FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
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INTERVIEW BETWEEN:

INTERVIEWER: Art Puotinen

INTERVIEWEE: Helen Kruuth Leiviska

DATE: June 26, 1973

A: We're here with Mrs. Helen Kruuth Leiviska, and this is June the 26th, 1973. Just this past weekend Mrs. Leiviska was in Hibbing for the festivities for the Tyomies paper. Before we talk about the paper, Helen, I'd like to get a little bit of background on your own family. Did your mother and father come to this country from Finland?

H: Yes, they came from Gouthmo Gymo. I think in 1899.

A: Do you recall why they left the region?

Well---I don't know because my father came from sort of a middle class farm and there were only two sons and both of them came to this country, in which case the farm was left to some of the women folks. But, he came here and he became a steel-worker and he worked in Menessa, Pennsylvania in the steel mills. And, when I was about four and a half years old some Shoom Railroad Company land agent sold him some land up here in Plumber, Minnesota. And I can just recall when he went there, there was nothing but sort of a shack built--just one outside walls and the land was totally swamp, and in a few places it was a little drier. It had been an area that the Indians had occupied. About the first memory I have of the place is that the Indians had a camp about a half a mile from where we lived, and when they left they had a pow-wow there---and I was scared stiff. They all moved to the Red Neck Reservation because this was the Red Neck country and it had been part of the reservation. There was---I don't know---about forty Finnish families, some of them had come from Ironwood and some had come from Ripica, the New York mills area, and then a group from Pennsylvania---from the steel towns. I don't think very many of them lived here---in the 1960's I met a few of the families---the rest had moved away. And, my mother died during the first World War, and we left the town then and we came back here to live. We settled first in Menessa for a while and then after the 1919 steel strike, then my father was and we moved to Boston. And that is where I stayed until I guess I was about 16 years old, and that is the time I got acquainted with the working class movement,---the Finnish working class movement. Until that my parents had read the Bicoleiti and the and my mother was very religious.
A: What background was she?
H: She was also from Gouthmo
A: I mean, what—you said that she was very religious.
H: She was Lutheran.
A: A Synic Lutheran?
H: Yes, a Synic Lutheran. And, I got into the working class movement in a strange way, I was also very religious and I thought that I was going to become a missionary. When I went to hear one of these so called Evangelists, or what would you call them, you know the type of Billy Sunday. And, I went to one of these meetings and this man was preaching and he says that we shouldn't worry about all this big turmoil that was going on at that time, there was a way with strikes in the steel. And earlier we were going to go and see my aunt in the Pole area, but there was a marshal low and they wouldn't even allow it. That was in the early 20s. So, it struck me so strange—why shouldn't we better our conditions here also? And, I knew of the Finnish halls and I decided to go there and they just happened to have a series of course sisters—-I thought that they were talking more sense than the other Evangel.

A: Now the Evangelist type—was he a Finnish—he was an English, a revivalist—a ______ type of person.
H: Yes. Because there was no official church up there in Plumber. The minister used to come from Deluth up there, maybe in the summer time once every two weeks; and in the winter time, not so often—-and they used to have the meetings. So, the affiliation with the church wasn't as close—-it was only what my mother had taught us.
A: Well—-did she have the same type of pity as this preacher type—or did she——?
H: No, she was a type—organized ______ you know
A: Do you recall what the course was like—or what kind of turned you on?
H: Well—-they were explaining about the conditions of the working people, and the need to organize them—-and I thought that that made sense, because after all—we had been very poor in Minnesota. We only got shoes on our feet when we went to school, and until that, we never bought shoes.
A: You went around barefoot all the time?
H: All the time—-winter and summer until we went to school. And
then after my mother found out that we had been blacklisted
and we moved to Baltimore, and he worked a few months and then
came the 1921 Depression. I think it was 1921. He was out
of work for nine months----and there was ___ we hardly ate in
those days. So, there were times when we, my brother, was
very ill----and they neighbors gave him food. Most of the time
we just had bread and coffee, or else bread and water. So,
I knew what poverty was----so, it made sense to me.

A: This was through which hall---which organization---this was not
the Finnish Socialist Federation, was it?

