FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
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**Topics** | **Page** | **Comments**
---|---|---
Family History | 1270,1275 |  
Lillian gets married at 15 | 1271 |  
Lillian's own family | 1271 |  
1974-Lillian still working | 1272 |  
Lillian's jobs | 1272,1277 |  
Religion – Confirmation, Baptisms | 1273 |  
Pastors | 1273 |  
Brothers and sisters | 1274 |  
Celebrations | 1274 |  
Mother and Father | 1276 |  
Hard Times after W.W. I | 1276 |  
Moved to Marquette - 1934 | 1277 |  
Remarries – loses second husband | 1277 |  
Active in church activities | 1277,1278 |  
God is Finn | 1277,1278 |  
Church – Finnish Services | 1277 |  
Transportation | 1278 |  
First Cars | 1279 |  
Home Remedies | 1280 |  
Nationalities get along | 1281 |  
Doesn't want change in Church | 1282 |  
School | 1282 |  
Christmas Programs at School | 1283 |  
Potato Time | 1284 |  
Other programs at School | 1284 |  
Teachers | 1284 |  
Getting ridiculed at School | 1285 |  
Politics | 1285 |  
Getting the Mail | 1286 |  
Elections |  |  

I: What were your parent's names and where did they come from in Finland?

R: My father's name was Isaac Seriella and my mother's maiden name...she was Hilda Orikainen and they got married in Ishpeming. My mother comes from Guidianla, Finland, and my father comes from Goutala, Finland. And they were married in Ishpeming and they moved to Covington after three years of marriage and they moved out to a farm...or not a farm, is strict wilderness...there were just a very very few families living out there; and I am one of the first children born in Covington or Watton, rather and I can always remember when my mother used to tell us that when I was a baby...well, her Christmas dinner with the two children, Dad was out in the woods somewheres at a lumber camp, and our Christmas dinner had been only potatoes and milk. And to think nowadays the children, they go to work and if they were ever offered anything like that to eat, well my goodness, I don't know what they would ever do. But, we got along. We raised all our own crops over there after they got a little spot cleared around the house. I can remember when I was only about five years old and I had a hoe and I was digging holes and I was planting potatoes. And then when we went to school, well we had to milk a couple of cows in the morning before we'd ever go to school and see how...we were five or six going
to school at one time and me being the oldest one in the bunch, well I always had to see that all the rest of the children's clothes was ready, their lunch pails was packed and then I'd have to run in the barn and milk a couple of cows to help my mother out, then I would go to school after I had everything done and I hadda go there at a break-neck speed so to get there by nine o'clock when the bell rang. And then when we come home in the evening, my mother would have a big pot of coffee and some of the old-fashioned (?) for us or toast, and we'd eat our belly full and then we all had our chores. The boys had to...one had to get in the kindling, the other had to carry the rest of the wood, and the girls had to fill everything with water, everything that would hold water in the house so Mother would have enough for anything she was doing in the house. Then we'd have to carry in enough wood for the next day when we'd be in school so she didn't have to go out and carry wood, and if there was a snow storm or anything, it was us little kids that was out with shovels and brooms and everything else to open the paths to the barn and to the well, and the best part was what I can't get over to this day...we had a well and we only had some kind of a flat cover on it, and my mother had to heist the water from that well with a pail for nine cows and eleven children. She would not dare let any of the children go and heist up any of the water 'cause around the well it was so frosty and so much ice that she was always afraid that we'd go right head first into the well which would have been possible. So then when we got a little bit older, well oh the oldest one of the kids left when she was only fifteen years old, she went to Ishpeming to work and then the next one left and I got married when I was fifteen years old and at seventeen I had two children and at twenty I had three. Then I raised my own family and Depression came along and oh my, that's a time that I will never forget. There were so many families, we never knew what we were gonna eat, or if we were gonna eat at all before we retired in the evening; but with God's help and lots of Finnish sesoo, we done an awful lot though. I had a small place...I lived in a shack with my husband and three children. It was only twelve by fourteen. And we went to work and got a team of horses from his mother's house and we pulled the stumps off a piece of property, piece of ground rather, we planted our first garden and we got enough food off of that to last us all year. We got our potatoes and all the vegetables we wanted to eat and, of course, I was pretty good in canning and doing things, always made my own bread, always fed my family with everything homemade...nothing bought from the store. Then in the wintertime when we'd have meat...or that we had some kind of a building outside, we didn't have no deep freezes or no refrigerators or anything to cool anything in, it was all put outside in a house where it froze so stiff that you hadda take an axe in the wintertime when you wanted a roast of anything and that's the way you hadda go to work and get a piece of meat to roast or fry or whatever you thing. This sounds like everything was real hard work, but that's what we liked and it had really brought out good workers from families that had to live that way. I can remember all the big families that was around Covington and Watton. There were many families that had sixteen and eighteen children and there isn't one in any of those families that ever went to prison or ever was arrested for any pot smoking or drug addicts or anything like that. They're all nice clean-cut people and they all believe in hard
work and honest living...no welfares, no nothing. Myself, I wouldn't take no welfare unless...I wouldn't care, I wouldn't want it as long as I'm able to work. I'm sixty-eight years old and I'm doing four hours of work every day just like a person that's twenty years old I raise a big garden and I do all my own carpenter work, all my own...laying cement blocks, everything that's done around the house is all done by my hands and my feet.

