

Nordic American Voices
Nordic Heritage Museum

Interview of Ingvar Pétursson
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Seattle, Washington

Interviewers: Arnfridur Sigurdardottir; Susan Haris; Anita Henriksen

Arnfridur Sigurdardottir: [0:00] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices oral history project. Today is the 18th of February [2017], and we will be interviewing Ingvar Pétursson. We are at the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle, Washington. My name is Arnfridur Sigurdardottir, and with me is—

Susan Haris: [0:19] Susan Haris.

Anita Henriksen: [0:20] Anita Henriksen.

Arnfridur: [0:22] Welcome, Ingvar.

Ingvar Pétursson: [0:23] Thank you.

Arnfridur: [0:23] If you would just start, and tell us your name, and your background.

Ingvar: [0:29] My name is Ingvar Pétursson [with Icelandic accent] if you're in Iceland. It's Ingvar "Peterson" if you're in the U.S. I was born in Reykjavík, Iceland on March 18, 1957 to Hulda Emilsdóttir, so she was the daughter of Emil Björnsson. She was born in Eskifjörður, Iceland on August 25, 1930. She actually lived there for many, many years. When I think she was about nine or ten years old, she moved to Reykjavík from the east coast of Iceland, which is where Eskifjörður is.

[1:04] She came from a long line of folks from the east coast, including a man named Hans Jónatan, who was the first black man to settle in Iceland back in 1802, I think, he came to Iceland. He had been the son of an African slave in St. Croix. His father was likely the governor of St. Croix at the time, a Danish man named Hans Schimmelmann, or his secretary. It's not clear exactly who it was. So, Hans Jónatan grew up in St. Croix until he was seven or eight, and then got moved to Copenhagen, Denmark, where he actually was owned by the Schimmelmann family in Copenhagen, and tried to get his freedom. He went to the courts to try to get his freedom. The courts disallowed his freedom.

[2:01] While he was doing this, he was fighting for the Danish Army against the Brits in the Battle of Copenhagen, and becoming a very strong young man. When the courts disallowed him being freed in Denmark, they basically said we're going to ship you back to St. Croix so you can be a slave. He wasn't actually allowed to be a slave in Copenhagen. So, he bailed, and got on a fishing boat, and landed on the east coast of Iceland. So, he was the first black man to actually land in Iceland. So, he's my great-great-great grandfather. It's an interesting part of my mother's story back there.

Arnfridur: [2:39] How was he welcomed? Was he welcomed there?

Ingvar: [2:42] He was very welcomed. It's interesting; in Iceland, it's not well-known, but I think in the 1600s, there was a group of Moors from Algeria came to Iceland and stole people, and basically put Icelanders into slavery. And that came from this area of Iceland as well. There were some stories about that. The Icelanders weren't racist in the least at this point. They were quite interested in the fact that Hans Jónatan, a beautiful black man, would come and stay with them. He married an Icelandic woman, and worked in the general store in a town called Djúpivogur, and then went north on a farm for a while, and lived a very good life. They accepted him very well. It's a fascinating story about the east coast of Iceland.

[3:41] That's also, by the way, where the Brits landed. They did a friendly invasion of Iceland at the beginning of World War II. They landed on the east coast, and everybody welcomed them, because it was either the Brits or the Germans, and the Icelanders would prefer to have the Brits. That all happened around the same area of Iceland.

[4:02] My father, Jóhann Pétursson, is the son of Pétur, my grandfather— Pétur Guðmundsson. They came from exactly the opposite side of the country, a town called Hellissandur, which is on a peninsula called Snæfells Peninsula, on the west coast of Iceland. And that is the peninsula that Jules Verne used when he wrote *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, where they go down through a volcano and a glacier. That's Snæfellsjökull that they went down through.

[4:02] He was born there, and lived there in Hellissandur. The community was a fishing community, so he learned to fish in the very rough North Atlantic. Of course, when we moved to America, we did nothing but fishing for a number of years. So, he was from there. He moved down to Reykjavík with the family as well. He went to college and learned electrical engineering in Iceland, and then studied also in Copenhagen after he married my mother, Hulda.

[5:10] My sister was born in Copenhagen. She was born there in 1953. Birtna Jóhannsdóttir, is what she was born, like I was born Ingvar Jóhannsson, because I am the son of Jóhann. I only took the name Pétursson after we came to America. So, Birna Jóhannsdóttir was born in Copenhagen on September 11, 1953. Then they studied there. I had not been born yet. They moved back to Reykjavík. I was born in Reykjavík at the hospital, Landspítali, basically in the middle of Reykjavík, in 1957. So, that was the family, and what the family had done in Iceland before we came to America.

[6:03] As most Icelanders do, there came a time at which my mother, I think, mostly, said, "We've got to get out of here. We're on an island. I've got to explore the world a bit more." So, she decided to request of my father that we move to America for a few years. So, we picked up in October of 1962. My father had gone a little bit earlier. But in October of 1962, we got on a DC-6 propeller plane out of Keflavík, or maybe Reykjavík Airport, and landed in Idlewild. It was not yet called J.F.K., John F. Kennedy Airport.

[6:49] So, we landed at Idlewild. The story I've been told is we went through the airport carrying our *sængur*—basically are down comforters that every kid, and everybody has. We were walking through Idlewild Airport carrying these comforters, effectively. The whole family was. So, we ended up at

Idlewild and flew down to Fort Worth, Texas, because my father had gotten a job as an electrical engineer through a friend that worked for a construction company in Fort Worth, Texas.

[7:28] So, we ended up in Fort Worth, Texas. What I remember of that is experiencing my first lightning storm, which was shocking and scary. And experiencing my first tornado, walking out one morning and looking across the street, and an apartment building had had the roof effectively lifted up and thrown into the swimming pool. That was the first tornado I had ever seen. I saw several more later. And just learning what America was about. Learning English. That's where I learned English.

