

Interview of Claude Nelson

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Swedish Cultural Center

Seattle, Washington

Interviewers: Brandon Benson; Michelle Brogden

Michelle Brogden: [0:01] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices oral history project. Today is May 5, 2012, and I'll be interviewing Claude Nelson. We are at the Swedish Cultural Center in Seattle, Washington. My name is Michelle Brogden, and I'm also here with Brandon Benson. Could you please tell us your full name, where you were born, and when you were born?

Claude Nelson: [0:23] Well, my full name is Claude Norine Nelson, and I was born up in Everett, on February 17, 1931. My father wanted me named Nils Christian after his grandfather, but my mother, she objected. She said, "No, I don't want any kid of mine called Nils Nelson." And so my father said, "Well, here's a telephone book. Pick a name out of it." So, I got... my first name was picked out of a telephone book.

[1:04] But my first name, even though... when I was a kid, I didn't like it very much, but when I grew up and I was taken into the army, even though I spent the first six months in Fort Benning, Georgia- I did military illustrations. And then when I got sent overseas, I thought I was going to go... in those days, I thought I was going to go to Korea or someplace, you know. But as luck would have it, I got sent to France.

[1:35] Probably the happiest time of my life, spending thirteen months living in the army in France. Half the time in Orleans, and then the other half in Paris, and then back and forth, you know. Like I say, it was probably, I think, because of my first name. That's the only reason I can think, because in those days, in 1956, I didn't think we had any military in France at all. But like I said, it was a happy time, and I really enjoyed it, you know.

[2:17] And then I took two leaves, and I went to Sweden so I could meet my cousins and my aunts. And I was lucky to have met all of my aunts, all six of them, before they eventually passed on as the years went by. And I enjoyed my times, at that time in Sweden. One time in the late summer and then Christmastime, which was wonderful. I learned a lot of things that I never knew about, especially in Sweden.

[3:09] I noticed things were a little bit different in Sweden, but I found out that it was like the old days were still there. And the Swedish people had a lot of respect for the old days. A lot of the young people did not like the type of government because they felt that they were being sort of

hamstrung by it. But they got used to it after a while, even though today a lot of them would rather do other things.

[3:51] Sometimes my cousins would call me up, and we'd talk on the phone about this and that and so forth. But it's just like things have never changed, even since the 16-, 1700s, in some cases. Because they have a lot of things going on over there that a lot of Americans don't even know about. Sometimes, some of the old Swedes who have never even gone back home after coming here- they don't know what has happened back there, you see.

[4:31] And so, it's really interesting just to find out that things have changed, and they have a kind of a socialism type of thing, because it's just like the old people are well taken care of when they reach a certain age, and they're put into assisted living. All my aunts, you know, ended up that way. Some of them never went into assisted living; they stayed in their homes.

[5:04] But the government officials had to come around at least once a month to check their health, if any, you know. I was there one time when a government official came to check one of my aunt's health. When they came, you know, she served them coffee and cake, or whatever. It's just like the man said, he said, "Now you know why I come here once a month. I like to get coffee and cake from your Aunt Jenny." [Laughter] So, that was funny.

[5:46] Then over there, there was also a lot of people going from house to house, trying to get you interested in many things. I was there one day, you know, when a Mormon preacher came, and he wanted to talk with my aunt, you know, and so forth. And her husband, Gunnar, he said something in Swedish I couldn't understand, so my cousin [Carl-Gustaf] said, "Oh, Dad doesn't want to talk with those guys, so that's why he's going upstairs to hide." [Laughter] So, there was a lot of that, jokes going around, you know.

[6:36] I found out that during the war, a German plane came into Swedish territory that had been shot up. It was in the morning hours, around nine, ten o'clock. It came down and made a crash landing into the field. And my aunt was out there doing something in the garden. Gunnar was in the barn. And they said that the plane- it was a Messerschmitt- came down. It made a couple of bounces on the field. Jenny went out there, and the German, she knew because she recognized it as a German plane.

