Nordic Heritage Museum

Nordic American Voices

Interview of Norman Westerberg

On November 3, 2012

At Seattle, Washington

Interviewed by Gary London and Affa Sigurdardottir

Gary London: This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices Oral History Project. Today is November 3rd. We'll be interviewing Norman Westerberg. We're at the Nordic Heritage Museum here in Seattle, Washington. My name is Gary London, and the other interviewer today is...

Affa: Affa Sigurdardottir

Gary: Norman, let's begin by talking a bit about your parents. Could you tell me a little bit about your mother and father?

Norman Westerberg: OK. My mother was born in 1900, even, in January. She would have been 112 years. [laughs] She was born in a small town named Lovisa, which is about 100 kilometers east of Helsinki. She and her best friends decided to move to Canada when they were about 22 years old, or something like that. She came over and ended up in Windsor. It was about 1924, and she...

Affa: We have to wait a second.

Gary: You were telling us about the Russians being misled and bombing the lake.

Norman: Yes. Also, later on, during the Continuation War, the same thing. Helsinki, of course, was already bad, because they came from Estonia, with the Russian planes. It took them but 10 minutes to get to bombing Helsinki. It was hard to get any sirens going. But over there, the fishermen on the southern coast of Finland put, all the way up, bonfires, in the evening. In the Winter War that started then in 1939, very soon Sweden, Sweden announced that they will accept Finnish war children to come away for shorter or longer times, especially small children, through to four. They set up a system.

My father told my mother, "Let's try to get the boys over to Sweden." I was 11, my other brother was nine, and the little brother four. For the first week or so, ships could take them over to Stockholm from Finland. It was easier from Turku to get over, but very soon the Russian Navy took control of the Baltic and we couldn't do that.

The alternative was by train all the way up to where Finland meets Sweden, and we were one of the early ones that went by train. It could take two or three days, because the Russians bombed the railroads. I would maybe be bragging if we also were hit by a Russian. We were happy we didn't, but we were out of the train a lot of time because there was an alarm going off. So it took a couple of days.

My mother was a little bit sneaky. She came down to the railroad station in Turku, and from there she came with us to Toijala [00:05:03], from where we were connected with other trains coming from Helsinki. She almost acted like the other leaders that said, "Can't you come with us up to Tornio to help us out?" She had planned that.

Affa: Sorry. Can we fix...Put it a little close to him, because it feels like a little echo. Was your mother allowed to go with you, then?

Norman: Yes. My mother came up to Tornio, which is on the Finnish side, and Haparanda is on the Swedish side, and there was a bridge between. We had some lodging there, I remember. Guess who comes up to say goodbye to us? My father. We didn't know it, but he was with Finnish northern troops there. [laughs] My mother and we came over, walked over, to Haparanda, and again was aked, "Could you come to Stockholm too?" [laughs] So she came. There was one or two Swedish [inaudible 00:06:34] . He could go there and they were really happy because most of the children could only speak Finnish. We had a big advantage, of course, because we speak Swedish at home, being part of the minority of Swedish Finns.

She was more taking care of us. But then in Stockholm, I remember it so well, we got off the train there, and the railroad station looked like a bazaar. Tables with clothing and food and then a table where you went to register, and they decided that we have a suitable family.

My mother was still there and when she found out that me and my one-year younger brother were going to be sent to Råda, Värmland[00:07:34] , which is close by the Norwegian border. That's where they have the Finnish Forest. That's a different story.

Affa: They were going to split up your brothers?

Norman: Pardon?

Affa: They were going to split up the three of you?

Norman: Yeah. I was one of their late ones, because my mother had arranged something like that. Basically, 10, 11 years shouldn't have been sent abroad. They can help with the war. But they split it so that me and my brother Sven, the older one, went to together to Råda [00:08:23] , but our youngest brother, Finn, four years older, was sent to a young couple in Stockholm.

Gary: Can I interrupt for just a moment? I'd like to have you talk a little about how you felt being separated from your parents, how they felt, how they reacted when they left you, and then how you reacted when you were separated as brothers. Do you remember your feelings at the time?

