Nordic American Voices
Nordic Museum

Interview of Kimberly Jacobs
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Interviewers: Mari-Ann Kind Jackson; Kaisa London

Mari-Ann Kind Jackson: [0:02] Good morning, Kim.

Kimberly Jacobs: [0:03] Good morning.

Mari-Ann: [0:04] This is an oral history interview for Nordic American Voices oral history program at the Nordic Museum in Seattle, Washington. We are at the Nordic Museum today. This is October 20, 2018, and we are interviewing Kim Jacobs. Welcome. We are delighted that you are here.

Kim: [0:25] Thank you for having me.

Mari-Ann: [0:26] I am Mari-Ann Kind Jackson, and with me is—

Kaisa London: [0:30] Kaisa London.

Mari-Ann: [0:34] Again, good morning. Would you start by sharing your full name, Kim, and then tell us where you were born, when you were born, and then share your life story with us, please.

Kim: [0:47] Okay. My name is Kimberly Anne Hongell, actually, is my maiden name. I was born in Coos Bay, Oregon, to a family on both sides that were Swedish-Finns. So, kind of a unique little group and a unique heritage to have, one that almost always requires a ton of explanation to people. But I did grow up in a place where there were a lot of us. Coos Bay, Oregon was called "Little Kokkola." Kokkola is a town in Finland. That's the Finnish name for it. The Swedish name is Karleby. That is where both sides of my family are from.

[1:39] I once had a discussion with Syrene Forsman, who said that Swedish-Finns are an adventurous people. And I pointed out that my family was not very adventurous. They came from the same town in Finland, the same little place, and moved to a little town in Oregon, and there they stayed. They brought all their friends, and didn't really venture out. I'm the only one in my family who left the area. Well, my sister also left the area. But it took a few generations to get us off the farm, I guess.

[2:24] At the time that my great-grandparents came over, there was a lot of immigration from Finland to Oregon. They chain migrated, which I think is important to mention, especially now,

when people speak of it in a negative way. I think it's important to acknowledge that's how my family came over, and that's how most families came over. It seems to crazy to refer to it negatively after that.

[3:02] They came to this little town, and they started a life. A reporter from Finland came over at the turn of the century to write an article about his fellow countrymen that had left. About Coos Bay, he wrote, "The Swedish-Finns are taking up all of the good property." [Laughter] There were no farms left for anyone else. It really was a very Swedish-Finn community. I feel really lucky to have known about my heritage the whole time growing up.

[3:40] There are a lot of Swedish Finns who think they're Swedish, and they don't know until a DNA test comes back, or they start doing some genealogy searches, and can't find anybody matching their immigrant ancestors' description, coming from Sweden. I never had that confusion, so I feel lucky to have known all along, and to have been able to talk about it with my grandparents. I guess I feel lucky that they didn't pass away, and *then* I got interested.

Kaisa: [4:18] Did you maintain the Swedish language?

Kim: [4:23] That's my grandparents' first language. But my parents aren't fluent. I was always the kid that listened when adults were talking. The other kids would go play, and I would just sit to the side and listen. I was an eavesdropper. [Laughter] Adult stories were so fun. When they didn't know you were there, they were just so interesting. I would always kind of listen. So, I loved to hear whenever my grandparents spoke in Swedish. I think in my family, I was the most interested. So, I picked up some vocabulary, but I'm certainly not fluent at all. But I certainly try. I can read a lot more. Speech production is really hard for me. Also, I sound funny when I speak. [Laughter]

[5:23] So, they didn't keep the language, but all of the first generation did speak Swedish. When they went back to Finland to visit, all of their cousins said that they spoke "Coos Bay Swedish." They assigned them their own dialect. They had recorded my grandpa, and they played it for me when I was in Finland. They just thought it was funny that when he didn't know a word, he would just pop in the English word for it. When you think about it, when your parents come over at the turn of the century, there are a lot of words… the things that they represent had not even been invented yet. So, he had a few words in English, and they just loved playing it. They thought it was hilarious.

[6:21] When I was 13, my father sent me and my brother to Finland to stay with cousins on the farm for the summer. I was terrified, basically. I wanted to go, but I was really afraid to go without my parents, because I hadn't met this part of my family yet. But my dad, a typical Finn, I guess, didn't take fear and nervousness as a good reason to not send us. [Laughter] So, we went. I was 13. My brother was 11.

[7:09] My grandparents went at the same time, but they had an apartment over there, and my brother and I had to stay with cousins on the farm. That was part of the deal. My dad wanted us to go, so we did. I think it was a life-changing experience for me. Even though I was nervous and had jet lag, and was basically so disoriented, and 13, and awkward… I still think back on it as being one of the best times in my life, even though I was really scared.

[TAPE BREAK]

[8:02] So, let me go back and give you the names. My great grandparents are the ones that emigrated. On my mother's side, we have Johann Athenarius Carlson. But in Finland, he was Pulkkis, which is rare in Finland, that last name. It was the farm name. And then Brant was the other place name that was associated with his name. He was married to Lydia, who took the name Johnson when she came to the United States.

