Nordic American Voices
Nordic Heritage Museum

Interview of Gordon Strand
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Seattle, Washington

Interviewers: Mari-Ann Kind Jackson; Caitlin Cotter

Mari-Ann Kind Jackson: [0:08] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices oral history program at the Nordic Heritage Museum. We are in Seattle today at the Nordic Heritage Museum and interviewing Gordon Strand, who is the chairperson of the steering committee for the oral history program. Today is November 15, 2014. Welcome, Gordon.

Gordon Strand: [0:33] Thank you. It's great to be here.

Mari-Ann: [0:35] It's wonderful to be able to get your story. Interviewing will be Caitlin Cotter and Mari-Ann Kind Jackson. So, Gordon, would you please start by stating your full name, where you were born, when you were born, and then share with us your life story.

Gordon: [0:55] All right. I think I remember the routine. [Laughter] Okay, my name is Gordon Chris Strand. The "Chris" is named after my maternal grandfather, who I never actually met. But his name was Chris Nelson. I was born on November 2, 1943 at Seattle General Hospital, which is kind of funny, because after I returned to Seattle after many years, and was working in the Bank of California building, I was walking down the street one day, and there was a plaque indicating that was the site of the Seattle General Hospital.

[1:30] So, I was born there, but raised and lived in Ballard through my college years. My father was an immigrant. His name was Thomas Strand. Actually, his name when he came to this country was Thomas Ingvald Fiskerstrand, but that got changed at Ellis Island, and it became Thomas Strand. He immigrated to this country in 1921 or 1922, just following the Great War in Europe, 1918, World War One. And I guess times were really bad in Norway, is what I was told.

[2:13] He was kind of the forward guard of the family. There were seven children- six brothers. They were all thinking of moving, and he was like the forward scout- he and his brother Peder. Interestingly, the rest of them did not follow. I didn't know the reason for that until I visited Norway in the 1980s. They basically realized that if they left, my grandparents would be left alone, and there was a shipyard, and so they just didn't really want to do that. So my dad and his brother Peder were the only two that made it.

[2:57] My mother was the daughter of Chris Nelson and Sigrid [Hoem]. Chris was… I call him an entrepreneur. He was interesting character. I always wanted to know more about him, and wished I had known him, because my Aunt Inga always said that of all the people in the family, I was the most like him. He sounded like a really special person. He arrived in Ballard in 1890. He had

emigrated from Norway, from the fjord… Now I'm going to not remember the name of the fjord. Well, anyway. [Ulvundfjord]

[3:42] And he came through Philadelphia, which I always find fascinating. I don't know of anybody else that ever immigrated into Philadelphia. I guess it was not uncommon. This is, again, prior to 1890, prior to Ellis Island, and all of that. And they came across the country. He and his brother Einar stopped in Minnesota for a while, apparently. The story is… this is all oral history. These are all things he told my mother and aunt- they literally walked from Minnesota to Washington. Now whether that's true, I don't know, but that's what they were told.

[4:17] So he came to Seattle and the embers will still hot on the ground, he told his daughters, from the Great Seattle Fire. But he came up to Ballard. And I have confirmed that he was in Ballard, because he was on the voter's roll in 1890. And he was a fisherman. He married Sigrid, who was from the same area of Norway. I don't know, honestly, if they knew each other in Norway, or if this was a relationship that developed here.

[4:53] And they built a house on 61st, and that house was in our family until just two years ago when I sold it. I was executor of my cousin Sheila Stangvik's estate, and she was the last occupant of that home. I really wanted to keep it in the family, but it was just not possible. But it still stands, and fortunately the people that bought it love the history of it, and love the fact that it is one of the early mill houses in Ballard, and have done a lot to restore it.

[5:28] Grandpa Chris was also a trailblazer in a way. I discovered in doing a lot of historical research… We had some wonderful photographs. That's how it started. These were my Aunt Inga's, and they were turned over to me. There was a series of photographs showing what turned out to be the dedication of Fishermen's Terminal in Seattle in 1916. That was in January. All these boats were in the dock, and the great parade. I discovered in doing my research, that there was a parade of 200 boats on Puget Sound, including boats from the fishing fleet in Tacoma and Seattle to open this publicly-owned facility that was going to help the Northwest fishermen.

[6:18] In the articles I discovered and read, they were more or less victimized by the pier owners downtown, and the Northwest fishing fleet was considering moving to Everett, or north, because they just couldn't afford the prices. So they lobbied, and a bond issue was passed in the early days to create Fishermen's Terminal in its current location, where it still exists, and still is primarily the place where the fishing boats are housed, the fishing fleet of Seattle.

[6:53] Grandpa Nelson was a member of a committee of largely Norwegians, but there were also some Swedes and Danes that were part of that lobbying effort. They formed a committee, the Pacific Coast… See, I'm forgetting names now. Puget Sound Fishermen's Association. We have a wonderful picture of them in front of one of the piers at the new terminal. He's the tallest guy in the bunch, with a big hat, and big moustache and beard. And his boat was called the *Inga*, named after his eldest daughter. And that led the parade of boats through Puget Sound.

[7:36] He just sounds like an interesting person. He was a community leader, and very involved in that effort. We have these wonderful pictures. Then in addition, there's a great one. Apparently the *Inga*, which was I think about a fifty-foot seiner… In those days, he would fish up in the straits of Juan de Fuca. There were halibut actually up in that area. I don't think they do that now, but in

those days, they did. So that boat was built in Ballard, actually, by Ingvald Hagem. And actually the granddaughter of Ingvald is somebody that we have interviewed in the course of this project, which I found very fascinating, because she actually was able to pull up records for me about that boat.

[8:30] The interesting thing about it is my cousin Palmer [Stangvik], who was a first cousin, was also fisherman- a schoolteacher, but in the summertime he would go fishing. He actually located the *Inga* in the 1980s. He discovered that it was up in Alaska, still being used, but had been called the *Floretta*. It was always my dream to go up to Alaska and see that boat. I would have loved to have brought it back to Seattle and restored it, but that was not going to happen.

[9:05] Sadly, last year, I had a very close friend who is a fisherman up there, and he had gone on his own to find out the history and find out where the boat was located. Unfortunately, it was scuttled last year. So it's now been buried, so to speak. [Laughter] But it did exist… I mean, that boat was built in 1903, so it was well over one hundred years, and had been fishing.