H: Yes, this was the Finnish Socialist Federation--although I think
by that time the split had happened and they were the leftwing
of the group. It was the Baltimore Hall in Baltimore.

A: During the course of your stay there did you have some of the
labor organizers come through giving speeches?

H: They used to have----after that I had heard Bouan, mostly
remember Bouan, he was a very colorful man.

A: Could you describe a little bit about him----what sort of a man
he was , what did he emphasize?

H: Well----it is quite hard to describe him. He was not so terribl)
tall, a very reddish complexion, a little bit on the chubby
side, and he was a very wry speaker, he had fire. Now when I
think of it, I think he had more fire than substance. But, he
was a real educator type of a person, as the Finns call
It made enough sense to me to become interested. Then of course
there was another experience that I had. I went to apply for
a job at the ______Railroad Company, and my name of course
was Finnish. Kakonen, and they asked me what nationality I was,
and my background. And I said that I was Finnish, and they
asked my if I was a Red. I didn't know red from white or blue;
and I asked Red----why do you ask Red, I'm a priest Well, she
said that that was why she asked because he said that 75% of the
Finnish literature in the United States is socialism.

A: That's the employer?

H: That's what the employer said. And evidently they had some sort
of policy not to hire Finns. And that was the first time that
I had heard of this----and at that time I had no inkling of
things being red or----. This was in Baltimore. But, he was
a personnel manager.

A: Well----that's very interesting. You faced some on the job dis-

H: Well, yes. I didn't get the job----I don't know if it was be-
cause I was Finnish or not--It didn't make any difference, I
got a job then with the General Electric which was much better paying, anyway. But, I was surprised at the question, because it had never come up.

A: Were there any other kinds of educational experiences that you had in your youth, besides you mentioned the hall and the reading course and Bauan?

Well---after I came to New York then I attended three different courses. One in New York, one in Worster, and then one that was up in a camp that I had been at. They used to have month courses in which they had lecture courses were they took up Marx's literature and so forth.

A: Were these the original writings on Marx, or were they---?

H: Some were, but they were mostly the lecture type, we didn't have to very much. But, there usually was---some of the courses had four lectures and some had two. And, two of the courses were in Finnish and one was in English only.

A: After this early educational experience---what did, what kinds of specific organizing activities or working class projects did you become involved in?

H: Well---when I came to New York we organized a young workers' league around the hall, and I was the secretary of that for many years. And, one of the big projects I had was to collect money for the---they were organizing The Daily World then---which I was a worker for. And I remember I raised quite a bit of money, I suppose because I was so young. I raised quite a bit of money for different things on the paper. And, then I participated in trying to organize the worker's school which was in English. That was before New York city. Then I was during the Strike, I was in the day striker's children camp. Most of the time I worked in the American field, it's funny---even though I got my star from the Finns. I had sort of been one foot in the Finns, and one foot in the American movement.

A: Would you say that there has been a strong cross-over---or the Finns that have been involved in the working class movement have tried to be involved in the American movement, as a whole---most of them?

H: Most of the American born. Because the Finnish movement made a big emphasis on being part of the American movement. Those of us who could speak English---we were the. We had one foot in the Finns and one foot in the American movement. So, later on we participated in the, during the unemployment movement, we participated.

A: What year would that be?

H: Oh, that was in the early 30s. And then when the union movement
I worked in the early organizing. So, a lot of us were. Were had sort of our background among the Finns, but we were active among the American movement.

A: How receptive were other nationalities, or leaders in the American movement towards Finns such as yourself—your participation?

H: Ah, I didn't feel that there was any strangeness. I think they accepted us.

A: There was a feeling of solidarity?

H: Yes. One of the things was that the Finnish movement was so solidly organized—the Finns are very organization conscience, more so than anybody else—and I think in that respect the Finns had always been able to make a contribution. The Finns go by the rules, their meetings are very organized, they go by the book rules. And if the meeting is at eight o'clock—the meeting is at eight o'clock. Their committee work was really very developed, which is very important. The Americans have much less of that, than maybe many other groups have.

A: Can you offer any reason or any explanation for this?

