

Nordic American Voices
Nordic Heritage Museum

Interview of Sharon Lund Friel
April 30, 2016
Seattle, Washington

Interviewers: Sandra Magnussen Martin; Dan Kaylor

Dan Kaylor: [0:10] This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices oral history project. Today is Saturday, April 30, 2016, and we'll be interviewing Sharon Friel. We are at the Nordic Heritage Museum in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle, Washington. My name is Dan Kaylor, and also interviewing is Sandra Magnussen Martin.

Sharon Lund Friel: [0:37] *God dag, god dag.* My name is Sharon Lund Friel, and I am a second-generation Swede. The lucky thing for me is, I'm Swedish on both sides of my family. My mother's name was Elsie Swanson, and her family from came from the Jämtland area. My father's name was Swen Edward Lund, and his family came from the Åland Islands. It has been a wonderful life for me, because I adore my Swedish heritage. I was raised so much by my Swedish grandmothers who lived in Seattle. They both immigrated here. I will tell you a little bit about those dates in a minute.

[1:20] I should also tell you that my sister Carolee and I have always been known as the Frikadellers, which are the Swedish meatballs. [Laughter] That was a nickname that we picked up about 35 years ago. When we walked down the street, everyone said, "Oh, here come the Frikadellers." And nobody knows what that means except for the family.

[1:42] I was born in Seattle. I was actually born at Swedish Hospital, and I think it was most appropriate, because I am Swedish. It was always interesting for me to find out who actually started Swedish hospital, and to know that there were a lot of Swedish people that were behind it, making sure that we had a quality hospital in Seattle. I was born on March 18, 1939. I have lived most of my life in Seattle, Washington, but I did grow up in Spokane.

[2:12] I did come back to go to the University of Washington. I graduated in 1961, and I was a Communications major. I was able to find a job here in Seattle, so I did not go back to Spokane. I lived with my grandmother off and on. I lived at the sorority house, but when I had a few moments, I loved to go to her house at 72nd and 3rd in the Ballard neighborhood. There was no generation gap between the two of us. Her name was Ida. Everything I did was perfect, and everything she did was perfect.

[2:44] She introduced me to a lot of Swedish customs. One of them was obviously cooking. So, we would make spritz cookies together, and Swedish pancakes, the really big ones. She never used any recipes. She also taught me how to drink coffee from the time I was three years old. You do that by putting a sugar cube between your teeth, and sipping the coffee through the sugar cube. So, that was something that I will always remember my grandma for. She was a beautiful seamstress. She made many of my clothes. My sister and I had many matching outfits that she would make, usually

without even a pattern, because she was so skilled.

[3:27] My grandmother's immigration story is very interesting. She was from the Östersund area in Sweden and lived in a little village called Tromstetonsven. She met a wonderful man named Sven Svensson, who lived in Blecke, which was the village right next door to her, and they fell in love. My grandfather, Sven Svensson, came to America through Canada and went to Calgary, and immediately changed his name to Swan Swanson. I'm trying to find the date when he came. He came in about 1903. I'm going to read just a little passage of when he came that my mother has written and saved for me.

[4:26] In 1903 he came to Seattle and went to Alaska. Then he came back to Seattle in 1903 and sent money to his sister to come to Snohomish in 1903. He went back to Alaska and got pneumonia twice and had his lungs tapped twice in Dawson. In 1903 he went to Fairbanks by dogsled. He and his sister from Sweden became associated again. In 1908, he went back to Sweden to get grandma and bring her to be married in Calgary.

[5:08] My grandma had told me she did not want to be married in Sweden, and it was a major production, and it would go on all night. The bride had to display all of her beautiful embroidery items that people would come through during the reception and comment on her fine work. So, she did not want to do that. I thought my grandma was so brave to come. They were married in Calgary in November of 1909 and established a wonderful house there close to my grandpa's sister Amanda and her husband, Mr. Pederson.

[5:49] They decided it was time to have children. My mother was born in 1913, and her brother Arthur was born two years later. From Calgary, they went back to Sweden for two years, and thought of maybe living in Sweden again. They decided not to do that, and to come back through Calgary, and then come to the United States. My grandfather changed his name from Sven Svensson to Swan Swanson. They moved to Seattle.

[6:19] On my father's side, his family was from the Åland Islands, and he also had a very, very interesting family life. His father's name was... And I have to read this, because... [Pause]. His name was Peder August Julian Bjerklund. He was a seaman. He worked as a carpenter, and also as an able-bodied seaman. He came through San Francisco, and he changed his name from Peder August Julian Bjerklund to Julian Lund. The place that he was from in the Åland Islands was Kumlinge, which is on the western coast.

[7:06] When I had visited the Åland Islands, the first thing I thought of was the San Juan Islands. I thought what an easy adjustment this must have been for the immigrants when they came to Seattle, and could see not only were the jobs similar, but the topography was very similar.

[7:25] I never met my grandfather on this side, because he was a fisherman and worked on a boat, and he was up in Alaska and got pneumonia and died up there, and is buried there. (My father Swen Lund spent a lot of his life trying to recapture who his father really was, since he didn't have a chance to meet him.) When he died, he left three children—my father Swen, his sister Ellen, who was older than him, and his little brother Martin.

