

Nordic American Voices  
National Nordic Museum

Interview of Marlene Andersen Bissell  
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Interviewers: Mari-Ann Kind Jackson; Kaisa London; Janice Bogren

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**Mari-Ann Kind Jackson:** [0:01] This is an oral history interview for Nordic American Voices oral history program at the National Nordic Museum. We are today at the Nordic Museum in Seattle, Washington. This is February 15, 2020, and we are interviewing Marlene Bissell. Welcome, Marlene. We are happy you are here. I am Mari-Ann Jackson, and with me is Janice Bogren and Kaisa London. Let's start by having you state your full name, and your date of birth, and tell us where you were born, and then share your life story, please.

**Marlene Andersen Bissell:** [0:44] Good morning. My name is Marlene May Andersen. I was born February 16, 1952, at Swedish Hospital in Seattle. My home was at 8348 Jones Avenue in Ballard. My father is my touchstone to all my Norwegian family information. My mother and father met here in Seattle. My father was in the Army Air Force during World War II, and my mother enlisted in the Coast Guard in Albany, New York.

[1:25] After basic training in West Palm Beach, Florida, they asked her, "Where would you like to go?" She said, "I want to go as far as I can go." She meant Alaska. Her assignment was to Port Townsend, Washington. She lasted about six months at Port Townsend. After being in West Palm Beach, to come to Port Townsend, to the spit on the water in Puget Sound, in probably in an uninsulated military building—she froze. But she'd come to Seattle on the weekends. She never liked ferries after that, because the deadline to be at the ferry and get the ferry was an obstacle for her fun and enjoyment, to come to Seattle.

[2:13] Mother had the ranking of a Storekeeper First Class when she retired, or was discharged. My father was a Sergeant when he was discharged. My father was discharged in approximately November 1945. My mother was still active duty. She was bivouacked, I think they called it, as a SPAR, which is what they called the women in the Coast Guard, who did not go on ships. They did administrative services in a hotel. I wish I could think of the name, but this was short notice, and I didn't dig deep enough. The hotel was in Seattle. So, her entertainment was to go dancing.

[3:02] My father, as we'll talk more about, loved to dance. So, they met at the Trianon in Seattle, at a dance. My dad said my mom had the best legs of any of the girls walking in, in that group. [Laughter] It was a short romance. They met approximately in October or November 1945. My mother was discharged in May, and she went home to Albany, New York, borrowing a suitcase from my father. And the joke was, she had to bring the suitcase back.

[3:42] They were married at Ballard First Lutheran Church, on October 17, 1946, by Pastor Haavik. My father's family... When he was born, January 7, 1920, his parents lived in Alderwood Manor. They had built a home off 196<sup>th</sup> as we know it now, on Cypress Way. There are now condos standing there. Those have been there since about 1988. Prior to that, my grandfather had built their family home, in 1918 to 1919, in that time there. On the deed for the pioneers of Alderwood Manor, which was a settlement started by Pope and Talbot, a lumber company, for chicken farmers.

[4:39] The Sacksteds of Ballard were listed in their name on the property. My father told me, also, that the Sacksteds were his godparents. My Andersen grandparents were: Karl Johann Andersen, born in Bergen, Norway, on November 29, 1882, and Aslaug Kaspara Olsen was born in Kabelvåg, Lofoten Islands, on April 11, 1892. They did not meet in Norway. There is quite a story involving Ellis Island and Boston. How did they get to San Luis Obispo, California, where my grandparents were married? Their marriage date was March 3, 1914.

[5:44] My story has so many parts. I don't know quite how to start, or where to interrupt or interject. It's a lovely story. I've spent my life on a quest. Not that I knew in the beginning it would be so, but I did not know my Norwegian relatives. They were mostly gone before my birth. I stopped this morning at Crown Hill Cemetery to say hi to my grandma. She rests there—Aslaug Kaspara Olsen Andersen. She passed on November 23, 1951. I think I mentioned my birthdate was February 16, 1952.

**Janice:** [6:36] Can you spell her name?

**Marlene:** [6:37] Aslaug is A-S-L-A-U-G. Kaspara is K-A-S-P-A-R-A. She was born Olsen, O-L-S-E-N. I also have information on her mother, not so much on her father. Like I say, I could go on and on. I have had the privilege in my lifetime to experience many things. My own life, as I said, started here in Ballard, living in the Crown Hill area, in a nice home. I still haven't found when my parents purchased it, exactly. Maybe 1948, I'm guessing.

[7:21] I went to Our Redeemer's Church for Vacation Bible School. I have a picture of that. I remember there was some playschool that I went to, but I don't remember the details. I do remember standing on the corner of Jones Avenue and 85<sup>th</sup>, and talking to someone when we were getting ready to move when I was four. I told them, "We're going to Bothell." They said, "Oh." Next door to my home at 8348 was a Scottish lady, and she became my adopted grandma, as I had many of, because our family was so small.

[8:08] Again, how to put all this in a reasonable order... My grandparents, as I said, were both gone before my birth. We moved to Bothell. We had purchased ten acres of property on the Bothell-Everett Highway, by Silver Lake, a couple years before we moved. I remember going there on the weekends to a structure that did not have running water. We had a dug well. We did not have plumbing. We had an outhouse. There were wonderful raspberry bushes. There also was a log cabin.

[8:49] We started a business there with chickens and eggs, and selling fertilizer, and selling vegetables. We had people come. But my father worked at Ballard Transfer here at 2417 Market, which is in sight, still, of the building where we sit today. So, he retired from Ballard Transfer in

1989, but he began in 1946, working for Scott Miller. He had graduated from Ballard High School in 1937—the twin sons, Roger and Rodney. They also had an older sister. They were all friends as I grew up.