[9:35] Grandpa Nelson died as a very young man, in his fifties. There were a lot of stories. My mother and her older sister were very close to him. My mother was born on Halloween, and one of her favorite memories was the lengths to which he would make a party for her. She said they were bobbing for apples, everything. This was her dad. This was her dad's doing. He loved to celebrate his kids and give them the best time possible. My aunt Inga said she would often walk with him, and they would take trips down Ballard Avenue or Market Street, or wherever, and she said everybody knew him. He was always greeted by this one and that one, and apparently a very loved character and person in Ballard.

[10:26] Sadly, he developed throat cancer. I actually have some written notes of that, too, from my aunt. She was maybe thirteen at the time. Well, she was just a teenager. And he was in great pain. She told me the story- my grandmother… He had access to morphine; he had access to drugs to control it, but my grandmother couldn't do it. So the oldest daughter… She hated to do it, but she knew that her father needed that. Those were the early days of treatment. She said he used to go out on the back porch and just scream in frustration. I know that's not a very good story, but that's something that had a great impression on them, because they loved this man. He was very deeply loved by his kids.

[11:25] After he died, one of the other stories that came out, and also one to which I have some notes about, the two oldest girls were basically sent over to eastern Washington to a member of the family, Pete Johnson, who owned a big apple orchard. They just wanted to get them out of the city and out of Ballard, and start doing a little… Grandma was not doing well. She had been taken ill, and needed to recuperate herself. So they sent the two girls to eastern Washington. And they just had a ball. They worked, helping to… Although my Aunt Inga says, "Yeah, you [referring to her sister Julia] had a good time out in the field. You weren't the cook in kitchen." Apparently she was doing all the cooking for the apple-pickers, so to speak.

[12:20] But they went on this trek in an automobile, of which I have pictures. An open… It looked like one of those Ford, early cars- up to Canada. My aunt's notes about that are a riot, because she had never really been out of Ballard very much, so this whole trip, and going into Canada, where they are drinking. Of course, we're talking about prohibition, so this was an eye-opener for a young girl. It's just a treasure. Those are the things that mean something now when you think about it-

those personal little notes, and what have you. So that was the family.

[12:58] There were six children in the family that were raised in that house in 61st. But in my research, I discovered that behind the house, there was a shed, they called it. But apparently that was also a place where immigrants- largely Norwegian young men who were just coming into the country were boarded there. And that's how Grandma helped to pay for some of the bills. But it was also a place where these men could first find a home. There is a list, if you check census records, of different names running through there. So that building was existing until last year, but now the current owners of the house have rebuilt it and are using it for an artist's studio. So in a way, it still exists.

[13:59] And it's interesting, on 61st, at the house next door was a great-uncle. And then down the block there were two other houses that were rented by different members of the family. So 61st was kind of a Nelson street, I guess you almost would say.

[14:17] Grandpa had one brother, though. This, I haven't tracked down for certain. But he came over, and he was jilted, is the way the family history goes. His name was Ole Nelson. He got burned by this relationship, so he took himself off to the San Juan Islands, to Henry Island, which is just off Roche Harbor, in that area. It's only accessible by boat. He bought himself some land, and according to my mother and her sister, a few times a year they would go up on Grandpa's boat to visit Uncle Ole in his shed. Inge said it was a shed.

[15:01] She said this is all he had, but he would be impeccably dressed in his white shirt, and everything. He was perfectly… That was the way she remembered it, you know, but the kitchen was not much to speak of, according to her. [Laughter] But this was Uncle Ole. I don't think this was uncommon- you know, some men who just kind of retreated from life. I have confirmed that he had land up there. And actually the water is called Nelson Bay. So I suspect it was named after him. I haven't proven that, but it seems ironic that it would be... But that's where he lived his years, and they would visit him.

[15:44] So that was quite a family. As I grew up, of all those six children in my mother's family, there were lots of cousins. As long as Grandma was alive, we would spend our Christmas Eves at that home. Everybody would come. I look at it now, and it was not large, but we would stuff thirty to fifty people or more in there [laughter], somehow. I just have the fondest memories of that. The kids- my cousins and I, we would play games. Everybody else would be drinking, frankly.

[16:23] But we would have rømmegrøt. There would be a midnight buffet. We usually would have dinner at home, but then about midnight, down at Grandma's house, we would have rømmegrøt, lefse, and all the stuff that went with it. And salmon, and speke kjott, which was a leg of lamb that had been cured for several months. There was always a great production about Christmas in our home, and that started in October. My mother would make trips to Pike Place Market, because that's where she could get the best leg of lamb. That's where she got the candied fruit, and things for when she would make julekake, and things like that.

[17:15] She was a wonderful cook. Lefse, I remember lefse. That would start early, in the fall, too. She would go to different houses, and they would go together as a group, these women- mostly, again, Norwegian immigrants of descendents of. They would make lefse together as a group. We

would have big stacks of it for the holidays. And I think she probably was revered for her expertise at it.

[17:48] After her death, and going through the house, I found an index card box, and I bet there's twenty different recipes for lefse. And it's Mrs. Olsen's, and all these people she knew, and she collected and would try them. So, I've saved that, and I'm hopefully going to make a little book out of that for the family. But yeah, that lefse, that was something that we treasured and looked forward to. There wasn't much in the way of big gifts, I'll tell you that.

[18:25] My father Thomas Strand was also a wonderful man. Unfortunately, he died the very year I graduated from high school at Ballard. That fact… I was just thinking about this the other day, because people have such great memories of their dad. But for me, that is the biggest memory, is that experience. And I regret that. He was a fisherman, too. Like I say, he came in '21 or '22, directly to Seattle, because he had an aunt that lived here. That was typical. It was the place where he started out his life.

[19:24] I don't know how he met my mother. But his earliest record, he was living in a hotel or rooming house down on Ballard Avenue. They were married sometime in the early 1930s at the Ballard First Lutheran Church. They ended up buying a house from, I believe, the minister of that church. It had originally been the parsonage, or whatever they call it. So they purchased that house, and that's where I lived for most of my childhood, and actually into my college years. So Dad was a fisherman. He was co-owner with Ralph Ekrom, who was my godfather.