[7:59] One of my earliest memories is walking outside of our house— we had a small house on a street called Lock Lane in Fort Worth, Texas. And I remember walking out and looking across the street, and there was a little girl walking along the sidewalk. And I just remember looking at her, and she started speaking, but I didn't understand what she was saying. It was all gibberish to me. And I started speaking, of course, Icelandic, to her. And I still remember her face getting angry. Angrier and angrier.

[8:32] She was a local Texan, and I don't think she had ever met what they call in Texas, a "ferner." So, she had never met a foreigner. So, she kept getting angrier and angrier. She runs over to me, and she hits me. She slugged me. I remember this. Of course, I was offended, and started crying. And I tell everybody this was my first experience of a kid in America. And my first experience with women, in fact. It was traumatic at first, but I learned to live with that and be fine with that.

[9:07] So, we stayed in Fort Worth for about a year. My father then got a job at a company called Brown & Root Engineering in Houston, which is one of the largest construction companies in America. It does oil fields, and some other things. It's now called KBR Kellogg Brown & Root, which is a large corporation similar to Halliburton. So, he became an electrical engineer down in Houston in about 1963-1964.

[9:34] But before we moved, I remember coming home from school one day and walking in and seeing my mother and two of her friends crying inconsolably. And I remember walking up and saying, "Hvað er að?" "What's wrong?" And she said, "The President has been shot." We were living at the time close by where that happened. We were Fort Worth, and J.F.K. was shot in Dallas.

[10:02] It was one of those things where you remember exactly where you were. For me, it was mainly for the sadness of foreigners, because all three of the women there were from Iceland, and I believe one was from Norway. The sadness of seeing a great man cut down in a country that they had decided to come to, that they loved. It was in some ways sadder for them than it was for Americans, because they were not clear exactly what would happen next— who would take over being the President of the country. So, it was a very clear memory of the day that J.F.K was shot.

[10:39] So, we moved down to Houston. By this time, my sister and I had both learned English reasonably well. We went to school, and got an apartment close to the old airport in Houston, called Hobby Airport. I remember that's where I sort of learned about Texas. I learned about the bayous of Texas. I used to walk with a friend named Donny, and we'd go into the bayous with sticks, because there were snakes— copperhead snakes and rattlesnakes, and water moccasins down there. That was an interesting experience as far as learning how to take care of myself in the swamps of

Texas, kill a snake, or whatever. The ruggedness came up.

[11:29] I went to school there. Eventually, my parents, who had had a very difficult time together... They had been married about 12 or 13 years, and my mother decided to divorce my father. The reason we stayed in America, as opposed to going back to Iceland after the three years we had planned, was they were divorced. They separated, and we moved. My sister and I stayed with my mother. We moved to the west side of Houston, where we grew up after that.

[12:03] My father stayed sort of on the south side of Houston. Every other weekend, I'd go with him, and we'd do a lot of fishing on the Gulf of Mexico on a small runabout boat. I remember people looking at us when we'd go way out onto the Gulf in a 15-foot fishing boat. People would say, "You're crazy being so far out there." But my father was a good fisherman in the North Atlantic. So, we did a lot of fishing.

[12:28] What I remember about Houston was at the time... And this was the early sixties. I remember going into a department store at one point, and I remember looking at two water fountains in the department store, and one of them said, "white," and the other one said, "colored." I remember asking my mother what that meant. I thought it was something to do if you had a painted face, or you were wearing makeup. So, she told me what that meant. And that was the first time I had really encountered any racism of any kind.

[13:10] We lived in a part of Houston, and most people lived in a part of Houston that was quite segregated. There were African Americans around, but not that many in that part of town. It was clear that there was, in the South, a significant amount of racism, discrimination, and other things. For us, from Iceland, that struck us very poorly. It was not something that we had any understanding of, based on skin color. We talked a lot about that as I was growing up.

[13:49] My sister and I did very well in school. I don't know why. I think it was because my mother forced us to learn English. To this day, I will correct people that I know on their grammar—a number of little grammatical things. People say, "Why do you care about that?" I said, "Well, my mother told us that grammar and language is the way you communicate, and you have to do it fairly well." We learned English very well. I think that part of it, and the focus on doing things well, really made us say we were going to be good in school.

[14:26] When I went through high school, I went to a school called Stratford High School on the west side of Houston. When I came out of that school, I was valedictorian of that school, and frankly, I was valedictorian of the entire school district, mostly because I spent a lot of time getting good grades. As well, I was a fairly social person. I was a cheerleader for a while, just so I could be part of the football parties that took place in high school.

[14:55] My sister also did really well in school. She went to a school called Westchester High School. She went off to Rice University in Houston. About junior year or so, I had a decision to make. I was very heavily into calculus and physics, and those sorts of things. And I had applied to Rice, and MIT, and Stanford. I got into all three of the schools, and my decision was whether I would go to MIT or to Stanford.

[15:29] I had a very close friend named Dave Mellar. He had long, blond hair, and he was a fiddler.

He played fiddle beautifully. He would have gigs around Houston that we would go to, and we would dance to Dave's fiddle-playing. And he was also into physics. At one point, he and I had agreed we would go to MIT together, because he got into MIT as well. At the last minute, I said, "No, I don't like the idea of being up in Boston in the snow and the cold. I want to go to California." The Beach Boys were playing, and I had the albums, and I really enjoyed the Beach Boys songs.

[16:09] So, Dave went off to MIT, and I went off to Stanford. Coming back at Christmas that first year, our freshman year, I went and saw Dave. And Dave said to me, "I can't stay at MIT." I said, "Why can't you stay at MIT?" He said, "Well, I got to the dorm, and I was just practicing my fiddle, and three guys came down and said, 'Could you please stop that? You're disturbing our study of physics,' or whatever they were studying. And this was in the evening. He says, 'When somebody came and told me that I couldn't play my fiddle, I said this is not the place for me.'" So, he transferred to the University of Texas, and is now a physics professor at the University of Texas, I believe at UT, or up at Illinois. I can't remember which one. He still has long hair. He looks like a professor.