[8:01] Because he did not perish at sea or on the boat, his widow did not qualify for compensation.

So, unfortunately, she had to get a pension that was allotted to women with children by the State of Washington. She received only \$25 per month. So, as her children got older, they actually went to Webster School. She lived in Ballard. She became a mangler for a laundry firm. She also cleaned hotel rooms and office rooms.

[8:41] Many times, my Aunt Ellen would have to take care of the boys when she was in 8th grade, so her mother could go out and make a living. They also had a custom which was called the rent check party. Other Swedish people knew of women or men who had fallen on hard times. At the end of the month, they would have a party and leave a dollar or 50 cents or some food for the widow so that she would be able to get through from month to month.

[9:10] My grandmother had a very hard life. She lived very close to downtown Ballard. I enjoyed meeting her. We were not as close as my maternal grandmother, but when I got to know her story many years after she had passed away, I had such admiration for her. She did not return to Sweden. She also had a lost a little girl named Alice. She passed away. She also had two stillborn children. So, she had a really hard life, and unfortunately passed away from stomach cancer when I was about ten years old. So, I didn't get to know her as well as I knew the others.

[9:52] The highlights of our year were always going to the Midsummer Picnic out at Vasa Park. The two big things in our family were Christmas Eve, which was a wonderful Swedish party, and going to Midsummer at Vasa Park. My parents were very involved in the Swedish community, and belonged to the Vasa Hope Lodge. My grandparents were involved there, too, as well as another one called Freehead. It was nice to see that everyone wanted to keep the Swedish traditions going, and I think that's one of the reasons so many people moved to Ballard.

[10:30] The butchers knew the kind of meats that they wanted, and they could all speak the same language. The homes were always open to people who were coming from the old country. My grandparents always had someone living with them who had just come here from Sweden and needed a place to stay. They would stay with them until they found a job. I remember often meeting a single man who would be welcome at the dining room table. My grandma never had a dishwasher. She never had any recipes. She didn't know how to drive a car. But she made her way, and that's why I was so admiring of her all of my life.

[11:16] She tried to go into the dressmaking business with her sister-in-law, but that was not successful. But what was successful was they taught themselves how to speak English by listening to the radio. That was one of the stories she told me, because I said, "Grandma, how can you speak English?" She spoke very broken English, but she said, "Oh, I listened to the radio all the time." [Laughter] I thought that was so wonderful, and so cute.

[11:42] My parents really wanted my sister and me to understand the Swedish traditions. So, my sister and I had little Swedish costumes, and we learned some of the dances like the hambo and the schottische. When we'd go out to Vasa Park, we would also dance around the maypole. It was always a highlight. I don't know whether any of your other guests have told you, but that was a major occurrence for the Swedish population here. Many times, politicians or actors or actresses who were Swedish would come out to Vasa Park and be part of the afternoon. It would start with a pancake breakfast in the morning, and then we'd have pea soup in the afternoon. It would go until it was dark. It was just really a highlight.

[12:33] When I was in the 8th grade, I was living in Spokane, Washington, and my grandparents had decided to go back to Sweden for the summer, and they asked me to come with them. This was 1953. It was a life-changing experience for me. My grandparents still spoke quite broken English, and I think they also thought I could help them with the trip. So, they came to Spokane, where I was living, and we got on the train and went from Spokane to New York. Then we met a family from Seattle, the Boyd family, who had driven a brand new car across the country and were determined to put it on the cruise ship so he could show his family how well he had done as an American.

[13:20] We took the *Gripsholm* cruise ship from New York to Gothenburg. When we were pulling into Sweden, everyone who was Swedish was the deck and they were crying, because they were seeing Sweden for the first time after many years. And I couldn't figure out why everyone was crying. It was late at night. As soon as they could see the lights of Sweden, they knew. They always called it "the old country." They knew they were going to be there.

[13:50] I had two uncles that picked us up at the dock after we went through customs and got our luggage. Immediately, the four adults started speaking Swedish to each other, and I thought, "I have made the biggest mistake I have ever made, leaving all my good friends in Spokane, and coming to Sweden. I don't know anyone. I can't speak the language. I'm going to be gone for three months. What have I done?" I had just a little yearning about maybe I had made a big mistake. Well, that would have been a big mistake.

[14:23] We drove for two days and got to Östersund, and then went to the family farm, which is in Tonsven, as I mentioned. They have a winter house and a summer house. They had lots of acreage. I was met by three cousins who were close to my age. They welcomed me into... We were going to be staying in the winter house. The summer house was just maybe half a block away. They had the summer house because it was easier for the woman of the household. She didn't have the labor of keeping up a large family home. Everything was a lot simpler for her. They had a lot of acreage where they were working the fields. They had horses and some other animals there, and we were right on the lake. It was just beautiful.

