IKEA helped us remodel the kitchen. It was a very dismal kitchen. It had been used by the school. The whole building was more or less abandoned because the school district realized that they were not going to use it anymore and they also leased it to a theatre company that made a film in the building and they really trashed it.

When we finally took it over it needed a lot of tender care and all we could do was clean it up and replace the windows. We had a wonderful volunteer by the name of Paul Mathisen. A little man – he's no longer with us either – who was the volunteer janitor, volunteer maintenance man, volunteer all and took care of the boiler and seeing that everything was fine. And also we rented out which was then the gymnasium which is now where the Dream of America is. That was the gymnasium. And that had nice wooden floors and you could dance on it. So we rented that out to the Skandia Folkdancers and it was Gordon Tracie who really was the liaison there and ran it. And in the little office that is now the Post Office he had his office and we had musical instruments there. But you know the school was not safe from burglary in those days and there had been a break-in and they had stolen some of his equipment which he was very upset about. Because, you know, the doors were easily breakable and they were not at all like they are today with different locks. So there were a lot of things to do. But it was an interesting period and everybody was very enthusiastic. A lot of hard work went into it, incredibly hard work.

I spent the early days – that was in '79 or even '80 – between teaching at the University of Washington and driving to the museum to help with the first exhibit

were going to put on. And Sven Gilje using his journalistic skills was the one who did the PR for us and wrote all the news releases and told how we were establishing a museum.

[0:20:46] But it was interesting to see because the Nordic colony was not exactly optimistic about it. I remember well when I went around and talked about it they said you'll never manage. By way of doing this you should rather go in with the Museum of History and Industry and do something with them. Because the Museum of History and Industry had had in 1976 an exhibit because of the Norwegian Sesquicentennial. No 1975 sorry. 1975. Because of the Norwegian Sesquicentennial they were celebrating the 1825 arrival of Restauration to New York and at that time the Norwegian colony got together again very much under the guidance of Sven Gilje and a large number of Norwegians. I know that a woman by the name of Dagny Schurheim(ph) was very much involved in it as was Anne Marie Steiner and others. But in 1975 they had had an exhibit at MOHAI and gathered a lot of different objects and so on. And it really became quite obvious of the importance of the Norwegian community and in a bigger sense the Scandinavian community. So it was really at that time that they started to think about this, having a museum and now it was coming to fruition. Well this was an aside.

[0:22:29] So we started then collecting and we knew there were Norwegians and other Swedes, etcetera, etcetera. We went around and we got a good start. It was rather eclectic of course because we really did not have very thorough guidelines. We were willing to take more or less everything because we were an upstart museum. And I know that there were a lot of unnecessary things undoubtedly but also lot of interesting things that we got. We had enough to put together two rooms which I was very proud of. At that time then in 1980 I was then head of the exhibits and the exhibit committee. And we focused on what we called home life and had different objects and material documents of the Scandinavians such as textiles, house wares, wooden objects, decorative objects, etcetera etcetera in one room. And in the other room we had occupational objects such as boat building which of course was very prominent, and logging. Boatbuilding and logging, those were the two main we started and those are the two rooms that are now on the second floor called the Heritage Rooms. That's where..those are the only two rooms we had available. The rest were just empty horrible classrooms with green walls and big huge dirty windows.

But we opened on April 12 because that had been a fundraiser for the museum. It had been at the Space Needle and Bert Lundh was one of the organizers of that and I know that Carl Helgren supplied the champagne. It was a very fancy Scandinavian menu that we had. It was up on the Space Needle that rotated and we were able to raise quite a bit of money. And the first year's budget was \$28,000. I became ... I was hired and the reason I was hired was that we were able to ... Sven Gilje and I wrote a grant ??? and put on as the Acting Director at that time in 1980. And as I said I was the only one. But before that, before I was

hired we had had a woman by the name of Marit, she's now married to Arne Thomsen, Marit ?? Thomsen. And she was answering the phone and really did a lot of wonderful things – came to the office and helped organize the volunteers.

I think that in the first year we were able to get about 218 members of the Museum and the person who was in charge of the membership – of course everything was done by hand, no computers or anything, maybe a typewriter – was Wilson, her last name. Slips my mind right now. What was her name It was ... Sirkka Wilson. It was Sirkka Wilson that was in charge of membership to start with.