[7:27] She said, "Are you all right? You can come in for coffee." And this German pilot, he said he had never drunk coffee in his life because they never had it during the war in Germany, apparently. That's what I was told. So, when they were walking to the house, she saw Gunnar in the barn looking out, and she said in Swedish to call the police, and the pilot couldn't understand, of course. They were in the house, and the police came and took him away. And the plane ended up in a museum. [Laughter] I guess it's still there. But [these were] some of the stories I was told from one of my aunts.

[8:22] My other aunt, Aunt Anna, who came back from living over here in the States, she worked as a maid for a doctor back in Chicago. I was in that doctor's home one time, visiting, and I hadn't seen my aunt since I was two years old. And that house was like a museum, because this doctor was a surgeon during the First World War in Europe. And he had a lot of souvenirs in the place. It was like a museum- uniforms on mannequins, and things like that.

[9:05] Then on the wall was a big sign, and I saw that sign. I couldn't see it up close, so I backed away and I could read the sign. It was a blue and white sign, white letters on a blue background, all shot full of holes, and it said, "Verdun." That doctor brought back that sign from Europe. It was the name of a city that was shot to pieces, I guess.

[9:36] And so, my Aunt Anna, she went back to Sweden to die, too. And when she died, she wanted to be buried in her mother's grave. Because back in those days, they didn't have coffins. They were put right into the ground. According to old-fashioned religion, you go back to the earth. And she wanted to be buried in her mother's grave. I thought that was interesting.

[10:10] Whereas my last aunt, she went the modern way, and she was cremated, but she was buried next to her mother in a little jar. I was back there for that a couple years ago when she passed on. And that was the last of the old folks. The old house is still there. It's called "Bakken," and one of my aunt's boys lives in that house now, and I'm happy to hear that, so the house will be well taken care of.

[10:54] A lot of the traditions are still carried on, and that's good. Some of the small towns will have one or two choruses in it, and maybe once a year they'll get together and sing together. This is a very interesting thing. Most people who work or do labor, like I say, they will stay in the area and they do their work there. A lot of work. Most work for the young people now is doing construction work, things like that, on houses, machinery, even doing highway work, agriculture, most cases. So, that's still what they're doing.

[11:51] And a lot of the young people that I've talked to, they talk about trying to get to America so they can work. And some people... a lot of people have even come here to the Seattle area, and they're working in Microsoft. So, they're going into computers and so forth. That's picking up now, the computers. In my case, I don't have a computer. I'm old-fashioned. I raise my fingers and I count "one, two, three, four, and I've got four." Okay, I don't need to push buttons.

Michelle: [12:36] How did your family end up coming to America?

Claude: [12:40] Well, my father, he was the only one except my other aunt... my aunt came back to America in 1922 with my dad when he came back. He entered this country in the early 1900s, and then he ended up doing farm work back east on the east coast in certain areas for a couple of years. And then he ended up joining the Navy, and he was in the First World War as a... doing airplane construction work down in Pensacola, Florida.

[13:19] And then when the war was over, he took a trip back to Sweden. And then his sister came back with him, and she ended up doing housework for a doctor, David, in Chicago, who happened to be almost like a millionaire. And my father, when he came out, all the way to the west here, he got the last homestead in Snohomish County, and made a farm out of it, and he was a farmer since the '20s into the early '40s. And he had to give up the farm because his herd of cows got the Bang's disease, and it completely wiped them out.

[14:17] So, he ended up becoming a carpenter in civil service, and he went to Alaska. He was in Alaska for about four and a half years, and he couldn't come home because of the war. He went up there in about mid-'41, and he couldn't come back, you know, for Christmas because Pearl Harbor locked him in, and so he was up there, so all of us in the family didn't see our father for about four and a half years because of the war.