[15:21] My cousin Ulla, who was two years older than I, was so kind. She said, "You can have this room, or if you'd like, you can stay in my room." I said, "I think I would like to have my own room." And she said, "You're most welcome." Her two brothers stayed in the lower level of the house. And we became like sisters within three days. Her parents were very happy I was there, because they thought I could help their children learn to speak English better.

[15:53] The three of us remained friends our whole life. I was there the whole summer, and I met all their friends. We rode our bicycles everywhere. We'd ride our bicycles to the railroad tracks, and we'd throw the bikes just into the grass. We'd climb onto the train and go into the city. It was such a beautiful way of life. We'd take the boats out and catch fish, and my auntie would make fish for dinner. Ulla taught me how to play double solitaire. Every night we would sit at the dining room table. We'd eat *tunnbröd*, which is a very thin flatbread with a special *smör*, and we would play double solitaire. We just bonded.

[16:38] At the end of the first two months, the family who had come from Seattle picked me up in their big car, and we went to France, Germany, and the Netherlands. They were kind enough to take

me with them. When we were in Germany, I saw some remnants of the Second World War. The cities that we were in had not been rebuilt, and it was very frightening to me. I would be in the hotel, in the room with the little girl who was traveling with me. I was terrified that something that was going to happen to me. That was a real eye-opening experience for me, to see what Germany was like.

[17:23] So, after having a wonderful time and meeting all kinds of relatives, and having strawberries at every single place where we would go, and meeting all these relatives, I flew back with my grandparents to New York, and then we flew from New York back to Spokane, and I started the 9th grade. I suddenly realized that I had become incredibly worldly. When my dad said, “Do you want to go to Mount Rainier?” I thought, “Gosh, I’ve just been in Paris. I don’t know. I’ve just been in Stockholm.” [Laughter]

[18:02] Suddenly, all kind of opportunities opened up for me. As I mentioned, my family was very interested in keeping the Swedish traditions going. So, we would come from Spokane to Seattle every year for Christmas Eve. We would not miss it, because that was a chance for the whole family to get together and sing Christmas carols. My father played the accordion. He had taught himself to play the accordion. And I found out all kinds of things about him.

[18:39] When he was in high school at Ballard High School, he had formed a Swedish band. He played the accordion, and he had another man who played the saxophone, and another man who played the piano. They played for a lot of Swedish parties. That led him to form a dance band that played popular tunes. They would play at many... the Shadow Lake Club, and clubs on Bainbridge Island. He played by ear, and he taught me the love of music.

[19:15] I started playing the piano thanks to him, by ear, when I was about four years old. Many of the first songs I started playing were Swedish songs that he had taught me. My grandpa heard me playing the hambo and a schottische, and he started to cry, because he was so happy I knew this music and could play it by ear like my father did. That became part of my life for the rest of my life.

[19:43] My father’s name was Swen Lund. He only had one semester of college at Washington State. That was all he was able to afford. When he went to Washington State, he changed his name. His name was Swen Edward Lund. He took off the “Swen,” thinking that was too was ethnic, and he became known as Edward Lund. I thought Swen was such a beautiful name, and he said, “I just didn’t know if I would fit in.” He had joined a fraternity. He had just enough money to go for one semester. But he found a great job with the Grinnell Company in Seattle and became an officer with the Grinnell Company, which was down on the waterfront.

[20:32] Then we were transferred to Spokane. He was to open up the Eastern Washington and the Inland Empire office in 1950. My mother cried the whole way going over to Spokane. When we got there, there was a foot of snow on the ground. My dad had to carry her into the house because we had taken the train, and we were not prepared for that at all. When we got to Spokane, they did investigate some of the Swedish organizations that were there, but it was never quite... It wasn’t anything like Seattle, which was so full of tradition and people whose parents had come from the old country. So, it was not quite... We didn’t really get into too much of Swedish things when we were living in Spokane.

[21:28] Then they were transferred back to Seattle in about 1967, I think it was, and they lived in Olympic Manor when they came back. My mother started developing Alzheimer's, and my father's health was a little tenuous, so we were very happy that they were able to live at the Norse Home and spend the rest of their lives there.

[21:58] My father was very hard to please. We went to look at two other retirement centers. We went to the Hearthstone. He said it was "too many women." We went to the Ida Culver House, and he said, "Too fancy." So, then we went to the Norse Home. He said, "I think this will be okay." About two weeks later, after they had been residing there, I called and said, "Hey, dad, how's everything going at the Norse Home?" He said, "Too many Norwegians." [Laughter] He was able to take his accordion out and play for everyone at the Norse Home. A friend of his from high school had moved in there, and she played the piano. He lived out his life at the Norse Home. It was just the perfect place.

[22:46] My sister and I were thrilled, because only lived 20 to 30 minutes away from the Norse Home, so we could be there often to be with them. The other thing that my father did was, because he loved the Åland Islands, he decided that he wanted to have a place in the San Juan Islands. It reminded him so much of the Åland Islands. So, they found a place on Lopez and built a home there. That was filled with a lot of their memorabilia from Sweden. We use the house to this day.

