FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
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I: I'm here today interviewing Mrs. Laina Hogback. Mrs. Hogback, can you tell me how old you are, are you married, and how many children do you have?

H: I'm 56 years old and I am married and no children.

I: How old were you when you got married?

H: 20.

I: Are you Finnish yourself?

H: Oh yes, yes I am.

I: Are both of your parents Finnish?

H: Oh yes, 100% Finn

I: Who came over here first, your parents, or your grandparents?

H: Just my parents came first.

I: When did they come?

H: I don't remember...oh dear...

I: That's okay, that's okay...like when they were really young...say, in their twenties? Or were they...

H: Yeah, in their early...ummm...around twenty, around twenty years of age.

I: How about your husband, what nationality is he?

H: He's Finn.

I: Are his parents Finnish too?

H: Oh yes they are.

I: What part of Finland did your parents come from?

H: Well mine came from the uh...my mother came from Nuromo and my father came from Kulikka (?) and they are both near Seinäjoki. That's the biggest town near there.

I: Did they come over together?

H: Oh no. They met here.

I: How about your husband's family. Do you know where they are from?

H: I couldn't tell you.

I: Okay. Now did you grow up right here in the Copper Country or in Snake River or?

H: Mostly in Chassell since I was seven years old.

I: That's interesting. Ummm...did you go to school, How long did you go to school?

H: Well I graduated from high school

I: High school. Did you have any kind of further educ...ummm like any kind of special training? Or anything like that after that?
Well, I took up nursing, and that was one year, from September of 1959 to September of 1960.

Did you ever...were you a nurse after that?

I worked as a practical nurse for 16 years.

How about your parents...did they have any kind of education?

Not after their grade school in Finland.

What did they do...were they farmers, or...

My father was a blacksmith, all the time.

And your mother?

Housewife.

Did your parents encourage you to go on to nursing school? Or was that your idea?

No, I went after I had been married for quite a few years...I wanted to go on.

Were they pleased with that? I'm just wondering what their attitude towards education is.

Oh, uh, well I think so...they didn't have any objections. The reason was that my husband found out he had a heart condition, so he had to sort of semi retire, and I thought someday that I might have to go to work and that was the reason I went into practical nursing. And after I did take the training I went right to work because I thought well, I might as well make use of it. And I'm still working part-time. Same job.

When you were at home growing up, what language did you first learn?

Finn.

And then when did you, ...did you speak it at home all the time?

Yes.

At what point did you start, or did you ever speak English at home?

No, not to my parents, because they never learned to talk English. So we just talked Finn to them all the time and we still do.

Hmm...that's interesting because I have met more and more people that once they learn Finn first at home, and then they start speaking English at school, and come home and start speaking English.

Well, we tried it but they just didn't go along with us...they understood everything we said. We would come home and we'd try to talk English to my mother and she'd just answer us in Finn, so...that's the way it's been.

How many kids were in your family?

Five.

Hmm...you know this concept of language is very fascinating to me. Like last night I was at the Suomi Kerho and the women were sitting there saying, you know, I just don't understand it...these were like...some of these women had come over here themselves from Finland and some
had been born here, but they were real old, like in their seventies and they spoke beautiful Finnish but they said that among themselves they speak English. "Now why is that?" one of them asked me and I said, well I don't know. It's just interesting that some people, even these people who go to Finnish language services, sit down and chat together and they still speak English.

H: They do?

I: Yeah, I couldn't believe it.

H: Oh my.

I: Some of them don't.. I mean some of them don't speak much English at all. It was pretty interesting. How about, do you speak Finnish with your husband?

H: Well, it's mostly always English, but once and a while to express yourself, you know Finnish word is better or a Finnish expression and he understands it. He can talk Finn just as well as I do.

I: Did he grow up speaking Finnish or English?

H: English, because his mother talked good English and I think his father did too. I never knew him, but the mother talked very good English. But it certainly has come in handy, knowing Finn and keeping it up. I'm not the best, but even on my job there's been more than once I've had to translate for the doctor. He'll have a Finnish patient and he'll just say "I need you" and I'll have to translate.