[14:59] And it was sort of interesting, when he did come back- my brother was out on the bicycle, and my dad didn't recognize him, and my brother didn't recognize him, of course- he was a young kid. And my father wanted to know where the old Hansen place was. And we used to joke about that, and we used to tell our father, I said, "Gee whiz, Dad, you didn't even recognize your own son?" He said, "Oh yes, I knew who he was, but I had to get to the house first, you know." Well... [Laughter] He didn't know. But we joked about that.

[15:45] He was a hard worker all of his life. A lot of the time we never knew hardly anything about Sweden, because he was busy, always working, doing things. So, we never got to know anything about Sweden. I found out on my own. But I'm not upset by it. It worked out well. I learned things real quick. I got into learning things about Swedish history.

[16:33] And I met my mother's father years before that. He was from Denmark, originally. And he had a place up north of Marysville, too. My mother and her parents lived on a farm in Nebraska. They were there all during the First World War. When they had the flu epidemic, they couldn't leave the farm, because her parents refused to have the kids going to school during the flu epidemic. And the story was, there was a Russian immigrant family living down the road, and they got wiped out by the flu, including all of their pigs. The pigs died, too. Apparently pigs would get the flu also, and they'd die. A lot of scientists claim that pigs and human beings are almost alike.

[17:42] But anyway, she used to tell us stories about on the farm in Nebraska. Because of the storms back there, before they'd go to bed, her father would go out on the front porch and look at the sky, and think about things, and they'd say, all right, we're going to go to bed upstairs in the regular bedrooms, or we're going to go down in the basement. Because they did have tornadoes back in those days, too, and a lot of windstorms.

[18:19] But my father, being a farmer, he spent so much time doing farm work that my mother was the only one that would probably help us kids out doing schoolwork. Because I had a tough time with mathematics and things like that, but she took the time to help us kids out after dinner. We'd sit around the table, and I recall my father sitting over in the chair, smoking a cigar, listening to the

radio. That's about all he ever did after milking cows. Because he would hand-milk over forty cows, in the morning and in the evening, and sometimes he'd have hired help, once in a while.

[19:17] But the only time I met my aunt was in 1953 when I hitchhiked across the country with the idea that I was going to go all the way to New York City and take a boat over to Europe so I could go to Sweden. I had that on my mind. And I stopped by Chicago, and I saw my aunt for the first time since I was two years old. And I spent almost a week there during the summer, in the house that she worked in... because her folks were back in New England and they were very wealthy, and they had a summer home in New England. But my aunt had to stay at the house in Chicago, north of Chicago, that is.

[20:19] But I could not get a boat over to Europe out of New York- not in the summer. When I went to the area where a lot of people were trying to get jobs on a boat to go over, the place was just packed full of people, so I knew that was it. So, I came home and I went to graduate school. Then I went into the army. Then when I spent half the time in the army in Fort Benning, Georgia, then I was lucky enough to go to Europe.

[21:01] Then from France, that's where I got to know all of my relatives in Sweden, and to know a lot about them. I started at that time, in 1956, when I had a chance to get acquainted with all of my aunts and my cousins. I was very happy about that situation. Then I got interested in Swedish culture, and I studied the history. A lot of the old Swedes don't know hardly anything about their own history, because they had to work hard all their lives.

[21:46] I've talked to a lot of old Swedes, and they know nothing. They'd even ask me, they said, "How do you know about Sweden, you're an American," you know. And then I'd ask them, I said, "Well, you're supposed to know things about Sweden; you're supposed to tell me." He said, "Well, I didn't have time to learn." He said, "I had to do this and do that. And then I ended up coming over here, and I did this and I did that." [Laughter] But it's interesting, just to kind of tie it in, to see what they were doing in those days.

[22:26] I was lucky enough to have the curiosity to learn things about the old country. And I got interested in old coins. I happened to get lucky there, that the interest compelled me to do a lot of reading about it, and the reading took me into reading history. And when you read about the history of the Swedish royalty, you wonder how in the heck did that country survive in those days, going back to the 1600s, at least, or maybe the early 1500s. Because there were some tough times in those days. And you wonder, why did those kings do what they did? And I'm still trying to find this out.

