FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
Finnish-American Project

INTERVIEW BETWEEN:
INTERVIEWEE: Emil and Elmi Pesonen
INTERVIEWER: Viola J. Brown
SUBJECT: Recollections of the Past: Sports; Mining; Ice Fishing
DATED: July 10, 1973
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family came to South Range</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father died in mine</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and Athletic club—Huima club</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td>Mentions a 40 mile trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical care—A hurt arm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First jobs—Delivering papers&amp;Pop shop</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine work—Trammer's helper</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913 Strike—Chased from boarding house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913—Company brought in men—Nationalities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression Years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost his eye in Mine Accident</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Good Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drift Miner—A specialized job</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid by hour and footage</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old time lunch pails &amp; Carbide lamps</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Fishing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church group—&quot;Naurisonluto&quot; &amp; Activities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setti's First Car</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Funny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry Picking—Baraga Plains</td>
<td>8,9</td>
<td>Interesting group activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of &quot;Ill-repute&quot;—South Range</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vi: This is Viola Brown interviewing Elmi and Emil Pesonen, who have
been long time residents of South Range and members of my own family
... my sister Elmi and her husband, Emil. And we were talking last
fourth of July, when we were here, about, first of all, the ... when
you came to this country, Emil ... what you remember about early days
in Finland or your travels here; how you met your wife and so on. How
old were you when you came here?
Em: I was seven years old. I can't remember very much ... only that
we lived in the farming country ... in a farming district. We never
did go to town or anything.
Vi: You really can't remember very much about travelling .. the boat trip.
Em: No, the only things that I can remember is that it was awful stormy.
Vi: Do you have any idea how long it took you to come here?
Em: No, I don't.
Vi: What was the name of the boat that you came over on?
Em: The 'Baltic.' It was a big boat.
Vi: And many people came to Upper Michigan on that.
Em: Oh, ya, quite a few.
Vi: Where did you go first when you came to Upper Michigan?
Em: We came straight to South Range. And my dad was here before us.
I think that he was here for about ten years. He made a trip down
in Finland, you know; and he brought my older sister with him over here....
Mary. So, they put up the household, you know, and got ready for us.
Vi: Your dad worked in the mine.
Em: Ya, he worked in the mine.
Vi: Well, you told me last time about how you met my sister Elmi.
Em: Ya, when we came to South Range, she and the whole family was up there
at the station waiting for us. And we had a Finland basket. She
had a hold of one side, and I had a hold of the other side. We walked
up the railroad track there.
Vi: Hand in hand ... so, that's the way you began your days and end your days.
Em: So, that's the first time I met her.
El: Emil's father roomed and boarded at mother's when they had the big boarding
house. Ever since he came from Finland, I think he stayed at Jarven-
poln's. Didn't he?
Vi: Do you have any idea how long mother and father had the boarding house?
Did they run it for very many years?
Em: I don't know.
Vi: Because that was quite an institution in those days, too.
Em: Well, my dad, he got killed in the mine.
Vi: Was that when you were quite young?
No, I was about fourteen or fifteen years old. I worked in Kivi's store when he got killed.

You were fairly young then, and your mother was left with the family of children to take care of.