I: Are there very many doctors around here who can speak Finnish?

H: No, no there aren't. But every once in a while you'll run into a patient that doesn't understand English. Not very often any more but once in awhile. I work a lot of night shift and sometimes it really comes in handy to be able to talk Finn. They can tell you their complaints better too. They'll speak out whereas some of the other girls don't understand Finnish at all. So it really has come in handy. I'm not a bit sorry that I kept it up and I'm not ashamed of it either. I'll speak Finn... I don't care where I am.

I: Good. I'm glad to hear that. I think that's probably why a lot of people haven't... because I'm sure there's some kind of... well this woman was saying last night that her kids didn't want to speak Finnish because the neighbors made fun of them all the time and that's when they began speaking English because their kids were too embarrassed. It's almost too bad. It's such a beautiful language too.

H: Well... I suppose my parents didn't go on to further schooling, didn't make any effort to learn English, they didn't think there was any need for it... now they realize that they should have learned English. They say more than once, "it's a handicap". They understand it, just ordinary speaking, if it's not too fast, but uh, like maybe to go to an English lecture or something, they wouldn't get anything out of it. But they realize now that they've gotten older that they should've learned English. It is too bad.

I: I imagine though, when they were here at first that there was never any need to learn it.

H: They didn't realize that there would ever be any need for it
I: Its amazing how fast that change is too, that English has become so common.

H: Ja, it really has changed.

I: Okay. ummm...I was going to ask, do you know how many kids were in your parents families? I'm interested to see how that...

H: Ja, Umm...I should know. My mother had, uh, she had at least three sisters and four brothers, at least that. My father had one brother and um, I think at least six sisters.

I: Did any of their brothers and sisters come over to the states too?

H: Ja, My father had one brother in Minnesota and my mother had one brother here.

I: Do you know what the primary was for your parents to come over here? Economics, adventure, or?

H: I really don't know. I s'pose they were looking for something better and then America was such a promising country and there were many others coming over, so they were young, I s'pose they wanted to see for themselves.

I: Do you think they came over here with the idea of staying?

H: I really don't know.

I: Did they ever talk about going back?...when you were growing

H: Oh...they never talked about it, I think they realized things were much more convenient, here. My mother has made trips back there. She's made three trips back there within the last twenty years.

I: That must be something to go back after not being over there so long.

H: It is, it's really nice.

I: Well, I don't know if you know this...I've been reading up on the history...about 380,000 people came over here and about 80,000 of them went back. So quite a few people do. It's a pretty large number. And usually they go back within the first five years.

H: I s'pose, it was probably lonesomeness

I: Umm...are you a member of any church?

H: No, I'm not a member. Not a paid member.

I: Did you grow up in any church at all?

H: I started out in the Evangelical Lutheran. That's the church I started with. I went to Sunday School...and summer schools.

I: Do you think that the church played a large roll in the community? Or do you think that roll has changed at all? Let me explain...Dr. Puotinen has done quite a bit of research in this area. Apparently the church did play a real big part particularly around the turn of the century in the community, especially when there was a need for social activity and things like that. I was wondering what you
think of that

H: Yeah, I imagine it did. I really don't know.

I: All right. Let's see... now, I would imagine... I may be wrong... but I would gather that if you grew up in a family that spoke Finnish all the time, then... were there a lot of customs that were carried out that were Finnish? Like... umm... well like Christmas, particular Christmas customs... did you eat special Finnish foods?

H: Well not much I don't think, because when I was growing up it was during the depression years and we had very little, of EVERYTHING.

I: How about... did you celebrate Juhannus Päivä? (St. John's Day or Midsummer Day).

H: Well, they, uh, it was... well I wouldn't say they really celebrated it, but we were aware of it.

I: How about... I was trying to think of some habits... I was curious if you have even heard of this: in Finland they... everyone takes off their shoes when they enter the house. Have you ever heard of people doing that?

H: No. Do they still do that?

I: Yes, they still do it. Always.

I was over there four years ago and I was there at Christmas time last year and everyone in the cities and in the country takes off their shoes when they enter the house. There is always a little place right by the door.