[23:21] Because when you have a king like Charles the Twelfth, who lived to be in his mid-thirties, and he ended up being shot in the head up near the Norwegian border. And yet, he was the same king that took the Swedish army down into Europe, and they were doing all kinds of fighting and everything else. Then I found out that he didn't like living in a palace. He wanted to be out there with his troops.

[23:53] And some of the early Swedish kings, you know, when the soldiers were lucky enough to survive the war, in those days, they were given property. That never even happens now, but they were given property at that time. And some of the property that some of the old Swedes had came from their ancestors who were in the Swedish army probably in the 16-, 1700s. A lot of people don't know that. But it's a strange situation about the history of the Swedish people going back to those days.

[24:48] The trouble is, some of the Swedish people living here in the States, they don't even know their own history sometimes, because they don't want to. They said, I came here to be an American. I'm not going to keep all this other stuff in my mind... that maybe it should help me out, but it won't help me out because I have to make a living here. And this is what happens. I've talked to a lot of old Swedes about that, you know.

[25:28] But it's their children that become interested in the old country. This has happened many times. I know a lot of children from Swedish parents that have gone back to Sweden, and they've learned a lot. Sometimes the parents are kind of curious, too, and so they ask their kids, "What did you learn over there?" They want to know.

Michelle: [25:59] So, growing up, you didn't really have a lot of contact with Swedish traditions? Or did you speak the Swedish language?

Claude: [26:06] You know, that's a funny thing. I tried to learn a lot of the Swedish language, off and on. But I got interested in... when I was in school, I took the easiest language, because we had to have a language in college, so I took German, of all things. And then when I got stationed in France, then I started to pick up the French. Then, when I went to Sweden, and all my aunts could not speak any English- except Aunt Anna, she was the only one who could speak any English- but she was in the States at that time. So, I had my hands full when it comes to languages. Especially visiting all my friends. Even when I visit friends in the alpine areas of Switzerland, and the little country of Liechtenstein, you know. But they all speak English.

[27:03] English is so common in Europe. The Swedish young people, they all speak English, you know. But the older people don't. As a rule they don't. But I accepted that. I was not confused by it, because I realized "Well, heck, I'm in a foreign country. This is to be expected. So, Nelson, you learn the language, or else keep your mouth shut. One or the other." [Laughter] And I laugh about it.

Michelle: [27:41] Growing up, your father spoke English to you, then?

Claude: [27:44] Yeah, he did. Yeah. He would never speak Swedish once. He became very American. When he was up in Alaska, he was a baseball umpire one time, and they had a ball game, and he was an umpire. One of the people who was up there entertaining the troops was this boxer, Joe Lewis. And my dad knew Joe Lewis and he even called a couple of strikes on Joe Lewis a few times. [Laughter] And he got into a little argument, and they said that my dad, he pointed a finger at

Joe Lewis and said, "I'm the boss here." [Laughter] "One more of those, and you're out." It was funny. I heard that from somebody who witnessed that one time.

[29:06] My father... he went back to Sweden in the early '60s with my mother. And then when my mother passed on in 1978, then he went over in 1979, and I met him over there. I recall when he was talking with his older sister, who was my Aunt Lena, they were arguing about something. And I found out that my father claimed that he was the oldest of the kids in the family.

[29:55] I recall Lena pointing a finger in his face, and saying, "Jag är äldst," – "I am the oldest." And of course, she was, but my dad didn't want to recognize that. He wanted to be the oldest. And he wouldn't believe it. I even told my father, I said, "You know, Dad, Lena's the oldest." He said, "Nah." That's what he said. It was funny. I got a kick out of that, a little bit of humor there, you know. They were all laughing about that. All of my father's sisters were pointing at him and saying, "you're not the oldest." Of course, they were saying it in Swedish. But it was funny.