[20:12] The boat was called the *Attu*, of course named after the island in the Aleutian chain. That boat has a history, too. They didn't build it. They purchased it from someone else. But in doing my research, I discovered it had quite a storied history. It had been a rescue boat for a sinking ship in the Bering Sea. It just deserved a lot of honor for that. But it was built like a lot of… It was a wooden schooner. There were a bunch of them built in the early 20th century, of which this was one. They were built by Norwegian boat-builders here in Ballard. They're still revered in this area because of their seaworthiness, and everything. So that was the boat. It was the *Attu*.

[21:07] A fisherman's life… I think that's another part of maybe why I don't have a whole lot of memories of Dad. I mean, he was gone most of the year. We did not have a family where we had summer vacations. I mean, nobody was around, you know. I don't mean nobody, but my dad was fishing. That's what they did. They would go up for two-week periods, and come down to Seattle, and then back up to the fishing fields. After the summer was over, he would go tuna fishing off the coast of California and Oregon.

[21:44] So they did well, I guess. I think about it. I mean, I think about it. After he died, which was a total shock, but you know, my mother never had a worry. I could overhear from their conversations, which was true of all fishermen- if they had a good year, many would spend everything. Well, obviously, they saved, and she was able to live twenty, thirty years after that without any real concerns. Certainly didn't live like a princess, or queen, or anything like that, but Mom was… You know, I give them great credit for that. They knew how to manage their affairs.

Mari-Ann: [22:37] I don't believe you mentioned your mother's name.

Gordon: [22:41] Oh, I'm sorry. There's a great story about that. We knew her as Julia- J-U-L-I-A Nikoline Strand. Nelson was her maiden name. She would tell you if she were here, and get very angry about it, that she was born "Julie." J-U-L-I-E Nikoline- N-I-K-O-L-I-N-E Nelson. But because her mother was Norwegian, and I guess there's no silent "e," it became "Yulia," and that's what the Adams School people heard, was "Yulia," and she became Julia on the official records of the school. She resented that fact, for whatever reason, I don't know. She wanted to be Julie, not Julia. But it was never changed. They let it go. That was her name, and she was born in 1906.

[23:40] She lived in Ballard all of her life, and never understood why I wanted to leave, which I did, because of my career, and what have you. But eventually when I did end up in the New York area and had a home, she came out. I hooked her up with some retired folk at a church we were attending. She had an incredibly… She went everywhere. She just loved it. So that opened some doors. And I was really happy that she was able to see places and do things that she had never thought of being possible. So, anyway. So, let's see… We hit on Christmas, and fishing…

Mari-Ann: [24:30] What about your high school days and the years following?

Gordon: [24:39] Yeah, there's something else important that I'm missing… I had a brother, by the way, Raymond. Well, I went to Ballard High School. I graduated from there in 1962. I went on to the University of Washington with a large group of friends- great, very involved, active in Ballard High School affairs, whatever you want to call it. A group of us were freshmen at the University of Washington, and actually commuted. We had a carpool [laughter], which was not always a pleasant thing to do. In those days you had to park down by the University of Washington stadium, and climb up the stairs to go to class.

[25:25] Only once during that period, I tried living in an apartment and shared it with a bunch of guys, and it was such a dismal experience that I went back home. I had it too good there. Most of us did that. Very few lived in the dorms. So, the University of Washington. I actually got admitted to the law school at the University of Washington, but did not finish for reasons that even now I'm not quite sure about. Anyway, it didn't happen. I was drafted after that. Kind of a down period, I guess, in my life, so to speak. And of course, that was the height of the Vietnam War.

[26:13] I've always been one of those… Not that I supported the war, but I felt guilty that all of us who had gone to college, somehow we were exempted from that service. That bothered me. It was easy to be critical, and yet others were going who just didn't have the advantage of going to the University of Washington. So even though I didn't want to… And my mother, God bless her, said, "I will fully support you if you want to go to Canada," which shocked the heck out of me, because she was a woman that was very…

[26:50] Somebody… a friend of mine in the IRS said, when I told him about her attitude towards taxes… I was trying to work on her taxes once, and I said, "Well, you can take this as a deduction," and she said, "Oh, no. No, no. I don't want to do that. I want to pay my fair share." I told my friend at the IRS, and he said, "That's why this country operates, because people…" You know, anyway. But this time, God bless her, she said, "If you want to go to Canada, that's fine." She would support it, because she was very much against the war. I said, "No, I can't do that."

[27:25] Well, anyway, they had a great party, all my friends saying goodbye. And I said goodbye to

Mom, caught the bus, went downtown to the great big room where they're putting all these young guys, all of us. At that time, I had eczema. I had it more or less off and on all my life. It had never been a big issue with me; it was just part of… As somebody once said, "It's the Nordic curse." I don't know if it is, or not. But I went in and saw the doctor, and he said, "You'll die if you go to Vietnam." You know, because of the exposed skin, and what have you, and the jungles. And I said, "Well, okay." And that was it. I got on the next bus and went home. [Laughter]

[28:30] And then, what do I do? My life had suddenly, again changed. I had to now plan for another future. Oh, I forgot about something very important- my first job, and that was in graduating from high school. It was 1962, which was also the year of the World's Fair. That summer, the early summer, my mom had said, "You need to get a job." And I agreed. I did. I really wanted to. So they were hiring at the fair, and I was really excited about the fair. It just seemed like the world was coming to Seattle, finally. For most of my life, it seemed like we were at one end of the country, about as far away from everything that was happening, you know. It was always Washington and New York.

[29:17] So I went down there, and there was this huge, long line of people waiting to be interviewed to see if there were jobs available. I went up to the desk. The lady said to me, "Do you have an appointment?" Well, I didn't, and I thought, the heck with it. I said yes. So I got shifted to another line, and I got a job. I suppose that was a lie, but what the heck, anyway. My job, as it turned out- I was hired to be an usher in the new opera house and the play house, and all the performing events that were going on at the fair. And that was an incredible experience- all of these groups that were coming from Europe and Latin America were performing at the opera house.