H: I don't know. I really don't know, because when I had to leave Finland even. You know when they start their march—they will have a time clock even, and they will look at that and that is when they start. When they start their meeting, it is exactly on the dot. What is about—even today, what it is about the Finns that they have so well organized. You take the French, or, maybe the Germans are as well, I don't know—but, the Americans, they will say ten o'clock and it will be close to eleven when it. But, I know that among the Finns of this country it was exactly the same—the punctuality was.

A: Did this carry over also—for example, in discipline in the movement?

H: Yes. Most of the activity, the Finnish activity, was done through committees. They would have sports committees, drama committees, and so forth. Paper to solicit adds, a committee to solicit subs, a committee to cook the coffee, and they worked through these committees and they always made their report to the organization. And, I think through that kind of activity—-they learned to be very cooperative, or to work jointly, and that of course manifested itself in the cooperative movement.

A: The cooperative movement has been very strong here in the midwest, was it strong also in the east?

Not as strong as here, because of the fact that I don't think there was quite the need that we have here. These were small farmers and they really did need the cooperative economically,
more so than the industrialists. They have had cooperatives in Massachusetts, and they had one in Brooklyn, and they developed a cooperative housing on a large scale, which also answered a need for housing.

A: Could you go into that a little bit more, explain what you mean by cooperative housing?

H: Yes, well you see what they did was that they would buy----so many people would join together and they would build an apartment. It wasn't exactly the true cooperative in a sense according to Rochdale's principles. But, these people would jointly own the house and they would pay the mortgage monthly----the rent consisted of mortgage payments, the taxes and so forth. And, many of these houses are still in existence----it was a long time ago that the mortgages had been paid, and the rents are very reasonable. For instance, my sister-in-law has a five room apartment and she only pays 52 dollars a month. This is high now, because they are putting in some improvements----but for years it was only 41 dollars a month. In New York city we rent for 200 dollars a month. And they have kept the houses in very excellent shape, the constantly repair, and they never have pay managers, they usually have a chairman of the board that acts as a manager. And that is an elected job. Some of the houses have had janitors, a family that takes care of the house for a small payment. But, now when it is hard to get janitorial help they do it by turns. So, to that extent in Brooklyn they had cooperatives. Then they also had a cooperative store and bakery, but that existed for quite a few years until there was some kind of a split. Where as now in Benner, they had a large cooperative. But, that was economically very necessary. They were able to get the feed----they were mostly poultry men----and they were able to get their feed much cheaper through the cooperative. And they also marketed a lot of their eggs. So, I guess any place the Finns are if there is a need for a cooperative, they will establish it.

A: When did you first become interested in or become involved in writing for working class papers?

H: Well—that has been, every time I have had to do it it has been compulsory——somebody else wanted a vacation or they didn't have an editor. And that's how I felt maybe you could do it—and that's how I became, I'm not an editor, I'm not a writer either.

A: But, when did you first start?

H: When did I first start? I guess it was in the 30s, the 40s----I think it was during the World War, on the ________ when they needed someone to replace someone who wanted a vacation. And then when I was in '48 I wrote a lot of stories about Finland, about the Finnish conditions, which I thought, not because I wrote them, were fairly good for the point of view that our Finns had been so isolated from Finland and its problems and what had happened.
there. And I tried to give the unpartial attitude as much as I could—to show really what the life was there, what things had advanced and what things were negative. And they were quite popular and I became an expert on Finns. I was there seven months. Before that I went back to Finland, right after the war—although we had been critical of the Finnish government's participation in the war. When the war was over we organized a relief committee, but Finland wouldn't accept us. So, we formed our own and in the end we worked with the same people, we worked with The American Friendly Service Committee—the same law from the same office. And then they organized a trip for all of us to go to Finland, because they would distribute the relief in the area.

A: Do I understand you correctly to say that even though there was the difference of opinion between the help Finland group and your group that eventually in the end you came together?

H: Well—no, not exactly. You see, the American Friendly Service Committee administered the relief and what we gathered went to the same warehouse and they distributed. And then we had, I had my office, and Mr. Baualeigha, who by the way is a very excellent gentleman, we were working in the same office, and we got along beautifully. But, some of those ladies, they sure didn't get along with me—I tried to be cooperative as possible but they were quite hostile. But, Lester Baualeigha, with him anyone could get along. And we also attended the same meetings as the American Friendly Service Committee, and so forth. Of course, in all truthfulness, they helped Finland a lot more in relief—they had a lot more relief.