I: And where do you work those four hours?

R: I work in an elementary school at Whitman and I been over then now going on seven years and I worked there three years before cooking on the hot lunch program.

I: Now, you had some other jobs before you worked at the Whitman Elementary School.

R: Oh yes, I worked over at Morgan Heights Hospital or Sanitarium, whatever they used to call it...I worked in there for six and a half years taking care of the old people and some of the TB's and everything that was around there. And while I worked there for the six and a half years we had four hundred deaths there and I had to put perntnear all the bodies down in the morgue and, oh, that was really something...kind of got you in a way and then my husband had only been dead about three months before I started working there...and oh that was so hard on me, but I had to work...I had to make my living, so it didn't matter what the work was like. So, anyway, I got along okay...and then I finally went to work and I got tired of it because I always had that kind of a shift where I worked from eleven to seven, and it kind of got me in the end. So, then after that I went to the...I worked at the Bay Cliff Health Camp for two seasons too and I was cooking down there and that's another nice place for a person if you want to see what hardships there is in people.

I: Now, the Bay Cliff Health Camp is where?

R: Big Bay...it's in the back of Big Bay...and I'll tell you, a person can really count your blessings when you see them people down there and them children...and you have good health and everything, it really makes you think and think that why does God allow this that these kind of people have to be born on earth and that; but oh, they're taken such good care of down there that it's a God-send place for on earth for children to go in the summertime. And it's...oh really it's heartbreaking. You know, lot of people when they go to work and they see only one crippled child somewheres, that kind of gets to them; but when you go down there and you see hundreds of them...there was three hundred of them when I was cooking down there and they were all that they couldn't help themselves, so you can just imagine what a person, you know, feels like when you have to work with them.

I: And then you went to the Whitman School to cook after that?

R: Yes, from there I went to Whitman School. I cooked there on hot lunch for three years...that was not a nice experiment and then oh I was out
from there for awhile and then I went back there as what I'm doing now. I'm in the clean up crew now, and I've been down there on this stretch now for seven and a half years. So, I've been pretty busy.

I: So that we know, the Whitman School is in Marquette.

R: Yeah, it's in Marquette and it's the biggest elementary school in Marquette. It's really a nice place. We've got nice teachers to work with and nice principals... everybody gets along good...no arguments, no fights of any kind, it's really a nice place. Everywhere where I worked though, I've never had any hardship with any of 'em. I always got along good and I always went to work and I always been a helping hand for the next one.

I: Now, going back to Covington and Watton, Michigan, and do you remember the pastor's name who confirmed and...the pastor's name first who had baptised you and which church did you...there were several Finnish churches in Watton-Covington, was there not?

R: Oh yes, there's the Lestodians or whatever they called them and then there's like Our Redeemer Church here in Marquette...

I: The former National Lutheran.