[17:05] I went off to Stanford. What's funny about that is there is a very famous quarterback who plays quarterback for the Indianapolis Colts— Andrew Luck. Andrew went to Stratford High School in Houston, Texas, and then went and played college football at Stanford. He was the quarterback of the Stanford Cardinal. I keep thinking that because he and I had the same path, we need to become friends at some point. I want to write him an email at some point and say, "Hey, you and I have an interesting background. I never played any football, but we should get together."

[17:41] So, I went to Stanford with a friend of mine who also got in there. My mother had told me to study medicine. She wanted me to be a doctor. I said, "No, I'm into physics and calculus and technology." I learned how to program in 1974 on a Wang paper tape little computer in what was called Wang BASIC, so BASIC language. I liked software, and I liked programming. I went to Stanford and decided that I was going to follow an engineering path. I started the engineering curriculum and did a lot of software-learning. This may not make any sense, but I learned ALGOL W, which was an artificial intelligence language at the time. Pascal, Fortran and a couple other languages.

[18:30] My engineering took me into the mechanical world, into aircraft propulsion. So, I became a propulsion engineer at Stanford. The other part of Stanford was meeting a lot of lovely, very capable people. A good friend of mine in the dorm were Jay Roach, who did the Austin Powers films, and Jim Collins was my next-door neighbor. He was one year younger. He wrote the books *Good to Great*, and *Built to Last*. He sort of became a business icon. A lot of very smart people, and a lot of very fun people.

[19:06] I was very glad I had gone to Stanford, because you could be outside. I think in Boston, for most of the year, you wouldn't have been able to do that. So, I started running. I became an athlete. I used to run the hills behind Stanford. It's called the radar dish. All the students who run at Stanford "run the dish." You used the term, "I'm going to run the dish." And we used to go out and camp up in the hills, and watch the cows, and run after the cows. At one point, we illegally climbed a large water tank up in the hills to see a solar eclipse. We used some film to block the harmful rays. But some friends and I climbed this water tank. So, we weren't bad... We were irreverent. We were

not illegal most of the time.

[19:55] I had a wonderful social life at Stanford. I learned how to be social, more so than being social in Texas. I had to get rid of one of the two accents that I had. I had an Icelandic accent speaking English, and then I had a Texas accent speaking English. So, I chose to get rid of both of them, but I claim that I kept the Texas one a bit more because of a major grammatical flaw in the English language. And that is, unlike every other language that I know, and probably you all know, there is no plural “you” in the English language. It’s only “you and you.” In Texas, they invented... They added “all” to it. “You all,” which turns into “y’all.”

[20:55] In New York, of course, they put an “s” on the end. They say “yous.” In Philadelphia, they say, “you ones,” and then shorten that to the “yens.” Everywhere in America, they determined that we need a plural “you.” I figured, well, I’m going to keep the plural “you” that I grew up with, which ended up being “y’all.” So, while I got rid of most of my Texas accent, I kept the ability to say “y’all,” and I still do to this day. How y’all doing? That was a fun part of it.

[21:23] The other part of Stanford was, this was a time when the word “hacking” was a positive term. It was a term of intelligent, intellectual exercise of computer scientists to say, “Can I figure out a puzzle to get into these systems in order to learn something about these systems?” So, it was a very positive thing. It was actually a part of the learning you did in Computer Science. A couple of us in the dorm did what I call now “white hat hacking,” which is you go in, you prove that you can get in there, and you come back out. It’s really just sort of a puzzle. So, we did a number of those things.

[22:07] I had a friend who hacked into the California State Highway computer, and let us all know that the parking tickets that we were getting on the Stanford campus really wouldn’t amount to anything, because they couldn’t store anything but California license plates in the computer. That was the sort of hacking you did. It was more benevolent, to learn about things. You weren’t going there to do anything disastrous. That’s when I actually learned that skill, which I used later on in my career.

[22:39] Stanford was wonderful. We had the bonfires at the time. There are no longer bonfires at Stanford. Very good social environment for me to explore. I actually graduated early, because I had come in with a whole bunch of AP (advanced placement) credits. So, I graduated in March of 1979. I immediately went to work for McDonnell Douglas Corporation, down in Long Beach, California as a propulsion engineer, an aerospace engineer, working on the engines for an airplane at the time called the DC-9 Super 80. It’s now called the MD-80. You all have certainly flown on it. It’s a twin-engine, tail engine plane.

[23:24] So, my job was to write what was called the Thrust Rating Computer for the cockpit. There were four of us that worked on that. The way we did that was, we wrote some Fortran, which had a whole bunch of technical thermodynamic equations embedded in the software. Then we would put it in the cockpit, and when the plane was in first flight, we would learn how the plane behaved during flight-testing. We would have to tune the software with these empirical tables that would correct the equations based upon how the plane performed.

[24:02] We would do fascinating things. I was responsible for doing some of the analyses of the results of what we called bird-strike testing. You may have seen the story about Sully Sullenberger,

who was the pilot who landed the plane... I think it was an Airbus A310 or A320, on the Hudson River. He got hit by a bird strike in both engines— significant, big birds— geese, I think. Several of them, in both engines. Well, that's something you test for when you're an engineer.

[24:38] So, we had a test stand in a place called Quartzsite, Arizona, and we would put an engine up on the test stand, and rev it up to takeoff thrust. On the other side, probably a hundred yards away or so, was a cannon. The FAA forced us to test a bird strike on the engine by shooting... I remember this. We had to shoot two three-pound chickens, and one six-pound turkey at this engine. They had to be frozen, because you can't shoot an unfrozen bird out of a cannon.

[25:11] What happened is, the birds would hit the engine, the engine would sort of drop its thrust, and the reason we needed to know this was we were building this thing called Automatic Reserve Thrust. If this happened, the other engine would immediately pick up into red line, basically as much thrust as possible, so the plane would be safe. I remember doing the analysis of these curves, how these birds would strike the engine. What would happen, of course, you destroy the engine, as you saw with Sully. That was one of my jobs as a propulsion engineer at Mc Donnell Douglas.