And of course by that time we had, there was a board formed, interim board and by-laws were written. And the museum submitted its foundation papers to the Secretary of State and the Museum should have all of those papers in the office because I saved everything from 1980 on so there should be a lot of background material at the Museum right now - hopefully. But the by-laws were established and the Museum was incorporated as a non-profit organization with a board. Before, actually, I became the Director I was on the first board. I was a board member.

But when I was given the Directorship, of course, I had to give up my board membership. Then, of course, the rest is history. I was then Director from that time until my retirement on April 30 or May 1 in 2007. It was many difficult years to start with but very exciting years. It was like a little family that had no money. Because the budget was small and we were not always sure that we could pay salaries, my little salary, or the maintenance, running it. Because, after all, we were heated by oil. I think that was the largest bill, the oil bill.

So I remember .. it must have been within the first year, it must have been 1981 we were in dire straits and I decided that I would take a cut in my salary. I think I was under \$500 a month and at the same time I taught at the University of Washington so that the Museum would survive. I taught in the morning at the UW and then I ran over to the Museum and I was there for the rest of the day. Also at that time we got a young intern from Portland State University – Janet Basinger. She later married ?? Moneymaker. Her name now is Janet Moneymaker. And she became an intern because she was in Museology and she wanted to study the museum and she was a great help. And she started then a more direct policy of registering ?? the position of the objects, recording the objects. Because back in '79 we had, what we call, a volunteer curator registrar, a young man who was for a little while, who was quite cantankerous actually. And he and I did not get along too well. But he later quit and Janet took the position. Then Janet went back and got her Masters and after that we hired as the first Curator of the Nordic Heritage Museum.

[0:30:29] There were many funny incidents of course. Of course you realize that we needed to entice the Nordic community to become involved and it was very hard to become involved and enthusiastic about a rundown, damp, dark rather

scary building. So there were many work parties where they were painting. We painted ourselves. I've been standing on many a scaffolding painting the then exhibit rooms. The configurations of the exhibit rooms are different now especially on the second floor. Because especially in the temporary exhibit galleries. Those were not joined and we didn't have an elevator. They were just individual classrooms and each classroom had a closet where the kids were supposed to hang their clothes and of course some the exhibit rooms didn't have those closets which in my time were used as storage and other things and I assume that they are still are used as storage.

But we painted and some of the board members helped us paint and I remember one of our early board members, Carl Jarvie, who was also a good supporter of the Museum, coming to paint and he was really an accountant by trade so this is somewhat symptomatic of how we worked in the early days - really by pure labor and being obstinate. And then of course the board met and it only met six times a year. We had a few committees working but it was not at all streamlined and official and with the many committees and departments that exist today of course. Because we were just beginning to run - not even run, to walk - we were crawling first and then little by little we were able to walk.

[0:32:48]I remember well in the early days when we had Scandinavia Today and that was a big, big undertaking. Seattle had been chosen by the American government in conjunction with American Scandinavian Foundation to be part of Scandinavia Today. In those days, many years ago, the United States government focused on different countries to show what the countries were like in today's world. And Scandinavia was chosen in 1993 I think it was. And Seattle was one of the cities, one of the many cities that were going to be part of Scandinavia Today. And we competed for some of the exhibitions - the Nordic Heritage Museum. Of course very young and as I said had only two or three exhibit rooms but we cleaned up a couple of classrooms that now are the temporary art galleries and we were given an exhibit that dealt with Greenland - Greenland Today, fascinating exhibit. And at that time, Janet was working full-time and I was working full-time and then we had a part-time, two to three days, assistant who was very artistic too. Her name was Issa Parker. She worked with us and the three of us were supposed to mount this humungous exhibit but we had the architect who had designed it from Denmark with us, Soren - I can't remember his last name. But he was really a very talented man and very friendly because he always went around with a little bottle of cognac in his back pocket because he could, he took it to strengthen him because he said "I can't believe this. This is amazing." You know our museum. He was used to working in bigger museums, etcetera etcetera, but it was really, really a challenging time but a fun time.