R: Yeah, the former National Lutheran and then there's the Suomi Synod. And I was baptised by Reverand Liisonen in this National Lutheran Church and then I went just because a neighbor girl was going to Bethel Lutheran Church...Suomi Synod for Confirmation and she wanted me for a partner so I went there for Confirmation with her and Reverand Revalutti when and confirmed me in 1919; so that I can remember fairly well. And then I was in a choir in National Lutheran Church for about a year in Covington; but then when I got married and, of course, after I started raising a family I couldn't do much anymore.

I: Do you remember any of the other pastors that you had at that church then?

R: Well, there was...National Lutheran, Wiisculli was over there and I can't remember all of them...who was over there; but Wiisculli and Liisonen and all those. I really don't remember too many of them and Revalutti was over at the other one and I can't remember now what this other minister's name was that was in the Covington church in the Suomi Synod. I can't remember his name...he was there for many many years. He was a young fellow when he came in; And then, of course, what was his name now, that young fellow that I said we used to call to the Copper Country for...what was his name...I can't remember what his name was. Now I remember who those National Lutheran Ministers were in Covington...there was Bentinen and there was Goupinen and there was Neimi and Alfrainsen...Alfrainsen was really my favorite...oh I liked him...he had such a beautiful voice for singing. He even buried a brother of mine who went to work and got killed in a car accident. I'll never forget when his funeral left from the house and we sang a hymn and he was always complementing me on what a good voice I had...I did before
I got too fat to sing...well, I could sing real good and I never can forget Alfrainsen for that. He had such a beautiful sermon for him that, oh...and he had got married only six months before. And Reverand Maki married him here in Marquette and then Alfrainsen had to go to work and bury him. Maki would have come down a read his services, but he had to go for some kind convention; so he wasn't down here in Marquette at all at the time.

I: Now, going back to your family, you had several sisters and brothers. Where do your brothers and sisters live now that they're all married adults?

R: Yes, they're all married and my oldest sister, Mrs. Ussikainen, she died last October the first in Ishpeming, she was buried in Ishpeming; and my oldest brother died on my fortieth birthday and he's buried in Covington and then this other one that I was just talking about little while ago, well he's been dead since '54 and then I got two brothers, George Seviella and Arnie Seviella living in Dieright and Carl Seviella living in Clarksburg and Mrs. Johnson living in Snowville...that's close to Dieright, and then I got a sister, Mrs. Ojanin living in Ishpeming and I got two sisters, they're both Mrs. Lief's in Covington. And it makes me laugh when I leave from Marquette to go to Covington, I can stop about every two miles for coffee...there's some relatives of mine all along the line from Marquette to Covington and you can even go as far as White Pine over there to Ontonagon and there's still relatives. So, oh we're a big family. We're so many, we're in the hundreds and just like the...oh the sisters and the brothers, then the nieces and the nephews, like in the second generation. But me now, I have three children, six grandchildren and I got five great-grand ones. My great-grand one...the oldest one is going on eight years old...going on nine. So, I expect to see the fifth generation...the way I feel right now, anyway.

I: Yes, it's nice to be healthy.

R: Oh yes...if lot of these people would see what I've done around my home and my garden and all that and what I've put out this summer, well they wouldn't believe it...they wouldn't believe it...they'd say you never done that all by yourself. I certainly did though!

I: Plenty of fresh air.

R: Oh, I guess so.

I: Now, if we go back to Covington-Watton area, were most of the people Finnish descent back then and did most of the people speak Finnish to one another? Do you remember any special celebrations and so on?