A: Did that effort, which was a joint effort, did that have any bearing on sort of removing the ill will divisions which existed between the more conservative Finns and the more radical Finns—did that have any effect in bringing them together?

No, I don't think so. The thing that has brought some sort of understanding was the joint effort for the Tri-Centennial. In '38 and '39. In '38. At that time they had joint courses, and all kinds of activities. But, then the Finnish War came and that of course destroyed all the unity that had been. And then during the war—well, after the war was over those that had deported to the Finnish cause were terribly bitter, and it has taken them until now, I think, to—well, the Finnish government themself says that it wasn't such a good idea. To think that a little country like that could follow a Protestant policy.

A: So, the Finnish-American community has really felt and experienced, well—international politics has had a great effect on the Finnish-American community?

H: It has been tremendous. Of course, we were the object of most of that hostility at the time, but sometimes it was really ri-
diculous. I remember when I was going to one small community, Connya. I always retained good relations with my family, even though they were on the other side, because they were old people and what was the use of arguing about things that you weren't going to come to an agreement on. So, they were very cooperative with me, and every time that I went there—I used to go around as a speaker for the Finnish organizations. So, I went there and we had a meeting—I don't even recall what the issue was, but we had a meeting with our people. They brought me to the meeting, and they had gone to some of their own meetings. When we got home, my mother said—my aunt said to me, "You know, they decided that they were going to kick out all the Communists from this community." And then I said, "How ridiculous—then I'm going to leave tomorrow morning on the early train." All those people do is read the press—they have never been actually associated with the Communist Party. They are just supporters of the dead, which has never been an ordinance of the Communist Party. So then I said, "Well, are you going to take me to the bus tomorrow morning?"

A: Well—the group she was referring to, was it a church related group, or—?

H: Yes, she was active with the church.

A: So it was a church meeting that decided that?

H: Well—I don't know if it was exactly the church meeting, or if it was one of these relief committee meetings, or something. It went into such ridiculous—.

A: Was the pressure subtle, or were there ever threats of physical abuse?

H: I don't think that it was ever physical abuse, but they did call up people if they were on jobs. A lot of people were called in and said, "Somebody called you a this, and this, and this." But, most of the time the employers—there was a need for skilled workers at that time, and many of these Finns were skilled workers—machines and tool and dye makers—and the employers were damn glad to have a tool and dye maker. So, it didn't amount to anything, that was a general thing. Then sometimes—like I spoke last week at Superior University—and this woman who had a totally foreign name, I didn't know that she was Finnish, but she said that she was Finnish, and one of her grandmothers read our paper, and the other one was really a church people. And she said, that some of the people were against them because of the other matter. And when they would call on the telephone somebody would say, "You so and so Communist—get off the line. But, I still would say in all truthfulness that it was a small minority.

A: Was there ever a crossing of lines where someone who is very active in the church was active in the party—or vice-versa?
H: Among the Finns, I wouldn't say.

A: Their lines were pretty sharp?

H: Their lines were pretty sharp. I do find that among the other people, progressives that work in churches. But, among the Finns, historically, we really didn't know what was going on with them anymore than they knew what was going on with us.

A: Were there any Finnish organizations that were sort of half-way meeting grounds? Like either the Temperance Society or the Kaleva?

H: I think years ago that the Temperance Society was, but even that. You see what happened with a lot of these Temperance Societies was the majority would be the so called socialists and then they would vote the whole Temperance Society into the Socialist Party. And then the Finns were always builders of halls, and when the majority was at the hall, they would vote the hall in over to the Socialist Party. And, I don't think that that would create very good feelings. Like this Workers University was like a hall—-that used to be the policy.

A: Did you ever attend any of the meeting at the Workers People's College, or——?

H: No, I never was there. I have met a lot of people who have——-

End of side #1 of tape

side #2 of tape

A: Let's pick up the topic in the 1930s—that event when a lot of the Finns from Canada and the United States went to east——Do you have some recollections about that experience?