Norman: No, I don't really. It was a big adventure, being this age. It was OK to leave. Maybe I'd been out on that farm with bombs coming and things like this, and then something completely new, and no problems with the languages, and ending up with a family who had had seven children. Only one stayed home still. The others were at their colleges. He was my age, Lennart. We had no contact with our little brother. I don't know, I think my mother probably had a phone number or something that she could communicate. I remember when we separated from Finn, the younger one, somebody said, "Aren't you going to cry?" "No, I'm a Finn." [laughs] I started crying. He was a funny guy, always been.

We had a good time with my brother, Sven, and this new brother, Lennart, there. We both went to school there, I don't know, when you're 11 years old, maybe fifth grade, something like that.

Gary: What town is this, Norman?

Norman: It was Råda . It was fairly small. The parents, our hosts, were in their 70s, probably, and they were like grandparents to us. The school was also nice. We had a ski competition. It was a really, really wet snow, and I had so much snow under my shoes. I know I was among the the slowest skiers. I was very surprised when the teacher announced the fact that he was giving out two or three of these little prizes.

My name was called, and so I went up and I got it, and soon found out that I was the only. It was for the best foreign skier. [laughter] nd I was only foreign skier.

[laughter]

[inaudible 00:12:06] . I think about those times. That war ended March 13, so it's only like three and a half month. January, February, March 15. It may have been less than that.

We got a phone call from Finland about four or five days later saying that is ended, but there is no transportation for many weeks. You can't get back home. It was more like mid-April when we got place on one of the ferries from Stockholm to Turku, actually.

Gary: Do you have any other...?

Norman: We picked up Finn for some reason. I have a note. I don't remember that. There we were, about 50 kids laying on the freight deck[00:13:13] . Then came the peaceful world. For a year I think, we started with scouting back again. I have my scout book when I got first class and when I was second class or third class.

Gary: So when you got back to Finland, you started in scouting.

Norman: Yeah. Not as a leader, but as a scout. What do you call that, second war?

Gary: Continuation.

Norman: Yeah, actually the war was different because it was not that wild on the home front. Bombing now, but Russia needed to have all their power against Germany those two years there. When they made a little mistake to again attack Finland in 1941 in the summer, very quickly the Finns started to take back the things that we had lost in 1940. There were periods of several months where there was no bombing, or they picked another city and took it for that month to tell people that you never know when you're going to be hit. In the fall of 1940, I continued to be a member of that guard, and old enough as 12, 13, 14 years old that I got paid. I joined really messenger for the army. The fall of '41 for two months, I was a messenger for anti-aircraft unit in Turku.

Gary: What did being a messenger involve?

Norman: Basically, clean captain's room. I was kidding, I [inaudible 00:15:47]. Yes, that was part of my duty, bringing in wood for the fireplace and things like that. My basic duty was to, by bicycle drive through the city during air raids with messages if the phone contact with headquarters didn't work. That happened a few times, but there was no bombing. I was really...but basically I could have...and I got a couple of army medals very late in 1990 when Soviet collapsed. The Finns, they didn't want to irritate Russia by giving medals to some people that had fought against them. I ended up with five of them because...Then I got an ideal job as a messenger for the center of registered foreign soldiers that wanted to join the Finnish army, though mostly Swedes and Estonians.

We were there through...it took them two, three, four days usually to get everything registered with where would they be sent and what color uniforms do they get, and so forth. We got from the front clothing, many of them with holes in them and blood, and also shoes that we then had a bunch of ladies and shoemakers to fix up. These soldiers, they really looked funny because they all had different uniforms. Then they had for the hat, Finnish army...

Gary: Insignia.

Norman: Insignia. It was white with a blue cross or something. I did that in 1952. I did it six months including summer, because our school was closed for half the year almost.

Gary: That would have been '42?

Norman: That was '42. In '43, I did the same thing I remember it was Germans on the way up to Lapland, Norway. They actually went...German troops actually fed on...they were fighting Russia up in Lapland, and they really helped Finland that they could concentrate that to defending. And so that was '43.

In '44 always something happened every year, a little bit different. Schools were closed...'44 in spring when Russia started to take Finland. It was the war's end, and they were pushing down Germany. Let's get Finland now, and so they...the numbers were huge. 2,000 airplanes and a couple hundred tanks, and things like that against a pretty tired Finnish army. But, again, many steps not a lot of them to occupy the country. We lost some territory again.

But these schools were closed, but it was more a chance that we'd be bombed too much, and we had a girls school in Turku, girls only, and that went...many of its students came from an area in Kimito [00:20:54] outside Turku, maybe 30 miles. And they managed to find a building and convert that to where they got the girls could sleep and study.