R: Well, I can always remember one celebration we had at Watton, oh I must have been about six years old or so, six - seven years old, well it wasn't much of a celebration because there wasn't too many people there, but they had built a little Post Office there anyway and they started getting in stuff, you know, that we never had had around the place before. All kinds of canned stuff and fresh fruit and different kind
candy and stuff, and we went in there for this celebration and they were shooting fire crackers and what weren't they doing, and there was quite a few young fellows over there and my dad, of course, had himself a big family and I guess they felt sorry for us. So, one man came and bought us a dozen oranges and another man came and bought us a case of pop, another one came along and bought us each a box of cracker jacks, another one came along and gave us each a package of chewing gum, then another one came along and gave us some kind sparklers or noise makers, and, Oh, I'll never forget that, that was my first Fourth of July Celebration and that was something, 'cause we had never had oranges even, we didn't know what an orange was like. So, getting something like that, I'll tell you, that really was something. Then when they used to have weddings, well they mostly had them in the house, you know. They'd just go to church and get married or go out of town and then they'd have at oh either the brides house or the grooms house, whichever was more well-to-do and could put up a little something. All of the people down there are this kind and still are around Covington. If there's a funeral or if there's a wedding or if there's any kind of a party, everybody brings. So they'd have a big lunch and they'd try to pick out some...a good-sized house...and of course they'd eat and make merry but there wasn't much drinking though. That's one thing we never knew nothing about when I was a child...about people getting drunk or drinking. So, then sometimes if there was room, they'd do a little (???) dancing even, they'd just throw the chairs on the sides and somebody had a little accordion and they'd go to work and (???) a little bit around there...polka and all the old-fashioned Finnish dances...oh and that used to be another treat for us to watch 'cause we didn't see that too much either, you know. So, there's all kinds of little things that, you know, stays in your mind more or less than. So, I don't know...I had a nice childhood though. Oh, my folks were just as poor as...as they used to say, poor as church mice; but we had a wonderful home. We always had enough to eat, our clothes weren't the best, we never had more than two sets of clothes...one was being washed and the other one was being worn...and then when a holiday or anything would come, I tell you, we really had a meal. And off of the place... and off of the little farm that we had, always had all the cream we would use, all the milk we could use, we used to walk about ten miles out to the blueberry plains and pick blueberries and, mind you, us kids and me since six or eight years old, I used to carry an eight-quart pail of blueberries home from about eight miles out. I betcha there aren't very many that could do it in this day and age. Then there were lots of wild raspberries, we picked lots of those. My mother never had less than three-four hundred quarts of them and always at least six hundred quarts of blueberries canned. Then there was all our apples...what wasn't canned, they were...the kids used to take them and wrap them in newspapers, put them in a barrel and down in the root house. And after they rippened good...oh, that was good going in those days in the wintertime when we got our teeth into some of that. And, oh my mother was a hard worker, though. She never had a washing machine, no conveniences in the house of any kind...nothing. She washed all eleven kids clothes on a scrub board and two tubs... carried the water in...of course the kids had to do some of it too, you know, carry water in and all that...but, oh boy, you don't find very many women that works like that anymore.
I: How old was your mother when she passed away then?

R: She was seventy-two. She died in June and then she would have been seventy-three in November. My father was only sixty-one...my father had been sick for about ten years. He was working out in a lumber camp and a tree fell on him and he had a broken back and, imagine, he wasn't even able to work for about twelve years...at all, nothing. So, Mother and the kids used to do the farm work and make the hay in the summertime and all that and then they didn't have nothing coming in, there was no pensions in those days or nothing, we just had to go to work and get our noses together and get along as best we could. We couldn't just go and say, "Well, the heck with work, we're just gonna go to work and go on welfare," oh no! That just wasn't.

I: Welfare was not the thing.

R: No welfare, and my folks were so proud, I don't think they would have ever taken welfare. I don't think so, and I'm one of them too...I wouldn't either. As long as I can work, no welfare for me.

Stop in tape.

I: Now, just after World War I...

R: I can always remember that when my father cried one night and that's one time that I saw him really feel blue. You know, the bottom started falling off of things, it's something like it is now...

I: This was after World War I?

R: Yeah, that was right after World War I, yeah. There was no work...there was nobody could get no work no matter what on anything. There was no wood work, there was no nothing. And living cost was up. I can always remember that when flour was thirty dollars a hundred-pound sack, and sugar was forty dollars for a hundred-pound sack, just like it is right now. And my dad had taken some stuff from the store on credit and, of course, they couldn't keep you up forever either and he didn't have no job on the side or anything and this day he went to the store and the store manager says, "Well, I'm sorry I can't give you anymore stuff until you're gonna go to work and bring me some money." Well, my dad said, "Well, I just don't know what I'm gonna do." And he couldn't get that sugar or that flour of anything he needed. He come home and he put his head on the table and he cried like a baby. So, this was just...oh I'd say...on Christmas week so you can imagine what kind of a Christmas we would have had. It wasn't Christmas Eve, but the night before Christmas Eve, we could hear horses coming and jingle - jingle - jingle, the bells were ringing and my mother couldn't make out what was coming. The neighbors that was more better off than we were, they had got together and they had bought a big barrel of this dry toast...the way it used to come in wooden barrels...and there was a hundred pounds of flour and a hundred pounds of sugar and ten of fifteen pounds of coffee on that sleigh what they brought and they hellered, "Hey, Santa Claus is coming." So did we ever all run out there and see when Santa Claus came. I'll tell you, that really was a Santa Claus. Then they had
bought a big box of cookies...there was many different kind in it... that was a treat for the kids then for Christmas. Well, I tell you, my mother was so happy that she cried and Dad cried and I guess, everybody cried.