Michelle: [30:45] What about on your mother's side? The Danish side of the family? Do you have Danish food or Danish customs?

Claude: [30:53] We just knew about... I knew about my grandparents, that her parents were Danish. We didn't know much about them. We knew where they came from. We had pictures of the old house, and I happened to be in the old house one time, and I even took my parents there in the early '60s, so I could show my mother where her father was born. I'm glad that happened, because I can still see her there, standing outside the house with her hands on the wall, on the corner there.

[31:35] It looked just like the old photograph taken in 1902, which showed her grandparents standing out in front of the house, having their picture taken, in 1902. And at least she got to see the old house, you know. And my dad, he was happy to go along with her on that. Because he wanted to see what the old house looked like, even though he saw it in the old photograph, but that's all he recognized. But when they had a kind of a reunion back there, all of his sisters and my father were having their picture taken in the early 60s, that was kind of nice, just to see that, you know. And all of their kids were there.

[32:34] But now, since all of the old folks are gone now, one of my cousins also passed away, and also my sister passed away, so two of us so-called young people passed away. And technically speaking, we're all on our way out as time goes by. But just to realize our background, I think, is very important to everybody, if they have a background that can be easily looked at. In some cases, you can visit those places. I'm all for it.

[33:23] I met a lot of Americans going over to Sweden, when I was on a train going up from Germany into Denmark. They were on their way to Sweden. Some of them were on their way to Norway. These were young people, and I was happy to hear that there are young people that have that interest to do that. And that's good. And they should do that, if they can.

[33:48] It's very pleasant, just to ride around the countryside. I enjoyed it myself. Even when I was with my cousins, we went to different castles in Sweden. A lot of the time, we had to drive very carefully because of the moose. They go across the road. They got their nose in the air. It's funny. I really enjoy that. I always had a good time in the countryside. Especially... if you're carrying a camera, I can guarantee that if you're there to take pictures, you'll probably shoot up a roll of film within probably less than twenty minutes, because there's so much to see and to record. And it's worth it for the people- the young people who have Swedish parents, to take those trips and go over there.

[35:00] Because I... when I go to Stockholm- I used to see my cousin there- I used to walk the streets of Stockholm at night, and sometimes it would be a full moon, and boy, I tell you, it was nice. Just to walk the streets at night, just walk. One time I got lost and couldn't find myself back to the hotel, and I had to ask somebody where my hotel was. [Laughter]

Michelle: [35:34] So, you mentioned you collect Swedish coins?

Claude: [35:39] Yeah, I do.

Michelle: [35:40] Would you like to show...

Claude: [35:42] Sure enough, yeah.

[Pause 35:43 – 35:52]

Claude: [35:53] Now, in the old days in Sweden, in the 1600s, they had a silver shortage, but they had lots of copper in Sweden. Lots of copper. So, they made copper into money that would equal the size of a silver coin, especially a four-mark piece, in silver. And so here you would have a four-dollar coin. Here. This is a four-dollar coin.

Michelle: [36:32] Just out of copper.

Claude: [36:33] Out of copper. Most of this copper was not utilized by the average Swede. It was used by merchants and people of a higher caste, especially in business. So, this was used, especially all through Sweden in those days. But a lot of the stuff ended up, in some cases, in sunken ships, and that's where a lot of it was found. Or they were in houses up underneath roofs, or hidden, or buried.

[37:13] But when you think about these so-called coins, you know... a lot of people make jokes about it. But it was being practical. They had lots of copper in Sweden. A lot of Swedes know about the copper mines in the area called Falun. So they just... in a practical way, they decided to get things back in business so they could get things done right.

[37:56] And then... here's another large copper coin. This is from the 1700s, and this is about the same size as the four, but this is a two-dollar. Times got tougher. And so this is a two-dollar large

copper, when things were really rough. And this was under the rule of Charles the Twelfth. This is when he was always fighting wars outside of the country, and things were really bad in Sweden. And so they had to make two-dollar coins this size. Normally, it would be smaller than this. This is the size of a four. Because when you think about the largest Swedish coin made was about a thirty-dollar coin, it was the largest ever made of any coin, and it was large, heavy. About a yard long, and about a foot wide, and about an inch thick.