And that was the same time that a little bit further out I was with my...both brothers, actually. And pretty soon my brother Sven, who was nine years old, got a chance to go back to Sweden, to the same place. Again, there was a shortage of food and a lot of things like that were...and he was older and went. He broke a leg and ended up being there for eight months [laughs] . But my little brother, Finn, had a chance to go to some relatives far away in Sweden [inaudible 00:22:05].

Gary: Elementary school.

Norman: Elementary school. And I heard about...mother heard about this girl's school. "Will they take boys?" "No. OK." So me and two other boys we were...three boys and 60 girls, I think. And both myself and one of the other boys played accordion so those girls really got to dance. We came back we had rented a little bit upstairs and a little bit outhouse or someplace, the three of us, and they would always come in the evening and, "Play for us." That was an interesting experience.

Affa: Wow.

Norman: And that was '44, and, of course, '44 in summer the war ended against Russia. One of Russia's demands in the peace treaty was to get the Germans, out of Finland right away, and so I'm sure that the Finnish officers and German officers that had been fighting together Russians, You do that and you do here...we will fake that thing and you withdraw, and we proclaim to push. But the Germans didn't do that. They started to burn every village that they retreated, bridges, everything. And so the Finns lost another 10,000 killed soldiers, because the Russians supervisors, or whatever

they were called, came into to see to it that the Finns adhere to the treaty. "Hey, I don't believe you are fighting. I'll come with you and let's see your next attack."

So it took almost...Rovaniemi up in northern Finland, that's where the Santa Claus lives, was completely almost burned, the biggest Finnish city up there in the north. So it wasn't until the spring, I think April or something like that in 1945, that it was peaceful. Many Finns had been forced to live up north because of Germans. They even killed civilians. Something had gone wrong in them. But what else was I going to say? I'm losing myself here.

Gary: No, any other wartime memories that you'd like to talk about?

Norman: No. You might have heard me tell about something. Have you [laughs] ?

Gary: So you went to school during the World War, but you...

Norman: Well, we went to school, but...

Gary: It was interrupted.

Norman: Very much interrupted. I have a picture there.

Gary: So because your school was interrupted you weren't able to go to school every day or...

Norman: No, but we could. Maybe that period lasted only three months, and then many of the teachers were in the war. They had maybe some help, but when it got a little bit better then we could go and take and exam for that.

Gary: So you had to do a lot of studying on your own.

Norman: You had to do that. And some people that were not so good at school anyway probably didn't read anything at all [laughs] , but I think they looked...teachers looked through the...

Gary: Yeah. And you had more responsibility at home because your father was away.

Norman: Well, yeah. I remember once we got an American package the Finns in America sent. We didn't have any relatives. I don't know. We could have had friends here to send, but I think during the years we got three. I mean the post office decided who gets the package, and usually it was clothing. And I remember one man's dress work where everything...men's...

Affa: Suit?

Gary: Suit?

Norman: Suit, was enough to make suits for both older kids, Sven and me. So mother went to the tailor. He didn't have much work because there's no textiles really to...everything was down. But there was something about...yeah, in one package there was a pair of shoes that really didn't fit any of us. I actually remember. One of my schoolmates came over to play with me or something like that, and my mother took the shoes out and said, "Fabian, what size do you wear?" "Oh, it depends." [laughter]

Affa: He wanted it.

Norman: He took it, and I saw it on his father, a professor, later on, came over anything. But, actually, I didn't realize that my brother, Sven, next to me, now when I read some of the text, letters, spent a lot of time in Sweden. He also that time...in addition to that time when he broke his leg he

went there again. And we had to do something in '45. The war was not [fully completed]...all high school students had to work on a farm that summer because most of those farms was where the father had been killed during the war or other, and I was sent to a farm north of Kotka, close to where the River Kymi comes down to Finland, and I always said that I worked at the Russian border. And I was partly lying, but partly true, because it was a border from 1917 to '43. But Sweden had pushed it east, but I was writing from the Russian border.

[laughter]

That was an adventure in 1945. In 1946 there was not a war going on anymore. I got a job in a bank in eastern Finland in Kotka, I got interesting jobs. I used to be...what do you call people that handle the money?

Affa: Teller?