[25:45] One of the things I didn't like about that job, is I was forced... Even though I was not a part of a union, the union was the only one negotiating on my behalf as an engineer. And I didn't like that. That was not fair to me. I wanted to have my own destiny in my own hands. So, I did not enjoy that, and I decided, how do I get out of being in a union that I don't have any control over? I said, well, I'll learn business. I want to learn to elevate myself. That's when I decided to go to UCLA Business School. It's now called the Anderson School at UCLA, to get my MBA.

[26:31] I went and got my MBA. I found general business classes particularly boring, but really got an interest in international finance, in particular, the mathematical elements of international finance— options trading, some of the things that happen that involve a lot of mathematics. There is a thing called Black Scholes pricing model, which defines how you buy and sell options on stocks, or gold, and so on. So, I really enmeshed myself in that. I also wrote some econometric models in another language called APL, which I don't know if they use anymore. So, I wrote econometric models at UCLA, and tested them, and so on.

[27:17] At the time, for the first year of this, I was still working at McDonnell Douglas in Long Beach. During that year was the first flight of the MD-80. I remember thousands of people lining the airport in Long Beach, California, and we didn't know if they plane would actually be able to take off. You never know; it's a brand new aircraft. It's long. We thought it might break in half when it rotated, as they say. And we stood there, and the plane took off. Here are 3,000 people crying. We were all crying, because we had all had a part in this plane.

[27:51] And I realized I wanted to learn how to manage this. I wanted to learn how to run departments of people, and bring teams together to build great stuff. That was the time I was standing there, and... all I want to do is I want to build stuff. I want to build cool things. So, I finished at UCLA knowing that I now knew how to finance and manage the building of cool things. So, when people say, "What do you do?" I go, "Well, I've done many things. But the thing that is the glue through all that is, I like to build something interesting.

[28:35] By the way, I had lived in Pacific Palisades, California the second year. I had stopped

working at McDonnell Douglas. I lived in the home that used to be owned by a man named Bob Denver, who was Gilligan on *Gilligan's Island*. Two friends of mine had already been through business school, and they had very lucrative jobs in Los Angeles. We got this house in Pacific Palisades, California. It had a swimming pool with a waterfall coming into it. I remember really lovely, fun parties while I was going to my second year of UCLA. And running Sunset Blvd., and the coast. It was an idyllic life. Taking the bus to the university... It was just one of those times where you say, "Why can't I just keep doing this?" Well, because you have to make a living.

[29:27] In the last quarter of my business school life, I had two electives that I could take. After all of these classes in international finance and strategic planning, and management, and marketing, and those sorts of things— two electives. One of them I decided to take was a class not in the business school, called Modern Scandinavian Literature. I thought, I'm Icelandic. I have not really studied much literature. I had read a few of the Sagas of Iceland, and so on. So I said, I'm going to take this class.

[30:03] I remember the first day I walked into this class, I came in late, because I had a business school class that overlapped it. So, I was never there at the beginning of the class. At the end of the class, I remember looking across the class, and this absolutely beautiful blonde girl stood up, and I said, "Oh, what a beautiful California girl that is." Tears. I never talked to her in the class. We never met in the class, even though she said that she noticed me as well, this Icelandic guy.

[30:42] The professor of this class— his name was Chapman. It turned out he had been a translator of Icelandic language into English. So, he thought I walked on water because I was Icelandic. Whenever I would come in late, he would go, "Oh, Ingvar. Good to see you; welcome! The Icelander is here!" So, she would always turn around, and somehow she thought I was kind of cool.

[31:06] So, we did not meet in the class. But one weekend, there was a film festival. It was an Icelandic film festival in Santa Monica, California, at the Santa Monica Twin Theaters, close to the ocean. And I decided to go by myself to this film festival, just to chat with Icelanders, and see these films. Well, it turned out she decided to go by herself as well. For some reason, she had never gone to a movie by herself, but she decided to do that.

[31:41] I just happened to have finished talking to one of the directors of one of the films who had flown out to Santa Monica, and I looked to the door, and she is walking in the door. She walks up to me, and this is where I say that I made the most significant decision I have ever made in my life, within five seconds. There were two films. She looked at me, and said, "Which film are you going to see?" and I had decided what film I wanted to go see. But I was smart enough... And this is rare for me, because I'm not usually that quick.

[32:20] But I was smart enough, and looked at her, and said, "I don't know. What film are you going to see?" So, she said, "I'm going to see *Land og synir*," which is a great, wonderful Icelandic film about a young boy and girl up at a farm in Iceland." I said, "Oh, yeah. That's a good one." So, we went to see that together, and we went out to lunch afterwards. Well, she's been my wife now for 33 years. So, that's where I met Claudia, my wife. Claudia Petursson.

[32:49] After UCLA, I wanted to use international finance. So, I decided to go to the place where you use the most advanced international finance, which is Wall Street. So, I joined the project

finance team at J.P. Morgan. It was Morgan Bank, London, J.P. Morgan, Morgan Guarantee Trust—all of the Morgan family of firms in New York. So, I moved to New York. I remember landing in New York, and just feeling like this was not the place I wanted to be. It was way too busy, too crowded, too many people.

[33:35] But I started the job. What my job was, it was a very new job on Wall Street. This was 1982 by this point. Wall Street had not used computer science to do any software development around their financial transactions. So, they brought me in to do financial modeling. So, I created a set of financial modeling software that allowed us to take a look... For example, if you were going to finance a power plant in the U.S., or a coal mine in South America, or an oil field in the North Sea.

[34:17] The way it had been done before was, you just sort of judge what sort of interest rate would be there; you'd have to guesstimate what was going to happen to foreign exchange rates, and to the price of oil. Of course, this was 1982, after the price of oil had gone through the last ten years of great turmoil. A lot of the loans that had been made by the Wall Street banks had gone poorly. So, this was the time they decided we needed to do a better job mathematically at modeling what we do.

[34:52] So, I came in to an early crop of these folks to do this mathematical modeling, doing things like Monte Carlo simulations. For anybody who is involved in mathematics, it's a fairly common process of looking at large numbers of data about these risks. And I would computer model that. There were two of us that did it for a team between London and New York of about 40 bankers. So, we were very, very busy. I was working 90-95-hour weeks.