[Pause 39:13 – 39:24]

[39:25] Okay, now we get down to some more of these so-called copper pieces. Now, this is the smallest. This is a half-dollar. A lot of these ended up in the hands of the ordinary Swede. And so, they had a chance to have at least a half-dollar, if any. But you think that... imagine if you're an ordinary Swede, and you go out, you go shopping, and you had a pocketful of these things? It's just probably unlikely. But it was very common.

[40:18] Now, the other... okay, here's a one-dollar copper coin here. But it also has a counter-stamp on it, which meant that the value of this so-called coin was changed. So, when they changed the value, they would put a counter-stamp on it. And so this value was... I don't know what it actually was; all I know is that... and there's a date on the thing. Yeah, 1718. It's 1718 on the counter-stamp, and this was a 1715 coin originally. And it's all during the time of Charles the Twelfth of Sweden. Because I think he ruled until 1719.

Michelle: [41:32] So, how did you get interested in these types of coins?

Claude: [41:37] Well, I just... I happened to.... I was at a coin shop, and they happened to have some. I was surprised they had some going back that far. So, I purchased some of those back in the old days. Back in the old days, it didn't cost that much. Now... I have to think about the value now, you know, because it's up very high. Very high now.

[42:21] And here's a photograph of them actually striking these big copper pieces. This is how they were made, through an old etching- photograph. Can you see it in there? It's very interesting. "Before the stamping of the dyes into the plates. When the plates took place, the plates had to be cut to size and trimmed for weight adjustment, if necessary. Sometimes it necessitated all four corners, but usually one or two was satisfactory.

[43:06] The plates were made glowing hot in a forge before striking, and two men worked with each plate. One held the plate, turning it from one corner to another, while the other held the dye under the hammer, as close to each of the four corners as possible. The plate was then passed on to the other men for the center stamp, thus completing the minting process." Just think, they had to do all that just to strike one quote/unquote "coin." Oh yes. Leave it to the Swedes, huh?

[Pause 43:50 – 44:20]

[44:21] Okay, now I got some Swedish medals here. In those days, I was really surprised at how well these metals were struck. Very, very detailed and highly struck. Now, here's a very nice medal of Ferdinand and Ulrika Eleonora. Because Eleonora ended up becoming the queen of Sweden before she passed on. On the back side, they have all of these other kings in a row here, and when you take a glass to these, it's a very fine strike. Very fine strike. All the faces are clear, and you wonder how they did that in those days, you know, in the 1700s in Sweden. And this is a medal, a real nice medal.

Michelle: [45:36] So, was that used as a coin, or...

Claude: [45:36] No, as a medal.

Michelle: [45:40] Okay.

Claude: [45:40] As a medal. Only as a medal. And then the coin... here's a coin of Christina of Sweden. And you know how she lived? She lived like a man. And she hated all the people around her in the palace, because they had no brains, according to her. And as the story goes, she ordered so-called Rene Descartes, the philosopher, to come from Paris to educate her. And sometimes, she would get him up at four o'clock in the morning just to educate her.

[46:33] And of course, as you well know, Descartes caught pneumonia living life in cold Sweden, and he died there. And of course, as you know, when she abdicated, and got tired of the government and palace life, they said that she hopped the stream down in southern Sweden into Denmark-Skåne was part of Denmark in those days, and she went into Skåne. Then she ended up all over Europe, throwing parties and doing all kinds of things. And then she ended up in a so-called nunnery down in Italy. And that's where she died, and I think she's buried in the Vatican. I'm pretty sure.