[8:54] Last names in Finland at the turn of the century weren't really last names. They didn't really have to choose a last name until around 1920. So, it was really kind of fluid, what they called themselves. It wasn't thought of the way Americans thought of last names, and it wasn't so precious. Americans always think they have to pass on their name. That wasn't really the way they were thinking about it. The name she got her passport with was Korujarvi, which is very Finnish, which is surprising, because we were Swedish-Finns. But in Karleby, lots of the Swedish speakers have Finnish last names. On my dad's side, his name was Alexander Leander Leanderson Nissant Lilhonge.

Mari-Ann: [9:57] Oh, my.

Kim: [10:00] [Laughter] His name was changed to Hongell. "Hong-ell [soft g]" is probably a more proper pronunciation, but in the U.S. it's Hong-gel [hard g]. He married Irene Strom, also from Karleby. On both sides, I had great-grandparents that grew up right down the street from each other, and had to move to Coos Bay, Oregon, to meet each other and get married. [Laughter] That's how it is. My grandpa Nils Carlson, married Lucille Carlson. On my dad's side, it was Rolf, and he married Geraldine. Those are my grandparents. My dad is Ron Hongell, and my mom is Jan Carlson.

[11:02] My dad… this is kind of interesting. He's the one that kind of made my grandparents go back to Finland. Even though their first language was Swedish, they had not been to Finland. My dad took his dad back to Finland, and reacquainted themselves with the family. When he was getting his passport, he had to order his birth certificate. And when he got his birth certificate, he found out his name was Darrell. It wasn't Ron. He had been going by his middle name his whole life, and he had no idea. His brothers ordered theirs, and they all had been going by their middle names without their knowledge. [Laughter]

Mari-Ann: [11:56] Oh, my.

Kim: [11:58] Which I think was just a little bit of a holdover— that your first name is a family name, and your middle is the name you use.

Kaisa: [12:09] Interesting. I've never heard that.

Kim: [12:12] Yeah. Sometimes I think when the immigrants came over and kind of insulated themselves, they kind of hung on to some of these antiquated traditions a little longer than in Finland, even. Even some of the tendencies to be a little more stoic— I think they prided themselves on it, or held onto it, because it was a struggle, longer than maybe in Finland. So, sometimes what I think are these personality traits straight out of the box from Finland are really kind of maybe immigrant traits that my family held onto. "You have to work. You have to work all the time. Why don't you have a list of things you should be doing?" Those kinds of things may have

been more immigrant traits. I'm not sure.

[13:09] So, they sent me to Finland when I was 13. I wore this sweater on purpose, because I thought if I couldn't think of anything else to tell you guys about, this is the sweater I bought for my mom when I was over there, as a gift. I took it from her as an adult. But it's made in Scotland. [Laughter] It's not made in Finland. But I thought it was the most attractive sweater, so I bought it for her anyways. I always think of trying it on in the department store in Karleby, and making sure it would fit over her chest, and stretching the sweater out, as this weird 13-year-old in a department store. [Laughter] I think about it, how funny I must have looked.

Mari-Ann: [14:03] That's sweet. That's good.

Kim: [14:09] I think one of the reasons it was such a life-forming experience for me is, I have only one first cousin, but I grew up right next door to her. I have tons of second cousins. I grew up next door to all of them. I played with them every day. But my grandpa had never met his cousins, and met them for the first time when I was 13, and he was retired. So, I just couldn't imagine that. Up until then, even going to Finland, the whole concept of immigration was just theory. I understood that they left their entire families behind, and didn't go back, but I didn't really think about what that meant. Seeing my grandpa meet his cousins for the first time kind of illustrated that.

[15:12] But also, my Aunt Tilda (his aunt) was still alive then— so, my great-great aunt. When we went to visit her and we walked in the door, she hadn't seen him since he was a teenager, and she just started crying. To see that… My aunts and uncles were always around. They knew me from birth. So, that was a big deal to me, especially because I was so homesick, too. I missed my parents a lot when I was there. So, knowing that my grandpa hadn't had his family around him like that growing up meant a lot to me. Now that I'm saying this, I think the homesickness probably really helped bring that home.

Mari-Ann: [16:14] How old was your grandfather when you went back with him?

Kim: [16:19] He was retired, and he had retired twice. He retired, and then he got a second job. He was an electrician, and he worked for them long enough to get a pension, and he had two pensions. But I believe he was still in his sixties for his second retirement. He must have been in his sixties. I was 13, and he was just "grandpa age," I guess. He smoked a pipe. The entire trip, every time I saw him over there, I would lecture him on cancer and smoking. I had taken it up as my cause for that summer. And he was really irritated with me the entire time, but I didn't stop. [Laughter]

[17:25] We were constantly meeting new relatives, one relative after another. It wasn't until later, after both my grandma and grandpa had passed away, and I got the photo albums from that trip, that I was trying to untangle who all these people were that I had met. I just accepted "cousin," and that's who they are. It wasn't until later… My job is, I'm the Executive Director for the Swedish-Finn Historical Society. So, my job is literally to be a Swedish-Finn. When we have visitors, I always tell them I'm the only professional Swedish-Finn living in America today.