[35:23] I learned a couple things there. Number one, I did not want to work 90-95-hour weeks. I did it for two years, and health was not good. Claudia had moved out by then, and she did not find my health to be particularly good. And number two, I didn't really want to work in banking, because again, I was not building anything. I build stuff.

[35:46] Kristján, our son, our firstborn, was born in 1984 at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Manhattan. Six weeks after that, we had to make a decision. I had been offered a job in London to go with Morgan Bank in London. I didn't really want to move to London at that point. Instead, we loaded up a U-Haul truck, put Kristján between us, and we drove the U-Haul truck from Manhattan down to Austin, Texas, where my mother had moved.

[36:20] My mother, in fact, right after I went to college, had married the Chairman of the board of the bank where she was singing in the nightclub. I think she had begun there in 1968, or so. It was called the Summit Club, in Houston, Texas, at the top of a bank called Houston Bank and Trust. Ross Bennett was his name. She married him within weeks before I went off to college. She had committed that she would never marry until we were gone. She didn't want another father around.

[36:58] So, she had been married, and they had moved and retired to Austin, Texas. So, we went down there. I wanted to start a company, which I did, a company called ICE Computing. It was really doing financial modeling for companies around the country, mostly in New York, and some in Austin. We were there for two years. Kristján was young, about two years old when we left. At the point where I decided that I didn't want to continue doing my own company, is really when my career started—the career that has brought me to where I am now.

[37:39] We wanted to move back to California, or to the west coast. I had sent out some resumes, and there was a little company called PacTel Corporation that had just been formed. This was early 1985. It had just been formed from the breakup of AT&T. They had broken them up into Bell Companies. Pacific Bell was the company. U.S. West, or Mountain Bell was the company up here in the Northwest. So, there was a Bell company, and then there were these other companies that had to be put into a separate corporation. PacTel Corporation was that corporation for California.

[38:23] So, I interviewed with PacTel Corporation, to join them as a strategic analyst. They wanted somebody who had a financial background as well as a technology background. So, I joined PacTel Corporation in September of 1985. Almost immediately, I got a call from the Chief Financial Officer—the CFO, at a small company at the time, called PacTel Mobile Access. If you follow PacTel Mobile Access, you'll see that eventually turned into AirTouch, which turned into Verizon.

[39:02] The L.A. market of Verizon is effectively what PacTel Mobile Access was, as well as the San Francisco market, and we bought companies in Dallas and Atlanta. We ran cellular networks there. Anyway, the CFO called me up, and said, "I need somebody to deal with a problem that I've got, which is we have software that has been written, that is unable to run the billing for us. We have too many customers. We have grown too fast. Can you fix it?"

[39:31] It turned out, it was more of a legal problem. So, I flew down and looked at the software. I worked with the technology team there. Then I went to arbitration with the folks who wrote the software, so we could get access to the code and fix it. It took about three weeks. I got everything back up and running, and everything was fine, and I flew back to San Francisco. A few days later, I get a call from him saying, "By the way, why don't you come down and be the Director of Technology for us." I said, "Director of Technology? That's a heck of a role."

[40:04] I talked to my boss at the time, who was the President of PacTel Corporation. He said, "Oh, you don't want to do that. This whole cellular thing is not going to go anywhere." I said, "I don't know about that. That sounds pretty cool to me." I said, "I'm going to take the job." So, I went down and became the Director of Information Technology for PacTel Mobile Access, which became PacTel Cellular, which became AirTouch, which became Verizon.

[40:28] I did that work down there, and lived in Irvine, California, and Mission Viejo, California, where our second child was born, Katarina. She was born in Mission Viejo, California, at home, in fact. We had a home birth. The last one we had. It's difficult for the dad to have a home birth. But it was good that we did it. We lived there for a few years. By this point we had two children.

[40:55] In 1988, I got a call from a company up here named McCaw Cellular Communications. They needed a CIO, a Chief Information Officer. I had done fairly good work down at PacTel. I had built up a good set of technology. So, I came up and interviewed with Craig McCaw, and John Stanton, and Wayne Perry, and a number of other folks. They offered me the job, so that's what brought me up to Seattle—being a CIO for McCaw Cellular, which then became AT&T. We sold the company in 1993, I think. We closed the sale of the company to AT&T to become AT&T Wireless.

[41:43] In that scenario, some of the more interesting parts of my career began, as well as interesting parts of our personal life. Our personal life—Jóhannes, our third child, was born a week after we got here to Seattle. That began a wonderful, wonderful experience here in the Northwest. The

outdoors was very, very different here. Claudia and I would take them up skiing when they got old enough. We would take them up skiing every weekend for eight or ten weeks during the year. We would go hiking; we would take them around. It was just a much better natural environment than we'd had in southern California.

[42:31] I was also a triathlete. I had started doing triathlons in 1984, when we were living in Austin. I started doing triathlons as well as running races, and so on. Eventually, I did Iron Man— a number of Iron Man races over the last few years. I still do Iron Man. I've got this one this year, in fact— a half-Iron Man. We learned how to be outdoors here in the Northwest.

[42:59] At McCaw Cellular, I started a fairly advanced technology department. I had hired a company called Perot Systems. It had just been started by Ross Perot, who had sold EDS to General Motors. Ross had started this company, and by the sale agreement to General Motors, he couldn't make money doing technology consulting. So, it was a non-profit company for a while. A wonderful rate. So, I hired them to come in. We got Ross Perot to come in for management meetings once or twice.

[43:37] They introduced me to a company called Next Computer, which was, of course, the company that Steve Jobs had founded after he left Apple. He had been kicked out of Apple by the board of Apple after John Sculley came on the board of Apple. So, Steve came up. I had a team doing some prototyping of some technology, and Steve came up and said, "I can move the 18 staff months worth of work that you just did. I can move it over to the Next Computer platform in a week. I said, "You can't do that." He said, "Let me prove it to you." So, we gave him the base code that we had.