[47:24] But when you have that history of the people who ran Sweden in those days all the way down into our times, you wonder how in the heck that can be ignored, because it's interesting. I have read all the stories about the Swedish royalty. Some of them were pretty brutal. Others tried to make things better. It's just like I say, you know. I have a coin that was struck under Gustav the Third, who was highly artistic-minded. He lost his life by an assassin at a masked ball.

[48:25] And the coin I have happened to be minted in the year 1776, the year this country was born. And I still have that. I still carry it in my wallet. I should know better, but I still do it. It was given to me by one of my aunts. Then I got other coins here of all types, Danish and Swedish. But the interest is just... it just sort of spurred me on.

[49:16] When I found a picture that my dad had... when he came back after being in the Navy in the States, he went back home, and they had a big photograph taken of the whole family. I was really impressed by this. And he's in the back, standing in the middle, and his parents are in the front. All the rest of them are his sisters. And I always thought, I said, boy, these people were just ordinary,

you know, farm-type people, and here they are, looking like they were higher up in society. And yet, this is how they acted sometimes when they got together. Put on a necktie and get your picture taken. Then afterwards, you take it off, and you go out and feed the cows, so to speak. Yep.

Michelle: [50:17] So, how often do you get to go back to Sweden?

Claude: [50:20] I try to go back every year. Except this time, it's been two years since I've been back, because I've been losing friends here, and I had to stick around for their memorial and so forth, and that sort of upset my... you know, my realm of travel, because I like to travel, especially in the early fall- that's the best time. All the tourists are home, and here I can have access to hotels easier, lower price, and I can see my friends and cousins, because most of them are home at that time.

[51:05] Because my cousins in Sweden, of course, during the summer, you know, they're going to be elsewhere. Right now, in the spring, I have cousins who are in the Canary Islands, southern Turkey, southern Spain... and they're living a good life. And they still have their youth, so to speak. But the older folks, all my aunts, they never had that chance to travel. Never. Except one, my Aunt Anna. You know, she went to the States, immigrated. But the rest of them, you know, they were on the farm, and they did well, I think. I think they did the right thing. Because when I was visiting them, I could detect a calmness in the aura of what's going on around them, you know, and they looked very, very comfortable. And I see that amongst some of my cousins, too, sometimes. So, it... they picked it up.

[52:27] And it's a good background to have, when you can see them, how they live with their children now. In fact, one of my cousins, he... some years ago, he dove into the lake and broke his neck and got paralyzed. And he's wheelchair-bound. But he speaks good English, and he likes politics, and he's into politics. And he's doing well, even under the condition he was in, you know. And he still drives a car, and I'm amazed by that. So, in that case, when you have people like that that can do things, and they're handicapped in the worst way, that's something.

[53:32] And another one of my cousins, when he was a little boy on the farm, his father died, and his mother, who was the oldest sister of my dad, she wanted to sell the farm. But he convinced his mother, don't sell it; I want to work here on the farm. And here he was, just a little boy then. And Lena took his word for it, and they kept the farm, and they hired people to work on the farm, and so he also stayed on the farm all of his life, and he became the top farmer in all of Sweden.

[54:23] I couldn't believe it, when I saw that little article that I found that my aunt sent me, that he was the top farmer in all of Sweden. So, he even bought some land next to his land, so he could have more land for the cows, and so he could raise crops. And now his sons are working on the farm, and they're keeping it going. So, you have some people there in the family that were strong enough to stick with it. And I wish I could think of his name right now, but it escapes me.

[55:10] When I think of my other cousin, Gert, who's in the wheelchair, who likes to do political things, and he's doing very well, especially in the local area, in politics. And then another one of my cousins, he's a retired fireman. And he gives talks on safety in his retirement, and sometimes he even asks me to send him some Swedish jokes so he can tell. He says, more Swedish jokes come from America than from Sweden. And so when he starts telling jokes, when he wants to give a lecture on fire safety, they want to hear more jokes. They don't want to hear anything about fire safety. [Laughter] He has to laugh about that. He gets a kick out of that.