H: Well——I have recollections because I was there, and secondly I have since read some of the figures. I don't know how accurate these figures are, but I just read lately that about twelve thousand people went.

A: Two hundred and twenty thousand?

H: Twelve thousand. Now, that is quite a lot of people when you consider what a small community that the Finns are. Now, it wasn't the first effort in the United States where the Finns went to the Soviet Union. Already in 1922, there was a small group that went from the west coast——-fishermen that went to Karabia to organize fishing industries. But, I think that they went on the Basis of contract——-they stayed a few years and then they came back. Then, a lot of the Finns went with the group in 1921 or '22, when the Civil War was still raging and they went to Kemaroba,
in Siberia, to get some mills—mines and steel mills working. And there was a community of a hundred or so Finns in that group too. Later there was one group in the Weed Area that became part of the big state farm, Gigonke; or Giant. And that was organized by farmers, Finns, from Washington and so forth—the original group was called ________. And then when I went to the Soviet Union in 1929, there was a group of Finns near Leningrad called _______. They were also Finnish-Americans. But these were small isolated groups—and they had gone there with the purpose of organizing modern farming, or fishing, or so forth, and many of them came back later; after they had extended their stay. And the Soviet Union recruited many skilled workers. For instance, the former head of the Automobile Workers—Luther, he and his brother had been in the Soviet Union working as contract workers, to organize one of the tractor factories. And I think that the original purpose of recruiting people to Karalia was such a scheme. To get skilled lumbermen—lumber workers, to organize the lumber industry in the Soviet Union. But something went wrong, something happened, was it wrong in Soviet Karalia or here—but it became a mass exodus. One of the reasons was that there was a depression here, and over there there were jobs. And I don't understand how these people who had lived in the back wilderness of Finland—thought that they really had something in Karalia, which was really more backward than the backward Finnish areas. What my mother had told me about Gouthmo—I wasn't surprised that Karalia was exactly the same. It didn't surprise me, but it seemed to surprise the people who had lived here for ten years. And because there were so many of them that went over there, and they tried to give them little better conditions than the Karalians had or than the Finnish people had. They had their own stores and so forth. They tried to provide for them better because they had come on a so-called contract. It created a lot of animosity—among the Karalians, among the Finns against the Americans. And in all truthfulness, they weren't such experts either, because I went to one lumber camp and attended some of their meetings. Some of the guys had come from the west coast where they have tremendous timbers, some had come from around here, some had come from Canada, and they didn't seem to agree which was the best method of lumbering there in the Karalia conditions. So, even though they made a contribution to the economics of Karalia, I think that it also cost an awful lot of our movement here, because a lot of the most active people and organizers went. And no matter how we tried to stop them, they had committees here in every locality, they tried to stop them, so they would get angry if they voted against them going. I became like—it reminded me of the Jews rushing into Israel. It became the promised land that you had to get. That you had to prove something to get there. I know my brother, I was surprised, I went there to school and I had all the inten-sions of coming back and I came, but my brother, he was only 16 years old and he got it into his bonnet that he was going to go—and he went there too. Well—he stayed there two years, and he thought that I would object to his coming back—so he never told
me when he came back to the United States. And one of the things that I noticed is that the American born young people—they were much more satisfied than the Finns. I guess it is the fact that they were young, and it was a new experience for them. And many of them came back, but I haven't met one yet that was bitter among those. Some of these older people, who thought they—I don't know what they were looking for—but, they had been bitter.

A: What things were they bitter over—the living conditions—?

H: The living conditions. You see—I don't know—it is difficult to describe Karalia. The whole city was—I think there were a couple of buildings that were made out of cement, all the rest were wooden buildings. The streets were mud. And, when they had such a big exodus of foreigners there—they built just barracks—and the families had to live in these barracks. They had to cook together, either eat in the joint restaurant, or then cook in the same kitchen. And, they same thing in these lumber camps, they built barracks—but, they had to live in one room. They were very, very primitive conditions and if the lumber camps were far away like the one I went to—70 kilometers—from the closest road. You had to go along—I don't know how they ever got there, I know I had an awful time—and you couldn't use a wagon to go there, in the winter time you used a sleigh. And when they found themselves in this type of conditions—of course they were dissatisfied. And, like at this lumber camp—the farming in Karalia was so backward you couldn't supply the livestock with hay. They had to make the hay for the animals from the swamp, in a very primitive way. So, they were used to much more modern conditions, and they were dissatisfied.