[18:19] It wasn't until we started doing these exchanges and bringing kids over— the kids are from Karleby and Kronoby— I always have a cousin. There is always a student who is related to me, and they always come up with a family tree and hand it to me, and show me exactly how we're related. I

just find that incredible. First of all, they have my birthday on there. They know who I am; they know where I am. Swedish-speaking Finland is a small, small world. It's incredibly connected, which I find to be the best.

[19:03] I have access to people that should never give me the time of day, because we're Swedish-Finns. Like Bengt Holmström, who won the Nobel Prize for economics— even he will return my emails, because we share this bond of Swedish-speaking Finland. Right now, there's only about 300,000. So, we have to remain civil with each other, I believe. That makes for a wonderful community.

[19:36] I also find that the people whose ancestors stayed behind are just as interested in connecting with the descendants of those that left. Families were split, and they were very curious about what happened to the other half— what weird little twist of fate happens, and you're born in Coos Bay, Oregon, but your cousin is born in Karleby. So, it's very interesting. I think that's what drives people to figure it out. I know at SFHS, a lot of people thought that DNA tests would replace genealogy searches and queries, but it only provokes them. People get it, and then they want to know "who." It doesn't really matter what your DNA is. You want to know who gave you that DNA.

[20:43] I think that's a very human thing, that quest for something special. That identity is just so basic. We want to have something that we can hold onto, that makes us just this much special. We don't want to be too special, but we want to be just enough special, where we're interesting, I guess. I think it makes it a lot easier if we just admit that. It's this pretending we don't have these human emotions is what gets us into trouble, and makes us prejudiced, and distrust other groups.

[21:30] But if we realize the reason we have groups are so we can feel special, then it's really not as important. But it's very nice to belong, and that's how I feel about being a Swedish-Finn. I always have a group where I belong. Even if I'm grumpy and unpleasant, they can't get rid of me. [Laughter] And I think that's important for all people to feel. Even at your worst, you still belong to something. And we all have our worst, I guess.

Mari-Ann: [22:03] Very good. How did you get involved with the Swede-Finn Historical Society?

Kim: [22:13] In 2010, one night at home, I Googled, "Swedish-Finns." Despite the fact that I knew what a Swedish-Finn was, and I had been to Finland, and I knew who my family was— I guess maybe out of always having to explain it, if your family history comes up— are there more of us? What's going on here? Because it was a thing in Coos Bay, but it didn't seem like a thing anywhere else I was. And I found the Swedish-Finn Historical Society, and I sent an email asking if I could volunteer. I always liked to have a volunteer thing on the side, and something that wasn't at all like what I did in my work life. I wanted it to be something different.

[23:07] I got a phone call back from Dick Erickson almost immediately, like the next day. He wanted to meet with me. From then, I got elected to the board, which wasn't my intention. I was just going to volunteer. In 2012, I lost my job. While I was moping at home, trying to figure out what I was going to do, Dick called me and asked me if I would be interested in temporarily taking on a project management job with them, just half-time. I had decided to go back to school to get a design degree. This seemed like a perfect opportunity, to work half-time, and go to school. So, that's what I did.

[24:06] I graduated, and then they offered me the directorship. It just seemed like an opportunity I couldn't pass up. It also just seemed like I could do this for my great-grandparents. They sacrificed a lot, and I could do this. This could be a dream job. It wasn't what I went to school for, but it was something I could do, and I could make a difference. And certainly having design skills would not be a burden to the job. So, I decided to do it, and I'm very glad I did. It has been a remarkable opportunity that has given me so many opportunities to meet people and to make connections in Finland, that I just never would have had in any other job. And I still get to design stuff, so I feel very, very lucky.

Mari-Ann: [25:13] Is the directorship a paid position?

Kim: [25:18] It is.

Mari-Ann: [25:19] With an actual, physical office, and so on?

Kim: [25:21] Yes.

Mari-Ann: [25:22] Which is where?

Kim: [25:22] It's out of the Swedish Club. We lease the offices. We have a library and our archive at Swedish Club, and offices.

Mari-Ann: [25:33] I see. Wonderful.

Kim: [25:36] Yeah. It's a great place. It's nice to be in the Swedish Club, to have that built-in network there. It's also a great place, because Swedish-Finns are… If they don't know they're Swedish-Finn, they think they're Swedish. So, it really is a great place to find Swedish-Finns. I always congratulate people when they find out they're Swedish-Finns. I'm always like, "It's so much better than just being Swedish or Finnish. You get to be Swedish-Finn!" [Laughter] You get everything.