El: How old were the twins when they died?
Em: They weren't very old. I think they were about one year old.
Vi: Do you remember any good times that your family had? Do you remember any fun things that the family did together?
Em: Well, I don't remember any really good times.
Vi: Life was hard.
Em: Just everyday life.
Vi: Did you go on picnics, berrying ... ?
Em: Oh, ya, we went to picnics on Otter Lake and picking berries and all that, especially when us boys got a car, you know; we got around better. But that was after my dad died that we got the car. We took Ma out lots.
El: Tell about the ride on the motorcycle.
Em: And then I bought a second-hand motorcycle. I had a lot of fun with that, and darn' near killed myself on it, too.
El: What did you dad say when you bought the motorcycle?
Em: 'It'd be much better if you'd take a wife than monkey around with that.'
Vi: Can you tell us something about that athletic club that you belonged to ... that Huima Club?
Em: We used to meet every Sunday down at that old Temperance Hall there.
Vi: Is that a building that still is standing?
Em: Ya, they have the village garage there. We had about 30 members there, and we used to come and practice. Every Sunday we used to come there.
Vi: What did you play?
Em: Well, we used to march and do all kinds of tricks. Then, we used to go out running and jumping.
Vi: Who was the director, or did you have a director?
Em: Helikki Eskola.
Vi: Was he a trained teacher, or was he doing this just for fun?
Em: Just ordinary.
Vi: Ya, interested himself in it.
Em: Ya.
Vi: Were they mostly young boys, or were there married men ... ?
Em: I don't think there were any married men. But I think that they were grown up, you know ... between twenty and thirty.
Vi: What were some of the races that you ran with this Huima group?
Em: Well, I had quite a few medals from jumping and pushing shot and that stuff, you know. And then once a summer we used to have a big picnic, you know. There used to be races in there, you know. We had a band, you know, ... marching.
Vi: All part of the Huima group ... that band, too?
Em: No, we had to hire the band.
El: They had soft drinks at that time ... pop and ice cream.
Vi: Elmi talked last time about your running all the way to Otter Lake in a sort of marathon.
Ya, we used to do that many times a summer. There was about ten of us younger fellas. We'd put on our running suit, run up there, take a swim, and run back. That was about a 40-mile trip. You know that kind of thing is still going in Finland, where they have marathon races ... marathon walks, marathon skiing and so on. And people get out by the thousands on weekends.

Em: In the winter time they used to have ski races, you know.
Vl: Where did you ski?
Em: Well, from Kivi's corner you go to Baltic, and by that old hotel there's a road going in there and comes to this M-26. We used to call that 'Three-mile Block.'

Vl: Where's the hotel? What's that?
Em: The Baltic post office.
Vl: The post office was a hotel?
Em: Ya.
El: Charles Hotel.
Vl: I never knew that. Well, maybe you can tell us something about the school you went to ... started out in Baltic.
Well, I didn't have much of a chance to go to school ... just the lower grades, you know. When I was old enough, I went to work.

Vl: That was the way with most of the people.
Em: Ya, most of the people.
Vl: Do you remember anything about your teachers or about funny things that happened?
Em: Well, I don't know about the funny things happening. Well, I guess us Finland kids were kind of stubborn and had a lot of scoldings.
Vl: Did you speak just Finnish when you started school?
Em: Ya.
El: You remember your first teacher.
Em: Ya, I remember her name ... Miss Fontana.
Vl: How did you mother and father feel about your going to school?
Em: Oh, they didn't say nothing. I guess they were glad to get rid of us kids.
Vl: Well, you said something earlier about your father saying that you should go to papinkoulu ... to seminary. What was that story?
Em: Ya, well, I broke my arm; and they said they had to cut that arm off, you know. It didn't heal up.
Vl: That's what the doctor said.
Em: Ya, that's what he said. Then my dad was going to put me up to that Suomi College, you know; and I was against going to school. So, that arm healed up better, you know. And I went to work, you know; and schooling got left out.

Vl: Who was able to fix that arm?
Em: Dr. West.
Vl: What was his reaction when he was working with it?
Em: Well the trouble was, you know ... Dr. West said to come up to the hospital and he was going to cut that arm off the next day. So,
I went up there, you know. But I guess it bothered my dad, you know. He came and got me home. So, Dr. West came after me, and he told Dad that he'll try and fix it up some other how. So, they cut it open, and I don't know what they really done with it. It healed up pretty good. I got a good arm again... can't kick about it.

VI: That was your right arm. What kind of work did you do? You've always done hard work... working in the mine. I wanted to hear something about the work that you did. You started off in a pop shop. at about thirteen or fourteen.

EM: Ya, I was about twelve or thirteen years old. I sat in a pop shop washing bottles.

Do you remember how long hours that you worked? ... from eight o'clock in the morning until...

No, I don't remember because I was peddling papers... they used to have that 'Ply-lehti' ... I suppose you remember. And after I got finished with my paper route, I used to go to pop shop, you know, and wash bottles. Well, that kept you out of mischief, I'm sure ... busy from morning until night. Then you went to work at Kivi's. What did you do there?