H: Well, that's really a good thing. (Laughter)

I: I thought it was kind of strange when I first got there, but later I realized that it makes so much sense. In the winter time when there's so much snow, you don't track it all in. Usually if you're in your own home there might be wooden clogs you'd put on, right by the door so you don't tracking all the dirt in. And you know the women have such beautiful rugs... their hand made rag rugs and stuff and then like, one family I live in had beautiful floors... just beautifully waxed, so she never let us come in with our shoes on.

H: Now I didn't know that. Isn't that odd. My sister and her husband made a trip there, well, it's about four or five years ago and she never mentioned it. Are you sure they still do it? (Laughter)

I: Yeah, I was there at Christmas. Now, I was in Kuopio, and it could be that in different parts of the country they don't do it. I've been in Helsinki and I've been in Turku and they do it there too. It's an interesting custom. I've been around Europe and I've never seen it done anywhere else.

H: You just walk in stocking footed then? Unless you have your own little slippers with you then you could put them on.

I: Yeah, you always have clean socks on.
H: Make sure you don't have holes in them. Well, my parents,...
    we never... no they never went along with that.

I: I've only heard of one other person who did it... a neighbor of
    Mrs. Tuomi's... they were the only people she'd ever heard of doing
    it.
    But... umm... I'm just wondering how much did your parents ever
    encourage you to remember your Finnish background? To be proud of
    that ethnic background, of that culture, like did you read, umm...
    **Kalevala** and you know Finnish... how much did they encourage...

H: No, I don't believe they encouraged it... no I don't think so

I: Are you proud of having Finnish background? Not to the point of
    feeling like maybe you're better than anyone else, but...

H: Well, I don't really think anything of it. That's the way I was
    born and that's all. I just lived with it and then, there are so
    many others, you know like Chassell is, about 50% Finn, we never
    felt like a minority group.

I: But how about really proud of it?

H: Oh no, I never felt that way. No. You just go along with it,
    that's all. Think nothing of it.

I: Have you ever been to Finland?

H: No, I haven't.

I: Do you ever think about going?

H: Yes, I do. I have wanted to go many times. I used to write to an
    aunt of mine in uh... that big city on the coast of Sweden... Vaasa.
    I used to write to her and she would encourage me to come over.
    So I thought I'd like to go. I felt like I knew her, just by writing
    to her, but I didn't want to go alone, and then suddenly she died,
    she had a stroke. And she just died. And then I lost interest right
    there. I didn't want to go. I just feel bad that she died and I
    wouldn't see her. And now again I feel like I'd like to go, we had
    two cousins of ours visit two years ago, so now I would know
    somebody, two cousins and their wives. Again, it's the same thing--
    I don't want to go alone. My husband says he will not go. If I
    coerced him enough, maybe he would.

I: Does he not want to fly?

H: He just doesn't want to go. How did you like it?

I: Oh, I really liked it

H: Everybody does. Everybody I talk to They say they want to go back.
    (interlude here... interviewer talks about how she like Finland,
    where to visit, etc.)

I: Okay. Now I'm going to get to the craft section. What crafts... now
    you do weaving... what else do you do?

H: I knit, I embroider, I crochet.
Hogback

I: Anything else?

H: No that's about it

I: Did umm... let's see... are there any crafts which you'd like to know but don't. If there are, why would you like to know them?

H: No, not especially. I feel I have enough. And sewing. That's another thing I have a lot of.

I: Did your mother do any of those?

H: Yes, my mother used to weave... Strictly carpets.

I: Did she make the ryijy rugs or the mag rugs?

H: Just the rag rugs. Always rag rugs.

I: Did you learn how to weave from her?

H: No, I didn't. But I knew what a loom was and how it worked. I could see how warp was put on and how the weaving was done, but I really never touched the looms. That was her work.

I: When did you start weaving?

H: Uhh... I started with Mrs. Buhel... I'd say 14 years ago, approximately.

I: Would you say your mother did the weaving because she needed to, or because she liked it, or what were her reasons?