[30:10] It was just fantastic, and it was a great job. Largely it was in the evening, and all I had to do was show people to their seats. Interestingly, we had to become members of the Teamster's Union as Fair employees. Of course those were the years when Dave Beck was in control, and pretty much in control of a lot of Seattle, I think. So we had to join and pay dues. You know, it was no big deal, but I always thought that was kind of interesting. But that was a great summer of the Fair.

[30:43] Actually, it was a job that I then kept all through college, because after the Fair, those buildings continued. Like in so many places, they just end, and there's nothing left, but here you had a new opera house; you had a play house. And those continued. The coliseum was turned into the home of our hockey team, and basketball team. And all those places, I was able to usher in as a city employee- part-time and in the evenings. So I could go to school and still work and still support myself. So it was a great job, and the things I saw were just fantastic, and the people I met. So I forgot about that little bit.

[31:29] That kind of work, I continued all through college, along with in the summertime, I worked at the post office delivering mail. That, I loved. Not delivering mail, I was picking up mail. I would drive all the way up north on Aurora, stopping at all the boxes. It was just kind of… It cleared your mind, you know. You're studying, and all that. I enjoyed that.

[31:59] So I graduated. We're back to the story of coming home after not going to Vietnam. So my close friend George, his father Bert [Zander] was an FBI agent in Seattle. They had moved to Seattle in 1957, or something like that, and I had become friends with George, his oldest son. Well, Bert didn't want to see me wasting my time. He recruited me, and said, "Why don't you go back to

Washington, D.C. I can get you into the bureau. It wouldn't be as an agent at that point, but you can start off in some division and then in the meantime, go back to law school at Georgetown or George Washington University."

[32:51] Well, I thought, okay. That sounded like an experience. So I went through all the procedures, and the interviews, and all that, and the investigations, and I did get a job, and left for Washington, D.C. And I drove all across Canada, and that was the year of the World's Fair in Montreal. This is why I did that. So I had this little Plymouth of mine- two-door Plymouth- and drove across on the Trans-Canada highway and spent some time in Montreal, and then drove from Montreal to Washington, D.C.

[33:26] And that is a trip I will never forget. I had never been on the east coast, and to experience the traffic, the population- it was like, wow, this is a little scary. And I remember it was lightning and driving rain all the way to Washington. I got in town so late, and I was staying in temporary housing somewhere by the U.S. Capitol. And I pulled in, and they said, "You're a little late." [Laughter] "Well, you know, it was kind of hard to get here." So that began my career in the FBI.

[34:02] Ultimately I worked in Washington. Those were tumultuous years. Again, the war was going on. While I was there working, at that point I was assigned to the National Crime Information Center, which was just starting. It had just been inaugurated. The FBI created a computerized database of stolen property, of wanted people. It was the first time, and this was to be available nationwide to other FBI offices, and to local police.

[34:46] Remember, this is before computers were the way they are now. This was an early attempt to computerize crime information and assist law enforcement. If you had a license plate of, you thought, a stolen car, if there was a national database, that was the idea, that it would be readily accessible. What we did in the office was, besides enter the data and monitor it, would be handle telephone calls. We called them telexes, too- Teletype would be coming in, and we'd respond to inquiries about people, property.

[35:24] The other interesting thing about that is, the computers were stored in huge… They filled floor after floor after floor. I mean, now you could probably put in one server what it took then floors of computers to do.

[35:51] In 1968 was the assassination of Martin Luther King. And I remember that day very well. Our office was at the top of the old post office building on Pennsylvania Avenue. It was probably the highest point, so we could see Pennsylvania Avenue; we could see the White House; we could see the Capitol. That was where my office was. A friend of mine who I had gone to college with, Jim Sparling, a Seattle boy, was in town on business. I had to work that day, so he said, "I'm just going to go out, and I'll do some sightseeing, and then we'll get together after work." We were going to go to my apartment in Maryland.

[36:41] In the meantime, Martin Luther King is assassinated, and all hell breaks loose in Washington, D.C. Rioting starts. And I'm watching it right from the window outside my office. We can see the stores being looted. And I'll never forget, there was an older… I was a young fellow at that point, in my twenties. But one of the supervisors there, he was looking at that, and he says, "Well, Gordon, you know, they deserve it. They've been cheating those people for years." Meaning the African-

American clientele. Anyway, I thought that was strange, but that's what he said.

[37:21] So what happened was, the FBI sent all the female employees of the bureau home, because on the streets, it was dangerous. We were put on sixteen-hour shifts- all the male employees. So I was stuck there. So I get a call from my friend Jim, who is out, remember, sightseeing. And he says, "Gordon, they're throwing rocks." He's in the middle of a riot, and he's scared to death. So I said, "Well, you come down here." My boss had approved that he could stay with me until the end of my shift.

[38:07] We're watching the city north of where we were, Pennsylvania Avenue, burning, basically. Not all together, but fires were erupting all over, and you could hear gunshots, and things like that. At the end of my shift, we were escorted home by the U.S. Army, because the streets were not safe. We got home to my apartment in Maryland. Of course, in those days, because of the rioting, all liquor sales were banned in the District of Columbia within thirty miles of the center of Washington. So we couldn't even go out for a drink [laughter], which I did do in those days. So we drove. The nearest spot was Annapolis, Maryland. [Laughter]

[39:05] But that was the beginning of a series. Again, those were tumultuous times. We weathered that. Actually, we had to process… They got some fingerprints off the weapon that killed Martin Luther King. Without getting too complicated, when wanted people were entered into the database, this new national crime information, there was a code assigned to a person's fingerprints. It wouldn't get you exact, but it would maybe pull 100 or 150 people that had an identical code. But that at least would narrow it down. We took those fingerprints that were taken off the weapon. We were able then to find…

[39:56] The theory was, this probably was a wanted person. I don't remember how they came to that conclusion. But they searched that database. This is before all arrested people were entered into a database. This is just those were actively wanted, with warrants. And they were able to narrow it down to fifty, and from that they could do the hand-eye investigation of searching. They found from that… they identified the assailant of Martin Luther King. So that was exciting. I felt really kind of excited to be part of that, and it worked. It showed this system had a way of shortcutting investigations and what have you.