EM: Well, I used to deliver meat, you know. Had a single horse, you know.

VI: So, you were a teamster. Did you go all by yourself, or were you a helper?

No, I went out by myself. Your dad used to put the meats, you know, write the names on each package. There was nothing to it ... just put that package and run up to the house and come back and go to the next house.

VI: Did you take orders, too?

EM: No, not at that time. Then later on, you know.

VI: I remember when Louis Kangas was still teamster when we moved back here, and he would come to the house. Well, things are very different now. Then, when did you go to work in the mines... because that's what you really consider yourself... a miner?

That was during the war. They were paying good wages then in the mines; so, I went up there to make good money.

VI: You weren't very old then....

EM: About seventeen or eighteen years old.

VI: What do you remember about working in the mine. Did you start in right away as a drift miner?

No, I started out as a trammer's helper, first, you know. We used to fill cars from the shoots, and we had a motor. And the motor used to pull the cars.

VI: Do you remember anything about that 1913 strike?

EM: Oh, yes, I really do. Ya, we had a tough time with the strikers.

VI: Was your dad striking?

EM: Ya, he was for a while, you know; but he was out of work for quite a while, you know. And then he went back to work. Those who did go over... they used to call them 'scabs.'

VI: Ya, it was rough for a fellow with a family to be striking. And I imagine that many of them did not understand what was going on either because of their language problems.

EM: We lived in a company house, you know. And all those who were striking... well, they chased us out from the house.
Vi: Where could you go?
Em: We went to South Range and rented a house here in South Range.
And when my dad went back to work, we went back to Baltic.
Vi: Didn't the company get men from other countries to come and work
in the mines?
Em: Ya, they got some ... I don't know wherever they got those men,
but they got them by the car loads over here.
Vi: In Painesdale.
Em: In Baltic and Painesdale ... I guess most of them were Armenians.
Vi: I thought Yugoslavians and Croations maybe .... Do you know whether
they stayed here?
Em: Ya, in Baltic, you know, the company had a boarding house. They
used to stay in there. I don't know where they stayed in Painesdale,
but here in Baltic ... there.
Vi: But, did they become part of the community; or after the strike was
over, did they leave?
Em: Ya, there's only very few come back here. I don't know where they
went, you know; but they disappeared.
Vi: Do you remember what happened after the mining slowed down after WW I?
You said that you went into the mine during WW I ... there was a need
for copper and the wages were good ... and made lots of money. Things
sort of slowed down.
Em: Ya, it kind of slacked down. I don't know why.
El: Then you went back to Kivi's store.
Em: Ya, I went back to Kivi's store.
Vi: That was about the time you got married then.
El: He was working in the store.
Em: Ya.
Vi: Did you work in the mine all during the depression?
Em: Ya, I was lucky enough to get a job, you know. Lot of men were layed
off during the depression. I was one of the lucky ones, you know ...
held on to my job.
Vi: But, you didn't work steadily.
Em: No, but we had the best time of our life. We had a hunting camp, you
know; and we used to go up there. She used to pack our bags, you know.
Vi: So, what money you didn't earn in the mine, you made up for by fishing
and hunting at the camp.
Em: That's right ... do a lot of violating.
El: Then when the mine opened up again, things picked up. That's when you
went back to the mine for awhile. That's when you made good money.
Vi: This is after the depression. And you worked in the mine steadily
until what time, Emil?
Em: I think it was ever since I lost that eye ... in 1950.
Vi: In 1950 ... how did that happen?
Em: I was drilling; and while I was drilling, there was a piece of steel
... come right straight in my eye and punctured my eye.
Vi: Did you get some compensation?
Em: Ya, we got some but not very much.
El: Alli Tjkkthen was your partner then.
Em: Ya.
What exactly is a drift miner? This is a specialized type of job, and not everybody can do it.
No, Ya, there weren't so many drifts going along ... maybe about seven or eight drifts, you know. They had special men, you know. I think they picked out the best driller, you know. A drift is something like a snow bank, you know; and then you start digging in there ... 