Kaisa: [26:13] Like the Sámi-Norwegian.

Mari-Ann: [26:16] Sámi-Norwegian. Yes.

Kim: [26:19] There you go. Yes.

Mari-Ann: [26:22] How wonderful. What kind of design do you do? Do you do some work with that as well?

Kim: [26:34] Yes. I was kind of lucky to go back to school. It was my second time going to school. I went back for design later, because technical skills… Had I gone when I got out of high school, I would have had to keep improving my skills, so I feel really lucky to have gone late. I can design websites, and I can do graphic design, identity design, logos. Pattern design is really what I love the most. It feels very natural to me. It's just what I enjoy designing the most.

Kaisa: [27:15] Pattern design?

Kim: [27:17] Yeah. Like on your sweater. Surface design. It just seems to come the most naturally to me, so that's what I enjoy doing the most. At work, the website is what I work on a lot. If we have an event, I take advantage to design the invitations, all of that. In 2017, we had a professor from Åbo Akademi, come over with his photography, and we did an exhibit, and I got to design the exhibit. So, there have been a lot of design opportunities that I probably wouldn't get if I was just working at Amazon. The design wouldn't be as fulfilling, and it wouldn't be as personal— the design work I get to do. In many ways, I think I'm just really lucky. My design work is very personal, and enjoyable, and not for somebody else.

Mari-Ann: [28:26] Good.

Kim: [28:30] But I would have never predicted… I would have never thought in a million years that I would be working as a Swedish-Finn. That's just something I would have never, ever… It's just crazy that it happened, I guess. We're such a small group. Yeah, I guess I just feel very lucky about that, and to have such a strong community to work with.

Mari-Ann: [29:09] So, you have built a community here among Swede-Finns as well.

Kim: [29:16] Yes, because of my work. We are an international organization; however, just by default, the majority of our membership is local, because it was founded here. Also because any events we plan are here. That is something we struggle with— giving value to members outside of our area. We really work hard on that. But there is an added benefit to being a member in Seattle. So, members come in all the time to research their family. Some of them are also members of Swedish Club, and volunteers, so I see them a lot.

[30:03] My heritage is part of every single day of my life. Especially because I am the director, I look for ways to make us relevant to more than Swedish-Finns. Like cultural exchanges— we have connections that other people wouldn't have. To bring those connections and that culture to Seattle is something that we like to do, like the photography exhibit. We have a freelance designer in Finland who has done work for Marimekko, and many other places. She is going to come over at some point, and teach some design classes based on your family heritage. So, these incredible opportunities are open to anyone in this area, and really share what it means to be Swedish-Finn with everyone, but can still be interesting if you're like, German, I guess.

Mari-Ann: [31:22] Wonderful. Are these classes and exhibits at the Swedish Club, then?

Kim: [31:30] Yes. Most of the time we try to work with Swedish Club, especially if it's of benefit to the Swedish Club and to us. Those are the best. That's the best of both worlds. We want to bring something that benefits them, not burdens them. That we can mutually benefit each other is really important. To have a good relationship when you're right in their building is super important.

[31:59] It's interesting to me when people aren't excited about being Swedish-Finn. Like, I can't imagine. I think that's so funny. [Laughter] I think it's funny, because intellectually, I know not everybody really cares about their heritage. And maybe I wouldn't either, if it was a super common one. Maybe the fact that it's a small group has made it so special to me. But I'm always so excited when I find out someone is Swedish-Finn. [Laughter] And I just can't believe they aren't as excited as I get. But maybe that's why I have that job. Eventually, I'll get them all there.

Mari-Ann: [32:50] Yeah. Well, your enthusiasm, I'm sure, is contagious.

Kim: [32:53] I hope so.

Mari-Ann: [32:55] That's good. Can we go back… So, you went to high school in Coos Bay?

Kim: [33:01] [Yes.]

Mari-Ann: [33:02] And from there, where did you continue your education?

Kim: [33:07] Well, I took time off first. I was such a weird teenager, I think. I always had this weird activist spirit, but not really choosing things that were that important to my [inaudible]. [Laughter] I also just thought things were funny. So, I wouldn't take the SAT tests, because I heard on the news that standardized tests weren't fair to all populations. So, I wouldn't take them. So, I took time off from school. But I was a really good student, actually. Then I decided to go back to school after working for a bit, as a liberal studies major.

[34:01] Looking back, I don't really know why I chose liberal studies. Maybe because it was harder for me. Math was kind of easy. Science was kind of easy. But when you read something and have to interpret themes, that is a little harder. I'm not sure. But not entirely useful, unless you're going to be a teacher, or… Well, useful in life; not useful for a job unless you're going to be a teacher or a professor, or perhaps work in a bookstore. That kind of thing.