[23:24] In our travels, when my husband and I were able to visit Sweden in 1984, we had taken a cruise ship. One of the stops was in Copenhagen, so we flew to Stockholm, and I had a chance to finally renew my wonderful friendships with my cousins, and introduce my husband to them. Then in 1999, my sister and I planned a fabulous reunion in Östersund. My youngest son was getting married, and he and his brother had never been to Sweden. I really wanted them to be able to understand how wonderful this was. They knew of all our Swedish traditions, and certainly were admiring of them.

[24:09] So, it took us about a year, but we planned a reunion at the farm with the summer house and the winter house. We did this 1999. We had 60 family members that attended. There was also a church on our property in Tromstetonsven— a Lutheran church. I really wanted us to have some sort of service there that we could all enjoy. This was an amazing experience. Twelve people came from Seattle, but there were 60 people total. The youngest person was two months, and the oldest person was 85. And we all spent two full days together, eating, and visiting, and singing.

[24:53] We started our trip in Stockholm, of course, and then drove to the farm. And I accomplished what I really wanted to do, and that was to let my sons know who their cousins were, how wonderful this heritage was, and to be able to experience everything that I had as a young woman. Those ties have been lifelong.

Saundra: [25:25] Did you learn to speak Swedish when you were growing up, from your parents?

Sharon: [25:32] No. I did not. That was one of their sadnesses. I have no knack for languages. There is something about a left-brain/right-brain thing for me. I can say a few phrases, like *god dag*, *god dag*, and *adjö*. But that's about it. So, when I was in the 8th grade and lived with my cousins, as I said, for three months, they wanted to practice their English. So, we were able to speak English to each other. Then they would translate to their mother and father, the things that I was saying.

[26:14] 1999 is when we had the reunion. My sister and I went over first, and we went to the Åland Islands, to see my father's part of where his family had grown up. We had a very, very unique experience. We were in Mariehamn, and we took a cruise ship from Stockholm to Mariehamn. My cousin Diana, who is a first cousin to me, and whose mother was my father's sister— she had gone ahead of us. When we got off the cruise ship, she said, "I hope it's okay, but our cousins want to take us to dinner tonight." Of course, we were jetlagged and exhausted, and I thought, "I think this will be okay."

[27:06] So, I cousin came and picked us up in the car, and we drove and drove and drove into the forest. And there was a restaurant. It was like a little inn. We got out of the car, and there were all these people standing in front of the restaurant. And I said, "Oh, isn't it open yet?" And she said, "No, these are your cousins. They just want to meet you." I just start crying when I think about this, because I didn't even know I had these cousins, or that they knew who we were. So, we went into the restaurant, and told lots of stories, and they talked about knowing my father's family.

[27:41] The man sitting next to me was very articulate, and his name was Henrik Gustafson. I said, "Henrik, now that you're retired, how are things going?" "Pretty well," he said. "I'm working on our summer house, and things are going well." I said, "Well, what did you do before you retired?" he said, "I was the governor of the Åland Islands for 17 years." [Laughter] And I didn't even know this. I said, "Henrik, this is amazing." And he said, "I want you to come and see our summer house."

[28:15] So, the next day, we went. My father had collected, years before, these amazing rocks that are indigenous to Åland Islands. They have sort of a pink tinge to them, with a little bit of mineral in them, which makes them kind of silver. I went to his beach, and they were all over the beach. I had never seen anything like it. He said, "We had a really hard time during the war." He said, "Our land was hit." And he said, "This is the way I've turned this. We had this deep hole in our land from where we were hit." And he said, "Now I've turned this into a swimming pool so you can lap with peace knowing that was a time that we don't care to remember."

[29:08] Getting back again to when I was in the 8th grade and was in Sweden, a little boy named Pentti who had been sheltered and had come from Finland. He had stayed with my aunt and uncle on this farm. I had heard then that was a custom, that many families did that— they sent their children to be safe so that they wouldn't be hurt in the war, or that it wouldn't affect them. I had never heard that story before, so that was very meaningful to me.

[29:40] My husband and I were married in 1963. One of the things I wanted to do when I got married was wear the Swedish wedding crown. So, I was able to borrow this. I think it was from the Magnolia Lutheran Church.

Saundra: [29:58] We're going to zoom in on that. [Pause] The crown belonged to the church?

Sharon: [30:11] Yes. And it was out on loan.

Saundra: [30:13] They loaned it to brides?

Sharon: [30:14] Yes.

Saundra: [30:14] Wow. Wonderful. Thank you.

Sharon: [30:16] So, I wanted to be able to bring a little bit of Sweden to my wedding ceremony. We got married at Gethsemane Lutheran Church here in Seattle because that was the Scandinavian church. Sometimes on Christmas morning, we would go to the... I think it's called the Julotta service. It's a service that they have on Christmas morning at seven a.m. We only went twice. It's all done in Swedish. I don't know whether that has continued or not. But I just wanted to bring a little touch of Sweden to our wedding.

Saundra: [30:58] That's a wonderful touch.

Sharon: [31:00] I know.

Saundra: [31:01] And they do that in Sweden, also?