A: You mean, the men thought that they were leaving hard times, and for some they were even harder?

H: Yes, I mean economically I think they would have been better off on relief here. But, it is not the fault of the Soviet Union—the Soviet people were faced with much more difficult conditions because of that time. They wanted to start industrializing the country, and nobody would give them any credit. They had to buy the stuff from the world market—and in return they had to deliver things that they could sell. And one of the things that they could sell was food. So, lots of the food products were going out to pay for the machinery, and that was the only way that they could industrialize their country. So, it was hard times. But, the thing that they should be bitter about is that nobody told them that it was going to be easy—but, they imagined that it was going to be easy. Then I think, when they came back, instead of accepting these people as coming back, they sort of made that they were poor socialists. Well—actually there was so many of them—they weren't being utilized to the limit anyway. It was just as well for them to
come back to this country. But, the thing I don't even understand now, even so many years later, is that it is still a problem with so many people.

A: Was there any truth to that rumor that some of the Finns were being persecuted, or what is the right term—by the Soviets?

H: Well—I can imagine, as I told you,—that there was a lot of animosity between the American-Finns, Finnish-Finns, and the Karalians, because if you are going to give one side a higher living standard—it is going to create animosity among people who don't understand it. After all the Karalians weren't educated Socialist or Communist—they were just plain, ordinary working people. Then, also the Finns thought that because they had been in this and so many of them were skilled—they sort of looked down on the Karalians, that they didn't know how to do things. In some ways it was true, but a lot of it was not true—they just didn't get together. And so, their time came. And then many of the Finn leaders there were making their whole republic Finnish, rather than Karalian. You see, the whole leadership was Finnish—from Finland. So, there was a lot of animosity among the Karalians, and then when they got into the leading positions—I think they did things also with lack of understanding—things that they shouldn't have done. I had heard, for instance, that many of the people were sent to Siberia and so forth—but, they were opening new industrial areas.

A: What happened to some of the old labor organizers, like I think I heard Martin Hendrickson, did he go there, and Matty Tenahainen?

H: Well—Martin Hendrickson, he went there, and I heard that he died in—I met him there, he was quite dissatisfied and he was an old man—he was a good adjitator, but he never was an organizer. And in those situations, you don't need adjitators, you need organizers—and I think he was quite dissatisfied that he didn't get a big enough position. He stayed with us even one time—for a while when he came to meet us in Leningrad—and that's the way I had a feeling. Tenahainen—I never met there, so I don't know anything about him. I met Corrigan, and he had a very responsible position—everyone of those—they were good organizers. I mean organizers in a technical way. They were utilized, but like Martin Hendrickson who was in these conditions was good—but, over there I don't think

A: It was just a little out of his environment.

H: Yes, that's right. But, then after the terror during the southern period. I wasn't there then.

A: What years would that be?

H: Oh—'36, '37. Then I think a lot of things happened that shouldn't. These I heard from Finns afterwards when I was in Finland. They need not have happened, but it happened all over
the Soviet Union.

A: When did you leave then?

H: I left in '35—early in the year.

A: And how long were you in Finland?

H: Wait a minute—not '35, it was '34. I wasn't in Finland at that time, I was there later in '48.

A: But after you left Karalia, you came back to the United States?

H: Yes, I came to the United States

A: To the midwest, or where—?

H: No, to the east coast.

A: In the Finnish-American community what, more specifically what in the working class community—what perceptions did the people have of Roosevelt?

H: Well—they supported Roosevelt, and that was one man's picture than was in all the halls. And, many of them participated in—we had a Finnish-American committee even to re-elect Roosevelt—that we were instrumental in organizing, although we got other people to head it because I always felt that we wouldn't have a big enough appeal—if we wanted the Finnish-Americans to vote for them. They certainly wouldn't vote for it if I was the secretary again—so we had people who had a—how would you say—a broader appeal, to all the groups. But, we worked with the national—in fact I worked with the one of the men who was with The National Committee at that time—wrote a lot of the speeches that were delivered, but that would be fun—especially the second and third term that he ran.