[34:45] So, I ended up working for the Bon Marché for a very long time, actually, for ten years. I was a department manager. I came up to Seattle and worked at the Northgate store. I was a senior sales manager there. Then I decided it was time to look for other opportunities. I was from Coos Bay, and it was very limited what you could do in a small community. I came to Seattle, and I didn't have to work for the Bon Marché. There were lots of choices. So, I went out and found that retail is always kind of a bummer as a job. [Laughter] There is always something that will bring it down.

[35:34] Then, I worked for a company that did retail for cultural attractions. Very much like the gift shop here would be… The company I worked for would run all the gift shops for science museums, aquariums, zoos, single-themed stores, like for traveling exhibits. That was a much-needed break from the schedule that retail has. It can be a pretty exhausting schedule, especially if you have a kid, and I do. I have a daughter. So, I took that job, which had a very nice schedule. I really enjoyed it for a long time, but I was downsized in 2012. Then I ended up at SFHS.

Mari-Ann: [36:34] Very good. You mentioned your daughter. How old is she, and what is her name?

Kim: [36:38] Her name is Hannah, and she is 21 now.

Mari-Ann: [36:46] Wow.

Kaisa: [36:47] You don't look old enough.

Kim: [36:49] I am 49, so I am old enough. [Laughter] She loves learning languages. She started learning Japanese in the seventh grade. So, her Japanese skills are very good. But she has also practiced Swedish a lot. She is actually pretty good at Swedish. She can be conversational, as long as you limit the conversation. She has done very well. She is very interested in her background. Not as much as her mother, but she's 21. I probably wasn't either at 21.

[37:42] But I do hope that in the future she finds it as important as I do. Not for a job— she doesn't have to go to that extreme. But I hope that she holds onto it, because it's very easy for people and their traditions to disappear, and even more so for Swedish-Finns, because they look just like the population they live with. When people look different, we kind of force them to isolate themselves, and then they keep their traditions. It would be nice if people could just keep their traditions by choice, and not by isolation.

Mari-Ann: [38:31] Very good point. Yes. What does Hannah do?

Kim: [38:38] She works at a daycare. She loves babies. I think sometimes she loves them too much. She's 21. [Laughter] But she really loves kids, and I think she'll find her way doing something with kids. She's still undecided about her future.

Mari-Ann: [39:01] Does she live here in Seattle?

Kim: [39:03] She does. She lives in North Seattle. That's the thing they never tell you about having kids. They will never be like you. [Laughter] They have their own opinions, and their own things.

Mari-Ann: [39:18] Yes, indeed.

Kim: [39:19] It's shocking. I can't believe it. [Laughter] And it starts when they're like five. And you're like, "It was going to be me and you against the world!" And she has her own ideas.

Mari-Ann: [39:33] Yes.

Kim: [39:35] It's been a learning experience for me. And appreciating your own parents. I think having a kid makes you never judge your parents, because it's so scary that you might be judged. You know you're not smarter when you have a kid. It doesn't make you any smarter. When you're a kid, parents seem so smart. And then you realize that it just doesn't happen, and you have to do the best you can. It really alleviates any desire to judge your own parents, I think.

Mari-Ann: [40:20] The best job you will ever have, and the most important job you will ever have in your life— being a parent.

Kim: [40:27] Right. Yeah. The stakes are so high with that.

Kaisa: [40:31] They are.

Mari-Ann: [40:35] Well, you have created a really exciting life for yourself with really worthwhile occupations. That's wonderful.

Kim: [40:49] I do feel very, very lucky. I certainly could not have predicted this. That's amazing to me, because I really think life had been fairly predictable. So, for it to have turned out this way is wonderful. I just hope that I can build on what the founders of the Swedish-Finn Historical Society have done, because I would have never started my own society, a not-for-profit. It just never would have occurred to me. I'm so thankful that they did. And I'm determined to not be the person that takes all their hard work and runs it into the ground. That I really just build on top of what they've done. And they're still involved. But to learn as much as I can before I have to take ultimate leadership. I still have a board, and that gives me a lot of safety. I'm thankful for the board and their leadership. So, I have this amount of time where I have to learn and gain the confidence to lead, too.

Mari-Ann: [42:10] Yes. How is the association funded?

Kim: [42:16] We had a gift from one of our founders, Elizabeth Berg, which was very generous. We try to keep our operating budget on the interest of that. Right now we're in the process of applying for some grants, because I need a little help. Trying to get some grants to fill in the gaps between the amount we make in interest, until we can build our fund. But that's the ultimate goal, to get that fund up higher, so the interest amount is higher, and we can have a little bit more help. But I believe that will come as we transition. Our mission is to document all of the Swedish-Finn immigrants that left. That includes… they went to Africa; they went to Australia. There are Swedish-Finns in South America. And then the U.S., Canada, and just a ton in Sweden. And we have a member in England.

Kaisa: [43:35] How do you keep in touch with them in Africa, and…

Kim: [43:42] Well, I am not in touch with any in Africa. It would be great to find some. In Australia, their last names give them away. I eventually made contact with some. We don't have a lot of representation in Australia. Because we are here, we have concentrated on North America. But social media opportunities have made it a lot easier to find people in these other places. There is a man who has done a lot of research on Swedish-Finns who have left Finland— [unintelligible]. He has kept lists of Swedish-Finns in all of these places.