You have to realize that this was taking place on the second floor. No elevator and very heavy objects to bring up. Very heavy backdrops to bring up and stuffed animals like the sleighdogs big huge sleighs, big huge things. We had to get volunteers to carry everything up the stairs and into the rooms. And I remember I

recruited some of the professors from the University of Washington to come and help me carry those things. We had it stored in what now is the beginning of the the Dream of America because that wasn't an exhibit space yet. It was partly a playground for kids and was partly opened to the outside. There was a big half-brick wall with a netting towards 68th so it was very cold and very open space. But the kids used to go there and play when it was raining outside on their breaks. And this was where we first stored all these heavy objects and then brought them up the stairs which was very different from today. The configuration upstairs was different too. But anyway Soren managed to get it all under control and we helped him – Janet and I – and we helped him and we had some other people too – volunteers to help him. And we opened. It was a beautiful, beautiful exhibit showing Greenland today with very three-dimensional way, with three-dimensional objects. Like I said sleighdogs, sleighs and everything else.

And that was on display when the King and Queen of Sweden came to visit. They came to United States. They had been invited and they did different things and they, of course the King went and met with the Swedish community. We had a variety of banquets for them and we even put on a fashion show. Actually I had decided I wanted to do a really fun fashion show in those days and we had it at the Westin Hotel I think it was. I gathered volunteers to help with the dressing people and even I at that time modeled something. So you can see it was really a hands-on operation but the King and Queen enjoyed it and but of course the Queen was very, very gracious but when I look back at it it's amusing because we were such a small museum and we had so little to show for it. The only thing we had upstairs – we had decided to use the room which is now – it used to be a gallery when it had been modernized, but in those days it was still a classroom but now it is part storage of the museum and part office space on the third floor. I think that Sandra Nastrovic has part of the office up there and then we've – I think you do Sandra. Anyway then it was just a classroom with the windows but we had installed a rosemaling exhibit up there. So we had our two heritage rooms, we had the Greenland exhibit at one end and upstairs we had the rosemaling exhibit. The King was not interested in going up there. He probably thought that we were really very small operation but the Queen very graciously wanted to go up and see it.

And then we gathered them in what we then made into the library on the mezzanine which is now also partly the Music Library and partly office. Because that was just little bit of a library beginning then – no it was more or less – no it wasn't. It was a, It was a classroom because we had classes there. Ed Egerdahl had started with us already then so it was just a classroom. And we gathered school children from Ballard who could meet with the King and Queen of Sweden and Olaf Kvamme was involved with that. Olaf Kvamme who later became a board member of the Museum. Olaf, of course, was working for the School District and there are many good photographs of Karl Gustaf and Queen Silvia and the children – meeting with the kids that we have somewhere in our archives.

There are other exhibits in Seattle. Bert Lundh sponsored a Georg Jensen exhibit that was mounted at Seattle Center in one of their rooms there, one of the galleries there and it was beautiful, beautiful exhibit, the Georg Jensen exhibit. The person who ran, so to speak, was head of the Scandinavia Today Seattle was Phyllis Lamphere. We had asked her to be head of the committee and there were also a lot of other movers and shakers in Seattle who were part of this committee. Because they had some tangential relationship with Scandinavia. We met sometimes met at Safeway, not Safeway. What is the insurance company?

GS Safeco

MF Safeco. We met at Safeco's headquarters in the University District sometimes. Then we had big banquets. But that was a really big up for the Museum [0:41:38] So I would regard that as one step forward from beginning nothing to now beginning to operate a little bit. And now I remember the Danish architect's name. His name is Soren Sass. And it was really great to have him here because it gave us a little bit of a professional aura.

So when we continued with travelling exhibits as well as collecting objects for the permanent collection. For many, many years it was just Janet and I and a person who helped with the office. It wasn't easy but we made strides and in 1985 we were contacted again by the Danes about an exhibit that they wanted to bring to the United States. It was the Dream of America. Even there one of the architects and designers of this exhibit came and met with me at the Museum and I became very enthusiastic about it. It was a fascinating exhibit. It was the core of what we have in the Dream of America plus a little bit more in Denmark. The Board also asked me to travel over there to look at it. And in the meantime Andrew Price who has been a great supporter of the Museum had also been over there and gone to what is called Mossgaard, that's the Danish Museum outside Aarhus and looked at it and thought this would be perfect for Seattle. It shows immigration and it's done in a very three-dimensional way. So after – I didn't know that – I didn't know at that time that he had also been there. But I was over there and went through it and was very, very enthusiastic. And came back to the Board and said we must really try to get this one and I showed them the layout and plans. And they became enthusiastic and Bert Lundh was really the driving force here too in saying that we should yes really get this one.