Norman: Teller. Teller for those people that had borrowed money to the government the year before, and they were getting a third of that loan back every year after that. And I want to show you if I find it...it might come out here what had happened there. No. OK.

Gary: No, you can take your time.

Norman: I'll take my time here.

Gary: Yes. Don't worry.

Norman: I think it was here, suppose to be in this pile. [papers shuffling]

Gary: Do you want to hold that up, so the camera can see it? Can you turn it this way?

Norman: Oh, I see.

Gary: Good.

Norman: There's a date even, or does it make a difference? That is, I think in 1946, or so. One evening on the radio, the Minister of Finance said, "Take out your scissors, and cut all your bills in half, and the right half, you can use for purchases. We will soon be changing to new bills. The left one, is a loan to the government." You just had half the money back.

I was a teller the next year at that bank where people came and got a third of this money back. A very effective way to putting people to save. Now, of course, the poor people had it worse, because they didn't have any money. Well, they didn't lose any money.

Affa: It says that this was a fiasco, so what is the article about? This is [inaudible 00:33:53] fiasco.

Norman: Oh, OK. We should tape all of that.

Affa: OK.

Norman: No. They said the people that they really wanted it to get to, were people that had black markets. The farmers, and what not, had a good time maybe, because people came out on their bicycles, and went to the farmers to see if they could buy something at a good price. So there was that one and they claim that those people got to know these plans, so they had time to arrange. They still had a hard time coming to bank with a million dollars, or two million dollars. I think the fiasco here, refers to that.

Affa: Oh. I see.

Gary: This was a way of...

Norman: I wonder if you want to have this picture?

Affa: Because it's interesting with the scissors showing their cutting the money in half.

Norman: Yeah. I would do that, let you do that. Many would leave away that stuff about a fiasco.

Gary: This was a way for the government to borrow money?

Norman: Yes.

Gary: You indicated that it was paid back then, in thirds?

Norman: In thirds, in three years.

Gary: Over three years, it was paid back?

Norman: Yes.

Gary: Very creative system.

Norman: Yeah. It was. We didn't have much money at home, so we didn't lose anything. The other thing at that time, those years through was very active for scouting, and we really had only our [inaudible 00:36:04] . Our scout unit probably had about 80 members, very big. I was in charge of 32. Four patrols. There were eight patrols. My brother Sven was one of my patrol leaders.

Gary: You actually had yours scout book, didn't you there?

Norman: I had it, yes.

Gary: Do you want to show us that book? [papers shuffling]

Affa: It's in the blue one.

Norman: I wonder if I had it here.

Affa: I think that it was. [papers shuffling]

Gary: I remember seeing it.

Norman: Yeah. that ring is a funny thing too. [papers shuffling]

Norman: I had it someplace. A picture of Astoria, but that's ah.

Affa: We have plenty of time. It's OK.

Norman: Hmm?

Affa: I said, we have plenty of time. [pause]

Norman: I have this map in [inaudible 00:37:41] mid-summer place, four consecutive, talked about the Nordics in World War 2.

Gary: Yeah. Do you want to show us that? Lift it up high, so the camera can see it.

Norman: That was way back.

Gary: That's the war children. That's fine, you can show that anyway.

Norman: That's my wife. I forgot my Benita.

Gary: Then I did want you to show us the picture of the rings, and talk to us about that. Do you want to do that now?

Norman: Let me see if I can put one of these in there someplace. [pause]

Norman: Maybe we can go back.

Gary: Sure.

Norman: To look at the picture of the war children.

Gary: Picture of the war children. You want to tip the top back towards you a little bit. Yeah, that's good. Now we can see that photo.

Norman: This is a picture that has been duplicated many, many times. They're small kids, I don't know if they're waiting to get on a train, or get on a boat.

Gary: Yeah. Wonderful.

Norman: Sometimes the mothers didnt come all the way. They knew that they were going to show the kid, that they were crying.

Gary: Remind us, how many of those war children there were.

Norman: They figured that during the whole period, both wars, 70,000.

Gary: Wow.

Norman: Primarily to Sweden. Denmark, a few, and even Norway, before it was occupied.

Gary: Now, we have found a woman that we're going to be interviewing, who's a Swede, who remembers war children in her home during the war.

Norman: That's interesting.

Gary: We'll be interviewing her from that perspective.

Norman: I have it estimated at again, being a numbers man here for the state, if there were 70,000 of them, they estimate 15,000 of them stayed in Sweden.