[44:36] His work has been extraordinary, documenting, getting their passport records, and then going to the places. He has been to Coos Bay. It's so funny, how parallel your lives can run. And he interviewed a ton of people. My great uncle Carl's picture is in the book. But I didn't know he was there at that time. He has done an extraordinary amount of work. Our founders did an extraordinary amount of work, documenting.

[45:12] As we get all these names in the database, then it frees up more time to concentrate more on cultural exchange, and making those connections with Finland. The organization will have to evolve, but I want it to evolve in a way that is true to our mission, and doesn't just leave the documentations of those immigrants behind, because that's at the core of why the organization was formed. But then to forge those bonds with Finland— make them stronger, and make the exchange more often, and share that more.

Mari-Ann: [46:00] Good. Do you do any fundraising?

Kim: [46:06] We have not really in the past. We are starting to ask for money more now. For a long time, when there wasn't anybody being paid, there were more than enough funds. But now, if we

want to continue, we are going to have to raise more funds. Even though we have this money, we can't just spend it. Because if we're out of money, it won't matter if we documented these immigrants, because we won't be around to preserve the documentation. So, to fulfill our promise to our members, we have to keep operating. So, that's where we have to change our message.

[46:53] I think that's kind of a growing pain we have right now— changing the message, that we do need monetary support: This is our goal. This is where we want to get to. That's our challenge right now, to change that message, and to ask for money. So, for the first time ever, with renewals, there was a form for donation; there was a form for gift membership. You could renew for several years. Just kind of starting a little easy with our members, and showing that we still need money. And it was very successful. They did give. And I think that people just need to know what you need.

Mari-Ann: [47:33] Yes. And do you have a membership fee, then?

Kim: [47:35] We do. It's very affordable. It's only $20 now for a senior citizen. It's $25 for an individual. A lifetime member is only $500. It's all very affordable. To support ourselves with membership fees, those membership fees would have to be extraordinarily high. So, it's not a form of revenue as much as it's a form of buying into and supporting, and finding people… If you won't pay $20, you probably wouldn't support us in any other way, either. It's just very affordable.

Kaisa: [48:20] Yeah. Like most other organizations like this, everybody comes because they want to come.

Kim: [48:29] Yeah. And actually, every time we get a new member, it costs us more money, but we need members to survive. I worked in for-profit my entire life, so it is a different way. In a lot of ways, I don't know anything about what I'm doing. [Laughter] Running a not-for-profit… I absolutely don't know all the tricks. I don't know all the commonplace best practices. What I do know is how to be a Swedish-Finn in America. And the board has been generous in letting me find my way with that, so it's also an extraordinary opportunity.

Kaisa: [49:20] I have a question, linguistically. The Swedish-Finn town— in Finnish, do you know the name?

Kim: [49:34] Kokkola.

Kaisa: [49:35] Kokkola. That's what I thought. Right. Because there is a New Karleby.

Kim: [49:41] Right. Just up the road.

Kaisa: [49:43] Yeah. Further south, there is [unintelligible] Karleby and New Karleby.

Kim: [49:47] Right.

Mari-Ann: [49:49] Kaisa is from Finland.

Kaisa: [49:51] Yeah, I am. So, Swedish is an adjunct language. You have to learn it.

Kim: [50:01] Right. Yeah. When I was in Finland, I actually hardly heard Finnish. I was definitely in the Swedish-speaking part. I remember we took the ferry from Vaasa to Umeå. When I went up with my ticket, the man at the ticket window was talking, and it seemed like he was being stern with me, and I had no idea what he was saying. And it was Finnish. And my grandpa came up and made him speak Swedish. My grandpa's first language was Swedish, and he did not know any Finnish. But I thought I was in trouble. [Laughter] That's the one instance I remember really hearing Finnish. It Swedish everywhere, because I was only around relatives.

Kaisa: [51:02] Yeah. It's interesting that languages retain themselves in small communities.

Kim: [51:10] Yeah. And the Swedish is different that's spoken there. It's easier for English-speakers to understand. It's not tonal like Swedish-Swedish is. And almost every community has its own distinct dialect. It is very interesting, coming from the United States, and then you go to Finland, which seems like it's so much smaller, and yet there are how many dialects of Swedish, alone, in Finland. It seems remarkable to me, especially being from the west coast, where everything is so far apart. Everything seems so close together in Finland.

[52:00] To a kid from Coos Bay, Oregon, who has to drive two hours to get to the next town, everything seemed next door in Finland to me at the time. That the language could be so different, so close together was also very interesting to me. Just different worlds. But all of my notes from the trip were in Swedish. I don't remember being as proficient in the language as these notes that I would write down.

Mari-Ann: [52:37] That's impressive.

