

Nordic Heritage Museum
Nordic American Voices

Interview of Marilyn Wirkkala Madden
At Seattle, Washington
On February 19, 2011
Interviewed by Brandon Benson and Michelle Brogden

Brandon Benson: [0:50] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices oral history project. Today is the 19th of February, 2011. [1:00] I'll be interviewing Marilyn Wirkkala Madden. We are at the Nordic Heritage Museum in Ballard in Seattle.

[1:07] My name is Brandon Benson and with me is Michelle Brogden. Please state your name.

Marilyn Wirkkala Madden: [1:10] Marilyn Wirkkala Madden.

Brandon: [1:18] Thank you. So Marilyn, let's start with where were you born?

Marilyn: [1:36] I was actually born in Astoria, Oregon, which is just sort of across the river from the little community that I grew up in. I can't really call it a town even, Naselle, Washington and it was really a Finnish community and is still. [2:16] And one of our sort of claim-to-fame is every other year we have a Finnish-American Folk Festival there that the town puts on, our little village puts on. It's really quite remarkable because now after all these years have passed since really the main group of immigrants came at the turn of the century, there are still enough Finnish people in the town, but also people that aren't Finnish at all, which we find here at the museum too have an interest in things Scandinavian.

[2:44] So part of it was preserving the heritage of the town. It's always the last week of July every other summer and I'm thinking it was this last summer, so it won't be again until 2013, no 2012, so that has been really preserving the heritage of our community.

[3:14] When I grew up, if you just even looked in the phone book in Naselle it sort of looked like what I in later years saw, was a telephone book in Kaustinen, Finland, because that's where so many of the immigrants came from was that little town, which also puts on an international folk music festival every year. And in the course of the two weeks of that festival, they do it every summer, I don't know how they can handle it. It's a small town.

[3:24] They have upwards of 200,000 people that actually attend the festival or perform in it and they're from all over the world.

[3:47] Not all on the same day, but in the course of that time. It's kind of interesting to me, of course, ours is on a much smaller scale, but lots of people from even Canada and neighboring states and certainly Seattle and a lot of people that have been involved in the museum have been down there and come down with their Scandia dance groups and various things, so it's fun.

Brandon: [3:56] That's great. So which family members first came from Finland to the U.S.?

Marilyn: [4:32] Actually, my grandmother on my father's side came, Hilda Korpela I believe it was right at the end in the 1890s and she came as a single person from near the Kaustinen area. Her maiden name was Korpela, Hilda Korpela, and then my grandfather came about the same time from that same area, but they were not married. [4:53] They were both young people, I think they were maybe in their late teens when they came. My grandfather, Andrew Wirkkala, came from the area of Kaustinen and they met here and married here and they started a home on the south fork of the Naselle River, which is part of our little valley.

[5:28] They raised cattle and milk cows really. It was dairy and then also I know that my grandfather drove the school bus, which was a horse-drawn wagon of some sort. That was one of his other jobs that he did, but maybe what he was most busy with was raising a family of 15 children with my grandmother, Hilda Korpela Wirkkala.

[6:04] So she was certainly pregnant for many years. There were 12 boys and three daughters. So I, on my father's side, was from a huge family. I have lots of cousins, there's lots of Wirkkalas. Many left the area, but many left and came back and stayed and have worked in logging, although that's not so great in these last years, but several of them have college educations and taught school and then kind of came back to the area, too.

[6:35] Then on my mother's side, the only one that I really know about that came from Finland was her mother, Josefina Varila and she also came from sort of the other side of the river from where the Wirkkalas [in Kaustinen] were. She came before she was 20 years old and married my grandfather Andrew Johnson and it was a large family.

[6:54] My mother was from a family of about 11 children also. There were two different fathers and mothers and one father died and then remarried so there's half-sisters and half-brothers. It was in the same time period that they came.

[7:08] There were also very many relatives on my mother's side, which was probably typical of the families in those days. I'm sure it wasn't just our Wirkkalas. So she married Andrew Johnson, so Johnson and Wirkkala were the two family names.

Brandon: [7:19] So it was your grandparents that came across from Finland and then your parents were born in the U.S. as well?

Marilyn: [7:20] Yes. Yes.

Brandon: [7:28] That's great. So what was the community like in Naselle with the Finnish population?