H: Oh, both. I think it was because she earned a few extra dollars, and because she liked it. You have to like it, to do it. And I suppose to recycle the extra rags.

I: Sure. I think it's a great thing to do.

H: It is!

I: Well, what kind of weaving do you do?

H: I'm not good at carpets. I tried making some and they don't come good at all. I just do other weaving... place mats, bags... oh I've fooled around with a few little wall hangings. Pillows.

I: What kind of loom do you have?

H: Four harness. 36".

I: And it's on the floor or table?

H: Oh, it's a floor loom.

I: Would you say you do your weaving for...


I: Do you ever, or have you ever looked at a book with Finnish textiles and been influenced at all by their styles, or would you say that it's completely your own?

H: No, we looked at books. Not only Finnish books, but all types of weaving books.
Hogback

I: I'm curious to see how much Finnish influence there is in your weaving.

H: Well, it isn't influenced by only their weaving. I have books on weaving from this country...artists, you know, from this country. But some of it they do way back in Finland too. Some of it may, some of the patterns...like for instance we had to practice on this double weave, that's this type (points to wall hanging)...now that hanging does come from Finland. My mother brought that.

I: Now, this is what you call a "täkänä"?

H: Yes, that's a täkänä...reversible, you know, and we did have to practice that...I did learn the technique. It's called "FinnWeave". And I like it. I would like to come more.

I: Do you know that the: ryijy rugs come from Finland...I mean they originated in Scandinavia?

H: Yes, they do.

I: The word comes from the Swedish word "rya" which means to cover. They were used as bed covers and covers for the sleigh. I thought that was interesting because there are probably not too many crafts which originated in Scandinavia.

H: Well, that technique we had to learn too. Just learn to do it. It would be fun.

I: Okay, let's see what else...how about your knitting and crocheting. Do you...how much is that influenced by Finnish crafts.

H: Oh, I don't think it's influenced by that at all. It's just something I learned to do years ago, and it's just now and then I pick it up.

I: So you do that just for fun. Now, do you have any home remedies that you picked up from your mother?

H: No, no. I don't believe in that.

I: You know the Finns still have some...

H: Oh yes, they do!

I: I tell you, I picked up a few funny ones...

H: They do, they do, I know I umm ....many years ago I had, just before I was married, I was, oh maybe, oh, just before I was married, I had this dumb little growth here (points to neck). I can't remember which side it was on. Here, I guess. A little cyst popped out, and they wanted me, my parents wanted me to put a little home remedy on there, something like pitch, from a tree or something like that to draw that out. Of course, I refused, I wouldn't. I wouldn't fool around with that. This was many years ago now, I went to the doctor and had him lance it. No...

I: Were there any other things that you remember when you were growing up that you remember your mother using.

H: Well, it was just something, a poultice type of thing, that's what they called it.
I: That's what this, umm, Mrs. Jalkenen had, was some kind of a poultice.

H: They believed it would draw out infection, I s'pose. Any thing like that was festering, you know. I s'pose a lot of time it did help.

I: Have you ever heard of taking coal and rubbing it on your teeth to get the grey off?

H: No...

I: I've heard of that being used in Finland.

H: They do?

I: Yeah. But I'm just ... are there any kinds of ... whenever you had a cold or upset stomach or ... what did your mother give you for that?

H: It was just a hot drink ... for the chills, you know, a hot drink ... and if it happened that she had any brandy or whisky in the house you know, and then a little hot water, a little sugar.

I: How about for upset stomach ... what did she give you for that?

H: I don't remember, I don't remember what she would give.

I: When you were growing up, did you go to a doctor very often?

H: No, no I don't think I ever think I went to a doctor.

I: So your mom would just take care of you and do what she could?

H: Well, I wasn't very sick very often, I guess. I was just lucky.

I: How about the other kids in your family?

H: Well, yes I had a sister who had pneumonia, a very, very bad case and she was, well a doctor came to the house, he took care of her. My mother says to this day that the doctor did cure her, if it hadn't been for him she wouldn't have lived.

I: That's probably true.