Gary: Oh, and didn't come back?

Norman: If you were a two-year-old kid sent to Sweden, and in that three years, she didn't speak any Finnish anymore, and maybe the father had been killed, and the mother [is not in good condition]. Those were the crying things. Most of them were happy I would think, not happy, happy, but...

Gary: Your memories are mostly happy memories of your experiences of war child?

Norman: Interesting. It was an adventure.

Gary: An adventure. You mentioned that you had a host brother in Sweden, when you were there? Lennart?

Norman: I'm not very in touch with him.

Gary: I wanted you to talk about whether, or not you kept in contact with him over the years?

Norman: No, I did not. My brother went back once. Not my little brother, but my other brother.

Gary: The middle brother?

Norman: The middle brother went back, and had a good feeling but I lost contact with him. He became a sea pilot in the Stockholm [inaudible 00:42:29] . Also some came by boats to Finland.

Affa: Sorry. Did Sven keep in touch with him, your brother?

Norman: Yeah, I think he did. Actually, about 10 years ago we met him, and his wife. He actually married a Finnish girl from Gamla Karleby in Ostrobotnia[00:43:07] . Being a Swede. We were in Stockholm, and they came up, we were outside, and we spent all the day together. I'm mixing here a little bit. No, that's right. He has a daughter that lives, and I tried to write an email the other week, and it didn't go through. An interesting thing, that this American lady that has researched war kids all over the world, and right now is heading in on the Fins. [pause] I'm getting really off now.

Gary: Do you want to tell us about the rings?

Norman: [inaudible 00:44:23] ring. Yes.

Gary: Do you have pictures?

Norman: Yes. I have it right here.

Affa: Do you want to rest for a while?

Norman: No. I am taking therapy for word finding. [inaudible 00:44:41] . It's very interesting, but it doesn't help me. It's not just that I lost the word, but what did I talk about.

Gary: I think you are doing very well.

Norman: Before we leave the war children, my future wife, Benita, when she was in nine, or tenth grade, would normally not be sent as a war child, but she was so ill, she still doesn't know for sure what she had been through a month in a hospital, and they gave up on her. The doctor said the only way to go, is if you can get through to Sweden. The doctor knew another doctor in Sweden, and arranged it. She went over by, let's see, this was 1944Germany held the Baltic sea, so you could take a ferry again, you didn't have to go by train to Sweden. That was Russia, in the beginning.

She was there, and she ended up with a pastor, and family. A very nice family near Göteborg[00:46:17] in Sweden, and ended up being there for eight months. As a consequence when she came back, she being much smarter than me, was the same age, but a year ahead in school. In another high school, but these two schools had common dances, and things like that. I met her there, but it was not just a little bit. Going skating in the winter, and [inaudible 00:46:59] together, and so forth.

She's one year older than me. No, she's not, she's four months. Coming back, she had not able to go to school in Sweden, because of the illness, so she lost a year. Otherwise she would have been a student, high school graduate one year before me, and we probably would not be married. Thank you to the war.

[laughter]

That was one thing, she got well taken care and she has been in contact with her family.

Gary: With her family?

Norman: Yeah. They're real nice. Here is something funny.

Gary: Yeah, the rings. [papers shuffling]

Gary: If you'll show us that picture?

Norman: This was in early 1940. War was still going on, winter war. Finland desperately needed money to buy airplanes. Fighter planes to stop the bombers. It was announced by the President, "I invite you all to donate all your gold rings, and other gold things to the government." "We will melt it, and send it as payment for about 20 airplanes from England." [As a thank you you will get a simple iron ring.]I know my mother, and father had them. Everybody had it, and they had it the rest of their life it was [inaudible 00:49:05] , proud thing. They got this little metal iron, or something like that, and so thank you. My mother got one, and my father got one.

I don't know where they ended up, [however recently after speaking on the Finnish Wars in Nasell, a group of us] went to dinner, and someone said, "Tell a little bit more about the war." One older lady said, "Hmm. I think I have one in my junk jewelry box. Why don't you come by tomorrow, before going back to Seattle, and see it." Here it is.

Affa: Oh, wow.

Norman: Says, "Since 1940."

Gary: 1940 inside, huh? That's remarkable.

Norman: It does not fit me. It's one of those things.

Gary: It's not your father's, but it's from that time?