Marilyn: [7:50] I think it was probably a lot like it would've been if I had grown up in a community in Finland because Finnish was spoken definitely, and I would say maybe even 70% of the time in my young days growing up. Although, in school we were learning in English. [8:35] It was totally in English by that time. But as long as my grandmother lived I never knew grandfather on my dad's side or my grandmother on my mother's side. I didn't know any of those except for my paternal grandmother and she lived until a month before my husband and I were married, and she spoke Finnish almost entirely, but she could speak English and she never hesitated to speak English, but as long as she was living and that was until 1967 lots of Finnish was spoken in our whole family circle and also in the town. It was really that way with all the families that lived there.

[9:00] There were Pekkanens and Penttilas and all sorts of Niemis, lots of Finnish names. What I was going to say, our phone book looked like the phone book looks in Kaustinen, Finland with those same family names and lots of them are still in our little town.

[9:46] We had a lot of kind of Finnish customs, I guess. We probably made a lot of the same foods that they would've made in Finland and the interesting thing when I visited Finland in later years as a teenager I went with my parents and then I went again quite a few years later and when I visited my relatives in Kaustinen and we spent a lot of time there, they said that I spoke vanha Suomia, I was speaking old Finnish. It was actually antiquated, using words that they don't even use in Finland anymore. I realized that that was because we were totally encapsulated in Naselle.

[10:11] The Finnish that was brought over, that was the Finnish that we spoke. It never evolved. In Finland and in the other countries language evolves, but it didn't in Naselle. It just stayed the same old way, so they would kind of laugh. They hadn't heard that word in a long time when I was trying to communicate with my relatives over there it was kind of funny.

[11:00] Then the traditions I guess would be something like the foods that we had in our home and then sauna and Saturday night was sauna night for sure and we didn't have a sauna in my family, but my grandmother did and two or three of my aunts and uncles did. So Saturday night we would go to their house. They would always have coffee and all kinds of Finnish baked goods and pulla and jouluriisipuuro with marja soppa, berry soup over the rice pudding and rieska and always homemade Finnish breads and cheeses and stuff like that.

[11:25] So sometimes we'd go to my Johnson side of the family, sometimes we'd go to my Aunt Elizabeth's home and they had a really nice sauna and that was a Saturday night tradition. That's how I grew up, doing that. We have a sauna now at our little house in Naselle and we love to use it.

Brandon: [11:35] What about holiday traditions? Did you have any special traditions for Christmas or Easter?

Marilyn: [11:59] We always gathered at my grandmother Wirkkala's house as long as the house was standing and she was still living and with 15 of her own children and they all had families ranging from two children to five children. I think maybe that was the largest. You can imagine what a busy place it was. [12:28] They all brought presents that the children received. I don't recall that the adults exchanged any gifts. But I remember the tree was set on a large round oak table in the parlor, kind of in the living room and in the parlor. It wasn't a tall tree, but it was always decorated with those little bubble lights. I think those were probably a part of everyone's tradition whether you were Scandinavian or not.

[12:45] Underneath the packages were just overflowing; there was never enough room. We had a lot of fun. We just had things like we called Finnish biscuit in Naselle but it's pulla here at the museum, everyone calls it that.

[13:09] Again, lots of pies and cakes and fish, salt fish, Suola Kala was always part of our... everyone had it in a crock somewhere in their house and it was salted salmon that we would take out and slice real thin, kind of like lox, I guess.

[13:34] We didn't ever have lutefisk in my home. I'm trying to think of some of the things. I know my dad loved to have new potatoes in a white cream sauce with fresh peas. That was something that probably was kind of Scandinavian. It's probably across the board. I don't know.

[13:53] But really we always celebrated on Christmas Eve. That's when we opened our gifts and all of that. That was, I think, part of our Scandinavian tradition. We had dinner and got together on Christmas day, but Christmas Eve was our big celebration.

Brandon: [14:02] You mentioned that your grandfather had a farm. What occupations were your parents?

Marilyn: [14:30] My father, the first job that he had, really, was in the woods. They were all mainly in timber and logging. Several of my uncles started a company called Wirkkala Brothers Logging Company. My father had Wirkkala and Johnson and then just MW Logging Company. I think he logged about 30 years. [15:05] And different ones in the family, that was really the main thing. We were not fishermen. We were close to the Columbia River and so there were salmon and all of that. But most everyone in my family was really in logging. In our area, we were just in the midst of big trees. My father did a lot of old growth and maybe second growth timber. I don't remember how many employees he had.