[40:49] Also, though, that was followed up with the assassination of Robert Kennedy. And it really seemed… And I remember I wrote a letter to my good friend in Seattle- it just seemed like the world was coming apart. All of us, a couple of people that I worked with, we stood on Constitution Avenue. When his body was coming back from New York- they had a service in New York, and it came by train back to Union Station in Washington. Well, there were so many crowds along the tracks that it was delayed for hours.

[41:31] But the people… I'll never forget this. On Constitution Avenue, it was dead silence. Hundreds of thousands of people, but nobody moved. We waited. We all waited. We knew it was there- all of a sudden there was a speeding limousine, and it was Johnson's car. Again, another assassination, and everybody was so afraid that of course Johnson would be a target, too. And he sped past to Union Station.

[42:05] So I entered agent's class in 1969. I went to Quantico, Virginia- the Marine Corps base, and

went through my training, which was thirteen weeks of firearms training, all the usual stuff. This was before they had the beautiful air-conditioned towers. We were still in the old days, and it was just basically Quonset huts. It was hot as hell. But anyway, that was quite exciting. Out of that, I had my first office of assignment- Indianapolis, Indiana. [Laughter] In the middle of nowhere, basically. In those days, basically, your first office was one year, and the whole point of that was to be trained.

[43:05] I went there, and it was a small office. Because I was a junior agent, anytime it came up to volunteer for something, heck, I'd go. The first thing was Kent State, which I don't know… Again, a part of what was going on in the country- the Vietnam War, the antiwar protests had broken out in Kent State. The ROTC- the soldiers that were there had fired and a couple students had been killed.

[43:47] Actually, that's 1970, isn't it? Yeah. I'm jumping ahead a little bit. No, I'm not. 1970. And I'm in Indianapolis. And I was sent on special assignment to assist in the investigation at Kent State. President Johnson had sent the FBI. We didn't, theoretically at that point, have any jurisdiction, but he had the authority as the president to send us to Kent State.

[44:18] That was quite an experience, too. Emotions were high, and our object was, "what happened?" Was there some provocation, or what? I don't recall what the final result of that was. I just know there were mistakes on all sides there. It was tragic. Consequently, I was only a year in that office, and that was kind of fun. I had been sent also to assist the agent at Purdue- West Lafayette, Indiana. I spent a month or more there assisting that agent. For some reason, that was the scene of a lot of antiwar protests.

[45:04] In those days, the FBI was involved in catching deserters, which they no longer do. Of course there were a lot of deserters. Because of that, we became the target of protests. I will never forget being on the campus of Purdue University. We were in the headquarters of the campus police. And all of a sudden, this car that I had driven onto the campus, the FBI car, is surrounded by screaming people. [Laughter] We weren't threatened physically, I don't think, but I did worry about the car. [Laughter] And then I wish I had known that in advance, but the agent, the older man, who I had been basically assisting there, had been hung in effigy. [Laughter] He was not a popular guy on campus, largely because of his activities in investigating these protests.

[46:02] So from Indianapolis I was sent to New York City as my next office of assignment. 1970. Yeah. And that was a shock. Here I was, finally… Growing up, complaining about being at the end of the world, away from where everything was happening. Well, now I had been in the two centers of American politics and commerce- New York and Washington. And New York was a shock. I'll never forget driving through the Holland Tunnel, or Lincoln Tunnel, whatever it was, and being on one of the Avenues there, and just the incredible bustle. I was trying to find the hotel, and I just felt like a real neophyte.

[46:55] But that was the beginning of fourteen years' assignment. During the course of that, I married and had two children. We built a home in New Jersey, and my kids were both born in Princeton, actually. And I worked in New York. When I first arrived, because I had been to Kent State, they considered now that I had experience in campus unrest. So lo and behold, there was a bombing at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison, in… now I'm forgetting dates. And I get orders to go there. I didn't really want to go- new house, new marriage, all of that. But off I went.

[47:43] I had to spend a month there, and was very involved in the efforts to identify the bombers and arrest them, which we did successfully. But again, it's an example of the times. They were just very unsettled. You really didn't know what was coming next. Following that, I get home, and then I was sent to Southern University in Louisiana. There had been a campus shooting there as well. I was kind of concerned that I was going to be on this constant… But fortunately things calmed down, and that didn't happen. But for a while, that's what it was.

[48:34] Like I said, we spent fourteen years in New York. We went in search of my Norwegian identity. I'll never forget that. We lived in New Jersey, but we had heard that Bay Ridge, which is part of Brooklyn, had been a place where a lot of Norwegian immigrants had settled who had stayed in New York. And we found a restaurant up there that was still serving… It was basically a Nordic restaurant. It was wonderful. We went up there. But beyond that, you couldn't even find a Lutheran church in the vicinity of our home in New Jersey, which I thought was odd, because I came from Ballard, where there was one on every other corner.

[49:20] But we became active in the little town of Allentown, which was a very old New Jersey community due east of Princeton and very near to the Jersey shore. It's very old. It's reputed that Washington actually slept there. It had a wonderful old mill. And the church that we attended, the Allentown Presbyterian Church, one of the oldest, if not the oldest in New Jersey. Beautiful old church on a hill. And I discovered in the cemetery that the first territorial governor of the territory of Washington was buried there. So it was kind of an interesting link.

[50:04] We loved that town. My wife became active, and we both became active in an effort to build a new library- not a new library; it was to restore a historic church on Main Street, and turn it into a library. A local minister, who was also a… He loved to produce shows, Broadway musicals. His wife actually was a trained actress and singer. So, let's put on a show. Kind of sounds like Judy Garland, you know. And that's what they did. We formed the Allentown Players, and put on a series of musical plays and presentations to raise funds to support this library. And we just had a ball. Through that, we made wonderful, wonderful friends, some of which we have to this day.

[50:59] And I, a couple times was the chef, and actually did the dinner. But my wife was a singer, and loved to be part of the chorus and the group. I was then the babysitter at home. [Laughter] But it was a great town, very friendly, welcoming atmosphere there. Sadly, after, we went through a divorce, and I moved out, and then the kids moved back to Seattle. I always felt like they were yanked out of a place that they loved. They recovered, but particularly for my son it was tough. He didn't want to leave. I don't know. I'm talking too much now.