Norman: No. Yeah, from that same time. Small world.

Gary: Amazing. That's a constant reminder to you.

Norman: Yeah, it was tough. I know the Icelanders are the same too. They're proud of their [inaudible 00:50:52] , and they want the country to go well, so they can have it well. What does Kennedy say?

Gary: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Norman: That helped it.

Gary: Anything more about the war? That you want to talk about?

Norman: Well, I think that's quite a bit that you got.

Gary: It's been extremely interesting. If you want to go on, to talk about the later period, we can do that. You mentioned that you met Benita.

Norman: Maybe shortly, if it's OK.

Gary: Sure.

Norman: We met in Turku, and we both graduated in 1947 from high schools, and that summer, I passed a test to come into the Åbo Akademi [00:52:01] , which is the Swedish speaking university in Turku[inaudible 00:52:04] for the chemical [engineering]. And I made it. Maybe I mentioned, my family had moved to Sweden. There were many Finns after World War II. They were there for work, job opportunities, and everything, for at least a couple of years. We hadn't clothing, anything. My father, who was born there, had especially easy to get a visa for family to come.

I said, "What am I going to do?" One of my classmates had said, "Norm, you always tell me that you're born in America. Aren't you a citizen?" I said, "I don't know." Bingo, my mother had my birth certificate from Detroit. In one month I got a US passport. I had to practice to say thank you to the consulate. I said, "I can't afford to study now," even if I had been accepted, with family, my father very ill, and things like that.

I went over to Sweden to work for a year. I was just in high school but I got to work in a laboratory on fairly interesting things, x-ray type things, studying powders, and seeing what is the chemistry of this powder.

Then, my mother, who had never been really a worker, having a job, and after the one in Canada, got a job at a hotel. My father knew about the high contacts to that hotel. It's where famous, our Finns, better Finns, stay there, at Hotel Reisen, in Stockholm.

Also I got evening jobs from 6:00 to midnight, washed dishes. I had accumulated quite a bit of money. That took me through college for two years.

Affa: You were 22?

Norman: Yeah. How does that fit with the other story? I think it does. Good enough. I came back in '48, and '47 I had gone to Sweden. In '48, and very quickly, found this blonde, blue-eyed girl, that's flirting a little bit with me.

[laughter]

We married in 1950. We escaped Finland for it, and we went to Stockholm, to the Finnish church down in Stockholm.

Gary: I know where that is.

Norman: Yeah, next to Royal Palace. There was my little family. Benita's sister had also married a young Finnish soldier, and they moved to Sweden. We were not too many, but it was good. Then I got married and then I got a U.S. passport. I thought that when I graduated, got my engineering degree, we'll go for a couple of years to America. We planned for that. When I graduated in 1953, in the fall, we put in a visa application for Benita, not knowing that it was going to take a year for her, because of some general, or a senator, or something, that hated the Communists and thought all Finns were it.

Gary: Probably McCarthy.

Norman: McCarthy. I found out later, because in February, 1954, I had only waited half a year. I said, "I have to work." I had a part-timer to get me going in America. An old friend to my parents, he lived in Allentown, Pennsylvania. And I took that job, and just waited. Benita went back to work

[in Turku], and stayed for half a year with friends, good friends. Within a month, after I came, I was drafted in the US Army.

When I came to the airport in New York, in February 1954 they told me that I had to give an address for where I was going. A couple of weeks later, I got a letter to go to a medical exam, I think Philadelphia.

Then Benita came [in August] and I was taking all the Army professional testing early, some technical training to claim glass for tanks, binoculars and everything, anything with glass. And that was beneath the camp in April, I had been here about a half year. A little bit later, I got message that I will be sent to Germany to the US army for 18 months. And we were living with...many time we are renting a little room. Interesting, probably one of best times we had cause when you're in the army, no problem.

But US army would not pay for Benita. And we were pretty much emptied our wallets by coming here. So I wrote to my mother, "Don't you know anybody here?" And she said, "Yes. Emil Ekblad[01:01:07] ." He was called Vasa Emil[01:01:09] probably not even finished Swedish Finns historical. He said, "Come up to Gardner, Massachusetts[01:01:18]. I'll watch over her."

And on my last three days, I took her up by railroad and said her bye-bye. I rented a room for $8. Now she was pregnant, I forgot that. That's one of the reasons [inaudible 01:01:40] . [laughs] So she find good friends there, Swedish and Finns both. Gardner, Massachusetts was called [inaudible 01:01:59] and things like that.