[15:20] Then he sold everything in 1958 and kept a rock business that he had acquired to build the logging roads because you got to get in to get the timber out.

[15:34] But I remember Dad always being up in the woods and then coming home. Then what he loved to do, because we lived right on the south fork of the Naselle River, especially in summer evenings, he'd go down and fly fish in the river.

[16:02] The cattle, the dairy cows, were really mostly for home use. I don't think too much was actually shipped out of our area, like to bigger groups, for milk, selling milk. I think most people used it and had their own little gardens and things. Haymaking was always a big thing in the summer for the numbers of cattle that my uncles had.

[16:18] We didn't have a farm but I always went with my cousins to make hay. One of the fun things was homemade root beer that our aunts or moms would make. [laughs] On hot summer days it was always lots of fun.

[16:37] We had lots of family picnics, too. We had a little park in our town. Our family would gather lots of times on summer evenings there and do all the cooking there, hot dogs and baked beans and hamburgers.

[16:51] We also played baseball games. The whole family played. It wasn't just the kids or the adults; we were all mixed up. Or volleyball, and we did that on long summer days always.

[17:15] It was kind of an ideal place to grow up. Yet we had a fairly good school system for being in such a rural area. At that point, when I was growing up education was valued. But my father, for instance, went as far as the fifth grade, my mother as far as the eighth grade.

[17:36] But he was always very well read and always travelled. His vocabulary was excellent, and he didn't use it to impress anyone, but he was just well-read and well-spoken. So you would have thought that he had gone past fifth grade, but he didn't.

Brandon: [17:40] So how many children did your parents have?

Marilyn: [17:40] Five.

Brandon: [17:47] Five. Did any follow in the footsteps of your father and work the logging?

Marilyn: [18:15] Actually, at that point he had developed the rock and asphalt business. One of my brothers went into that business with my father and then took it over when my father passed away. Actually now my oldest brother and my younger brother do still operate that business. They sell rock and asphalt, and they hire quite a lot of the local people there. That's one of the few businesses, actually. [18:36] We also have a youth camp. When I was growing up there was a radar station, an Air Force site. There were about 200 families that lived there on this station, I can't call it an air base, because it was really radar stations that were up on the hills.

[19:09] Of course, when that all became obsolete, there was this housing, there were a lot of office buildings and places. So the State of Washington brought in, it's called Naselle Youth Camp. It's for troubled young people. I think it's mostly all boys that are there. But it actually has a really good track record. They have really done some fine rehabilitation work there. It's one of the places that is still open.

[19:12] That's one of the other main employers, really in our little community.

[19:34] My other family members, I have a sister who is a speech therapist [and youngest sister is a CPA]. And my other brother was in finance. I was a school nurse until I retired from that. I've lived in Seattle with my husband, really all our married life.

Brandon: [19:36] Did you meet in Seattle?

Marilyn: [19:39] We did. We met in college at Seattle Pacific University here.

Brandon: [19:43] And does he have Finnish heritage?

Marilyn: [20:03] Not at all. He is all British Isles, Scottish, English, Welsh, Irish and a little French. But he's always been interested in things Finnish and has traveled with me to Finland, too. That's been neat. [20:13] I think he's enjoyed the Association here at the museum as much as I have, which I am very happy about. [laughs]

[20:31] I don't know that he knew what he was getting into when he married into our family because we're such a huge group. He is an only child. He does have cousins and a neat family, but not quite maybe as overwhelming in numbers as ours.

Brandon: [20:37] Tell us about your first trip to Finland.

Marilyn: [20:58] My parents took my younger sister, Margery, who I mentioned was a speech therapist. We were in our teens. That was our first trip to Finland. We were two months, a month in Finland, and then we traveled in other parts of Europe at that time. [21:23] But I remember we flew there. I'm trying to think. No, we flew across the United States and we took a ship actually from New York to Southampton, England. So we did a bit of travel before we got to Finland, We spent a month in Finland.

[21:54] So we flew from wherever the last, it might have been London, to Helsinki. As I was looking down out of the window of the airplane, I just suddenly got so choked up. I was a 17-year-old teenager. I was excited about the trip. We had grown up in a Finnish community; I thought I knew a lot about Finns and Finland, but I just really was kind of emotionally overwhelmed when I first saw Finland.

[22:10] I was so surprised. I just got all choked up. I felt like "That's my homeland," in a way. [laughs] We were so closely attached to it with all the Finnish people in our hometown and everything.