Bert was the second president after Sven Gilje. Sven Gilje was president for many years in the beginning and then the next president was Bert Lundh. So we decided to raise money and at that time Andrew Price had become so enthusiastic and he became my main helper in raising money and he went around and talked to people. We were able to accomplish incredibly much. I wrote grants. I wrote lots and lots of grants and we did raise the money and we also approached Jens Bruun of Scan Design because he was Danish. And he said he would sponsor the actual purchase of the Dream of America. Because what it is it was not a travelling exhibit. They wanted ... they were going to just destroy it or send it to someplace who wanted it. And at that time we were ready for it. So Jens Bruun said he would pay for the core exhibit as it was brought over here. In those days I think

the Danish Crown was 10 crowns to a dollar but by the time that we were able to get the exhibit and pay for it, it had gone down so it became quite a bit more expensive than we had thought. So anyway Jens Bruun helped us acquire it and he also loaned one of his carpenters from Scan Design, one of his workers. And then Mosgaard Museum sent over the designer and somebody else, a man who worked with us for several months. Because we had to totally re-do the downstairs. We had to close in the open play court area where now is the beginning of the Dream of America. We had to break through into the gym and make that available. And then we had to bring the huge exhibit over to Seattle. We got Maersk, the Danish company to sponsor it and they brought it over free of charge. It was unloaded here and we have many pictures of the unloading of the Dream of America.

I remember well how we got the lifeboat out because it was heavy and we were standing there and again it was some of the workers now that we had to hire plus volunteers who helped bring it out. And low and behold we managed to mount it and we opened in June of 1986. And I regard that as the next big step up for the Museum. Entrance then we had to the side of the museum next to where the main entrance now is. There is ? two doors there and that was the entrance to the Dream of America. Because we did not have the new entrance then and it was very awkward to up to the ...from 67th. So people could park in the parking lot and go straight into the Dream of America. The opening ceremony was gigantic, wonderful. The choruses sang. I know the Norwegian Male and Women's Chorus sang. Lisa was directing them. We had many important politicians coming and there was a line out, a long, long line to go through the Museum. And at that time we got three young girls from Scandinavia to come over and help as guides. And we had made arrangements that they could stay with families here in town. I had one of my good friends Kerstin Kaman who has now returned to Sweden because her niece came over. I think her name is Elena came over and she stayed with her. And then there was a young Danish girl and a Norwegian girl and they stayed with different families. And they were with us for three months. And they were guides that summer. So it worked really, really well. And it was a good experience for them. They could improve their English, et cetera and then we got a young Norwegian fellow to come over too to continue be a guide. And he stayed with a person who became a board member of the Museum. But it was an exciting time because this really put us on the map. It had taken us five or six years to get there but now we had the foundation so to speak of a permanent exhibit that was well done and we could build further on it.

And at that time I started to think "What do we need to do now?" We had two main galleries that were little by little were improving. We had put in another gallery that showed women's work, et cetera but we needed to upgrade. We continued upgrading and I thought that we needed a fishing exhibit and a logging exhibit. So there was lot of grant writing. I did the grant writing in those days. And I remember it cost me a lot of nervousness to be able to do that plus everything else. And it wasn't easy but we did get grants to mount the fishing exhibit and we were able to get some ? to design it and we did the same thing with

the logging exhibit. It was really thrilling to see those three exhibits come to fruition because they are so important in the history of the Nordics here - especially for the Norwegians and for Ballard. The fishing industry has such impact.