Gary: Big Finnish settlement?

Norman: Yes.

Gary: So as I calculate it, you and Benita have been married for 62 years? Is that correct?

Norman: Yes.

Gary: 62 years.

Norman: Yeah, this Christmas. Actually 23rd of December that we married because she had a job. She couldn't take off. She flew from Turku to Stockholm. Our wedding was at 4:00 and [her plane] was supposed to land at 2:00. There was a snow storm. He did land but it was really jumpy. And then my own mother had towed her car. My mother she's got to have a hat. She hates hats. So we stopped at Nordic Company, it's big store there.

Gary: To buy her a hat.

Norman: So she a hat for once but it's on the picture. Anyway.

Gary: We are getting close to running out of time so we probably have to hurry this along. You're in the army.

Norman: We were in the army, After our first son was born, the army brought them over to Germany and I just changed my mind my service station to Munich so we spend nine months in Munich, another very good time. [My Army duty ended in May 1956.]

Gary: Good.

Norman: We went for two years and ended up in Ohio and worked for a chemical company. And then I went back to Finland and I got a job at a Finnish company where I had many friends, consulting engineers called Ekono[01:04:13].

Gary: [inaudible 01:04:14] , yeah. And it's through [inaudible 01:04:17] that you came back to the United States and this area.

Norman: Yes, we had so many American clients [interested in our exclusive expertise] on pollution or energy efficiency in pulp and paper so Weyerhaeuser and Scott Paper they start coming, and I was the perfect person for our company to having an American engineering license, spoke decent English. So when we had clients said, "Can't you have an office here so we can understand you and we can get your Finnish reports," the next day my boss came in, "Norman, I don't want to see you here in a week." So we came over, the whole family. We had three kids, too. I spent two years in Seattle, wonderful years.

But then I had an agreement with Ekono [01:05:33] that after two years I'll come back. So I went back and I was 10 years, had good years there but then my children said, "Can't we go back? We would like to live in Seattle." My oldest son came here by himself, and so, "OK, well, then, let's move." Benita said, "That's going to be the very last move."

[laughter]

And we came in 1980, 1979 late. And then I worked for a couple of days, weeks, even as president for this small office that I had grown from two people to about 30 into 10 years. And I got interested in other things while I was still working there. I was appointed [Honorary Consul of Finland] for 16 years and things, and I didn't pay much attention to that little company. And I noticed that they would think that it was high time for me to retire.

[laughter]

First time in my life I had those feeling of someone doesn't want me.

[laughter]

And so you know the rest of the story. I think I've written someplace of the feeling of living there professional and studying with volunteering in organizations, and I concluded that being a consulting engineer or a projects engineer and working on projects is exactly the same work as a project with a Finnish community. It was easy to...I don't know if I had been a person selling clothing and things like that if I would have some same interest.

Gary: Now you've been active in a number of organizations in the Nordic Heritage Museum itself, right?

Norman: One of the early...

Gary: Yes. That's still active in that organization.

Norman: Yes. I'm active, but it's getting harder and harder. I have a hard time driving, for example. I almost think I should have invited you to come to our home in Mercer Island.

Affa: So your children are all here?

Norman: They're all here.

Affa: That's good.

Norman: My oldest is the one that came by himself, and he married her already a little bit mother's advice the wrong girl that was running around with a US soldier from which there is a big camp down in Tacoma.

Gary: Fort Lewis?

Norman: Fort Lewis. And never remarried, is a bachelor. And our daughter did not come with us right away. She came, but she went back because she had her boyfriend in the Finnish army [inaudible 01:09:15] for her. But fortunately, they were just friends with that one. She met a Greek boy that lived in Finland, that lived there for five years buying lumber for Greece and spoke beautiful Finnish because all the small sawmills couldn't speak English or any other language. So they had been together for a year when they decided to bring him over here for two weeks so we could [get to know him] I traveled so much to Finland that I had met him, but not [the rest of the family]...and he was here one week, and he said, "I could live here." And that was bingo for us, because they would probably be in Finland or Greece.

Affa: Right.

Gary: Yes.

Norman: They've been there many times. But...what was I going to say?

Affa: So you just had two children?