[22:38] That was really neat. We spent a month there. We drove to all kinds of little towns and stayed in mostly hotels then because there were four of us. Visited family in Eastern Finland, where the Wirkkala's, Tapio Wirkkala, who is a Finnish designer. He is deceased now.

He designed mainly in glass. [inaudible 23: [23:03] 45] and [inaudible 23:47] glass and also he designed a lot for Rosenthal China in Germany and I think probably lots of things that I don't really know about. But we did visit his home place in Finland and we visited his parents, who are long deceased now.

Ilmari Wirkkala was his father. We didn't actually meet Tapio . He spent a lot of time up in northern Finland and [inaudible 25:19]

[23:13] and getting his inspiration for his designs.

[23:35] I guess he was not a real social person. But that was interesting and you realized how beautiful the country of Finland was. We just loved it, and eastern Finland, several provinces, too, even though western Finland is where my relatives are mostly from.

It was a great experience. We polished up our poor Finnish a little bit. And met some young people and made some connections that still remain today. A family that we visited in [inaudible 27: [24:04] 23] , Finland on the eastern side of Finland I have returned twice, three times actually, and seen them, spent time with them in [inaudible 27:59] and they have come and visited us in the States.

Also, Tapio Wirkkala's brother, Tauno, who was also really an artist, but he kept the family farm in eastern Finland, he also was recognized as a designer and all in Finland. He came with his granddaughter and spent two weeks with us in our home in Seattle.

[24:39] We were, at that time, talking about building another home, which we have done, and he sat and did some sketching and stuff and said, "This is what I think you ought to do here."

[24:59] It was really fun. The connections have been really close for me. I feel really blessed to have those people that I know and have spent time with and have been able to come here and share our heritage that way.

Brandon: [25:01] You have children of your own?

Marilyn: [25:03] I do. We have a son and daughter.

Brandon: [25:10] Have they also been active in the Finnish community or learning?

Marilyn: [25:28] They haven't been involved as much but they both spent two different times in Finland, once six weeks and once almost three months in 1984 when they were 10 and 12 and that's when they picked up quite a lot of Finnish and then we went again two years later. [25:50] To tell you the truth, neither of them have returned. We had a trip planned about three years ago and something came up and we weren't able to do it. Collin had just gotten married and he and his wife had said, "Mom and Dad, we want you to go to Finland with us. We want to know the people and not lose those connections." We haven't done it yet, but we will.

[26:16] They usually come to the auction. They've been involved in a lot of different events here at the museum and have enjoyed that a lot. Our daughter always says, "Mom, speak Finnish to me so I don't lose the little bit that I have." My Finnish isn't that great but I can get along. They appreciate their heritage very much.

Brandon: [26:26] The trip that you took with them, was that in the three month trip with one of your offspring?

Marilyn: [26:28] Yes, with both of them.

Brandon: [26:28] Oh, both of them.

Marilyn: [26:42] Yeah. We were actually gone three months. We left actually two weeks before school was out when they were in I think it was sixth and fourth grades. Then they got back just in time to start school then the next year. [26:54] They had just a wonderful time and one of the things that was so neat was that in Finland in the summertime Scandinavia it just doesn't get dark and people don't go to bed.

[27:21] At midnight they'd be out playing with their cousins. It was just amazing. We had to set some parameters but the midnight sun is a very real thing. It was really, really neat and they don't put heavy curtains on their windows either. Just maybe little lace curtains or something like we have right here and the sun comes through all night long. [laughs]

[27:28] Well, it sets for a little while but it's still light, it doesn't get dark. Have you been travelled in Scandinavia?

Brandon: [27:29] Yeah.

Marilyn: [27:30] So you've experienced that?

Brandon: [27:31] I have.

Marilyn: [28:03] I would like to go in winter. I really would. I'd love to go at Christmas time. One of the traditions I know what in I call my home town, Kaustinen, where our relatives are, a lot are buried in that cemetery, at Christmas, and maybe other countries do this too, they bring candles to the cemetery on Christmas Eve and they put a glass chimney around them so they're not blown out and I guess it's quite a sight to see on Christmas Eve. I think that's one of their traditions is to make a trip to the cemetery. We don't do that. That was never a part of our tradition and I'd like to see Helsinki when it's frozen over and you can walk across the ice to Suomen linna . That would really be something. [laughs] I don't know. It's hard for me to leave home at Christmas time. We have our own traditions and it's hard, but one day I want to do that.