[44:23] Sure enough... We gave him the code on a Monday. On Friday, Steve flew up with his team. There was an office here at Carillon Point in Kirkland. The President of AT&T Wireless at the time, Jim Barksdale and I— I remember walking with Jim through the garage. And we went up the elevator at Carillon Point. And demonstrating the software that we had prototyped, but demonstrating it on the Next Computer, was none other than Steve Jobs. So, Steve did the demo, and did all of this work.

[44:56] He said, "If you build this using a technology called Next Step [that they had built], then you will get much more out of this," and so on. So, Jim and I were walking back through the garage. Jim had been the Chief Operating Officer at Federal Express— FedEx, as well as the CIO, Chief Information Officer. He had started the package tracking back in the seventies. He said, "This is great technology. If we can get half of what we saw done, this will be wonderful for our customer service activities, and our billing activities, and the growth of the networks, and so on."

[45:32] So, I signed a contract with Next Computer. And for the next four years, Steve would come up, and we'd have dinner together. I would take the team out. I'd meet him down in California. I brought him up to do speeches at the [Museum of Flight] for technology leaders around Seattle companies. I remember going over to Microsoft with him one day, and Bell Laboratories. We were part of AT&T. All the Bell Labs folks would come out. We would have fascinating conversations about technology.

[46:05] What people don't know is... I think some people know it, but it's not well known. Next

Computer was first hardware— it was called a Next Cube; and software: a software operating system called Next Step. Those were combined. Well, three of us flew down one year. The CIO— Chief Information Officer of Chrysler, the CIO for the U.S. Air Force, and myself (the CIO for AT&T Wireless)— we flew down to California. We had been asked by the executive team of Next to help them convince Steve to get out of the hardware business. Sure enough, we had a big lunch in an octagonal room at a very nice restaurant. And we debated, I think, for four hours, why we believed that Steve should get out of the hardware business.

[47:04] At the end of it, he was coming around to the idea. And here's the importance of that. He decided to stop being in the hardware business. Next Computer went from being a \$400 million revenue company (because they made hardware) to overnight being an \$80 million revenue company, because they were only making software. In order to do that, he had to make his operating system able to be running on Windows. He made it able to run on Sun Computers at the time. He made it open. And he renamed it Open Step. Instead of Next Step, it was now Open Step. This meant you could run this, and you could run other Windows applications, and so on.

[47:46] The importance of it was, by him doing that, when Apple Computer came around looking for another operating system, and decided to buy Next, they bought the company. They only did that because the operating system was easy to move over to the Macintosh. And they brought Steve back, because he had an open operating system. So, that became Mac OS X. I don't know if anybody used Mac OS X. So, Open Step became Apple's new operating system in 1995-1996, and became Mac OS X, and iOS.

[48:30] So, I contend that that one meeting we had with Steve where we all tried to convince him to get out of the hardware business, is why we have the iPhone today. Because had he not made it open, had he not been bought by Apple, had he not gone back to Apple, had he not had Avie Tevanian, who was his chief technology person, create Mac OS X, and then create iOS, the iPhone would never have happened.

[48:57] These are the sort of little leverages... Like that great decision I made, when Claudia asked me, "What movie are you going to see?" That decision I made to go down and tell Steve Jobs, you have to make this an open operating system— it's one of those things where you think... There were many things that went into it, but it's always fun to consider that that one meeting might have been the place that created the possibility for the iPhone.

[48:30] After AT&T Wireless, I went on to a number of other companies. I went on to work for Regence Group, which is a healthcare company here, being the Chief Technology Officer. Then I went to work for a company called Corbis. Corbis is a private company owned by Bill Gates. For seven years, I used to say there were two CTOs— Chief Technology Officers, working for Bill Gates— Nathan Myhrvold, and I was the other one. He owned Corbis. Corbis was digital media. We bought companies around the world. We had photography and media. We were digitizing so many things. It was when the Internet was young, and we were trying to figure out how to make these technologies work.

[50:06] That was a big part of the work here in the Northwest. Simultaneously, our kids were going to school here. Kristján, our oldest, when to Lakeside for a couple years. He didn't like it, because he was more irreverent than the Lakeside families could accept. He's a very irreverent young man. So,

we took him back, and he went to International School in Kirkland, the group. It was the first year that school started. And he ended up going to Stanford, and getting his Bachelor's and Master's in Computer Science as well. So, that was a fun part of all this.

[50:46] Claudia and I continued to love the Northwest. We used to come here, on this stage, with the Nordic Heritage Museum, mostly because my mother, Hulda, was living here. And she would always sign us up to be doing a play about jólasveinar, the Icelandic Christmas lads, or some other play. I was always playing some part up here on the stage here at the Nordic Heritage Museum back in those years. And we were still going up to the mountains and skiing.

[51:17] Claudia, my wife, ended up wanting to get a Master's in Divinity. So, she took six years, and got her Master's in Divinity at Seattle University. She had converted to being Catholic back in the early nineties, and our daughter did, as well. She got her Master's in Divinity, and then went to work for the Parish in Kirkland— Holy Family Parish. She has been doing that for a number of years.

[51:42] After Corbis, I invested in a consulting company here in Seattle named Slalom Consulting. I went to work there as an executive, doing strategy work for them for a few years. I enjoyed it. I kept the investment, but then I wanted to go build things. So, I went and became the CIO at Expedia for a couple of years. Then in 2010, I was offered the role of Chief Information Officer for Nintendo, which I went over and did. I've been there ever since. In 2013, I also took on the role of finance, so I became the CFO— Chief Financial Officer, at Nintendo of America, here in Redmond, Washington. We've done a lot of fun things. Great products, and games, and so on. That's kind of the core of life, I'd say.

Arnfridur: [52:43] Tell me a little bit about your mom. Your mother used to sing in Iceland, I know.

Ingvar: [52:47] Yes. So, if we land in Iceland and get in a taxi, I always ask the taxi driver... I say, "Do you know Hulda Emilsdóttir?" And they say no. And I'll say, "Have you ever heard the song "Halló?" Or, "Have you ever heard on the radio, a beautiful voice singing "Geng ég fram á gnípur?" And they'll go, "Oh, yes, I know "Halló." I'll sing the song, and they'll start singing it with me. "That's my mother." So, in the fifties and sixties, Hulda, my mother, was a songstress at Thor's Café, which was a very nice nightclub. She sang with a band in Iceland, and recorded a number of songs.