[9:39] I came to Ballard. My dentist was here. In the summer, I'd come and spend the day with my father at work, and I'd go to Pat McClain, my dentist, whom dad had gone to high school with. I could walk up and see Grandma Sims on Jones Avenue. Back in those days, you could do that. You could walk; you could ride the bus, as a younger person, and I took full advantage of that.

[10:06] I used to catch the bus to downtown Seattle, because I became a stamp collector in fourth grade. So, I'd go down to Union Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, and I'd go down to the post office to buy my stamps when I came to Ballard. They had a philatelic window. Here I go, rambling.

[10:24] Back to a little more about my family from Norway. As I said, my grandparents did not know each other in Norway. But I have had the privilege of going to Norway three times. I went in 2008, with Ed Egerdahl, from the Scandinavian Language, here at the Museum. I had taken my instruction at Bothell Sons of Norway. A lady, Kristina Strombo, was our instructor, and worked for Ed.

[11:08] I had care of my mother in 2008, or shortly before she passed. I started my Norwegian language classes probably in about 2006. Before that, I joined the Sons of Norway. Going back even more, where I lived in the North Creek Valley, was many Scandinavian families—Carlson, Nelson, Olson. My good friend a mile away lived on a dairy farm. We were the same age. Her father was from Ribe, Denmark. Their last name was Vater. Her mother also was not Scandinavian, but her family had been in the North Creek Valley for many generations. I knew the grandma.

[12:05] My mother's family came to the United States from Holland. Her maiden name was Madeline DeWitt. Her first relative, Tejert Clayson DeWitt, came to New Amsterdam, later known as New York City. In 1656, they were married there—he and his wife. So, they were there before 1656. I did my DNA a few years ago. The first test was done with 23 & Me, and it came back and said I was 95% Northern European, Southern European, Eastern European, a little bit of Jewish, and broadly European. I didn't like the results, because it said I was only 20.4% Norwegian/Scandinavian. How could that be? My grandparents were from Norway.

[13:22] So, I took another test with MyHeritage, later, and that, I liked much better. It said I was 71.8% Scandinavian, and 17.9% English, some Scottish, Irish, and Welsh—4.3%. I'm a little North African, and some other, which is Italian and Nigerian. My mother's mother's name was Carrie Eva Hunt. I recently wanted to know more about my English background. The reason I started doing genealogy was, my mother's sister had traced Tejert Clayson DeWitt from his arrival. So, I never knew about her mother's side. I only knew the surname, the DeWitt's history.

[14:17] Come to find out, the English side arrived before the Dutch side in the United States. I had the pleasure this last year of going to Boston and Plymouth. In 1634, Simon Willard arrived in the United States from England, and I can trace our family to him. So, he is in the *Mayflower* journals in the books I found in Plymouth. They have a library for the *Mayflower* families. We're not a *Mayflower* family, but we're only three years behind.

[15:00] I found the second generation still in Concord and Lexington area. I drove over there before my plane left, and I had a Google search find of a house that belonged to the son of Simon. I pulled in on Sunday to the home that said, "Genealogy Society." A man had pulled up in a truck before me, so of course I had to see what that was about. I got out of my car, and I said, "I have very good luck," (and I'll explain that more soon) "of finding my family ties." I said, "I'm looking for Simonson." I haven't written his name down today. "I wonder who the person is to contact. Since this is a Sunday, I know they're not here."

[16:05] He said, "By the way, across the street, before you get a block and a half further, the house you're looking for is a vegetable stand and farm, and it belongs to the Willards." And I had the privilege of walking in, and a man was there at the counter, and he said, "This isn't mine; it's my brother's. I'm really a carpenter." He had beautiful pictures on the wall of the remodels he had done. He said, "I just come to help with the produce." But I got to meet descendants after 400 years, still in that area.

[16:44] The DeWitts and the Willards both had patents from the King of England, to help with assignment of property in the colonies. I could do a whole thing on that side of my family, too. Three years ago, I had the privilege of going in my great-grandparents' house in Upstate New York. My great-grandparents' 200-plus year-old house that my mother described, and my aunt described. Nobody took me to it. I found it through another relative who said, "Oh, yeah, your grandma lived upstairs over my mom. We're cousins." He knew right where this property was. It was exactly as my mother had described it.

[17:32] I was an only child. I don't have any brothers or sisters. My mother did not have any other relatives in the area. So, she and my favorite aunt, who did the genealogy, wrote letters back and forth every couple weeks. So, we knew about the family. The sister had never married, but she knew all of us 16 nieces and nephews intimately. From a one-room schoolhouse in Upstate New York that she left at 15, to go to Albany, she became a tax adjuster for the State of New York there in Albany. Where to go next?

[18:16] That's a little bit about the English and the Dutch that I carry. But I really was raised Scandinavian, coming to Ballard. I had one other family here in the Ballard area, a relative. Let's go back to my grandparents, who came from Norway. Karl Johann Andersen, born November 29, 1882, in Bergen, was a seaman. I have had the fortune of getting a lot of papers from my father's parents. So, I have his seaman's documents. I've been to Ellis Island. I've found things through so much work on the Internet.

[19:04] When I began really trying to understand the lives of my relatives from Norway, I began with my membership at the Sons of Norway, but I never got back to when I was in high school. The Vaters had gone to Denmark, and everything when I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Maybe it was 8<sup>th</sup>. That summer. They said, "We're going to take you to Europe when we go again, when high school graduation happens."

[19:37] So, I took German for four years in high school. I was very excited. At that point, my parents joined the Sons of Norway, because you could arrange your travel with Pan American

Airlines to Scandinavia as part of a program Sons of Norway had. The joined Normanna Lodge in Everett, Washington, and I had a ticket to go to Europe. We were talking to go to Norway.