Mari-Ann: [51:57] No. Will you tell us about your children? You haven't mentioned their names and when they were born.

Gordon: [52:06] Well, John was born forty years ago- November 8th is his birthday, in Princeton Hospital. So, 1974. He now lives here and actually just got married himself. So that's very exciting. He's a fine young man. He was an extremely active young kind. And Alexandra was born one week shy of a year after John. And the favorite story, which we have repeated recently, with Alexandra, when we were getting ready to go to the hospital, Colleen is down at the car.

[52:57] John, when he was born, it was a 36-hour labor. Poor Colleen. So I'm upstairs getting ready

to go to the hospital, changing a shirt, trying to decide what I'm going to wear. Meanwhile, Colleen is downstairs. She is already practicing her Lamaze techniques and breathing because things are getting… So it was a rushed trip to the Princeton Hospital. I didn't even get a chance… I had to park the car while Alexandra was born. It was that quick. [Laughter] They wheeled her in. So we laugh about that a lot today.

[53:40] So those two were almost like twins, they were so close. We had a lot of fun in New Jersey. We would go on bike rides on the canals up there. People think of New Jersey as an industrial wasteland. It is not. There are parts of it that are gorgeous, especially around this town of Allentown. There were a lot of horse farms. I don't know if "farms" is the word, but beautiful grassy fields, and horses. And a lot of farms.

[54:21] So, Alexandra is married now, and has been since 2001, and she has three daughters, so I have three granddaughters. Like I said, John married his longtime girlfriend Donna this year. So who knows, there might be more grandchildren on the way.

Mari-Ann: [54:45] And Alexandra's husband's name, and the names of the grandchildren?

Gordon: [54:51] Oh, my goodness. Brett Tucker is his name. Emerson is the oldest, and Reese, and Cameron. And Cameron was born in Sydney, Australia. Grandma and Grandpa went to Sydney in 2010 to assist with the babysitting duties and what have you, down there, as she was born. So that was quite an experience. Loved that trip, and loved Australia. We didn't really see very much because it turned out our babysitting duties became quite extensive. But we had a good time. I was glad to do it.

Mari-Ann: [55:37] Go back to moving away from New York and coming back to Seattle.

Gordon: [55:44] Yeah. I spent, like I said, the fourteen years in New York. I was assigned to largely white-collar criminal investigations. Although in 1976 I had been in New York then six years almost. I was on a squad at the office there that also had… One of the types of investigations we did was aircraft hijackings. Aircraft piracy is the legal definition, of which there hadn't been many, but all of a sudden I'm driving home one day in my government car back to New Jersey. Interestingly, they allowed us to take those cars home even though it was sixty miles one way. But it was cheaper to do that than to pay for housing them in a garage in New York City.

[56:44] Anyway, I get a radio call that I have to get back to New York. There has been an aircraft… A plane has been hijacked. It's in the air, and all hands on deck. Of course, this is our squad. So I basically went home and then had to turn around and go back to New York. What had happened was, a plane leaving La Guardia Airport en route to Buffalo, New York, or Chicago, wherever, was hijacked in midair by Croatian nationalists. We called them terrorists.

[57:29] We were set up in a large squad, and this plane is in the air. Being relayed to the FBI office in New York… which by the way, is by far the largest in all of the United States, and the most… I mean, they're the one that gets everything in terms of… and has experience in this sort of thing. I didn't, but all of a sudden I was thrust into it with all the rest of them, and I was responsible for communications to Washington and back. What is going on?

[58:05] So this plane is in the air and instructions are relayed from the hijackers. "To show our bonafides, you are instructed to go to a locker at Grand Central Station, and in there you will find a bomb." And this is meant to prove the seriousness of what they were doing, that they also had bombs onboard this plane.

[58:37] So I was sent along with the bomb squad of the New York City police department, because certainly I was not a bomb technician, but I had to be there to observe what was going on. And I will never forget it, because of course, Grand Central Station, which you must know is probably one of the busiest in the world, has been shut down. And the locker was in an area of the station. We're watching this remotely. They have these robots that are opening this locker. They are taking what looks to be a pot- a cooking pot, cast iron, taped over. It looks like a cartoon version of what a bomb would look like.

[59:32] I'm behind a pillar, somewhat far away. I can still see. All of a sudden they dropped it. Oh, my God, what's going on? Well, the fear was, of course, it would be booby-trapped, so they wanted to test it. Nothing happened. And then it was sent by these massive trucks that they use to haul them. It was sent to the bomb disposal site at the New York City police department. I returned to the main office. There they attempted to diffuse… They wanted to find out how this bomb was constructed, how it was put together, because it could be important to saving the people on the plane, if we knew exactly how it had been put together.

[1:00:25] I don't know what happened… They thought it had been… They had remote wire cutters, and a remote wire cutter cut the wires. So they went forward and it went off and killed a young police officer, which was a horrible case, because his wife had convinced him just the week before to seek reassignment from the bomb squad. And he was killed instantly, and several others were wounded and it ended their careers, but they did survive. So suddenly we had an air piracy case resulting in murder, which in terms of the federal law, was subject to the death penalty. So this had case had just gone through the roof, so to speak.

[1:01:16] So what was coming back from the hijackers, "We want to drop leaflets over London and Paris." They were seeking the independence of Croatia from what was then Yugoslavia. This was not the first instance of Croatian terrorism. It had occurred in Australia and elsewhere. But it was certainly the biggest thing that had ever happened in the United States in that respect.

[1:01:48] The bottom line is, the plane was allowed… A second aircraft was sent up in the air to follow it, filled with some agents and other people. It landed in Gander… It landed in Iceland, I believe. No, it landed in Gander for refueling. And then it flew over London, and they actually distributed these damn leaflets. Remember, we're still not sure that there's a bomb onboard. We're doing everything we can to identify who these people are. We think we know some of them. And then they get to Paris to de Gaulle Airport. We're monitoring all of this somewhat live in New York at this point.

[1:02:42] The plane has landed in Paris, and the French… their inclination is to storm the aircraft and get this over with. That, to us seemed like it was going to be a huge loss of life. We had a couple hundred people aboard that plane. And it stayed on the ground for a couple hours, and then they surrendered. They surrendered of their own free will. Off the plane they come, and the French immediately extradite them. They didn't want to even process them through. They were sent right

back to New York.