I: So you had a real Christmas.

R: We had a real Christmas.

I: Now, when did you move to Marquette, Michigan?

R: Oh, I moved to Marquette in 1934, and I started working in the Brunswick Hotel downtown here and I worked there for six weeks and then I went to Superior Restaurant and I worked there for two years...then I quit there and I went to work at Marquette Cafe and I worked there for six and a half years. And in 1940, we bought the place where I'm living now and of course my life had taken a change then too, I had got rid of my first husband and I had got married all over again here in Marquette to Mr. Quilliam and we bought our home where I'm living now, paid only two hundred and fifty dollars for the place when we bought it, but it's worth quite a bit more right now. And Mr. Quilliam died in 1961 of a heart attack at our camp. So, ever since then I had to paddle my own canoe. I been working steady all the time and I don't see much relief. Oh, I suppose I could go to work and stay home if I kind of tightened my shoestrings a little bit, but I'm the type that I always want to help somebody else and somebody else's life is more of a concern to me than my own. I'm always helping my children, my grandchildren, and if there's any other...I've got a few neighbors there that's widowed and they're worse off than I am, well I give them a helping hand and I'm always handing somebody something out from my garden or bringing them some kind of a hot dish or baking something and giving it to 'em and, oh there's lots of things that a person can do in this world.

I: Yes, and I remember you from the Zion Lutheran Church...the Finnish National Church in Marquette.

R: Un huh, oh yes. I was pretty active in there when Reverend Maki was our minister and that. I brought all the Alter flowers over there for many many years from my garden; and then I was in what they call the Ladies Aid. I was...when Reverend Aho was our minister...I was the speaker...whatever you call 'em...in the Ladies Aid and oh, I was into everything. No matter what was going on, I was the head fellow in pertnear everything in the older people's circle.

I: Yes, so you were there when my father was the President of the congregation.

R: Oh yeah

I: And everything was more or less in Finnish.

R: Yeah and to me God is Finn yet today. I like a Finnish service. Oh, I haven't been able to go to a Finnish service...you know why? My folks were that kind people that they always sang Finnish hymns in the
evenings and I learnt all these hymns now...???) and what was the
other one now? (???)...all them. I learned them on my dad's knee
and I never forgot them. I never forgot them hymns, I know them all
by heart. And we used to sing them always over there in Zion when it
was Finnish and I miss that so much. 'Course now since we moved into
this Redeemer Church, well, you know we don't have the Finnish anymore
and since Siipila left, oh I miss him too. I think it's too bad he
hadda go 'cause we had our Finnish service yet then although he used
to tell me lot of times when I told him, "Don't you ever leave from
here now so we'll lose our Finn"...he said, "Oh you can understand
English, you shouldn't worry." I said, "Yeah, but I was brought up
in Finn and I love it."
Or if you hadda horse that was good enough to walk, you know, to make
the trip and you didn't want to walk yourself well then you'd go with
the horse.

I: Do you remember the first car?