[53:37] The Icelandic radio, about two or three years ago, did a compilation of the top 50 songs in their history, meaning the top-rated songs on Icelandic radio. Four of them are my mother's, along with one or two other people that are on the songs. So, she was a good singer. That was very good for us, because when we moved to America, she needed to make a living. So, when she divorced, she became a singer. We grew up with her singing.

[54:10] Now that she's back in Iceland, she doesn't sing much anymore. But people recognize and know her. She also made an album in Texas in the sixties, called *Hulda at the Summit*. A fascinating story about that— about five years ago, I'm looking online for my mother's name, because I always like to go out and see if there is any information out there that I don't want to be out there about us—private information, social security numbers, addresses, or whatever.

[54:44] I go there, and there is a radio station in Sugarland, Texas, which is just west of Houston, who has articles called, "What would Hulda think?" What they determined was, because the cover of

my mother's album, as well as other pictures that were taken of her in the nightclub (a very fancy nightclub— all the oil people would come up), and she was dressed beautifully, and she had this lovely sixties hairdo, and she's beautiful woman, holding a guitar... And for some reasons, a group of Texans had decided that this was the perfect example of a Texas woman in the sixties— my mother, an Icelandic woman.

[55:32] They would always say, given what's going on politically here, what's going on in society— “What would Hulda say?” So, you saw these little articles, and these blogs of “What would Hulda say?” So, she didn't know this... I told her about this, and I contacted the radio station. They were looking to find where Hulda might have gone off to. So, we told them where she had gone off to. Fascinating life.

Arnfridur: [55:59] Do you want to ask any questions?

Susan: [56:02] I want to thank you. Fascinating interview. I learned so much about your world that I really didn't know about. Thank you very much. As I look at some of the things I wrote down— do you have any family traditions that are important to you now with your children?

Ingvar: [56:24] We do. As a matter of fact, we have a condo now in Iceland, and my mother lives there. We were back in Iceland this last Christmas. We wanted to have a family party. I actually have 45 first cousins, and hundreds of second cousins. So, we brought one side of the family over for an event right around Christmastime. And the traditions that we followed were always, of course, Christmas Eve, we would have lamb— lambakjöt, or leg of lamb.

[57:02] We would do presents Christmas Eve. One thing Icelanders do is get together and dance around the Christmas tree, and sing songs. This last Christmas, one of the things I wanted to— I said to my mother, “I have not done this in years. We have to dance around the Christmas tree.” So, we did that. That was one of the traditions that we did.

[57:25] The other traditions, we did at the Nordic Heritage Museum. For example, the jule lads, the Christmas Santa Clauses. There are 13 of them in Iceland. So, we always did the tradition... The children put their shoes in the window, starting 12 days before Christmas. Each day, a different Christmas lad comes and puts something into the shoe. Some of them are jokesters, so they put a rock or a potato, but some of them bring you candy, and the like. We did that when I was growing up, and we also did that with our children when they were growing up. We put the shoe in the window so the jule lads, the jólasveinar, can come by and put things in it. Those are the traditions I remember mostly.

Susan: [58:11] Thank you.

Arnfridur: [58:14] Tell me about what your children are doing? What are Katarina and Jóhannes doing?

Ingvar: [58:20] Kristján, as I mentioned, went to Stanford. He finished in Computer Science. He also was a drummer in the Stanford band, which is where he learned to be more social. He is now Director of Software Engineering for a company in San Francisco.

[58:34] Katarina went to WSU, Washington State University, and studied Political Science, and then got her Master's in Global Politics at King's College in London. She is now working at the Gates Foundation in Seattle. She was married in Iceland in 2015, mostly because her fiancé wanted to get married in Iceland. He actually looks like a Viking. He likes the Viking history of Iceland. So, she is at the Gates Foundation. They live in Kirkland now.

[59:07] Jóhannes, our youngest son, also went to WSU, and studied Mechanical Engineering. He got his Master's in Aerospace Engineering at Embry-Riddle in Florida, and met his wife there, who is also an aerospace engineer. They are now living in rocket city—Huntsville, Alabama, where the first manned space program in the U.S. began with Wernher von Braun, and so on. So, they're living in Huntsville, Alabama. We're actually going there in a month for a ceremony that they're holding. So, they're all doing what they love.

[59:47] What I thought was fascinating about raising children is that we're all somewhat narcissistic. We believe that our children have to look, act, and feel sort of like us, until you find out that they don't. Then you look at it and say... I think it was when our first one, Kristján, was like five or six years old, we both realized, we're not here to make him into anything. We're here to give him opportunities to explore things that he loves, that he's good at, that he's got the ability and the motivation for. Parents often see abilities, and they push their children into those things, but the children don't have the motivation. You have to have both.

[1:00:33] That's what was fascinating to watch. Once we figured that out and stopped pushing, Kristján emerged into wanting to be a computer scientist. Katarina emerged into wanting to be more of a social scientist. She is so beautiful in the social environment with people, and getting people together. Jóhannes wanted to be a physical scientist, and engineer, to go build airplanes, and the like. They just sort of emerged. That was a wonderful part of watching them grow.

Arnfridur: [1:01:03] Tell me a little bit about Claudia's father. Didn't he get honored by the French government?

Ingvar: [1:01:11] Many, many times. Steven Weiss, my wife Claudia's father, was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He went to World War II when he was 17 or 18 years old. I think he joined the war in 1943 or 1944. He landed in Italy, and his troop made their way up to France. It's a very famous story. He and eight other soldiers were caught behind the enemy lines, and they had to make their way out. So, the French Resistance found them and saved them. They were hidden in the top of a barn in France. The French Resistance helped them get across a river. They were getting shot at. This was like straight out of a movie.