[20:10] Unfortunately, Oscar Vater had a medical setback. I won't go into the details. And I had to return my ticket. And I did not go to Norway, or to Europe, at that time. I did, however, in that membership with the sons of Norway, apply for a scholarship for college. I had always thought I'd go to Western up in Bellingham. I thought I wanted to be a teacher. I graduated Cascade High School in June of 1970. We're in the process of planning our 50-year reunion this year.

[20:53] I submitted for a scholarship with the Sons of Norway, and lo and behold, I was selected. At that point, a number of my friends were applying to go to Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, which was founded by Norwegians. In the end, I graduated from Pacific Lutheran University in January of 1974. I did summer school, and different things. I shortcut a four-year degree by half a year. The environment in the United States at that time was when women were starting to acquire nice jobs. Minorities were starting to be placed in higher positions than previously. Men who had been the sole employees were having a little harder time, because there were more candidates, and it was an interesting time.

[22:05] If I had not graduated until six months later, I would not have had the opportunity I did, because there was a freeze on a lot of hiring. And I was blessed again. I had an opportunity to go to work for Scott Paper Company in Everett, Washington, in a management trainee position. I successfully completed that in 14 months, and I became an outside sales rep for commercial products here in Western Washington, which I did for the next six years. That's a whole other version of who I am.

[22:47] That got me thinking I really like travel, because I was taken to the East Coast, to the headquarters. I went to national sales meetings. I had a company car. It changed who I was, because I was a girl from Bothell. I went to school in Everett. I came to Ballard. We didn't travel, because we had a farm. I don't know for sure, but we had somewhere between 2,000 to 4,000 chickens. We also had beef cattle. We had some sheep. You didn't leave. [Laughter]

[23:23] Maybe a nice segue—I called my two sons this morning. My marriage was very good, but it also was complicated. So, my marriage ended in 1997, after 22 years. I have two sons. The first, born in 1978, is Brent, and my second son was born in 1982, Ian. I asked them, "What is your memory of your grandfather, my father?" He was more like their father, too. I didn't quite understand that until after his passing. A couple years later, I was saying something about losing my father, and they said, "Mom, you're not the only one who lost your dad."

[24:15] So, I called my oldest son first, and he said, "What do you remember about grandpa? And he said he was so proud to be Scandinavian, but in the course of time, of course, it was in his generation to become American. He had a fabulous work ethic. There was always a way. You had to figure out the way. You never should stand around with your hands in your pocket. I was raised with that on the farm. I learned to drive tractor at five. They went away on vacation when I was 17, and left everything in my care for three weeks, to a reunion for my mother's family in New York. I wish I had gone to that. But you know, stories go on.

[25:05] So, what did my oldest son say? He said, “Grandpa taught us how to work, and how to work through problems.” My oldest son has created his own company, and is doing very well here in the Seattle area. My younger son has honored my dad in the last five years on the birth of his children. He has two boys. The oldest is named with my father’s first name for his middle name. They had another son this last year, and his first name is Andersen. And I had no idea. It’s very touching.

[25:57] So, I asked him what he remembered. He said, “I remember grandpa being an American, but he’d always tell everyone he was Norwegian.” So, we were raised with the traditions. But my mother not being Scandinavian, I had to reach out to learn the cooking, the language, the other things. My youngest son said, “Nobody spoke Norwegian.” I said, “Your grandpa repeated first grade in Alderwood Manor, because he came from a household that spoke only Norwegian, and he stumbled on the English.

[26:37] So, it’s an interesting time. My birthday is tomorrow. I’ll be 68 years old. In hindsight, it’s fun now to tie the memories to things, and share. So, to be asked to do this interview was the best birthday present ever. Where did I leave off, again?

[27:05] Here in Ballard, before we moved, I can remember being at home with lots of music. I learned to schottische on my father’s feet. I couldn’t dance. I was one-and-a-half. He’d hold me. He was six-foot-two, which was a miracle in and of itself. There’s another story. His mother was five-foot, and his dad was five-seven. Where did my dad become six-foot-two? He had two older brothers, Karl Bernard, and Arnalf Nils.

[27:41] Arnalf and my Aunt Martha lived here in Ballard. Until I was four, their son Curtis and I were very close. They lived over on 80<sup>th</sup>, and I lived off 85<sup>th</sup>, within five blocks. It was like we did have siblings. Curtis had an older half-sister, but I, again, was an only child.

[28:04] So, there was the music. In their older age, when any relatives of Norwegian descent were in the area... Karl the oldest brother, had moved to San Francisco at 15 to live with the grandparents, which is a whole other layer I can share. But they would come to Seattle, and there was also dancing. The Seven Cedars at Stanwood. Harry Limback. Stan Boreson. My dad and his uncle would call each other on Saturday when the Scandinavian Hour was on, to talk about the content of that program, or memories. It just goes on and on.

[28:51] My father had two older brothers, and a younger sister, and also a younger brother, but he passed at a young age from spina bifida. I was raised around cousins from each of the brothers—they each had one child. Karen Victoria Andersen, who was born in San Francisco—her maternal grandmother was here in Seattle. Her mother, Borghilde, was born here. So, that family was 100% Norwegian.

[29:33] My Uncle Arnalf married Martha Hegbloom. She was Swedish, from here in Ballard. So, I have a cousin who is half Swedish and half Norwegian. And I have to tell about their boathouse at Warm Beach. When you open the door, one side has the Norwegian side, and one side the Swedish flag. [Laughs] Grandpa had bought the lot, and gave Arnie and Martha the adjoining lot when Curtis was born. I, on the other hand, had an American mother. [Laughter] So, it enriched me to have all these different people in my life.