[51:03] I had forgotten to mention that very early in the beginning – it was actually in 1980 – I was approached by somebody from Sagstad Marina with the idea that they had an interesting big ship there that they thought the Museum should be interested in. I went and looked at it and I said yes it really is great but how can we do that. They said well it can stay here for awhile but soon we need to move it. And it's the Norlands boat that now evidently has been renamed the Nordic Spirit or something. But anyway it is the Norlands boat. It was used as a fishing boat in Norway in the early 1800's. I had an expert from Norway come and look at it. And also Inge S? who was the main immigrant authority in Norway saw it and they said yes indeed it has been used in Northern Norway as a fishing boat. But it was purchased by Volvo and Volvo used it as a gimmick and sailed up and down the Potomac – outside Washington, DC with it. And it had sails which said – it was typical striped sails, red and white Viking sails – and the shields had in runic letters Volvo, I think Volvo Penta or Volvo on it. So we .. what's interesting is it was a Norwegian fishing boat that Volvo had hired a well-know sculptor in Gothenburg to do the embellishment on it. So the head, the Viking head on the boat was sculpted by this sculptor and swirls on the side and the embellishments on the sides were all sculpted by him. [0:53:08] So it was embellished this way to look like a Viking boat. So Volvo took it around different places on the East Coast but eventually, of course, it ran out of news worthiness so a man who worked for Volvo lived in Seattle in those days and decided to bring it to Seattle. And pulled it all the way across United States to Seattle and stored it in the Sagstad Marina where we looked at it. And where we then got it. We have at the Museum several slides showing this ship sailing on the Potomac in Washington, D.C. I don't know if they have been found but they are there in ? slides. So that was an aside. So that boat was brought to the Museum and first stored in the open space which was the open semi-covered playground for the kids. Then we were building Dream of American that boat had to be brought out so then we brought it outside and put it where it was outside on the west side. And eventually it was covered by our volunteers with a scaffolding and awnings.

But interesting too in this little space where we had this ship in the outside area, the Norwegian war veterans also had a ship and they wanted – which they used for 17th of May parades – and they wanted to store their ship there too so we had two ships stored in the outside play area. Both had to be moved when we produced Dream of America. The Norwegian War Veteran's ship was eventually sent to Norway and it's in Norway now. But we also used our Norlands boat one time in the 17th of May parade. We had it pulled and a few people dressed as Vikings sat in it and we pulled it in the 17th of May parade in the early 1980's. [0:55:38]

Part 2 of 2

Sandra Nestorovic Could you talk a little bit about the development of the vision of the Museum?

Marianne The vision – yes – actually there had been talk about a museum many many years before the Nordic Heritage Museum was started. The Norwegians already in the early early part of the 20th century had wanted a museum because they realized the richness of it. But nothing happened.

So talks continued off and on and then during the United States' celebration of it's foundation in 1976 we talked again. And at that time it was realized that not just the one nation should do it but the five Nordic nations should be involved. So that was already from the very start very adamantly stated. It must be a museum that covers the five Nordic countries.

Of course a lot of people were saying that Scandinavia means the five countries and in the beginning there were some that wanted to name it the Scandinavian Heritage Museum. But the Finns and the Icelanders were adamantly opposed to that. So a group from all five countries were convened and discussions took place. It was agreed it should be the Nordic Heritage Museum. It should be a museum that describes what the Nordic-Americans did in the Pacific Northwest. That was the main vision.

What were their lifestyles here? What did they do? What did they contribute to the community? Who were they – in other words the Nordic-Americans? And it wasn't really verbalized in the Northwest but the vision became such that it really centered on the Northwest. So in the bylaws it really states – a little bit –and the papers of incorporation what the museum was about and what it wanted to do.

The bylaws have been changed several times but the early bylaws said it must document and interpret the Nordic-American experience in the United States, the Northwest.

So from the beginning it was also agreed that all the five nations should be treated equally. In other words they have an equal place in the Museum – the Danes, the Finns, the Icelanders, the Norwegians and the Swedes. And each should have three representatives on the Board. That's how it was started from the beginning, three representatives from each community with strong roots among their own constituents should be on the Board. So that means 15 and then there should be nine at-large that could be anybody within the Nordic sphere.

So the vision was to document and describe and interpret what the Nordic-American experience was like. As the Museum evolved, of course, it became more and more focused and it also became important to explain from where they came. In other words explain a little about the Nordic countries themselves. Put it in context and also maybe enlarge the sphere so it really did cover the Northwest. At least this is what

discussions were held and what we did agree on as time went on – that it should be a regional museum that places the Nordics in context in the American fabric of life and immigration.