Kaisa: [52:38] You recorded what you heard, which is very good.

Mari-Ann: [52:42] Oh, my. That's impressive.

Kim: [52:43] What helped a lot was, they would watch Finnish television, and it had Swedish subtitles. Or, if they would watch English television, and it had Swedish subtitles, I could learn words really quickly that way. That was the easiest way for me. And I could then compare Finnish and Swedish words, because it was in writing, which is so much easier than auditory learning for me.

Mari-Ann: [53:13] Good.

Kim: [53:13] But I don't think I retained any of that.

Kaisa: [53:18] Finnish is very different.

Kim: [53:21] Yeah. I have been interested in the Finnish language recently, because it would make my job easier to at least have a basic knowledge of some Finnish words. So, I was like, I'll go online and look up learning the Finnish language. And the first think I found had this explanation written in English. He said some part of grammar, and he was using the English word for this part of grammar, and I had no idea what he was talking about— in English. And I was like, "Oh, no." [Laughter] "How am I ever going to know what you're talking about here?" And I was like, "Ugh." But I still think that I should at least go take a class, maybe. Finnish is complicated enough that an

online class might not cut it for me.

Kaisa: [54:12] It's complicated.

Mari-Ann: [54:13] It's complicated, but it's such a beautiful language. I don't speak Finnish; I'm from Norway. But I love listening to Finnish. I love listening to Icelandic, too.

Kaisa: [54:26] That is also hard.

Kim: [54:29] Yes, it is. Of course, Icelandic has the same Nordic roots, the Germanic roots.

Kaisa: [54:37] Yes, grammatically… Finnish is so complex, grammatically. It just separates itself from all the other countries around it, except for Estonia.

Mari-Ann: [54:48] Yeah. It's interesting.

Kim: [54:50] Yeah. Swedish is very similar to English in terms of how you handle possessives and past tense. It's very similar. It all makes sense to me. And then Finnish— I didn't even know we had this part of grammar in English. How am I going to learn it in Finnish?

Kaisa: [55:07] You don't, in many cases.

Mari-Ann: [55:09] It's true.

Kim: [55:19] So, I am fascinated by it, though. I used to do this… I had a designer friend come watch a documentary with Moomins at my house. Earlier, when I said my great-grandfather's last name was Pulkkis, I was looking for this documentary online, and the director's last name was Pulkkis. I couldn't find where to stream it, but I could find her email address, so I emailed her, which is weird to email a director about their film— "Where can I rent your movie?" But, I did anyway. At the end, I wrote, "P.S. My great-grandfather's last name was Pulkkis. I'm sure that's common, but I just thought it was interesting." And she wrote back, "We're most definitely related; this name is not common. You're the only person outside of my family that has heard of this."

Kaisa: [56:24] I've never heard of it.

Kim: [56:26] Yeah. Pulkkanen is very common.

Kaisa: [56:31] So, it's P–

Kim: [56:33] P-U-L-K-K-I-S.

Mari-Ann: [56:39] A-S?

Kim: [56:43] No, I-S.

Kaisa: [56:45] So, the Finns would say "Pulkkis."

Kim: [56:49] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [56:51] My goodness. So, have you kept in contact with this person?

Kim: [56:54] She gave me her password to watch the film on Vimeo.

Mari-Ann: [56:58] Oh, good.

Kim: [57:00] I know; it was really nice of her, very trusting of her. And I was able to watch it. She offered to let us show the documentary if we wanted to. She said if we charge money, we have to pay licensing fees, so we'll charge you licensing fees, but if you don't charge money, you can just watch it. So, that was very generous of her. It's been a couple years since this happened. When I was watching this film with my friend, a lot of the interviews in the film were in Swedish, because Tove Jansson was a Swedish-speaking Finn. Her family is interviewed, and they are the ones that own the rights to Moomins. They all spoke Swedish in it.

[57:43] There are just a couple of Finnish speakers in the documentary. When they come on, it's very obvious it's not Swedish. I would start giggling, and my friend Michelle was like, "What?" And I was like, "Can't you hear the difference? It's so different." And she's like, "They're speaking a different language?" She couldn't hear the difference between Swedish and Finnish. I was like, "Uh, what?" So, I would try to show the difference, and go [imitating Finnish], because there are so many k's, and that rhythm of Finnish is very consistent. Then I learned that there is a poem in Finnish that is just, "*Ko, ko*…" It's just "k-o." You're going to have to help me out.

Kaisa: [58:28] I don't know.

Kim: [58:29] Every time I mention this to Finns, I get a blank look, and then when they remember what it is…

Mari-Ann: [58:33] Oh, good.

Kim: [58:38] But it's a poem almost completely with just two letters. We'll talk after this, because this is just going to be awkward in the interview now. [Laughter] I'm going to look like a liar. [Laughter] So, there is this weird thing where I have a curiosity about the rest of Finland— I can feel so at ease with my own tiny part of Finland, and just be almost a complete stranger to the rest of Finland. I think it's interesting. I don't want it to be that way. [Even though] my ancestors spoke Swedish, they were Finnish.