[30:14] As I say, I've been blessed with a lot of travel opportunities. I just want to say here that in 2018, I took a trip to Calgary. I took a train ride across, and then the ice highway. We were headed to Prince Rupert in British Columbia, and then to Ketchikan on the Alaska ferry. The last day I was in Ketchikan, I went to the local museum. They had recently acquired a location after [joining together] the library and the museum.

[30:59] As I walked amongst the displays there, I found my grandfather from Ballard—his picture on the wall, with a 400-pound halibut that he had caught on the *Albatross* from Ballard. Most likely, he built it, as a seaman from Bergen. All that I can tell... I don't know how much we want to do with props. I have been to Europe, as I said. This is a picture of their house in Bergen that belonged to my great-grandparents. My grandfather Karl's parents were Petra Nielsen Andersen... Let's see. It gets complicated. And Bernhard Andersen. I have stories about them, also.

[32:04] This is located in the historical area above the Bergen Harbor, by what used to be a monastery for nuns. That is gone now. But if I just walked from 18 Klostergaten, to the bluff, I could see the harbor. I can go into the whole story. The Germans occupied Bergen in May of 1940, and there was a ship that blew up in this harbor. The paperwork that I have in a family bible talks about Petra's death. She died four days after the Germans occupied Norway during World War II. Her husband had passed in December of 1930, about ten years earlier.

[32:57] They had six children—two boys before my grandfather, one girl, and then two additional boys. When I began my research, all I knew about were four children. I encourage everyone... things are so available now, if you just have even one name. I began my search with help at the Sons of Norway. There are people that appreciate genealogy, and will do that with you. I first went to Norway in 2008. I had already taken some language. I had done some research through Digitalarkivet, and different sources of information. I started sewing bunads that I could wear.

[33:55] I had been to Decorah, Iowa, to Vesterheim in 2007 with a friend, and we went to take Hardanger embroidery classes through the museum's instruction. So, which way do we want to talk? [Laughs] I've had so many wonderful experiences, but I guess I chose them, too. I've always had that focus. At Pacific Lutheran, they'd serve us rice porridge sometimes for breakfast. There was a Santa Lucia celebration for the Swedish. So, kind of always something. I took my first Hardanger from a language instructor there.

[34:53] The different things that I participated in related to my Scandinavian heritage is, like I say, I went the first time to Vesterheim in 2007. I participated in the Bothell 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade on the Sons of Norway float, which is a Viking ship, waving to everyone. I marched in the Ballard Syttende Mai parade in 2008, with a flag at the head of the parade for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Daughters of Norway.

[35:36] I received an invite to King Harald's visit to Seattle in 2015, because I am a member of the Daughters of Norway. My first membership was with Thelma Lodge in Everett. I am currently a member at Gina Krog in Bellevue. A wonderful way to learn your heritage. We have guest speakers, just the way Sons of Norway had guests come in. A lady named Kelly came to the Sons of Norway that was part of the rescue of Norwegians in Northern Norway after World War II. When the

Germans were retreating, they burned everything to the ground.

[36:26] She was one of the survivors from the caves, and her story was so moving, because England and Scotland—the merchant marines had silent missions into Norway. She escaped on one of the Scottish vessels, and Mr. Kelly was aboard. She shared all about what it was like around Kirkenes.

[36:55] My grandmother's mother, Laura Olvidia Christiansen, was born in Kabelvåg, Lofoten Islands. She had my grandmother before she married. I always thought, how does that look, because here in the United States, that has certain feelings about it. On my first visit to Norway, I went with Ed Egerdahl and the Scandinavian Institute, after I had some changes in my plans in 2008. I said, "I'm going to go to Norway." And there was a spot. There were only eight of us that joined Ed and his wife, Laurie. We started in Oslo. We went over the Hardangerbrua to Bergen. We went to Ålesund. We went to Trondheim. We went to Fjelldal, and Røros and then to Lillehammer.

[37:57] I thought the tour was going to go to the Lofoten Islands, and it ended up that year, it didn't. So, I made arrangements on my own after the tour, to go to Lofoten in 2008. While I was in Bergen in 2008, I tried to find out more about the Andersens in Bergen. I went to church on Sunday morning. We had come in on Saturday, late. I went to the Domkirke, and there is one other church. I'm sorry; there has not been time to put total notes together here. But I went to church that morning at the congregation my grandmother participated in.

[38:45] I met with the minister after that, and I said what I was interested in. He said, "Well, I'm sorry." I had gone to an English service, also. "I have another service yet." I was there the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. In fact, in Norway, the families go to their *hyttes* in July. Everybody goes on holiday. He said, "If you can come back in August, I'd be happy to have you." I didn't get very far, but the picture I showed of the Andersen home above the harbor—I did find that on that visit.

[39:29] And then we were off. We went to the other locations I mentioned. At Lillehammer, I said goodbye to the tour. Ed had helped me, through a person in Norway, make arrangements to get on the train in Lillehammer and go to Trondheim. From Trondheim, I got on another train, and I went to Bodø. That was overnight. At Bodø, I got on the Hurtigruten, and I went into the Lofoten Islands, and to Svolvær. Svolvær is the adjoining town to Kabelvåg, which is where, again, Laura Christiansen Ersen—that's another story. Enunciation can help you find your relatives or not find your relatives. [Laughter]

**Mari-Ann:** [40:20] Ersen [Er-seen].

**Marlene:** [40:24] Yes, Mari-Ann. I said, "Er-sen," which is what I always heard here in our country, the United States. They were perplexed. Who is "they?" That's the good story. They were perplexed who I was talking about until we got to "Er-seen." Then, it was obvious. However, I digress. So, I journeyed to a *rorbuer*, which is a fishing cottage, in Kabelvåg, which I had rented for I believe two nights. My first night, I came in late. The next day, I went to the Lofoten Cathedral, which was built by the King of Norway to house about 1,500 in this wooden cathedral, because the history of Lofoten is based on the lingcod.