It was difficult to stay very focused on object collection because people came in the beginning with all kinds of things that they thought were important. As time went on the Museum could focus more and more on those areas that was felt to be the main impetus for the Nordics coming to the United States and the Northwest in particular.

It evolved to show that.or.to also talk about the trip across, to show why they had left the homeland, to show the homeland then, the push action, in other words what pushed them out. And also show the pull factor, what had pulled them into the United States and to show areas where they had gathered and try to incorporate those areas into the whole narration.

The vision has been discussed over the years from the beginning. Of course I left but I think that it has been fairly consistent in many ways in that it is a Nordic-American museum located in the United States where the Nordic have been part of American life. And I think that is a very important thing actually because I mean it is not a Nordic museum in the Nordic countries. So it certainly cannot focus to a great extent – it was felt from the beginning – it could not focus to a great extent on the Nordic countries themselves. It had to focus here and give an idea of who they are and who they were. And to honor those that came but also it was felt it should be put out that there were hardships, to not only focus on those that succeeded. And whether that has been accomplished one can discuss of course.

But the hardships of many of the early Nordic-Americans was obvious but they also succeeded in creating a place in the United States for themselves. And this is what we talked about in the very early days. What is that place? How have they done it? And what have they really worked with? And where did they live? And then to really bring it up to date, I think, that has been the hardest part. We talked about that many times. How can we bring it beyond the Second World War? How can we bring it beyond 1930's, 1940's? Bring it into today's immigrant. And I know that was talked about a lot of times and I think that the vision has evolved over the years to realize that that is important. To not only honor the past but to also look at the present time and look at the future.

So this vision has been enlarged in that sense because in the beginning we really focused on the past a lot. But as time went on we realized the present is equally important because the present at one time in the future will be the past. And one needs to think of the future as well because immigration has come to a trickle for the Scandinavians. And many of the early ones are now deceased and left. And now we are dealing with the second and third and fourth generations. And I know that that vision has been discussed a lot.

But also I know that we talked in the early times about the relationship with Scandinavia today. How can we keep a relationship with Scandinavia today? How can

we make it relevant in a historical museum about the relationship of the Nordic-Americans here and the Scandinavians today over there. So that was touched upon many years ago and really never..never formulated in any policy. But I think that the vision still became practice, I mean that idea became a practice through our temporary exhibits and our lectures, and films and our programmatic activities even though in the early days it was not actually verbalized in the vision.

So this vision has evolved and I think that one needs to think of the fact that it really is a museum in the United States that needs to be relevant for people in this region or in the United States and that it is a Museum here and it is not a museum over there. It has a very different vision and focus. (11:11) So that I think shows how we started with a vision of just collecting things to show what they did and where they came And then how the vision enlarged and maybe became a little bit larger but still very focused.

Gordon: So Marianne could you talk to us, tell us how you were able to balance running a new startup Museum with having three children and the difficulties that posed for you and what it was like being a Director in kind of a man's world even back then.

Marianne Yes that is a good question actually because it wasn't exactly a ? of roses having the children and having the Museum. I know that it put a lot of demands on me. I tried to balance in a way family life with the Museum but I know that some of the family life aspect had to be sacrificed. And I know that my children had to give up a lot of things and I must say that I am very grateful to them because they were great kids and very understanding. But there were times when I was rushing home to prepare dinner for them and then putting dinner on the table and rushing back to the Museum for there was a meeting in the evening. That was when the children were still young enough that I was needed at home to do this. And there were also – of course my daughter Eva was the youngest, only three when the Museum started – and she was in a nursery school, a small school that I had to pick her up afterwards. I brought her to the Museum very often and she loved actually being there and being with me.. She was very shy in those days but she had her own little office. In the very beginning I had an office that now the office manager has and there was a little – that was where the principal had his office and he had a little opening into the other, next room which is now - I think there is a printing machine. There was a little opening with a lid that you could drop and I made that into my daughter's office when she was three and four.