[1:02:05] Then he worked with the French Resistance for a number of months. He came out of the war. He wrote a book about it, which has done fairly well on Amazon. It's called *Second Chance*. Which means, all of these people around me were dying. I'm the one that got the second chance. He was in Los Angeles and met Claudia's mother, who had been a ballerina in the Royal Ballet in England. So, Claudia's mother was British, and Claudia's father was American.

[1:02:43] They met in Los Angeles, and he was in the film industry as an editor, doing editing for his career until he turned 60, at which point he decided to go back to London and get his Ph.D. in Military History. At that point, he got his Ph.D., and started doing lectures. Everybody wanted to

hear about World War II from somebody who knew the history, as well as who had been there. He's still alive. He's 91 now. He still goes over to France to give tours of Normandy and the other places. He's an honorary citizen of France. He has the...

Arnfridur: [1:03:23] Legion of Honor?

Ingvar: [1:03:25] Legion of Honor. Légion d'Honneur. I was trying to remember the French term. So, you'll see him walking around with a red rose. And he's the Grande Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur in France. So, he does that work. Claudia's mother, after the Royal Ballet, partnered with a woman named Yvonne Mounsey, who had been the prima ballerina for George Balanchine at the New York City Ballet in the 1940s. And they started a ballet company in Los Angeles called Westside Ballet, which is still going today, and is a very well known company. Every Christmas, they do *The Nutcracker*, and the likes. So, ballet and theater was a big part of Claudia's upbringing, as well.

Arnfridur: [1:04:10] So, your mother was very much involved at the museum, right?

Ingvar: [1:04:14] The Nordic?

Arnfridur: [1:04:16] Yes.

Ingvar: [1:04:17] She was very much involved in everything Nordic or Icelandic. She loved it. She wanted all of us to keep the memory of Iceland, and to keep the knowledge about Iceland, and the Nordic culture. So, she was very active when she lived here in Seattle.

Arnfridur: [1:04:36] And you speak Icelandic, right?

Ingvar: [1:04:38] I do.

Arnfridur: [1:04:39] And your sister, also?

Ingvar: [1:04:40] She does. We kept Icelandic. We spoke Icelandic at home. When I go back to Iceland, if I'm talking to computer scientists or financiers, I don't have the vocabulary for that. I wouldn't mind picking it up. But otherwise I can do fine in Icelandic.

Arnfridur: [1:04:59] Can you think of anything else, anything in your background? Your grandfather was in [inaudible]. Was he the head of [inaudible]?

Ingvar: [1:04:10] No, I think he was the head of something... He was head of... Sýslumaður. What would that be? County executive?

Arnfridur: [1:05:22] They call it a sheriff, but it's not really a sheriff. It's head of the county.

Ingvar: [1:05:26] Yeah. Head of the county. So, he was sýslumaður in Eskifjörður when my mother was growing up. Then they decided to move to Reykjavík. And my father's father was a fisherman and worked in Hellissandur, on the other side of the country.

Arnfridur: [1:05:47] After your parents divorced, and your father stayed in Texas, what did he do for

work? What did he do in Texas?

Ingvar: [1:05:58] He continued being an electrical engineer for Brown & Root. His work... Partly because he was divorced, he was able to go all over the world. He did engineering in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Scotland, and Venezuela. I went to visit him when he was living in Bergen, Norway, doing electrical engineering on some of the North Sea oil platforms— \$5 billion platforms that they were building. He was the electrical engineer on those. Known as an incredibly smart man, and known as an incredibly stubborn man. Pretty much like most Icelanders, I think.

Arnfridur: [1:06:42] Anita, do you have anything?

Anita: [1:06:45] Very impressive. Thank you.

Arnfridur: [1:06:50] Is there anything else you can think of, or anything you might want to add, or anything you remember?

Ingvar: [1:06:58] What I would say is, the Pacific Northwest has been... There was an interesting time when Claudia and I were living in Irvine, California, and I remember coming home from work one day. I was the CIO for PacTel Cellular at the time. She had grown up in southern California, and she didn't like it very much. And I didn't really like it very much. It was dry. It was crowded. The traffic was terrible.

[1:07:30] I remember coming home, and she looked at me, and said, "Either we move north of the 45th parallel, or I move north of the 45th parallel." It was sort of an ultimatum. Luckily, it was six weeks later, Craig McCaw and the McCaw folks called me up and said, "Hey, come up and interview." We came up here, and we just found this to be the place we wanted to be. Claudia had studied in Uppsala. She spent two summers in Uppsala studying with a professor there, some old folk music in Sweden, and how it connected to America. So, Claudia is very connected into the Nordic world.

[1:08:11] So, coming up to the Northwest, it was so similar to Sweden. It was so similar to what she was used to in going out to the Stockholm archipelago. And the weather was similar. So, we just found our place here so well. I remember our children were baptized here at the Calvary Lutheran Church in Ballard. Not that any of them are particularly religious, and I'm not very religious. But they were baptized here when it was an Icelandic Lutheran Church. But I don't think it's Icelandic Lutheran anymore.

Arnfridur: [1:08:46] It's gone.

Ingvar: [1:08:47] Oh, the church is gone completely?

Arnfridur: [1:08:48] Yes.

Ingvar: [1:08:50] That was part of the reason we got to know Ballard so well, and the Nordic Heritage Museum, and the Scandinavian community. The summers that we would spend at the Icelandic picnics, meeting other Icelanders... I remember we were sitting at an Icelandic picnic once, and Claudia looked at this guy and said, "You know, he looks like your father." And I said,

“Fascinating. He does.” It turns out, he’s a third cousin. Gisli is a third cousin.

[1:09:33] These are the sort of connections that we were able to make here in the Northwest, in the Nordic community. Not to mention the beauty of the Northwest, and the outdoors, which is so fabulous. That’s really what I want to add. We’ve been here now for 28 years. We love it here. We’re probably going to retire here, and Europe. We’re going to spend our time between Iceland and the rest of Europe, and here, because of the connections that we have to both places. Beautiful place to be.

Arnfridur: [1:10:03] Thank you very much.

END OF RECORDING.

Transcription by Alison DeRiemer.