Brandon: [28:35] You've been to Finland and you've had Finnish relatives visit you in the United States. Do you have any formal family reunions?

Marilyn: [29:06] Not between Finland and the US, no. Actually, we haven't done family reunions so much. I have one cousin in Nasselle where I grew up, so I shouldn't actually say that because they would have a picnic in the summer over many years and it would gather most of our family together, but it wasn't real formal so I wouldn't say that we have done it really formally. [29:35] A lot of us, of course, do gather on this semi-annual festival that our little town has. We all try to make that if we can. Sometimes they coordinate that with some

of our high school reunions, too, because they know that will bring people into town and we usually do three, four, or five years together for our high school reunions because there were 40 in my graduating class and we were, I think, the biggest class.

[29:41] They're not even that big anymore. There're like 20 graduating from our little school.

Brandon: [29:49] Naselle has changed some. It's not as densely Finnish as before.

Marilyn: [29:50] That's correct.

Brandon: [29:54] What are some other changes that you've seen in the area?

Marilyn: [30:19] Mostly it's just other people coming in but there isn't so much to draw people. So in terms of the population it's pretty much stayed the same. For me, a big change is that now all of my relatives except for two aunties are deceased so there's no one of the generation that came before me remaining. [30:36] It was really sobering because last week, actually last Saturday, we had just been to Maui, Hawaii, and got home Friday night, drove to Naselle Saturday for the funeral of my last uncle, Uncle Hannes Wirkella.

[31:15] He had been a pastor of a church in Yacolt, Washington. That's near Vancouver, east near Brush Prairie and those little towns. He had done logging in his early days and he'd been a painter and he was an ordained minister and he was almost 98. He actually lived the longest of any of my father's brothers. It's the last of that. We have two aunties that are still living, but that family, all on my mother's and father's side. That's a big change.

[31:32] Many of my uncles lived still in the valley, in our little Naselle valley, but now it's my generation. I still have cousins there, but the older generation is going. That's a change.

[31:51] Otherwise, I don't know that things have changed too much. They're still logging in spurts and starts. When the markets come back a little and right now there's a little bit of an upturn so you see log trucks on the roads again some like we always have had.

[31:57] Not too much has changed.

Brandon: [32:06] What kind of Nordic organizations have you belonged to here or in Naselle?

Marilyn: [32:38] I belong to Finlandia Foundation, which is a Finnish organization, and Finland Society or Suomi-Seura, which is more of a national or international Finnish organization and I'm not real active in it, but my main activity has been the Nordic Heritage Museum which is all five Nordic countries. I have really enjoyed that. I just think we're so unique. [33:03] There's not another museum or cultural group, I don't think, in the world

that encompasses like we do the five countries. I know there's other Scandinavian museums in the United States but they're not like we are.

[33:21] I was actually planning the first trip to Finland with my children in 1984 when the woman who was the travel agent, and she was Finnish 100 percent and from Finland. That's Rita. Her name was Rita Alport Koski now.

[33:43] She's very active in Finnish and she's been on the board here, too, at the museum in years past. When I met her and when she helped to get our trip all organized for my children and I to go she said, "Marilyn, have you been to the Nordic Heritage Museum?" I said, "No, I haven't." She said, "It's in Ballard."

[34:11] This was in '84 and I think it started a few years before that. Then she said, later when I got back from Finland, she said, "You know what? One of our Finnish stalwarts is retiring from the board and I'm going to submit your name to be on the museum board. Would you consider that?" I said, "I don't have any qualifications to serve on a museum board. I don't know what that would require."

[34:20] She said, "No, you just need to be interested in things Finnish and you can handle that, I think."

[34:37] I said, "I don't know about that." Anyway, I did take the position that was vacated by [Finnish name] and he was a wonderful Finnish man. I felt like I had some pretty big shoes to fill.

[35:00] Anyway, I think I went on in about 1985 and served in several capacities. I was vice president for a couple years and then we always have had responsibilities as board members in certain areas that we would need to be on committees and serve.

[35:19] Really the membership committee has been what I've been involved with for the last several years. I served actually for 12 years and then I was off for three or four years. Now I completed another three terms and so I'm going off in a couple days. [laughs]

[35:26] But that doesn't mean I'm not going to be associated or affiliated. I'm still going to be serving on the membership committee and the auction committee.