[41:22] I could bring all kinds of things for show and tell here today. I didn't. But in the village of



Kabelvåg, I went to the goldsmith, and he said, “Oh, you have to have this necklace.” It’s a little codfish pendant. He said, “My family has been jewelers here in Kabelvåg for 125 years, and we created this. He said, “The people of Norway that come from Kabelvåg wear this necklace.” So, of course I got one. And it’s pewter, or something. It wasn’t a huge investment. But I met the owner of the store.

[42:04] The next day, I arose, and I met the owner of the cathedral, because I have the baptism or exit papers that were required from the church when you were going to travel, from the church, for my grandmother. Just to back up again, Laura left Kabelvåg to come to the United States in May of 1912. She arrived at Ellis Island on May 17, 1912. Syttende Mai. With three young children—my grandmother’s half siblings—Henry, Trygve, and Ragnhilde.

[42:44] Ragnhilde had been born in Narvik in 1905. The two boys had been born in Kabelvåg. It took me a long time to find Ragnhilde’s information. At that time, her father, Kaspar Ersine, was working in Narvik. So, the family basically was based with the sea. Learning about Laura’s father, whose name was Karl Christiansen, he was a farmer, amongst other things. I saw buildings in the town— homes that he had built when I found my relatives. So, stay tuned.

[42:35] I went to the cemetery, and I walked for three and a half hours, after going to the cathedral, and finding out that since the Hurtigruten couldn’t come into Kabelvåg, the center of activities for that area of Lofoten had moved to Svolvær. So, I stood on the steps as I left the cathedral, having spent some very hard, touching time there. I said the prayer, “Thank you, God, for bringing me here.” Who thought? And maybe I’m the first from my family. “I’m so happy to be here, but if I could find some family, that would be really special. But I’m okay if I don’t.” [Laughs]

[44:12] So, then, I walked the graveyard for three hours, looking at every headstone across the street from the church. A groundsman came in, fairly young, and he said, “Oh, Andersen,” and he took me to one headstone, but it was from a different time, and a different part of the Lofoten Islands. I was not successful. As I was walking the path to come back up to the little street to walk back to the main part of town, a fellow was walking in, and he had a paper bag with a geranium, and I’m not sure of the other flower. Like I said, it was the 1<sup>st</sup> of July.

[44:54] All the stones in that cemetery, for the most part, had a little garden. This is a custom. I thought, “Why not?” So, I greeted this man, and I said, “Do you speak English?” He said, “Yeah.” I said what I was doing, and that I hadn’t been successful, and he said, “Well, I’m here to place these flowers for my mother, who passed a couple years ago. But if you want to wait, I’ll take you back to town, and we’ll go to the Bjørgvin, the harbor area. There is a little café there, and everybody comes in the afternoon to have coffee and *vafflers*, and all that good stuff. So, I thought, “Okay.”

[45:38] So, I sat on a bench. They have a beautiful setting there where they offer you tools to do your gardening, and a water faucet to get your water. They’re so thoughtful. So, here I am, walking down the path later with someone I’ve never met. [Laughter] We get to the parking lot, and the side of his VW van says, “Dog Groomer.” And I get into his car in the middle of nowhere with a strange man. But the trip to town is less than five minutes, and he takes me to this restaurant we’ve discussed, which has a large plaza, and a gazebo.

[46:18] He sits me at a table with his brother, who happens to be the jeweler I met the day before. And they're conversing, and they're talking about how to find a groundskeeper who wasn't there, but normally came to coffee. The jeweler brother is saying to the other brother, "Well, try to call him. See where he's at, what's going on." Sure enough, it's the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, and he's on his way to Sweden. [Laughs]

[46:46] Meanwhile, next to the gentleman at the table I was seated at, another man comes and sits down. Granted, there are 25 tables to choose from. And I'm telling about letters my father had kept from relatives, written in Kabelvåg, to my grandmother. One of them talks about my great grandmother's sister losing her husband at sea, and having three young children. When I got to this part of the story, the man who had come recently and sat down next to the jeweler—they had gone to school together in Kabelvåg. He looks at me, and says, "I think we're related. That was my grandfather."

**Mari-Ann:** [47:42] No.

**Marlene:** [47:43] So, if your skin isn't crawling now, mine does every time. I found a relative, who promptly, when his wife came over, said, "You know, we've got to go a couple blocks up to the 93-year-old lady, and have these letters looked at, and make sure this lady..." What's going on here? So, we did. We went to see another relative who lived very close to the town center there, and I was approved. The gentleman I met—his name is Ola Strand. His mother was my grandmother's mother's sister.

**Mari-Ann:** [48:31] Was Ole Strand a teacher?

**Marlene:** [48:34] I'm not thinking that he was. His mother was very involved in Kabelvåg. Ola took me with his wife, Margot, and we went to this other relative. After that, he said, "Would you like to go to the Lofoten Cathedral this evening with me? They come amongst the various Lofoten Islands this time of year, with major musicians of Norway." Of course I did. So, I went back to my *rorbuer*, which was a fish cabin, about 100 years old, overlooking the little harbor.

[49:11] I got ready, and I went to the Lofoten Cathedral for a concert. If you've ever listened to music in a wooden building, it's a whole other experience. I came to realize that in Seattle, Benaroya Hall has a surrounding of wood, too. I was blessed in 2001... My first trip to Europe was to Ireland. I wanted to go somewhere where I wouldn't have a language obstacle. I went to Dublin, and they were saying, "Well, you know, the Vikings brought all the Irish together, and Dublin was settled by the Vikings." [Laughter] Oh, my gosh. Okay. So, my tour of Ireland was wonderful. Martin Luther's doctrines were at Trinity College. Oh, my gosh. It's just too much. Where was I?