Sharon: [31:03] Yes. That's a tradition. I knew that one of my cousins had done that.

Saundra: [31:13] How did you meet your husband?

Sharon: [31:14] Well, I was a Communications major at the University of Washington, and I had a very, very good education. I studied journalism, radio, television, advertising, public relations. I was able to get a job at an advertising agency my senior year at the University. My senior year, my husband came and joined the firm. Then the Seattle World's Fair was taking place. I was offered a job at the Seattle World's Fair to work in their press department. It was just amazing. I was only 22 years old. The man I was working for turned out not to be satisfactory, so they offered me this job, and I was 22 or 23 years old—to head up the press department for the Seattle World's Fair. They said, "Do you think you can do this?" I said, "Of course. I'm 23."

[32:19] By that time I had graduated from the University. My two best friends and I got this wonderful apartment down in Madison Park. We all had three wonderful jobs. One was working for KING-Television. I was working at the Seattle World's Fair, and my third roommate was working for the attorney general's office.

[32:41] Then Dick started asking me out when I started this job at the Seattle World's Fair. He was working for an advertising agency, and one of his clients was called Northwest Releasing. They would bring a lot of talent into Seattle for the Fair, and for other things. We fell in love. I had this job that was seven days a week. I had seven young men working for me who were press aides. He was heading up an advertising agency. So, we dated all that time, although I was almost asleep when I came home, and he'd have to walk me down and knock on the door, and my two roommates would let me in because I was so exhausted all the time.

[33:27] We had a wonderful marriage. We got married in 1963. By that time, I was working for Emmett Watson at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. My education was fantastic. It prepared me for every job. It opened every job door that I ever had. So, we were married in 1963. After I worked at the *Seattle P-I* for Emmett, then I took this job with the Alpine Hut as the advertising manager.

[34:00] We had a fabulous marriage for 46 years, with two sons, Rick and Christopher. He loved all the Swedish traditions, especially the cookies. [Laughter] Unfortunately, he passed away six years ago, and I miss him very much. He was very supportive of everything that we did, and I was very supportive of everything that he did. We made, I think, a total of four or five trips to Sweden.

[34:28] One was to meet my sister and her husband after my brother in-law had retired. They were picking up a Volvo in Gothenburg, I think it is. So, they drove to Stockholm, and we met them there. We had a chance, in the new Volvo, to go up to the family farm, and meet all the cousins again. We celebrated with my cousin Rune and his family, who lived just outside of Stockholm. So, Sweden has always played a really important part in our life. It has been my privilege to be able to share all these traditions with my family.

[35:06] On Christmas Eve, it is just something that all of our family will always remember, because we have the family band, and we sing *Jul, jul igen*, and we have a big smorgasbord. We have what is called the candle ceremony, and that's where each of us has a red candle, and we stand in a circle with each other, and the host wishes everyone *god Jul*. And they say something like this happened to them, and they light the candle next to them. And it goes all the way around until you get to the hostess, and she offers the prayer for the evening.

[35:50] Then Santa Claus always comes. We sing two Christmas carols in Swedish, and then we sing all the other traditional ones. We draw names, and then we always have Swedish meatballs, pickled herring, and then my sister makes a wonderful rice pudding with lingonberry. That's the tradition that we have passed down to our whole family, and it means a great deal to all of us.

Saundra: [36:18] So, your grandchildren now participate in these customs?

Sharon: [36:21] I don't have any grandchildren, unfortunately. But the others who do...

Saundra: [36:25] Your sister's...

Sharon: [36:25] Yes. You don't ever miss Christmas Eve. So, we hope that all the in-laws that we gather will come with us on the 24th. So far it's so good. It's worked out pretty well.

Saundra: [36:43] It sounds wonderful. Even the non-Nordic members of your family have embraced the customs.

Sharon: [36:52] Yes. They have. We used to have a lot more Swedish foods, but people didn't care for some of the things that we were serving. [Laughter] So, we switched from lefse to salmon. We always have pickled beets. The tasters of pickled herring are becoming fewer and fewer, but we encourage them to give it a try. All my cousins make wonderful Swedish cookies, and *krumkake*, and all the others... *Pepparkakor*. Now sometimes we buy *pepparkakor* because that's kind of hard to make. You can get that at the different bakeries that make it really, really good.

Dan: [37:40] You were talking about continuing Christmas— has your family been able to get involved in the Swedish Cultural Center?

Sharon: [38:00] They've all been to the museum. My grandparents were very involved in the

Swedish Club, and also when it moved to Dexter. So, that was very important to them. It was in Ballard, and then they had the opportunity to move to Dexter. So, our cousins have continued sometimes to go there. There have been very few of the cousins who have married other people who are Swedish. So, when you were saying, “what is the biggest change that has happened,” it is the fact that Swedes have not married Swedes. So, there has been a little bit of a dilution in some of the customs that we had. But it would be missed by everyone if we didn’t keep these traditional things going.