[55:12] And then my other cousin, she's retired from the hospital, and she liked to do works and helping people, especially the ones who are incapable of even living a good life, you know, and so she helps out, even nowadays, because she wants to. Retirement is nothing for her; she wants to keep helping people out, so she does. And I usually talk to her on the telephone all the time, and we have a good time talking. I pay the bill. [Laughter] It's a lot of fun. And a lot of cousins are doing very well. They're doing very well over there.

Brandon: [57:02] So, Claude, do some of your cousins visit you in Seattle?

Claude: [57:07] I don't have any cousins here in Seattle.

Brandon: [57:12] From Sweden. Do they leave Sweden and come visit?

Claude: [57:15] They have... years ago they came over. One time they came over during a pancake breakfast. And they were out even dancing on the floor, I recall. I didn't have to work that day, of course, because I had three cousins here. There were the two sisters, and one of the sister's husband was with her. So, that was kind of nice. And Lars came here, with his wife, and we went down to Oregon, and visited my sister down there, and her family.

[57:57] And Carl Gustav and his wife, they came here to Seattle, and I recall meeting them at the airport. And Carl Gustav's wife, Annelen, she said, "I'm alive!" Apparently that was an airplane trip that she wasn't very fond of. But anyway, so that was kind of nice to have them over here. And then we had, earlier, we had one of the cousins, Svarkor. He stayed here, and we visited my parents with him. And then my other cousin, who's older than me, Nils Eric, he came here, and we went up to my parents' place. And I recall when Nils Eric walked into the house, Dad looked at him and said, "How did you find me?" That was kind of funny- how did you find me?

[59:07] They're just down-to-earth, when you think about it. And I like that. And they don't have any political motivations about this and that. They say that if they want to do something that they don't like politically, they say, "Well, all we have to do is just break the law, and then we see if we can do something." And I said, "Maybe you shouldn't." [Laughter] Because a lot of them, they don't like certain things about what the government does in Sweden. But when they get older, and they're

taken care of, they keep their mouths shut. So, that's what goes on.

[1:00:01] But like I say, if more Americans who have Swedish ancestry and parents can take a trip over there, it's worthwhile. Even if you don't know if there's any cousins over there that you know of, see if you can find them. And you can usually find a lot of relatives. A lot of churches will have names and addresses. And it can be done, but you have to have a deep interest in your family, because that's what keeps the family here, together, is to have that connection, I think. And it's worthwhile.

Michelle: [1:00:54] Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Claude: [1:00:57] Right now I can't... I think I went through the whole gamut. [Laughter] Like I say, it's the whole gamut.

Michelle: [1:01:07] Okay then, thank you so much.

Brandon: [1:01:09] Thanks, Claude. Thanks for being part of our project.

Claude: [1:01:13] Well, I hope it works out. I hope it adds to the interest of the members who have a Swedish background, what they can do to just keep it going, because that's the important thing, is to keep the family going, is to have the background. And it's worthwhile, because I've seen the results over the years. And it's very valuable, I think. I've seen it with a lot of my friends, too, you know, when I talk with them. Even some of the Japanese friends I have- they have kept in contact with a lot of their family. I think it's worthwhile.

[1:02:06] And when I go over there, you know, I'm completely satisfied, comfortable, just to chit-chat. Even though now there's been a lot of passings going on. One of my cousins lost her husband last year, and I recall seeing him one time- he was in the palace guard in Stockholm. I couldn't believe it when I saw old Axel marching with the palace guard. I had to laugh about that, you know. It was funny. But he passed on.

[1:02:53] But it's just a nice feeling; it's a comfortable feeling. I think so. Because I see the results when a lot of people don't have anything. And I stay away from them, because they are just not nice to be around, because they've been influenced by a lot of bad things, you know. I think you can probably witness that around you all the time, sometimes. Especially when you're out in the street, oh boy.

END OF RECORDING.

Transcription by Alison Goetz.