So she could sit and draw pictures there and she could open the little lid and handed me the drawings she had made. And I also allowed her to roam the second and third floor. Because when we were only open very limited times – we were only open on Wednesdays and weekends but the work went on. From 1 to 4 on Wednesday or something similar. So I allowed her to bring her roller skate thing and she roller skated on the second floor and she kept herself occupied that way.

But she was also very interested in the Museum with all its nooks and crannies. There were a few times when I couldn't find her and it made me terribly nervous because

I always envisioned (14:52) something happening to her, something going wrong in this place for her. When she was older, she took the bus and came to the Museum and I put her to answer the phone at the Museum. So she answered the phone at the phone desk and she did a really good job. Because ..all of us still then were answering phones because we did not have an answering machine in the very beginning.

(15:26) So yes I also put my youngest son to work in the Dream of America. He did some of the...he did some of the installation and he also did the painting on the boat, the seascape on the boat there and used his artistic talent. It's till there after 20 years. There's a backdrop which is painted

(16:01) Otherwise it went OK because my kids were good and they understood that it was important for me to work. And I must say that, my god, the Museum was almost my fourth child which might sound ridiculous but I felt that it needed a lot of care. So I was willing to give it.

(16:27) As far as being a woman in a man's world, it was true to a certain extent because in the beginning the committee – the executive committee – always only consisted of men and I was the sole woman there. But I never felt any of diminishing my role. I did what I felt was right and I never felt any pressure on me because of being a woman. But it was interesting because in those days most of the Directors in all the museums in Seattle were men and we did have some meetings. And I know that there was one woman director, Mr. Gustafson, I think, of MOHAI, many, many years ago. She was the Director of MOHAI I think in the..and then there was another woman director. But now of course it's different. Now I think there are primarily – there are lots of woman directors all over.

But yes indeed it was very much when you came to the high echelon it was a man's world whereas the workers, the real workers, they were the women and we had more women volunteers than we had men. We were, I think, very fortunate in getting the Monday and Thursday crews started where the men found a niche where they could work. Now I think that we have a lot of different men working for the Museum. Today it is different.

(18:04) But there were challenges of course. There were challenges but talking about ? one challenge was when we were planning the expansion – in others re-configuration – of space in the Museum and putting in the H-Vac system and all the building that was happening. We met – the Executive Committee met every week at 7:30 in Jan Kiaer's office on Denny. And that was a challenge for me to always to be there at 7:30 once a week and have my kids to school and Eva to her school, etcetera. So it did take a lot of special organization at home to be ready to do all of these things.

(19:03) Otherwise things proceeded smoothly and we enlarged, of course, committees and our work at the Museum with more volunteers. The Dream of America, as I said earlier, became pivotal in that. It really became the turning point when we were able to attract more volunteers and more members.

Gordon: What are the origins of Yulefest and Tivoli?

Marianne: The Yulefest started before the Museum was founded. It started in '78, 1978 in order to raise money for the potential museum. And Elsa Elefsen's sister, Randi Hansen, was very much involved in that and Elsa also became involved. That was held downtown Ballard in what now is the restaurant in the old Carnegie Library, the Carnegie Restaurant. On the top floor we had the Yulefest. And we were very lucky because Rosanne Royer, then the wife of then Mayor Royer, became interested in the Museum because she's ethnic herself, she's Croatian-Serbian. And she became very involved in starting the Ethnic Heritage Council and she felt that the Museum was an important aspect of ethnicity in Seattle. So she was promoting this sort of thing too. So in 1978 it started, Yulefest, as a fundraiser and then when we got the Museum from the School District before we opened to the public in 1979 the first Yulefest was held in the auditorium of the Museum in 1979. Very few artisans and craftspeople were there but there were some musicians. It was kind of a almost forlorn group of people that was there I think because – the building was not up to par yet. [21:44]

And I remember so well in the auditorium, in this big, cold, dark space there was some musicians standing in the corner playing. And of course those are intrepid musicians that have been with us – I remember Art Nation was still with us at that time and I remember the musicians standing there and playing and not very many people were there. But it became more and more. As the Museum grew, Yulefest grew and in the beginning, the first few years Randi Hansen ran it and then I took over and started to run it. And wanted to put more structure into it and add things to it and make it a bit more exciting.