Vi: Sort of following the vein of ore ...
Em: Ya.
Vi: What kind of tools did you use as a drift miner?
Em: There was two miners, you know ... they had a machine. Each one had a machine, you know. Each one drilled so many holes, you know, out of each side ... then you'd drill about 36 holes altogether. Then when you got finished drilling, you know, you'd fill them up with powder and then you blast.
Vi: So, you were putting in the powder and blasting, too.
Em: Ya.
Vi: What did you do then when you really had to get out of the way in a hurry?
Oh, we had to get out in a hurry, you know. We'd light the fuses; then we'd run ... run right back. And then after them holes come off, you know, we had a slusher ... we called that a slusher, you know, ... kind of like a gruho hoe, you know ... runs back and forth ... and then we'd get all that dirt and rock. Then we had a slusher; he was especially for running that motor.
Vi: Did you ever strike a really good drift where you really could see that you were going to get a lot of copper from?
Em: Oh, ya, sometimes, someplaces, you know, the ground is awful hard, you know; and then again it comes softer. We made pretty good some months.
Vi: You were paid an hourly wage ... not according to how much copper you found ... or anything like that.
Em: No, we got paid by the hour and then footage, you know. The more footage you got, the better pay you get. It was contract. All the drifts were on that.
Vi: We were talking last week about the type of lunches that Elm packed for you. And how did you carry them?
Em: Well, there was old time dinner buckets, you know. A part to carry water ... on the top part, you know, to carry you sandwiches in there, you know. Sometimes we had sardine sandwich ... and one thing or another, I don't know.
El: You didn't have pasties, did you? You didn't care for cold pasties.
Vi: You had to have some kind of lamp to light your way in the mine.
Em: Oh, ya, first we used to have carbide lamps, you know. They come in two sections: In the bottom section there's carbide; then on the top section there's water. And then you open ... there was a kind of outfit on top, ... you open that up a little bit and you get water on that carbide. And it would be just like gas, you know. Then you put a light, ... got a good light. Then after a while, you know, we got battery lamps. You just hook that battery, you know, on your belt ... we used to have a belt, you know ... and then that was a good outfit.
Vi: But, you always had the light up here on your hat.
Em: Oh, ya.
Vi: Did you wear special clothes in the mine?
Em: Oh, just overalls, you know ... nothing special about 'em.
El: It was awfully wet.
Vi: It was cold down in the mine. Some mines, you know, are hot.
Em: Ya, the further down you go, the hotter it gets, you know. The
top levels ... they were pretty cold.
Vi: Were they wet?
Em: Someplaces were.
Vi: Oh, I wanted you to say something about fishing, too, and some
of your adventures on Lake Superior and Keweenaw Bay.
Em: Oh, yes, I used to do a lot of fishing ... ya. Lake Superior ...
do a lot of ice fishing ... had a lot of fun ... a lot of fish.
Vi: Tell us about some of the equipment that you fixed up for ice fishing.
Em: Well, ... had to have a tent and a little tool box, you know, sled
to pull your outfits.
Vi: What kind of a tent did you have?
Em: Just like an Indian teepee ... four poles and then canvas around it.
Vi: Oh, yes, we made everything ourselves.
Em: We had to take good care of our fish line ... tar them. Every now
and then we had to tar them, dry them, wax them.
Vi: How did you like having a fisherman in the house, Elma, with all of
these fish lines?
El: Well, we had new line; it had to be linen. I wasn't home and had just
cleaned the kitchen. The \textit{seal} was on the stove and the cover on.
And then I said, 'What's that black mark on the ceiling?' There was
a tar mark on the ceiling and had to scrape it off and had to have
a new paint job. But, that's the fun of being a fisherman's wife.
Vi: Good healthy smell ... that tar smell, isn't it?
Em: You made your own sinkers.
Vi: Oh, yes, how did you make the sinkers?
Em: Well, we got some lead, you know; and we melted it on top of the stove,
you know, and made a little tube out of the paper ... and make it a little
bit funnel-like, you know. Then that lead melted up, you know; and we
dumped it in that tube, you know, and got a sinker out of it.
Vi: Was fishing really good on Lake Superior? You know, things have died
down here now.
Em: Oh, yes, they were really good. I remember the best catch I had was
32 trout in one trip, and they were nice big ones. The biggest ones
were around 15 lbs. ... some were ten pounds.
El: There was no limit to the catch.
Em: No, there was no limit.
Vi: Did you fish on the lake during the summer ... or just ice fishing?
Em: Oh, ya, ya ... had to go with a boat during the summer time.
El: You used the same hooks ...
I remember that we talked about that when you were courting Elmi. Can you remember any of those courtship days? Things are different now; you didn't have an automobile. What difference did it make?