[1:03:23] That became my chance… Not chance, that's not the way to put it. Suddenly it was my case, at that point. We now had to prosecute these people. We had to interview them, fingerprint them, and do everything we could. I can remember this train of cars coming from Kennedy Airport. We had press all over the place. They were put into interview rooms, and I was given the task of interviewing the chief, the ringleader, whose name was Zvonko Bušic. He was onboard with his wife, a young American girl he had married, who was from Portland, Oregon originally. Her family lived there. Of course she was only onboard out of love for her husband, according to her.

[1:04:28] So I interviewed Zvonco. The interesting sideline of this, about six months before, a bomb had gone off at LaGuardia Airport, killing thirteen or fourteen people. It had been put in a locker. There was just too much similarity here. So one of the questions we had was, were these people responsible for the earlier bombing that resulted in such a high loss of life in the baggage area of LaGuardia Airport? So Zvonko Bušic became my man. Hours and hours.

[1:05:16] He was quite free, and talked and talked. He basically told me he was doing this out of love of his country. I said, "Well, right now, as far as the world is concerned, you are a cop-killer. So if you have some way of explaining yourself, you better talk now." Somehow that triggered his… And he did confess to what had happened, and how it had… the months spent on it. So, it was a good… He was dead to rights. He would not… Actually, I can't go into that. I can't discuss the LaGuardia part of it, because it's still basically an unsolved case.

Mari-Ann: [1:06:02] Was there a bomb on that airplane that day?

Gordon: [1:06:05] There was. There were bombs, but they were fake. But nobody knew that. The passengers all saw them. They showed them the same kind of pots that I described, the real bomb. So for whatever reason, the bombs onboard the plane were fake. Interestingly… Have you heard of the Stockholm Syndrome? Many of those passengers, when they were first interviewed, as they came off the plane… That was another thing we had to do, was interview all the passengers. They had developed an attraction… Not attraction, but a feeling for their captors.

[1:06:52] That was a lesson we learned from that. You never interview somebody like that immediately following the incident. Give them a day, give them a few hours, and they will look at it a little bit more realistically. Not that that ever hindered the prosecution or anything, but even the captain of that plane… He was probably so relieved to be alive that he had kind of different attitudes, but that changed over time, I assure you.

[1:07:24] Anyway, that became my life for months. We first thought we had to prosecute the case in Buffalo. I was home here in Seattle at Christmas, enjoying my lefse, I want you to know. And I get a call, "You have to go to Buffalo now." Apparently… This is the weird thing. Where was that plane when the crime occurred? And according to some people, it was in the area covered by Buffalo. So consequently, it wasn't in the southern district of New York, or the eastern district of New York. It was in the western district of New York, which is covered by Buffalo, meaning that's where the crime occurred. That's where you have to charge them.

[1:08:18] So off to Buffalo, just enjoying Christmas, in the middle of the worst snowstorm that had

ever hit Buffalo. I'm sitting in the U.S. attorney's office, and they had these huge windows, and people are lined up on two sides of the table. And I see this storm coming in, and I said, "You know, I think…" [Laughter] Well, I was stuck there for several days, could not leave, planes couldn't get out. It was really incredible. But anyway…

[1:08:51] The bottom line was, they were all prosecuted, both Zvonko and his wife. His wife… I would love to tell this story because I had sent agents to the public library in New York City, because amongst the things recovered from her person when she got off the plane, was a Xerox copy of a page out of *Jane's All the World Aircraft*, a diagram of the 737 aircraft. So I said, "Where did these books…" We discovered that there was a branch of the New York public library in upper Manhattan.

[1:09:40] We went there, we found the books; we seized them with a subpoena. We sent them to the FBI laboratory. The book that had the page… They found the page, and they found where it was ripped. They sent the book, and they found her fingerprints in the book, which just destroyed her story that she only did it out of love to her husband; she didn't know about it. She was involved in the planning. So this innocent, young…

Mari-Ann: [1:10:16] Portland girl.

Gordon: [1:10:17] Portland girl, was sent to jail for thirty years. Interestingly, last year, Zvonko Bušic was released by the federal government, and deported to Croatia. Not last year, two years ago. Which is basically typical for a life term. I think after thirty years, you're eligible for parole. I frankly don't think he should have been released. He was, though. He went back to Croatia, where he was greeted as a hero.

[1:10:52] His wife was already there. She had been released earlier, and she was some functionary in the new government of Croatia. Zvonko returns this conquering hero, and I have pictures of that. Within a year, he commits suicide. There's more stories there that I just… I don't know the rest, but that's the end of that. It continued up until 2014, as far as I'm concerned.

[1:11:31] So, coming home, retiring from the FBI… There are other cases I could talk about, but that was one that sticks in my mind, and I learned an awful lot from that experience about people. I retired in 1995. Oh, I came back to Seattle in 1983, then. Oh, that's a whole other… Well, I'm sitting there in New York, working on another major corruption case, involving judges, and what have you. And I get a call from the assistant director of the New York office. He was quite a character. He was a man who wore a cape, and loved to hang out in all the posh clubs in New York City. He was a man about town.

[1:12:25] He calls me, and he says, "Gordon, do you still want to go to Seattle?" I said, "Are you serious?" And I stopped him, "Well, you know, I got this case." He said, "Gordon, nobody is in [inaudible 1:12:38]. Do you want to go to Seattle, go home?" My family had since… My ex-wife, at that point, and children were back here. And interestingly, I had started thinking about resigning, because this long-term, long-distance relationship with the children just didn't make sense, and I was prepared to quit.

[1:13:02] He calls out of the blue, and says, "They need… This is a 'whoops' case. Do you

remember the nuclear reactors in Washington State? The bond was a big default." Anyway, a major federal investigation had been initiated, and if I wanted to go, I could be sent back to Seattle. I still wonder about that, whether… If I hadn't been done a little bit of a favor there, that they had heard that I was considering resigning, maybe. I don't know. But it just seems coincidental that out of the blue this opportunity came up.

[1:13:48] So I did. I took it, even though I loved New York. I have to say, after all those years, it had become home. I loved the work I was doing. I had good friends. But of course, family is more important. I drove all the way across the country, and had a great time. And I will never forget coming up to Snoqualmie Pass and starting down and just seeing… And I thought, "Oh, yeah. This is home."