A: I know where I have done some research in Upper Michigan, that making how the voting patterns change across the bborder from Republican to Democrat.

H: Yes, I think that he had a tremendous appeal, in the population. Generally I mean, in all the groups.

A: Well—let's change the subject to the role of women in the working class. Going to the very beginning of the movement here in America—I suppose we are now relying more on your reading, more than your actual experience. How would you access the role the women had—have they been in the forefront from the very beginning? What sort of role did they have?

H: Well—in the early movement, from what I have read—there used to be one or two representatives in the Finnish conven-
tions. And there was one—I think her name was Siganen—Hilma Siganen. And she constantly raised the question of—-in every one of the conventions—the question of leading and organizing a woman's movement. And she was constantly voted down. And they would say, "They have those—we need unity in our movement, we don't want to split it up into two sections." And she used to answer to that, "The only reason you need unity is so we will cook the coffee." And I think it was until 1909—here in Duluth—there were quite a few women working in a—it must have been a local needle industry or something. And they were going to organize a union. They held a meeting to organize a union—and then they decided they couldn't very well organize a union of just the Finns. And they went on that they needed a woman's paper. Then, at the next meeting of the federation—they told the women they could have a woman's paper if they could get 3500 pre-subscriptions before the paper started to appear. They got them, and in 1911 they organized the paper called The Woman's Comrade—and they published that, it was published on the west coast. The first editor was a person who had been elected to the first Parliament of Finland—after the women got their vote in 1906, and she had been elected as a result of that. And then she came to this country, and she was the first editor. And, since then—they had sort of a women's section of the federation, and later on they had a women's club. And, they have been one of the most active sections for years and years in the movement. Today, practically all the left hand movement is in the hands of the women, including our paper. Well—they advocated earlier for a vote, they participated in the suffrage movement, they advocated for organization, including the organization of the domestic workers—they raised that constantly, but I don't think they got very far—-because so many of the were domestic workers. They were in charge of the education of the young, and they had their Sunday Schools—where they taught Socialism.

A: They didn't necessarily meet on Sundays, did they?

Yes, on Sundays. Yes, exactly the same way. They met on Sunday—they also had, every summer they were responsible for holding two week summer school for the children.

A: That's the equivalent of ___________ (Finnish)

H: Yes, of like now a days, they have those camps—the church has those camps, two week camps. The camp used to be one of the camp sites, and practically every area had summer camps. They would have thirty or forty kids, and they would try to teach them something, and of course they would have sports.

A: Was the some emphasis on Finnish camps—in language in those summer camps? As well as the working class teaching?

Yes, they all tried to teach them Finnish reading and writing,
in those summer camps. So, in that respect they were very nationalistic.

A: Well---I'm acquainted with one minister who grew up in a working class family and he recalls being part of these summer schools. And he says that he was taught how to participate in a strike in one of these summer schools.

H: Well----I don't know. I only taught in one, and it turned out to be quite troublesome. Not because of the children, but because it was up there in the east coast, and the Ku Klux movement had been very strong there as a result of running. It wasn't against the Reds, it was against the They didn't like the Finnish cooperative mostly, and so they were attacking the school. It never amounted to anything except noise and fury.

A: Well---that's very interesting about the Ku Klux Klan. The Finnish radicals have been persecuted by the Klan throughout the years.

H: Yes, in the east. So, I don't know if the kids learned anything, I only remember the Ku Klux Klan business. The burning of the crosses and what else.

A: What was the attitude or the value portrayed in the working class movement about home life? Was the traditional nuclear family sort of emphasized, or was there what you might call a beginning of a women's liberation type of movement?