Em: Well, we used to go once in a while to Otter Lake, you know; and we used to hire a car and a cabin.

El: We'd go with Anna and Setti.

Em: Then we'd go for a walk; in fact, we had a theatre here... we'd used to go quite often there.

Vi: Were there movies in the theatre?

El: Oh, yes, they weren't talking movies; they had a piano.

Em: They used to call that 'Baltia Barn.'

El: And there was a church group called 'naurisonluto.' We had cars to go to different places... to concerts. We walked Atlantic to Painesdale and from Painesdale to South Range. We got the altar for the church.

Vi: Really.

El: We raised the money.

Vi: What happened to the old altar?

El: Hallila bought it/ and save it for the Salvation Army.

Vi: That is a nice, fair use of it.

El: One time he promised me a buggy ride. So, he got a horse from Laitila. That was a real frisky horse... we had Lehtoes with us. We were there long enough to cook coffee and to come back home. We weren't very long... were we... at Lehtoes?

Em: No.

El: I didn't like that buggy ride. The horse would trot and I was scared.

Em: It was a young horse.

El: And another time Setti got his first car, and he was driving. We were going up Baltic Hill. And, of course, Setti went 'Ho, ho, ho'... it didn't stop that way. Of course, he was cursing the horse.

Emil said that it don't stop that way. 'Well, what must you do?' Well, Emil had enough knowledge to tell him to step on the brake; so, we got down the hill.

And then the families used to grand make bonfires in back of Jarvenpää's with that St. John's celebration, and Dad would collect all the boxes and we'd have a big celebration. Different families used to come there. For recreation, almost every Sunday afternoon families would get together and cook coffee and have their song books along.

I remember hearing mother and father talking about it. And berry-going on many-days expeditions to pick berries. Do you remember about that, Elmi?

Em: We went with Mattilas. Ya, we had a tent along.... Baraga Plains.

El: We went pick blueberries.

Em: I don't know if you were with us when we took Kivi's truck, you know, and went down Baraga Plains.

El: No, I wasn't there.

Em: I guess that was all men.

Vi: It seems to me that mother and father talked about taking a train
and going to Stonington Peninsula.

El: All of KNV Company were there. Heikkinens were there, and Lohelas were there. We went by train, and the train stopped. We got special permission, and the train stopped at Stonington.

Vi: Where is Stonington?

El: By the water tank in Toivola. And we picked all day. And then there were the shelters ... where the men slept. They were all empty cabins. Father put leaves and straw and all that on the floor; we slept there for the night, and the next day we were picking berries and then came back by train again. But, we had a good time.
The question isn't in here, but somebody brought up the question of bawdy houses ... like Matti Allen's here in South Range. I remember them talking about that. I remember when we moved here, there was still that house of ill-repute here in South Range.

Em: Yes.

Vi: Matti Allen's place?

Em: Ya.

El: There was one place that up toward, when you go to the bush, not far ... when you go from Tormqla's house toward Trimountain. There was a regular house there, too. Wasn't there, Emil? Of course, when we were kids, we didn't know about it. We discovered it when we were older ... that there was a place like that. I remember people talking about Matti Allen's house, wherever he might have been.

El: Is that building torn down on Main Street ... Matti Allen's place?

Em: I think it is.

El: It was right across Karp's parking lot, where he's got those used cars.