[38:59] When my husband and I had our home, every other year we would have a Swedish picnic in the summer, and we would have a maypole. I would call the museum, and we would find a Swedish band to come and play. Then I would have everyone come dressed in either yellow or blue. That was always a big hit. Since I’ve sold my home, we haven’t kept up that tradition. It was hysterical trying to dance around the maypole. [Laughter] We’d always get all tangled up. That just made the fun of it.

Saundra: [39:38] So, do you do any activities through the Swedish Club now?

Sharon: [39:43] No, I do not. If there is a program that looks interesting... Who is the author that wrote *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*?

Saundra: [39:58] Oh, yeah... [Stieg Larsson]

Sharon: [40:02] Well, we went to the Swedish Club to see that series. I became very nostalgic when I was walking through it, because I thought, “Why don’t I come here more often?” The artifacts are beautiful. It’s a beautiful club. Because we were very interested in that series, my sister and her husband and I went to see all the movies that were there. They featured the club on Channel 21, which is the Seattle Channel, and I think the same thing. I have been to some events here at the museum, which are just remarkable. This is such a treasure, to have this museum, and to preserve all of this.

[40:43] When my uncle came from the Åland Islands, I took him to the museum, and he said, where is the Åland flag? [Laughter] I said, “Uncle, I’m so sorry; I didn’t know that you had your own flag.” [Laughter]

Dan: [40:59] Maybe he’ll be willing to donate one to the museum, if he’s concerned that the museum didn’t have the flag.

Sharon: [41:07] [Laughter] I know. When we came by, the museum was closed. I was trying to do Seattle in 24 hours so he could see everything.

Dan: [41:16] In a few years when the new museum is built, it will be a good opportunity for all of these cousins to visit Seattle.

Sharon: [41:27] Yeah. I think the thing that I admire most... As I said, I didn’t know my father’s family as well, because his father passed away when he was such a little boy, and his mother passed away when I was ten. But the thing I always admired about my maternal grandparents was how hard they worked. They provided a wonderful life for my mother and her brother. They really, truly

passed along all these wonderful traditions to my sister and me. It was truly unconditional love that they had, my grandmother in particular.

[42:12] My grandfather was a little more standoffish, but I knew that he cared for me deeply, and my sister as well. He lived long enough to see his first great-grandson born, and that was wonderful. He got a chance to hold my son Rick. This was just before he... Unfortunately, he had Parkinson's. He was one of the very first residents of the Ballard Retirement Home that was set up. His doctor was very involved in that.

[42:42] As I said, their home was on 72nd and 3rd. He was an amazing man. He was a carpenter. My grandmother was incredibly tolerant in that he would build a house and they would live in the basement of the house. They were moving all the time with two kids. When the house would be built, then they would sell it and start on another one. So, this was often where we go to visit, and they would be living in the basement. There would be sawdust upstairs. But we just took that as that's what he did. That was his profession.

[43:31] As I mentioned, their final home on 72nd and 3rd Northwest. They had a beautiful home that they also had built in the Blue Ridge area, which was wonderful. We had a family compound on 110th and 15th Northeast. That's where my parents built their home. Then my grandparents built a home that was just on the end of a block where they stayed in the basement and then built their house upstairs. We were able to have a pathway where we ran through the woods, and I could see my grandmother every day. My uncle ended up buying a piece of property and putting in a house right next door to us. So, our whole family lived together for several years. We were very, very close.

[44:24] My grandmother spent her last days at the Foss Home. When grandpa passed away, then she moved in with my mom and dad, and they lived in Olympic Manor. Then she became ill and was in the hospital, and then we moved her to the Foss Home. That's where she spent her last days.

Saundra: [44:47] Sharon, can you tell us a little bit about your career as an auctioneer?

Sharon: [44:54] Yes. I would be very happy to. My husband and I were charity auctioneers. We did this for about 30 years. We raised over 300 million dollars for different charities. We did two auctions for the Nordic Heritage Museum. They were out at the Shrine.

Dan: [45:16] Now a country club?

Sharon: [45:17] Now a country club. We did two auctions, or maybe just one. My husband was involved with Poncho, which was the fundraising auction that supported the arts. He was on their board. He was also a natural entertainer. So, the Seattle Symphony junior group always had this beautiful auction where they sold decorated Christmas trees. This was prior to all the Festival of Trees Auctions that happened. So, we went to the auction, and it was really fun.

[45:54] The next year we went, and the auctioneer did not show up. So, a friend of ours said, "The girls are in big trouble." This was the junior women's group. "Everyone is here to buy these trees. Since you like to tell a lot of jokes, do you think you could do this?" The man that asked him to do this, his name was David Hughbanks. His father was very prominent in the Ballard area. David still lives in Ballard. David auctioned off the first tree, and Dick auctioned off the second, and he was

just a natural. He was working in the advertising agency business.

[46:34] Then people just started calling, and he started doing these auctions. He never charged for his services. So, we were asked then to do an auction for the Rainier Club, because they had gone through a remodel. We parked on the other side of the freeway. People would say, “We’d like to pay you.” We’d say, “Just send some money to Seattle Children’s Hospital in our name.” I was very active at Seattle Children’s. They were in the process of putting murals on the wall for x amount of dollars. So, I got a call from Children’s, and they said, “We’ve got enough now to have a mural.” I said, “Oh, that’s wonderful.”