R: I remember the first car...Mr. Huutala had it and it was a Buick and
I remember when I got the first ride in a car...that was a Model T.
I had walked from my mother's over to Huutala's store...that was about
four miles...me and my oldest brother we were only about...I was only
about ten years old, he was about six...and there was an old fellow
happened to be in there in the store and we were just leaving the
store, and we had a lot of stuff to carry home...we carried all the
groceries...in our hands, we didn't even have any kind of shopping
bags or anything. If they weren't wrapped up good enough in the store
and broke on the way, well we just have to pick it up off the road.
Well anyway, this old fellow was in the store and his name was August
Beithelia...well he asked us, "Are you on the way home?" We said,
"Yeah". He put us in his car and he took us home and oh my...my...my,
that was really something. I can remember that as long as I live.
That was our first ride. Well, that was a Model T. Well then, just
about two or three years after Huutala had his Buick already, but he
had planted lots of wheat and lot of these here mustard seed plant got
into his wheat and he didn't want to get that mixed up into his wheat,
you know, when it was gonna be groud up and that, so he hired all the
area kids...there was about three hundred of us...he paid us a dollar
day to go to them fields there...and there was about twenty kids to
each man that was, you know, watching us and that, we hadda pull all
this mustard plant out from the outfit. Then he used to bring us home
with that Buick and oh, we would have worked for nothing all day just
to get that ride in that car. And he used to pack as high as fifteen
of us kids in that car and take us home.

I: So that was part of the pay check...getting a ride.

R: That was part of the pay check and that was my first money that I
earned. I was nine years old and I had worked over at that Huutala
farm for fourteen days and boy that fourteen dollars, that was big
money. I thought I should have a crown on my head for earning that
much money. And then my dad needed it for something and he said, "Can
I borrow it?" And he borrowed it and I never did see it anymore, but
that was alright. We never had a...there was no generation gaps them
days, you know. Whatever Dad wanted of us, he got it. So, I gave my
fourteen dollars for him...he needed it for something very important,
I guess, so I said, "Take it".

I: So, that was your first ride in a car and...

R: ...and my first pay check

I: ...your first pay check and then you did have some rides on the
Duluth - Southshore.
R: Oh yes, that I had quite often. We used to go to Ishpeming and visit some relatives every so often and the fair was cheap...only a dollar each way, so that wasn't bad. And then if we hadda go and see a doctor or anything, we used to take the train and go to Ishpeming and then come back. But, I had one sister that she was kind of sickly, and my mother used to have to take her to the doctors to Ishpeming quite often, so she'd take turns with the kids...she'd take one one time and the other another time and so we all saw the train and saw the town.

I: Yes, going back and talking about the doctor, what type of medical care then did you have when you were a child?

R: Didn't have any...never needed it. We were never sick. The only thing that my dad always used to have a bottle of turpentine in the house and if he could see that a children was getting a cold, specially a chest cold, he'd take lump of sugar and put a couple drops of that on there and that's what we hadda take. And then my mother used to take a onion and she'd take some brown sugar and put the onion in this sugar and put lots of butter on it and put a cup over it and she'd put a cup over it and then let this juice come out from under the cup, you know, and that was the best cough medicine that you ever wanted. That would break a cold in no time. A sister of mine had the croup one night so that they thought she was gonna die...she was just blacking out with it...and Mother got up in the dead of night and she started making that and by the time she had that all fixed, boy her croup was gone by morning. That was sour medications. Then we all got down with whooping cough and my dad went in the store and he got some good old fashioned good clean pine tar and he took that tar and he put in a kettle and he boiled it and then he strained it and then we drank that tar water and boy was that good. That broke up that cold in no time. That was our medications. Then we didn't have no...we didn't know what an aspirin was or anything. We never had an aspirin in the house as long as I was over with my dad and mother. So, you can imagine what...

I: Do you remember when you first saw a doctor then?

R: When I first saw a doctor? When my first child was born. I was sixteen years old and then the baby was born when he come to the house so he wouldn't of even been needed. He was late in coming by. It was such a storm, we had about ten feet of snow all even on the level ground that day, was on the seventh of March in 1923, and boy I'm telling you he had a time gettin from Michigamme to Covington. He came in the train from Michigamme as far as Watton and then he walked. I guess he had paddled on his stomach in the snowbank half of the way coming down to the house; and then he was late; but it was alright that he come there anyway so. And that was the first time I ever needed a doctor and then I'll tell ya, the second time that I had been at a doctor's was in 1961. I hadda get an operation that year in Marquette...I was working at the Morgan Heights then and I hurt myself, so I had hernia enough so I hadda go to work and have an operation and that is the only time I have ever been in the hospital. Oh no, I did get my tonsils and teeth out in 1942...fourteen teeth and the tonsils at the same time. So, that was really the second time that I saw a doctor and then this operation was the third time. So, I haven't spent too much for a
I: You've been real lucky

R: And I hope...I hope I don't have to spend too much more on account of it's so expensive now. You go and see a doctor...and the money that I make in four hours on my job...oh my goodness...I don't know how I could ever afford to see anybody. So, it's rough.