[50:31] So, I went to the cathedral for that concert. I basically took his wife's ticket, I think. But it was phenomenal. Then they said, "Would you like to go the next evening for the *midnattsol*? We'll drive north here on the Lofoten Islands, so you can watch the sun go across the horizon and never set. We did that.

[50:58] But in the meantime, he reached out to other relatives in the community there. Why I couldn't find anyone in the cemetery was because of marriages. The names were not names I knew.

I had the pleasure of a coffee in the afternoon at Karin and Jon Rolansen's home there in Kabelvåg or maybe it was more Svolvær. I don't know. Her brother, Harold, a dentist in Svolvær, came, and another cousin of theirs came, Anne-Marie Rothly, a nurse in Oslo. Her story is phenomenal.

[51:46] We sat out in the sun. Jon took me to the porch. Was it that time? I actually went back in 2013. No, that time I didn't have that experience. Anyway, it was wonderful. I did the *midnattssol*, and they took me to the museum at Bork, where the last Viking king had his longhouse. There were Norwegian longships to see, and they had a reenactment of Norwegian games. I was on overload. You can only imagine.

[52:30] So, I came to Kabelvåg on the Hurtigruten. When I returned to Bodø to take a flight back to Oslo, Gardermoen, to then come home, I used something like what we have here in Seattle, like a trimaran that goes to Victoria. Or a catamaran. That's it. It was a mail route to get back to the mainland, where I saw many little villages. People would come out and get the mail. Both the Hurtigruten and the catamaran are used as lifelines for these communities along the Norwegian coast.

[53:14] So, I went to Gardermoen, I got on my plane, and I came home. I had met Anne-Marie, who lived in Oslo. I already knew I was coming back to Norway in September of the same year, to Stavanger, with a friend I had met at the Sons of Norway in Bothell, born in Stavanger. Totally different experience than my trip as a tourist, because I was at home with her brother and his wife. I was able to go to family birthdays, and just really see how a Norwegian family in 2008 functioned with their children and grandchildren. It was very, very nice.

[54:09] Liv, the lady that I was traveling with and I, took an air-hop to Oslo and stayed three days with Anne-Marie. We also began our three days by going to her mother-in-law and father-in-law, and brother and sister-in-law about 60 miles east of Oslo. From there, we took the train back to Oslo and met Anne-Marie, who took me to her flat. She had retired as a deaconess with the Lutheran Church. She was administrator to the Holmenkollen Kommune in Oslo.

[54:59] She had begun her life, also, in Kabelvåg, and then had gone to nursing school, and then had gone to Africa as a missionary, and spent eight years there. She came back to Oslo, and was married for a time. At some point, she was an administrator in nursing homes. She lived in retired deaconess housing. That was interesting for me, also. She asked a cousin who is only two week's older than I—Stigrunn Sterna, to come with his family.

[55:42] Come to find out that included my grandmother's first cousins. They had grown up together in Kabelvåg. There's not the preparation you might think there would be. You go, and these people... I wasn't even out of the car, and Stigrunn's daughter was there. I had never met Stigrunn. Then, his mother, and her sister show up. So, driving here today, I was thinking, in meeting Solveig, Nissa and her... I've got my names mixed up. Solveig has a nickname. Galli. And her sister was Nissa.

[56:45] It was so amazing. We made it inside the flat, and the doorbell rang. First it was Stigrunn, who I met. He and Anne-Marie grew up together, very close as a family. When Stig's mother and sister arrived, they were arm in arm. They were humming, and they were dancing. And my heart

melted.

[57:13] My father always told me here in Ballard if his grandmother came from San Francisco, the minute music came on in the house, they were dancing. It didn't matter if it was the kitchen, or wherever—there was dancing. To see these two women come in arm and arm, and humming, and basically kind of shuffling to a sound of their own, I knew I was home. So much of this, yes, I could cry, because how do you know that your whole heritage will appear before your very eyes at any given time? And that happened to me so many times. Where have I left off, and where do I go?

[58:02] I had the privilege then to go back to Norway in 2013. At that time, Anne-Marie had reached out to relatives all over the country so I could meet them. Part of that trip was to be in Norway for Syttende Mai. I landed in Oslo probably on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May. I spent a couple days with Anne-Marie, and then I flew to Kabelvåg. I was in Kabelvåg for Syttende Mai 2013. I met Mari-Ann Jackson at the Nordic Museum in Ballard while I prepared for that trip. I wanted to take Syttende Mai pins from our Ballard parade with me, as gifts for my relatives.

[58:59] Mari-Ann happened to be in the gift store. In talking with her, she said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Kabelvåg," and she said, "Oh, I taught school there!" [Laughs] After completing her studies. She gave me the name, which is in this little book here of some people she remembered there. During the day of the parade, oh, my gosh. The cannons go off at 8:00. There's a children's parade. There's something in the afternoon. Karin and Jon took me to a fabulous restaurant for dinner that afternoon that had been a fish trading post for 200 years, on the harbor.

[59:59] And I found Mari-Ann's friends during the marching around town. Not only did they have the children's parade, but before the end of the event, we marched up towards where the nursing home was on the hill of the town. Not that those residents could all come out and greet us, but they were all on the balconies, and there was such reverence for their Norwegian heritage—the flags, the singing. Another wonderful experience. I haven't been back to Norway since. I always think I will, though. I'm not maybe done yet.

[1:00:55] My family history can be found online. When I met Ola in 2008, I also talked to him about how I had done some Digitalarkivet research. He told me about a database used by the Norwegians called geni.com. At that time, there were 52 names on that website. Over the years, it's now up to 600, because of the work of family members. I can't help but put a plug in here to anyone watching this, that you, too, can find your family, even if it's been close to 100 years without contact, as I did, if you just have a few names. It's easier and easier. I have enjoyed looking for my family for many years now.