[47:19] So then the Rainier Club was going through a remodel. They had found all these things in their attic, and they asked us to come and auction those off. Children’s called me the next day and said, “The Rainier Club just sent us \$500 for your services.” I said, to Dick, “Maybe we should start charging for our services.” [Laughter]

[47:39] We began a career. They became large, so he asked me to join him on the stage, and it turned out to be the most wonderful thing we ever did. He, in the meantime had become an executive with an aviation company called Aviation Partners. Prior to that, he had worked for the Gates Lear Jet Company, and had come back into advertising and then Aviation Partners. He asked if I would be the front person to get everything organized. Then we formed this team where we would do charity auctions. We did them all over the United States, and we did 18 in Australia. We brought the charity auction concept to Australia.

[48:24] The Australian Opera needed to raise money. The government used to pay for everything in Australia. They had sent a young man up to see what Poncho was like. He had gone to Dallas and Los Angeles, and everyone kept talking about these auctions that were happening in Seattle. So he came to the Poncho auction and saw Dick. They would have men only on the stage, so I was not doing the Poncho auction with him. Then we were alerted that there was a young man that was going to be in the audience, and he may make an offer for us to come to Australia, but he was going to see what it looked like.

[49:06] So I said to Dick, “If he makes the offer, tell him that we’re a team, and that we fly business class.” [Laughter] So, that started our relationship with Australia. We also developed a class called “125 Tips for a More Fun and Profitable Auction.” That became successful. We taught that all over the United States, and taught two classes a year in Seattle, and also taught it in Australia. It was a remarkable life. We met the most wonderful people, the most fabulous organizations. All the best auctions started in Seattle.

[49:46] We also were the ones that originated the paddle raise where people just give a fixed amount. It’s where you choose something that you have a compelling reason for raising money for. Here at the museum, it might be to enrich your funds that are going to go for the new site. People, as they age, they don’t need things anymore, but they still want to financially contribute. We were doing an auction for the Jewish Family Services in October many, many years ago. The roof had blown off one of their senior adult living homes in Wallingford.

[50:23] We got to the Westin to do the event. She said, “We had a terrible disaster last night. We lost half of our roof.” Dick said, “Can we take the money from the auction?” She said, “We’ve already

allocated that for other things.” He said, “Maybe if we just tell the story, people might be interested in helping us out.” So, she got up and started talking, and started crying, and said they had a blue tarp over the roof. They had to get \$11,000 by tomorrow to get a roof. So, we raised about \$13,000 in about two minutes. People just understood.

[51:00] So, we got home and we started talking about that. We would tell other organizations, and for a while, they were reluctant, and then it just made sense. You have only maybe 25 items you can sell, but you have 250 people in the audience, and people want to support you. If you have something that you really need money for, like within the next six months... Before this was a law, we used to talk about putting in handicapped railings at children’s summer camps, and things, so that people could be able to have access. Or it could be that you wanted to afford more scholarships. Or you needed to have some special equipment. In one case it was a piano for their music room. It’s now done at every single auction. People are so smart in Seattle. People have started taking certain levels, and saying, “We’ll double this level.” At preschools we’ve even gone down to \$25 dollars.

Dan: [52:07] I’ve been involved with some high school auctions, and I think it’s a good opportunity for people that don’t want more stuff.

Sharon: [52:15] Exactly.

Dan: [52:16] But are willing to raise their number. Start at \$5,000 and just work your way down.

Sharon: [52:23] Exactly.

Dan: [52:23] To people that can only maybe afford \$25 or \$50. Everybody has that opportunity to get involved without buying more stuff.

Sharon: [52:35] Right. You’re exactly right. We met the most marvelous people. The Seattle auctions are the most creative. We introduce a lot of opportunities. We introduce entertainment. We work with a man named Bob Flick, who is in the Brothers Four. He was my husband’s very best friend. He is just a genius when it comes to... So, we started introducing music as part of... He would put music to each item, and it would be very fun, and it would give people a chance to pause and make the evening more entertaining.

[53:13] Our oldest son Rick started joining us onstage as a spotter. It just became like a family affair. Sometimes we were doing as many as 70 a year. He was still working full time, and I was on the board at Children’s Hospital, so we had a very busy life. But it was certainly worthwhile. What a community we have. Everyone is so generous and so creative. It just makes it nothing but fun.

Saundra: [53:42] It’s so fascinating how you just sort of fell into this.

Sharon: [53:46] We did.

Saundra: [53:46] And then it became such a wonderful part of your life.

Sharon: [53:49] Right. And he was never trained as an auctioneer. He was a natural entertainer. He

was very, very funny. He would always have some jokes. If there would be a lull, he would say, “Two Irishmen walked out of a bar. It could happen.” [Laughter] He would just sort of throw these little things out so that people would have fun during the evening. It was just a joy. We would have other friends of ours help us onstage.