[1:14:21] So, '83. So I worked here in Seattle on that case and several others, and then retired in '95. I went to work for the State of Washington Attorney General's office. Christine Gregoire was Attorney General then. We just formed a special investigative unit working on economic crimes- crimes against the State of Washington- Labor and Industries Department; Department of Revenue, and tax cases, that type of thing.

[1:14:53] I did that for two years, and then I had become involved with the museum. At this period, too, returning home, I really wanted to look into my roots now. My mother was still alive, but now that became important- more so with two children, and letting them get to know this family, and where this strange stuff, lefse came from, and all that. [Laughter]

[1:15:25] I had first started out in 1989 working with the Ballard Historical Society when it was the 100th anniversary of the State of Washington. In 1990 it was the 100th anniversary of Ballard becoming a city. So I worked with them, and volunteered on a book project then, and I met Marianne Forsblad. One thing led to another. She was the director of the museum. I came on the board. Before I knew it, I had volunteered… Olaf Kvamme, board president at the time, had me working on the darn auction [laughter], which was fun. Jette Bunch and I became co-chairs of one of the auctions.

[1:16:10] Then at some point, 1998, I applied for and was hired as the business manager here at the museum. So I put both feet into my heritage, and it's just been wonderful. And this project is kind of unique when you think about it. All these interviews we do are not dissimilar from the things I used to do as an FBI agent. But we're not adversarial interviews anymore. We don't have to dig the information. Usually everybody, like myself today, we're just gushing forward. So it's a much different kind of… But it's not dissimilar. And I love it. I really do. I have tried to get my children involved here at the museum, and my grandchildren. I continue research in many areas of my family to the extent that I can. I think I talked enough. Are there more questions?

Mari-Ann: [1:17:17] Yes. You were working at the museum as the business manager from 1995… Is that what you said?

Gordon: [1:17:32] 1998 to 2008, ten years.

Mari-Ann: [1:17:37] And it was after you retired from the museum that you started as chairperson of the steering committee for the oral history program.

Gordon: [1:17:45] Correct. 2009 is when we started. We had worked, actually… We became involved with oral history in 2000. We joined with the Ballard Historical Society, and the Swedish-Finn Historical Society to do an oral history project involving immigrants to Ballard. We secured… I had to write grants. That was one of the things I did. So I got very involved in this oral history project. I sought support from the City of Seattle Cultural Affairs, and from King County to do a book, using the interviews that we did.

[1:18:41] Our goal was to do people who were immigrants, but who lived and worked in Ballard. So the focus was strictly Ballard. That's why the other organizations were involved as well. I think we did well over one hundred interviews for that. I mainly managed the financial affairs of the project. Transcription was very similar to what we did here.

[1:19:07] But then once that project was over, it was kind of over. Then when I retired, I always felt like that should be an ongoing thing at this museum, because there are so many wonderful stories, just from the volunteers I had met, and people in my association here at the museum. These stories needed to be preserved. Everybody knew that, but it was just like hit and miss. People were doing... I know Olaf tried to continue it. Olaf Kvamme did several interviews.

[1:19:43] I think 2009 is when we started in a concerted way. We had this group of volunteers, of which you guys are two of them; me, too. I think we've got the staying power now. The museum wants to continue this as a program that continues from year to year- not just a project with a timeframe on it. This is a continuing effort, and I think it's absolutely crucial. Out of this, we produced one documentary video, and we're working on another one. And we've done one book, and I'm sure there will be other books.

[1:20:22] And I think my mother would be very proud [laughter] of this. Her heritage was very important to her. She grew up speaking Norwegian. She never made the trip to Norway, though. Sadly, I learned later that the year my dad died, that was the year they were going. He had been back before, right after the war. He had returned to Ålesund, which is his hometown.

[1:21:02] After she died, I think it was 1986 or '87, I made my first trip to Norway, and I took my two children, John and Alexandra, and we just had a ball. We took the train from Oslo to Bergen, and picked up a car there, and drove up to Ålesund, which was an experience. The whole thing was an experience. It was wonderful. My kids call it "the death march," because I love to walk everywhere. [Laughter] But they liked it. And they met… I was the first person in my family to make that trip, which is… I don't know. It's just the way it is.

[1:21:51] We had a couple uncles and an aunt who had made the trip to Seattle, but nobody had made the trip to Norway, so we were treated like visiting royalty. And I had cousins I had never met. But I saw my grandfather's home, the original home, and the shipyard that he built, which was booming now. In many ways, that family that is in Norway… I don't want to say, "better off," but they certainly aren't lacking for anything. They're happy. It's such a beautiful place. I loved Ålesund.

[1:22:29] And I learned so much about my dad. Actually, in preparation for the trip, we took Egerdahl's class. We thought we could learn a little Norwegian. Frankly, that wasn't enough time. Anyway, in that class, a gentleman came up to me, and he said, "Are you Tom Strand's son?" And I

said yes. And he says, "Well, let me tell you about him." As a young kid, just out of high school, or whatever, I guess Dad hired him to be a crewman on the boat, the *Attu*. They had docked, laid up in Ketchikan, and all the other guys were going into town to drink, and whatever, and my dad told him, "You don't have to go. We can stay here."

[1:23:33] He said, "Your dad saved me, because out of that, I was able to save the money that I earned." He said, "He mentored me." And that's the way he was. That's a side of my dad… There's no reason he wouldn't be like that. He was a nice, wonderful man. But it just meant so much for him to come up and tell me that. You never know where you're going to learn something like that. And there was another occasion similar to that. Anyway, that's it. Probably some blanks, but that's the way it's going to be.

Mari-Ann: [1:24:22] A very illustrious life, I will say.

Gordon: [1:24:24] Illustrious. No. [Laughter]

Mari-Ann: [1:24:26] Yes. Very, very good. Thank you, Gordon.

Caitlin Cotter: [1:24:31] Yes. Thank you.

Mari-Ann: [1:24:32] For sharing your story with us.

Gordon: [1:24:34] I loved it. Thank you.

END OF RECORDING.

Transcription by Alison DeRiemer.