Norman: No, the first one, Danny...was born in Massachusetts during the army [period]. Chris, the second in Finland, and the third, Kenny, in Tennessee. I spent a year from the Finnish company [on a Finnish-government-sponsored study] in Tennessee to study nuclear power safety. I didn't have to work much in that field, but I was pretty much one of the beginning. I worked on for the government the level of radiation that could be [tolerated]...that type of things. But, otherwise, I worked with energy efficiency and pollution control.

Gary: So you've spent a lot of time in Finland, a lot of time in the United States, but have settled here in the United States, finally. What do you miss about Finland?

Norman: You put it very cleverly. The Norden newspaper, it comes out in New York. He asked the question of the readers about two weeks ago, "What [country] does your heart beat for?" Have you read it?

Gary: I haven't read that.

Norman: "For your new country or your old country?" Well, I was born here. [laughs]

Gary: That's true.

Norman: I don't feel like that. I feel like an immigrant.

Gary: You've had a unique experience since you weren't born here, and then spent a lot of time in Finland, and then came back.

Norman: That one year, of course, didn't bring anything except that I probably wouldn't be here then, if I hadn't been born...I'm not adventurous in that way. Right now, sometimes, I wish we would be back in Finland, with all these politics and things.

Affa: Are your brothers in Finland?

Norman: My little brother is still alive. My middle brother died five years ago. He was only about 80. [They lived in Sweden since the end of World War II.

Affa: They stayed in Finland, both of them?

Norman: Three of them, actually. After the war, the family moved there.

Affa: Yeah, Sweden.

Norman: Both married there. My little brother became very well-known in the watch business[01:13:28] . He was in charge for all those agencies in Sweden. He's a really fun guy. We call about twice a month or something. I believe it was her sister in Stockholm.

Gary: Regularly, yeah.

Norman: And so, we'd been going back, when I still worked about two or three times a year two or three months. In the summer, Benita came around and we spent about a month, doing the same thing, going to visit all the cousins and hearing that, "Why do you come to us only for coffee when you had lunch with other cousins?" [laughter]

Se we were restricted a little bit and said, "Let's go out to a restaurant." It's a very good question. I think you have to have deep. We enjoy people and have good, good, good, friends here and good, good, good friends over there. We still have about 70 Christmas cards going to Scandinavia.

Gary: Yeah.

Norman: I've been only once in Iceland.

Affa: You need to go on Iceland there?

Norman: No. That was way back. [cross talk]

Affa: Yeah, but now I said [inaudible 01:15:01] . [cross talk]

Norman: Yeah. We did the climbs. That was our last trip, four years ago. I ended up in hospitals, both Finland and Sweden. Something happened, but anyways, Now this was...I always managed because my position in [inaudible 01:15:23] was pretty high to senior vice president and we had about 2,000 employees. I asked my boss, my very good friend that I've been [inaudible 01:15:41] from him, and when got up from this little group to the next stage, three groups. I got to be chair for that small group there, and when he became the president, soon, within an hour, I was the senior vice president. He was a really good friend. Why would I tell that? [laughs] I'm sorry.

Gary: You had lots of good friends.

Norman: Yes, but also when they needed some leadership, it'd be either the association or consulting companies in Finland, I became the chairman for that. You probably don't know the problems sometimes with the Swedish and Finnish language. It pops up. "What the heck, why do you use Swedish when you're in Finland?" And I remember one board meeting. We were out at the restaurant and a fellow next to me said, "Norman, which language do you think is more beautiful? Finnish and Swedish?" I said, "Oh!"

[laughter]

Norman: Let me tell you something he said. He said something that sounds really beautiful if in Finn. Bad in Finn. Hey, for example is "he." Die, for example is "de." So he said "He de she," [inaudible 01:17:47] in Swedish. It didn't sound very good. But the thing was that they respected me speaking Swedish as my mother's mark. If you do like they do, it's not necessary, there has to be in there we're getting off [inaudible 01:18:15] .

Affa: That's OK.

Norman: There are Swedish Finns, they go into a store and not get served in good Swedish, they go out or something like that.

Gary: But you're equally fluent in both languages, right?

Norman: Reasonably speaking, yeah. They aren't using a lot of Swedish [inaudible 01:18:49] . [laughs]

Gary: Thank you so much, Norman, for coming in again.

Norman: It's been good.

Gary: This will conclude the interview.

Transcription by CastingWords