I: So, your mother didn't have a doctor.

R: My mother never went to a doctor for none of her babies or anything; and she got...the first time that my mother ever was in the hospital was about three years before she died. She had the flu and I don't know, she had some kind of a internal hemmorage or something because when she went to the bathroom she passed blood so much that...oh she was so sick. She was so so sick for awhile. So, they took her to the doctors and to Ishpeming to the hospital and the doctor had said that she had suffered some kind of a internal hemorrhage, but they...she used to have a little bit like all bladder trouble or something, but she never would go through no operation and she got over that...she was given some medication and she come back home and then three years after she died and she died so quiet too. We found her in bed dead in the morning. She went to visit in the evening with the neighbors and she left there about ten o'clock that she was getting tired that she wanted to go home; so they brought her home and in the morning found her dead at nine o'clock...died of a heart attack in her sleep.

I: Now, you had different nationalities in Covington, how did they get along?

R: Oh, wonderful. There was Swedes and there was French and there was Finnish...the funniest part of it was that they didn't understand one another, but you'd be surprised how they'd make one another understand, you know, understand each others. They'd take one by the hand and they'd show them what they meant if the other guy didn't understand what they meant any other way. And they never argued...there was never no discrepancies on anything that I'm better than you are or this one so and so or that one so and so, they all got along wonderu1. Real good. I can even remember so many of the French families down there, they were the nicest people...oh, gee they were nice. I, in fact, right 'til the last week that I lived in Covington, I had a French family for a neighbor and the man just died not long ago and oh I felt so bad and that woman's still living down there. I'd give my right arm to go and see her some day. She is a wonderful person. Then there was another family by the name of Youngrens...oh you could never go to work and find any better people than those people were...you'd go to that house and you'd never go out of there hungry...never...you'd never go out hungry from that place. They were just as...I don't know...and it didn't make any difference if it was a Finn or if it was a neighbor or Indian or whatever it was, they treated everybody...and that's what I like in Covington though. There never was any nationality uprisings or anything...they felt that they were all God's created people and that's what counted.
I: Now, were they were married into other nationalities and so on?

R: There was never nothin said. They were all accepted. No matter who you married, they said that you're old enough to make up your mind, you'll live with them, you marry who you want and if a Finn married a French, fine. If a Swede married a Finn, fine. There was never nothin said. I've never heard anybody go to work and say, "Oh, I've got a daughter-in-law that's a Swede and it's no good...or I got a son-in-law that's a French and they're no good," you'll never hear that down there. I never did and I think that's a nice way...I wish all of the whole world was like that, then there wouldn't be no arguments or fights.

I: Now, all of the people didn't belong to one of the churches, were there other groups too?

R: Well, the Swedes had their own church, the French had their own church and, of course, the Finns had their own church.

I: And then there were people that didn't belong to the churches

R: Yeah, but not too many in them days, not too many. They were pretty well all of them church members. You found very few in my time in Covington that wasn't a church-going person and a strict person too. They liked church as church is supposed to be. They weren't like now that lot of the people want to go to church now and they want to bring their own ideas into the church and turn the church to how they'd like it. Some churches into drinking places and dancing and, oh if that ever come in our church, that's when I go out one door and they can come in the other one because I'd never accept that in a church. You know, I was just reading in our church paper there, that Lutheran Witness about that President of the Missynod there...Pruess or Pruss or whatever his name, well he's really coming out with what the church is supposed to be and what people are trying to do. They're trying to take all of what God put on earth or what he put in the Bible for us to believe, they're trying to turn that all upside down and just put their own ideas in there. Well, unt-un, not so...not here...I don't like that. I always say that Bible is the only true book on earth, that's what kind of an answer I give anybody when they doubt the Bible I say that's the only true book on earth. Anyother book that's man-made, that I doubt. But, that one is a God-made book and that is a book of truth and I think as long as we have it, we will be okay. But when that gets taken away from us, then God bless us...then we don't know what's what.