[35:45] To me, the opportunities now that we have and the excitement of the campaign and a new building and the location down in Ballard I think is going to be just fantastic. So I'm not going to disappear.

Brandon: [35:55] Right. So you've been involved with membership, but have there been other activities that you've been involved with that you've enjoyed?

Marilyn: [36:28] Yes, Yule Fest and Viking Days almost every year I've actually been a volunteer and also enjoyed all of the vendors and everyone that comes. They have the Mostly Nordic Music Series, I have had series tickets for a number of years, I don't this year, but we come whenever we can to those. [36:47] I remember the first auctions that we had and I actually chaired the auction committee quite a few years with someone else who was excellent too, either Mari-Ann Jackson or Rita Koski and I did and I've served on that committee a lot and been involved in all the activities that are involved with that.

[37:12] I remember our first auctions were here in this building. It was just a lot of fun, but you can imagine how small we were, but that's how we started and it just grew from there. Then we had wonderful ones down at the Weston Hotel at Washington Plaza and other locations downtown over the years.

[37:35] So those are the main things. I'm sure there's other things that I'm forgetting. There's been so many years I've been involved. Not so much the capital campaign, but supporting as much as we can that way, but also membership campaign.

[37:45] Over the years we had special drives, so that was one of my interests and I put some energies toward that.

Brandon: [37:48] That's great. Do you have any questions?

Michelle: [37:52] I was just wondering about your grandparents, do you know why they came to America?

Marilyn: [38:25] I think that they just felt there was a lot more opportunity. In Finland I think things were, when they came and it was certainly before the war because it was at the end of the 1890s, but I think things were just difficult in Finland and I believe that there were other people that left from the area ahead of them and then wrote back and said, this is where you need to come. [38:43] And so Astoria, Oregon, which is just across the Columbia from us was kind of stopping off place for a lot of people that were from that area. And I just think they really came for an opportunity and to better themselves and for the families that they hoped they would have here you know.

[38:58] Some of them went back, but I think a lot of my relatives in that family of 15 and all, they never made a trip back to Finland. Of course, they were not the generation that came, but their parents did.

Brandon: [39:05] So the generation that came, like your grandparents, did they have siblings that came to the U.S. also?

Marilyn: [39:06] They did.

Brandon: [39:07] Other parts of The United States?

Marilyn: [39:16] They mostly came to certainly Washington or that area, not to other parts of The United States, my family did not do that.

Brandon: [39:21] So Naselle was sort of the area for the Finns?

Marilyn: [39:24] It really was.

Brandon: [39:25] Especially for that region of Finland?

Marilyn: [39:26] It was. Yeah.

Brandon: [39:35] You have a trip planned tentatively to go back to Finland, you don't know when that will happen?

Marilyn: [39:51] No, I don't know exactly when we'll do that. We're going to try to do that with our son and his wife and maybe our daughter, too. It probably will be pretty soon. You start to get the feeling that it's time to go back. [40:01] We were in Finland two years ago, my husband and I and another couple, but it was pretty brief. It was just Helsinki and then a little bit of Eastern Finland.

[40:28] When we went with our children and later in the summer my husband joined us and we made a trip into St. Petersburg and that was still behind the Iron Curtain and that was quite an interesting thing for our children. We were three nights staying, it was called Leningrad then and we stayed in a hotel there.

[40:58] A friend, it wasn't a family member, but this good friend of our family who lives in Kotka and who we have a lot of contact with, he said he wanted to drive us. So our family of four and then he drove us in his car and we went through the border at Valema where also the trains go across too from Finland to, well it was the Soviet Union then, it isn't anymore, but we had an interesting time.

[41:15] We saw things that we probably wouldn't have seen if we'd have been on an organized tour because he sort of felt like he could drive into Karelia, too. That was the part that was taken by Russia from Finland and so we weren't really suppose to drive down in that area, but we did.

[41:40] We got off on the sea coast there, which was a beautiful area of Karelian homes, large wooden with lots of ornamentation and just beautiful woodwork and all, but just in terrible condition. Nothing was maintained and you could just see that in that Soviet era that beautiful things just went.

[41:55] There were yards and you could see that there were beautiful gardens, but everything was overgrown. Even the concrete fences were falling down. We were very careful not to speak any English when we were there. A couple Russians were walking along that area. That was interesting.

[42:15] Then when we came back over the border and we had gone to the circus and done various things in Leningrad, we came back and my son said, "Why did we leave friendly Finland and go to Russia?"