H: Well, evidently she had such a high fever. When she was, oh, maybe ten years old. And then that same sister had to have her tonsils taken out a few years after. So she saw the doctor more than I ever did.

I: How about going to the dentist?

H: No, never did. But like I say, it was depression years and there was no money for doctors and dentists.

I: I'm sure there weren't many doctors up here either.

H: There was a doctor right in Chassell, Dr. Wilson. He was the local doctor, so he was never too far away.
I: How about cooking? Do you... well, let me start first, did your mother make a lot of Finnish foods?

H: Oh, not especially, very simple.

I: Did she cook nisua?

H: Well, yes, nisua she made.

I: How about puuro, did she cook that?

H: Oh that we had.

I: Did you have a lot of soups.

H: Stews. What do they call it in Finland, I think they call it keitoa. Oh yes.

I: What else. I wish I would have brought my cook books. I was wondering what you ate around Christmas time, but I can't remember any of the names of them.

H: Oh, we didn't have anything too different at Christmas either.

I: Do you do much Finnish cooking now? Do you make nisua?

H: No, no I don't. I don't know how.

I: It's so good.

H: I know it is, but I don't make it.

I: Do you like to cook?

H: I'm not too crazy about cooking, but I like to bake.

I: Do you bake these prune tarts or anything like that?

H: No, I don't bake much very often. Mostly just cookies and bars.

I: Okay. How about... your mother... did she ever go out and gather mushrooms?

H: No, never.

I: You know, I read somewhere, the people when they came here the people didn't pick mushrooms anymore, and in Finland, in the fall, they pick and eat mushrooms galore! We used to eat mushrooms everyday. They had shopping bags—all the bags there were plastic—and you would get a shopping bag with pictures with all the mushrooms on it and it would tell you which ones to eat. And then you go out and pick your mushrooms like that.

H: Well, what do they call them in Finn? What's the Finnish word for it?

I: Umm... sieni or siimi or... I think it's sieni. Is that right?

H: I didn't know they were familiar with them. (Goes to look it up)

I: Oh yes. We used to have fantastic mushrooms.

H: Mushroom... sieni, yup.
I: I would think that they must grow wild around here.

H: Yes, they do. We don't, I'm not familiar with them at all.

I: I'm not either, but I'd like to learn. It may be too, now I don't know, that in Finland there aren't as many poisonous mushrooms. I don't know. Maybe that's why people don't do it here. Some mushrooms can kill you just like that.

H: Easier to buy them in a can, I guess

I: Yes, but it's cheaper to go pick 'em

How about berries? Did you ever go pick them?

H: Oh yes, we always picked berries... wild strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, black raspberries.

I: Did your mother make puuro with the berries?

H: Yes she did.

I: Do you ever make the berry puuro?

H: Not very often. We eat our berries fresh.

I: So do I. They are so good up here too. Do you have anything else... well do you have anything in particular... did your father or mother have any old sayings they always... that you remembered growing up on?

H: Oh they must have. I can't think of anything. If I'd known you were going to ask this I would've been thinking about 'em all night. (Laughter)

I: Oh dear.

H: They must have. I just can't think of any. They have their own expressions.

I: Are they still living?

H: Yes, they are, but they've been divorced for many years now and my mother has remarried.

I: Does she still weave?

H: No, not any more, she has an allergy. She can't tolerate the dust.

I: Does she live in this area?

H: Yeah, she lives right where you live.

I: I should talk to her.

H: She lives, well you know where Bertha Rossberg lives, she lives two doors down. (Directions to her house)
I: What's her last name now?

H: Kuitonen.

At this point the tape ended and Mrs. Hogback said not to bother with the other side. She really didn't have anything more she wanted to say.

She showed me her loom and the weavings she had around... some very nice things. It was quite obvious that weaving is probably her favorite past-time. She is presently waiting for another loom to be delivered, a smaller one than the one she now owns.

We sat down and had some coffee and "chatted". She told me in the end that she hoped she had helped me, but she had told me when I called that she had led "a very normal American life."
We were just poor. "The only distinct memory I have about growing up was one of poverty" she said. "But then, in those days—the depression—everyone was struggling."