[22:37] Then our wonderful volunteers have helped with ideas, helped with every aspect of it. And it became very important for the volunteers to be involved. So they were the ones who suggested - let's get a kaffestua in the Dream, let's get something else, etc. So it involved over the years and became a good fundraiser.

[23:05] As far as Tivoli was concerned it was the same thing there. Actually the person who really suggested it was Bert Lundh because we needed more fundraisers. He said "Why don't we have a summer festival?" So we started to talk about that and we decided "Yeah why don't we a summer festival?" Again it became my responsibility to realize and we decided to have an outside festival. In the beginning it was only one day and our crews – Monday crew and Thursday crew who were then functioning – talked about it and become involved in it. It was Trygvve Jorgensen who ran the Thursday crew who devised and decided on the booths that were made for Tivoli. Booths that were then also in the beginning not having – I don't think they had awnings over them – the blue awnings over them. And that grew and again it was the volunteers who were the driving force seeing to it that it could expand by their willingness to work and their willingness to take on functions.

[24:36] We had discussions on what could be done and then it was suggested "Let's do ethnic foods for each of the groups." So that evolved that way. Then we decided it was

too hard to do it one day so we decided to do it two days because one day it really, it's not enough for all this work. So the first year we did two days was not as successful but as time went on it became more successful. As with everything else it evolved and became bigger and we almost grew out of the space. And we needed a beer tent. So it was by way of just looking at the surrounding area we decided the beer tent could be on the southside of the Museum. It grew incrementally.

[25:35] Then..so we had two fundraisers – one summer and one winter – then we decided – there was talk - we still need a major because these did not bring in hundred thousand dollars but they did brought in a good portion of what we needed. But they were not enough. So many years ago we started talk about a auction. That was done actually even before we opened the Dream of America. At that time we used the gym and the auditorium and the hallway into what now are classrooms. So we had seated the banquet in the gym. That was right before we started to bring the Dream of America. And our volunteers cooked the food. I actually again since we had such few staff members I kind of ran the auction. We did the catalogue on our first computer – our Curator Janet Moneymaker did the entry of the catalogue. And we had it printed, probably copied enough catalogues.

[27:15] Actually my son gave one of the first covers for the catalogue. It was a maritime theme. So it became a very homemade auction so to speak. I remember well because we had then started to break through so that there was an opening from the gym into the auditorium. So that people could go in that way pretty easily – which still is a breakthrough room right now. The people from Denmark that were building the Dream of America were already there so they participated in the auction as well. That's the reason I remember it was right before we had started installation.

[28:11] It was successful. I don't remember how much we brought in but it tided us over well for that year and helped the budget greatly. That was in April I believe. I think we had a spring auction in those days. Or was it before that? Well anyway it was early early auction. And that's how the auction started. The auction has been with the Museum for many years and of course it evolved again. Both with the help of the staff – as the staff increased – and the help of the volunteers. And made a much more organized committee for acquisition of the objects for the auction, etc.

Gordon How did you become the Glögg maker?

Marianne [laughs] In the beginning we did not have Glögg. We just served beer and wine. And then we started discussing – it was suggested by a Swedish volunteer I'm sure – why don't we serve Glögg as well. I felt that was a great idea but nobody was willing to make it. So I just said "Well I'll make it." And I started to make the Glögg and since I made it then everyone relied on me to continue making it.

Gordon Is there something unique about the recipe or where it came from?

Marianne Well not really. It's Glögg that I like. And I do it by taste. I do not put akavit in the Glögg like sometimes one does in Sweden. But I only use burgundy and spices – the spices that give that kind of extra little touch to it. It has to be sweet enough but not too sweet because wine can be slightly sour if you buy the fairly inexpensive burgundy. So you have to taste it until it's just right and you have to get the proper spices in it like the cloves, the cardamom, the cinnamon sticks, etc. And I also use the tiny slices of oranges, the peel of oranges. And sometimes one can even put a little bit of ginger in it but not too much. Because ginger is so very, very strong so I usually don't do that. It has to have just the right taste and it must be served piping hot. It's very similar in a sense to mulled wine. It has the spices of Swedish Glögg but not the akavit. So there is no real secret. It just has to taste right. And it must be very hot when it is served.

Gordon Well maybe that is enough for now. That is a lot.

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