[1:02:03] Last night, when I looked for things, I found the manifest of the boat my grandmother came over on, in September of 1912. She didn't come with her mother, who came in May. I haven't even told another part of the story. Great-grandma Laura and the three children arrived on Ellis Island on Syttende Mai, 1912. My grandmother, Aslaug Kaspera Olsen, had stayed behind in Norway, but she emigrated on September 16. She left Kabelvåg, and she arrived in Boston on October 9, 1912.

[1:02:57] Last night, when I was fishing around, I found a 28-piece copy of the manifest, and her

name on it, of that ship—everything—who the orchestras were, who was the Captain, who was the doctor, how they were classified.

**Mari-Ann:** [1:03:18] You found it online?

**Marlene:** [1:03:19] [Yes.] It was actually copied in 2012, but I hadn't put in the right combinations of things under Google search to have it before. I'm always finding more pieces. Just a plug here. It doesn't take much, but time. [Laughter] A lot of time. Let's see, what else can I say? It goes on and on for me, because I have enjoyed this so much. I've had many special moments in looking at my family's documented history.

[1:04:10] I haven't talked about Laura and her husband Kaspar's residence in California. About five years ago, I drove to California to see if could locate their final resting location, and I did, there in Colma. San Francisco does not have a great deal of real estate, so they have placed their cemetery property south of the city.

[1:04:42] I also skipped over how my grandma and grandpa met. How did that happen. We go to San Luis Obispo, California. Laura and the children were en route to San Luis Obispo, to meet Kaspar, who worked there for Standard Oil, as a sea captain. My grandpa, who left Bergen more than once... He was a seaman. I can see information from 1905. He came on the *Laurentic*, arriving at Ellis Island March 27, 1910 for his connection to Ellis Island.

[1:05:27] Then he was at San Luis Obispo, working with Kaspar Ersen in 1910 and 1911. Laura came in May of 1912 to San Luis Obispo. Aslaug came to San Luis Obispo in 1912. As I said earlier, they were married there—my grandparents, Karl and Aslaug, on March 3, 1914. So, how did they get to Ballard and Alderwood Manor, to begin with?

[1:06:14] I don't have anyone to ask, exactly that. But the fact that the Sacksteds in Ballard were my father's godparents, I'm still needing to read more. Some of the oral history, I know, here at the museum, includes information on the Sacksted family. Maybe they were from Bergen. Somehow, my grandfather knew them. I truly believe that there was a connection that probably enticed them to come to Washington State.

[1:06:59] My grandfather worked as a fisherman, as I said earlier. He was up in Ketchikan. We think that was in 1931-1932. He was on a boat, the *Albatross*, that he had built. But aside from that, he worked for Alaska Steamship as a longshoreman here in Seattle. My dad spoke frequently about their life in Alderwood Manor until he was 13. Then, they moved back to Ballard. He would ride the Interurban to Seattle with his father at Christmas to shop at the Pike Street Market. Now, my youngest son works on Western, directly below the Pike Street Market, as an engineer.

**Mari-Ann:** [1:07:49] Small world.

**Marlene:** [1:07:49] The connections. Oh, my goodness. Yeah. I was in San Antonio. I went into an antique shop with a friend. They had a rolled-up picture. I haven't shown my picture of Kabelvåg, too.

**Kaisa:** [1:08:10] We should see it.

**Marlene:** [1:08:11] This is something that my father had. I made copies of it so that when I went to Norway in 2013, I could give this to my special relatives. Not every relative, but special relatives. Anyway, while we were in an antique shop in San Antonio, very close to the Alamo, there was another picture on this style. A little bigger, a little wider, taken by Ellis, of the harbor in Seattle in 1923. My friend bought it, and I didn't get it, because it had Alaska Steamship, and everything. Guess who wanted it? [Laughter] I finally talked him out of it, and I do have that as my property now. That was another... you never know where, you never know how you're going to come across very valuable things to you, personally.

**Janice:** [1:09:20] How did your father and mother meet?

**Marlene:** [1:09:23] Here in Seattle. Mother was still in the Coast Guard. Dad had been discharged. They met at the Trianon Hotel, dancing. I have a picture of mother in the rose garden at Woodland Park. I heard lots about Golden Gardens. I think that's where they went to smooch. [Laughter] Basically, my Andersen relatives were in the Crown Hill part of Ballard. I can also identify three different locations that Karl and Aslaug lived in, here in Ballard.

[1:10:10] My daughter-in-law who is not Scandinavian, who is married to my youngest son, for a gift this Christmas, gave me this little guy. In 2019, 2020, this is the rage. Everybody is making *nisse*.

[1:11:12] I worked for the Boeing Company for 13 and a half years. I worked for Scott Paper for six and a half. I worked for a family company in Everett as a janitorial and paper products in sales, as an offshoot as having been the rep for Scott Paper. They were one of our distributors. The thing about my position at Scott Paper... Let's go back. I was one of the first five women in the United States hired by that company. Up until then, it had only been a male occupation. I did it for six years, until my oldest son was about ten months old, and then I went to work for one of our distributors.

[1:12:05] The way the business worked was, Scott didn't sell to their customers. I was not taking care of household products. I was selling to businesses. But I trained sales reps at the distributors. I went out and cold-called, too, and helped set up accounts, and I would ask who'd they'd like to be their vendor, and that sort of thing. That really got me into the travel thing, and it just kept going from there. So, not afraid to be on my own. Many people will say to me, "Marlene, how can you do that?" And I say, "Well, I don't do everything I would do if I was in the company of others. If I see a park, I don't go walk on a trail. If I'm checking into a hotel, I don't do it late at night. I go to my room." You can be safe.