[42:28] They had such a good feeling when we came back, because you really did feel the oppression then and we were watched like hawks in the hotel and everything where we stayed, but that was quite an interesting observation.

[42:44] One of the interesting and fun things in Finland that we did there in the eastern part was the Finnish Czar, during the time of the Czars, had a beautiful summer fishing/hunting lodge there near Kotka. Have you been there?

Brandon: [42:44] No.

Marilyn: [42:58] Along a beautiful river with huge rapids where there was a lot of good fish and stuff. And it was called Langinkotski and that was one of the places that we visited and each time I've gone back there I just want to go there. It's just such a beautiful spot. [43:31] And it was really the only place that the Russian family, this is what they tell you when you visit there, that they came without bodyguards or servants, just the family came. They may have had a couple, but they just wanted to live quietly and fish and she cooked, the Russian Empress Alexandra. So that was one of the real interesting things.

[43:39] Our kids enjoyed that, too. A beautiful place to visit. But that was interesting to go drive from Finland, then come back in.

[43:54] Then we did it later again by train in 2000 when there was no Iron Curtain anymore, but it's a beautiful city to visit and boy I recommend that.

Brandon: [43:59] It seems you maintain your relationships with your family in Finland?

Marilyn: [44:19] Yes, and we really truly want to do that. And send Christmas cards every year and letters back and forth, now emails more than that, but definitely really that's important to us, very much.

Brandon: [44:20] That's great.

Michelle: [44:26] What makes you proud of being Finnish?

Marilyn: [44:58] Well, there's something called Finnish sisu. My husband says it's stubbornness and he would know. I think that we're kind of known for not giving up and I feel like the little country of Finland suffered a lot of hardships and always lived close to the big Russian bear that could come in and crush them at any time. [45:32] And they were able to maintain the kinds of relations, where of course they were under Sweden and they were under Russia for many years, too, but now they have been able to kind of stand tall and have their own country and be really recognized. They have done a lot of innovative things. I know when I was in Finland in '84 several of the people that we met that were in business they had phones in their cars and I hadn't heard of phones in cars.

[45:47] That was in 1984 here in the U.S. I'm sure that there were business people that had them, but my husband didn't. I do remember the first great big one that he got, a very heavy thing.

[46:26] They were just kind of surprised, so being a small country and all I think they've been very innovative, pretty well-known for design and all. I guess that certainly gives me a sense of pride. Just very much of a hard work ethic and for the most part honest and straightforward kind of people, not people to put on airs or anything. Kind of ordinary folk definitely.

[46:44] They were very conscientious at the end of the war to take care of the debts that they owed and one of the few countries in the world that have, so all of that I appreciate greatly.

[47:12] I feel proud to have those kind of genes and I am 100% Finnish on both sides and now my children certainly are not. They are very well blended and that's great and my son is married to a beautiful Chinese girl, so I had visualized that I would probably have blonde, blue-eyed grandchildren someday, and I don't think that's going to be the case. But it's great, it's wonderful.

[47:31] Each generation brings amazing changes. But I think it's so important to kind of know who you are and where your roots really are. One of the other things that I was involved in that definitely was Finnish was – every year there is a huge national gathering of Finnish people called FinnFest USA. In 1989 we had the first one in Seattle. It was held on the University of Washington campus. I was very fully involved in that.

We had lots of speakers, lots of workshops. We had groups coming in from all over the United States – music, food, dance, everything. The U.W. campus is great – and then they could stay in the dorms. So it brought in several thousand people in 1999, ten years later, we did it again. I was involved in that too. What made me really pleased was in both

of those our little town of Naselle brought a pretty significant contingent of people to come to that. Because it was a national thing.

They also put on some really nice programs and that was a lot of fun. So I was kind of liaising a little bit between that. That is one of the Finnish activities that I have been involved in. Then our little hometown Naselle and Astoria, Oregon together hosted FinnFest USA national. Always people, groups come from Finland too for that. So Astoria and Naselle hosted that. And we had quite a large contingent of people come from all over the United States. So that was a neat thing to be a part of. I wasn't as involved in that interestingly as I was in the two that happened here in Seattle but we were certainly there and our family was there. We were a part of it as much as we possibly could be. That was exciting and it was fun. It was really gratifying to see our community, really small community could pull it off.

Brandon: Well thanks Marilyn for sharing your story with us.

Marilyn: Well thanks for wanting to hear it.

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