H: Well----it is hard to say. I think that, I have a feeling that among the Finns, the woman's liberation movement has always been there----whether they were radical or not. You know, the women in the Finnish home have been very important. And I think that it is true in any family. A Finnish woman has never had that attitude that she doesn't carry her share even more so than the man. That has been the result of the peasant type of home. I wouldn't say that men are hen-pecked, but they always heard their wives, more so than among any other group that I have seen. I mean that their men have heard their worries, and abide by it too. In the end, it is usually the woman who decides things----in a Finnish home. And, I think that the life among the so called "frantical Finns" home life was very much the same as the others, except maybe the hall life and the women being so active in the culture movement. Maybe they were a little more together at the hall than they would have. Of course, in a church you would have The Woman's Aid Society----which also kept the church going.

A: What would you say the philosophy of child bearing was in the Finnish home. Was there a lot of disciplinary, and permissiveness, "father-wears-the-pants"----or what?

H: There was strong disciplinary, I think so. At least that is the
way it was in my home. Boy, if we got criticized in school, we used to have to --with my brothers--we had to make an agreement not to say anything at home, because then we would really get it. That was the general pattern that I know of with the kids.

A: Was there any distinctive customs that young Finnish men and women had what we call dating and courtship—any certain traditions?

H: Well---I think they all met each other at the hall, at the dances. You see, in order to keep up these halls, they needed a lot of funds—and one of the ways that they raised the funds was to have dances. They usually had the dances on Thursday nights because that was the B-gun night.

A: What night was that?

H: The night when the domestic workers were free. They had their half a day off. So you had dances on Thursday night and you had dances on Saturday night, after the other program. And many times on Sunday too—Sunday evening, after the program. So, that's where there was the social life of the young people. And, that's where they learned their Finnish dances—and I think everybody met each other there.

A: Did most of these young people try to marry within the ethnic community? Or was there a significant amount of intermarriage, with other groups—say for example, in the east as opposed to the midwest here?

H: I would say that in the east there was more—marrying outside of the Finnish communities. I suppose it was because the Finnish communities were larger here.

A: Do you feel that there has been a great emphasis on education in the Finnish home?

H: In all truthfulness, I think that among the church groups, there was more emphasis on education, that is my feeling. Because, in my generation—of course my situation was a little different, my mother and father both died and we had to go to work early; but in many of the homes there didn't seem to be so much education, so much emphasis on education—certain families, yes. Certain families in the so called ethnic community, but not to the extent that there was in some of the religious families.

A: I would like to ask you a question about American schooling. Do you think the American public school tended to down-play the Finnish ethnic or other ethnic traditions? Or, do you think there was a fair portrayal of Finnish cultural traits and so on?
H: Oh, I don't think so. I think that when we grew up, when my generation grew up, it was very, very unpopular to be a foreigner. If you spoke with an accent, you were already second or third grade citizens. And, I think that that is one of the reasons why so many of the first generation ethnicities try to get away from their ethnic backgrounds. They tried to become Americans even though, I don't know if they succeeded. It is not until this third generation, when I suppose there isn't so many foreigners anymore—at least not white foreigners, European foreigners. You can even be an advisor to the president now, and speak so you can hardly understand. At that time you couldn't.

A: Let's jump along a little bit. The Tyomies celebrates its anniversary this past weekend. What ideals of the paper do you feel are things to be held up to? That the movement can say has been good?—and still worthwhile today?

H: Well—its number one is that all through its life it has propagated the organization of the working people. And secondly, it has always fought for social security, and social justice. It has always campaigned the rights of the minorities. It has always championed peace and internationalism, and that has been always, even in the case of the Finns. After all, they were Finns and it was very hard to choose between the Finns and the general internationalism, but they were able to do that. And, lately I think one of our big—-it has consistently worked for these things, and also it has never become purely a Finnish movement, even though we are inclined to be sectarian, you know. And, we have constantly talked and fought against this—-but, we still have always been a part of the American movement. And today, I think we are suffering from a lack of forces——we have trained an awful lot of people, but they are in the American movement.

A: Where are the children of the older generation? Are they still in the movement, have they gone to American radical movements, or have they been assimilated into middle class America?

H: Well—some are in the Communist Party movement, but and some have been active in the trade union movement. And, I would say that a good many have become, I don't know if they have become exactly middle class America; but tired radicals. But, I have a feeling that if there was to be a tremendous change in the economic situation—-conditions, that many of them could give valuable leadership yet—-with the training that they have had.

(End of side #2 of the tape)