[54:19] We would become really involved in the organizations. We’d always insist on knowing what the mission was, and how the money was going to be dispersed. We would prepare very well. We always made sure we had the guest list in advance, so we knew who was in the room. We would help with seating the guests, because we would know just based on what their bidding style was, where they should be, and who needed to be in the front row, which was people that maybe didn’t have much money, but were personalities. They would be seen, but maybe wouldn’t be bidding. Then we would know who was expected to do what. So, we got incredibly involved in the planning of the event as well.

[55:01] So, I admired him. He was vice-president of marketing for Aviation Partners, so he had his day job which involved some travel, and then we were doing the auctions, and I would try to do the pre-meetings and then bring him in at the end. We always felt very prepared. We had some wonderful relationships with the different hotels, and made sure the staff really understood what was happening that evening.

[55:30] And pacing the meals— when we would do the paddle raise, we would insist on no service, no delivering of food, no picking up of food, no rattling of anything so that everyone could just concentrate on that particular item. We would talk with the maître d’ and make sure that when we would sequence the items, we would know that everyone had been served. We would make sure the dinner was there before we would do the paddle raise, because that was the most important part of the evening. So, pretty darn good.

Saundra: [56:00] Would you also tell us a little bit about your work with Children’s Hospital?

Sharon: [56:05] Yes. I’ve been involved with Children’s for more than 50 years. I was invited to join a guild by one of my roommates—the three lovelies that lived in Madison Park. I became very, very involved in it through the guild system. I was the chairman of the guild association board, and I was on the hospital board. I served on it for 25 years, and was there almost every day because we lived in the Windermere area, and I was very close to the hospital. So, when somebody had to have a tour, or something, I would always be available.

[56:47] One of the best tours I ever did was for Mr. Rogers when he came through. To see the way the children would respond to him—I can’t tell you how fabulous it was. When I had to say goodbye to him, I started crying. He was so gentle, and would take time with each child. I’m still sort of active there, but not like I was. It was a very meaningful job for me. I took it as a full-time job. So, I was on the hospital board. I was the vice-president of that. And I was on the foundation board, and the guild association board. I was the chairman.

[57:24] Truly, there are miracle things that are happening. I think the biggest thing I’ve seen since I started working and doing my part at Children’s was, when I first started there, 80% of the children who had leukemia would die. Now 85% are living. That has taken 40 years. It shows if you get the right research going, that miracles can happen. So, it’s a pleasure. How wonderful it is that we have it

in Seattle.

[57:55] Right now, I live right across the street from Ronald McDonald House. I was very instrumental in the parent housing and oversaw the building that was then called the Kids Bowling for Kids Village. The Bowling proprietors wanted to contribute to Children's, and they wanted to do something in a meaningful way. So, we built a house. The Bowling proprietors would donate money. Children who had non-cancerous situations would stay there, and right next door was Ronald McDonald House. Children with cancer would stay there. Now they have taken the "Bowling" house down and built a very large Ronald McDonald House, plus apartments. So, that is still thriving.

[58:50] I think it has been one of the most meaningful experiences I've ever had, in working with the children and their families, and the doctors. The outreach we have with the Odessa Brown Children's Clinic, which is in the Central area, and seeing the work that is done there. And all the research now— that's a new area within the last 12 years. Children's now has their own research building on 9th Avenue in downtown Seattle. It's a major player as far as children's health is concerned. Now they're looking at autism, and just provided an adult autism facility in Bothell because this is something that you live with through your life. You don't want to turn your back on someone who is 21 when they still need your help. So, it's remarkable.

Saundra: [59:44] Well, you've certainly contributed to your community in many ways.

Sharon: [59:48] It's my pleasure.

Saundra: [59:49] It's very appreciated. Dan, do you have any questions you'd like to ask?

Dan: [59:54] I don't think so.

Sharon: [59:56] I forgot something.

Dan: [59:59] Wait, there's more.

Sharon: [59:59] There's more. I forgot to tell you, on my Swedish side, I was the Lucia bride in Spokane. I had live candles on my head. [Laughter]

Saundra: [1:00:09] Oh, my goodness. Was that in your church?

Sharon: [1:00:12] In my church. Salem Lutheran, [in Spokane].

Saundra: [1:00:14] And how old were you?

Sharon: [1:00:15] I was 13. My parents were so proud. My grandparents came over for the ceremony. It was just really remarkable.

Saundra: [1:00:24] Oh, that's very special.

Sharon: [1:00:25] It was. That's one of my claims to fame. I hope people will always remember that

I was a Lucia bride. [Laughter] I wasn't a beauty queen, but I was the Lucia bride. [Laughter]

Saundra: [1:00:37] Well, you certainly have an interesting life.

Dan: [1:00:39] Yes.

Saundra: [1:00:40] And we really appreciated you sharing it with us. We've enjoyed hearing about it.

Sharon: [1:00:45] Well, from one *frikadeller* to the other... [Laughter] *God jul*.

Saundra: [1:00:51] [Laughter] Thank you so much, Sharon.

Sharon: [1:00:53] Thank you.

END OF RECORDING.

Transcription by Alison DeRiemer.