Kaisa: [59:24] There is always the coastline… not all the towns, but the southern coast— Porvoo, Loviisa— they are all Swedish-speaking, primarily. But of course, they're Finnifying fast.

Kim: [59:43] Right.

Mari-Ann: [59:46] They are Finnifying?

Kaisa: [59:48] Yeah.

Mari-Ann: [59:50] I love that term.

Kaisa: [59:53] The major language tends to take over, and especially the older generation probably didn't move around very much, but the young ones do. Well, you know that well. Sámi doesn't stick around as much.

Mari-Ann: [1:00:13] Exactly.

Kaisa: [1:00:17] I grew up Finnish-speaking, so I had to constantly [inaudible] Swedish-speaking area.

Kim: [1:00:30] Yeah. I will often hear from Finnish speakers, "But you look Finnish." And I'm always like, "Because I am." [Laughter] It's funny, the things I will hear, all out of good intentions. But it's just kind of funny that there is somewhat of a separation between the Swedish speakers and the Finnish speakers. It's natural. Language will do that.

Mari-Ann: [1:01:09] Do you have plans to go to Finland?

Kim: [1:01:12] Yes. I believe that next summer is when we will go. The exhibit we did here in Seattle— we're probably going to do a version of it in Finland. The exhibit was about the Kvarken Archipelago off the coast of Vaasa. They have an interpretation center or visitor's center, and we will probably put that exhibit there. It's more than time for me to go and connect with my relatives as an adult, instead of a scared teenager. I think that will be interesting.

Mari-Ann: [1:01:56] Yes.

Kim: [1:01:58] I am really curious as to what I'll remember— if I can find my way around. Because I was on my own. I rode my bike everywhere. And it was a freedom I didn't have here. My mom would have never let me ride all over on a bike.

Kaisa: [1:02:17] The towns are so small. Most of them.

Kim: [1:02:21] Yeah. I was from a small town here, but I still didn't have that freedom. I just had so much more freedom in Finland. I don't think I've ever quite let my mom in on how much freedom we really had. [Laughter] But those are the kind of things I'm interested in. I remember discussing with a Swedish speaker about how I would order a pop in Finland. It was *lemonad*, which is not, I guess, a Swedish word. It's a Swedish-Finn word, so it's very particular to the dialect. I was like, "I swear, that's the word. I know that's the word." And I used it. I ordered all the pop I wanted. [Laughter]

Kaisa: [1:03:18] Closely related to "lemonade."

Kim: [1:03:22] I know. But I think it's taken from the Finnish word… is it *limonadi*?

Kaisa: [1:03:28] No, the Finnish word has taken it from the Swedish.

Kim: [1:03:32] [Laughter] But they don't use *lemonad* in Sweden.

Kaisa: [1:03:38] No. They use the word *limsa* in Swedish. In everyday language, it's *limsa*.

Mari-Ann: [1:03:49] Well, I am excited for you going back. And now, with your position, what a tremendous boon that will be to both you and your organization.

Kim: [1:04:05] Yes. It will be nice.

Mari-Ann: [1:04:07] I hope you stick with that, and do go.

Kim: [1:04:12] Yes. It's important. I want to connect with all the family history associations. Every town has one, but sometimes… like in Karleby, that would be the parish, and then there are villages, and sometimes every village has a family history association. So, there are a lot of connections that can be made.

Kaisa: [1:04:42] But the parish records are the most extensive ones.

Kim: [1:04:48] Yes.

Kaisa: [1:04:49] Finns have been very careful to contain everybody, and they're usually within the church, and now civil registers, but that's fairly new. Parish records are your key.

Kim: [1:05:05] Yeah. I'm hoping to make lots of connections that way. And there is a branch of my family that I haven't met, so I thought I might look them up.

Mari-Ann: [1:05:19] Wonderful. Very good.

Kim: [1:05:22] It will be good.

Kaisa: [1:05:23] You've done your homework.

Kim: [1:05:26] I have.

Mari-Ann: [1:05:28] This has been very interesting. I knew nothing of the Swedish-Finn Historical Society, so I have learned a lot, and I have enjoyed listening to you. Is there anything else from your life that you would like to add at the end?

Kim: [1:05:45] I don't know. Other than mink farms are the worst-smelling thing on earth, and we should stop, because that was the worst. That is one of the strongest memories I have from that trip— every time I'd ride my bike by a mink farm, I'd go, "[Gasps], Oh, my." It's those kind of weird memories, when you're 13, and you don't really filter your reactions.

Mari-Ann: [1:06:19] Yeah.

Kaisa: [1:06:27] Well, we thank you very much for your kindness, coming here today.

Kim: [1:06:37] Thanks for having me.

Mari-Ann: [1:06:39] Thank you, Kim.

END OF RECORDING.

Transcription by Alison DeRiemer.