[1:13:06] One other thing, I wanted to mention, too. When I was in Norway in 2008, and visiting with Ola Strand, I came to realize I really didn't understand their psyche, their experiences. So, when you look at your family information, try to also learn about the point in time, and what is going on there. The thing that impacted me the most in 2008 was, I had no sense of what the Germans coming into Norway had caused, or how they had to accommodate that.

[1:13:54] We really have the Norwegians to thank for not allowing heavy water to become Germany's tool in World War II, as well as their snow soldiers. There was so much work done in

Norway through the king being in England, and everything, and it oftentimes isn't talked about in the big picture of World War II. It's more the battles, or the scenes of major events. But there was a very important back amount of activity that played into the outcome of World War II, also.

**Mari-Ann:** [1:14:44] Amen.

**Kaisa:** [1:14:44] Norway in the north, was bordering Russia, so you had Germany on one side, and Russia on the other. Whom do you turn to?

**Marlene:** [1:14:56] As I mentioned, Kaspar Ersen was in Narvik in 1906. I did have the privilege of talking to a lot of family in Kabelvåg. I did see family bibles. I went to the rectory there. I could not find the oldest son of my great grandmother's siblings. What happened to him? The naming process in Norway is another whole discussion. The old way of having names in Norway was to take your father's name, and either put "sen" or "dotter" after it, and that was your last name.

[1:15:53] Where I have referred to Laura as Christiansen, her oldest brother chose to be Karlson—his father's first name, and the son of his father. So, I couldn't find him in paperwork. But the cousin that hosted me in 2013—in talking to her with Ola, with more coffee [laughter] said, "Let's go to the church. I remember Marie, his wife, and I'm sure that the church records—we can find them." And we did. That answered that one.

[1:16:35] I didn't talk about, in Bergen, I did not know that my grandfather had two older brothers. His parents did a very traditional thing. They were well-documented in the *Domkirke* as members. When they chose to be married, they did a binding for a year before the wedding service. They conceived a son during that time. What's this all about? My great-grandmother, who had my grandmother in Lofoten—I found out all her sisters had children before they were married.

[1:17:20] I said, "Coming from the United States, I don't quite understand this." They said, "Think about it. You have a very high chance you're going to lose some children. You also need children, because the living conditions here are not simple. So, oftentimes, the women would have children before they married, to prove that they could bear children.

[1:17:53] And the beautiful part is, whether they stayed with that partner, or they ended up marrying someone else, the children of the mother were accepted into that family, and were raised as one of their own. So, my grandmother had a better beginning than I knew. Going there, this is where... don't get your mind set in a certain way. You might learn it was just part of what was going on, and it's not at all what we see it as today. It was just part of a different way of life at that time.

**Mari-Ann:** [1:18:31] And very well accepted.

**Marlene:** [1:18:34] Oh, totally.

**Janice:** [1:18:37] Was this done in other countries?

**Marlene:** [1:18:39] Norway is still this way. I met family in Oslo—a young lady had two sons, but she'd never married the partner.

**Kaisa:** [1:18:50] Nowadays, yeah.

**Marlene:** [1:18:53] It's just a different social structure, and there's no big deal about it.

**Kaisa:** [1:19:00] The Lutheran Church started expecting marriage, but wintertime travel was pretty nigh impossible.

**Marlene:** [1:19:11] And the ministers couldn't get there.

**Kaisa:** [1:19:14] No. Or people couldn't get to church. So, they would get married when they could get married, but they may have had a child by then.

**Marlene:** [1:19:22] Yeah. But actually, I can show where they went to the church. They did the documents for that. Then they were married later. But trying to find the baptisms or confirmations of their children was interesting. Somewhere in Bergen was *Nykirke*, also. So, some of the children were baptized or confirmed in one... So, it can be a not straight line, even in the same town. There was a question of the naming process—when did that happen? I can see with my grandparents in Bergen, the Andersens were at Sandviken in Bergen, before they were above the harbor. But that's as far as I have.

[1:12:09] When I say I'd like to go back to Norway, I'd love to go to Bergen and just plop down. Don't tell the rest of the relatives. [Laughter] Because you do end up wanting to spend time with everybody, and you don't have time for the things you maybe want to do. There is a repository for many records in Bergen. I would love to find out... Bernhard and Nils Olaf, I have found out through their birth, their confirmation—and I don't know what happened to them.

**Mari-Ann:** [1:20:49] Are they the brothers?

**Marlene:** [1:20:50] The older brothers. The firstborn. I think they probably went to sea. But they could have gone to New Zealand. When I get the hits on where my relatives are... Of course, I don't know if it's from my mother's side or my father's side, for sure. But I have relatives pretty well spread across the globe. Maybe somebody decided to fall in love somewhere else in the world. I don't know. I think if there was any information... I've had a problem going through Digitalarkivet. I went to Salt Lake City three years ago, and spent time at the Mormon Square, using their information, and that's how I got beyond birth of Bernhard and Nils, to their confirmation. You've just got to keep scratching.

**Mari-Ann:** [1:21:47] You have done an amazing job of researching this. My goodness. That's great.

**Marlene:** [1:21:55] That's why I was so pleased...

**Mari-Ann:** [1:21:57] This interview is going to be a treasure for your sons. They will love this. With all of the documents you have already, and with this interview, they will know everything.

**Marlene:** [1:22:16] Well, thank you for the invitation. Like I say, it's the best birthday present ever.



**Mari-Ann:** [1:22:22] Good. Happy birthday tomorrow.

**Marlene:** [1:22:23] Thank you.

**Mari-Ann:** [1:22:24] Thank you so much.

END OF RECORDING

Transcription by Alison DeRiemer