I: Now, what about the school you attended in the Covington-Watton area?

R: It was in Watton where I was going to school and we had one school room, seventy-two children, eight grades from kindergarten to the eighth and one teacher and we had this many projects in there...we had reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography, penmanship, language and spelling. Now, we had all that just as good as any school today, and boy I'm telling you, they had...they got smart kids out of that school although there was, you know, so small little bit of room and
only one teacher and all that, but oh we had good teachers boy.

I: Do you remember the teachers' names?

R: Yes, one that was my first teacher was a Miss Fountain from Trout Creek and then we had another one, Mrs. Noselinen from Trout Creek also, and then we had a Miss Demons from Michigamme that taught in Watton Schools for about fifteen years and she was a better Finn than Englishman...she left from there. We taught her Finn and she could even write all kinds of Finnish words.

I: What about heating the school and the water situation?

R: Yeah, well we had a lady living right close to the school that was our janitor. She kept that school so clean that you could a eaten off of the floor. We had a great big...like a pot-belly stove with some kind of a tin over it so the kids wouldn't burn there selves on it and it was a wood-burning thing and we had a big woodshed in the back of the school and the children always carried the wood in for the janitor and then the water...she had a big spring there right by her house, it was only like...not even a block or what we call a city block...from the school and she carried the water from there all the way to the school for us. And the best part was that we didn't have no cups or different things to drink from or no faucets or anything...it was in a pail on a stand and there was a dipper in there and we'd drink with the dipper. It was a miracle that there wasn't all kinds of sickness and disease going around them days, but there wasn't. Then, some kind of a health program started and we all hadda buy one of these collapsable aluminum drinking cups and nobody could drink offa that dipper. We hadda take the water with the dipper and put it in the cup and then drink it and we always hadda take care of our own cup. So, that was the first health outfit that we had that amounted to anything in school.

I: Now, what about...did you have special Christmas programs at school?

R: Yes, wonderful...we had wonderful programs. Oh, we really had big ones and they were always in the evening so the whole community could to work and come and listen to us and they thought they were just wonderful. Yup...and then the Santa Claus would come and he'd bring us bags and bags of candy...sometimes we'd get three and four bags 'cause the merchants were so good with the...and generous with the candy and that they didn't even pay any attention to how many kids was in school, they just piled it in. Of course, when the Santa Claus came well if there was any left over you'd get two - three bags. Oh boy...and then Santa used to know that which children came from the poorest families, so they got the most candy, so we were always the lucky ones.

I: So, Santa Claus up in the North Pole even knew about that.

R: You bet, was out in the North Pole alright, yup.

I: Did you have a potato time in the Fall at school where you'd get time off to go and pick potatoes?

R: No, they didn't. We didn't go to work and take time off, but we had to
...we'd get home from school about four o'clock, well then we'd all have to go to the potato field for a couple hours and course, our farm we weren't on such a big outfit, it was only a farm that would feed the eleven kids and Dad and Ma, you know; so it was after school that we'd go out and we'd pick about ten - fifteen bushels of potatoes after we come home from school and that we'd do about four nights a week and that was all that there was to it. But there was some potato farms but they were too far, there was no transportation that we couldn't get out to. There was none around Covington though...we would have had to go way out to Michigamme or somewheres where they were raising more potatoes; but not around there, every farmer just had their own.

I: Yes, and your school was from September until May?
R: Un huh...until May. Usually left out around the tenth of May.
I: Were there any other programs besides the Christmas program at school?
R: Well, we had some kind of a May Day program...a big one. Oh, they used to have all kinds...and then when...well this wasn't a program, this was just a big picnic when the school left out. Oh, that was really a field day for us. There was ice cream and there was everything that you could think of for us to eat. That was really a big day.
I: Did you have a special Eighth Grade graduation at all?
R: No, unt-un...nope, they'd just get their diplomas as they got through school and that was it. But I often wonder when I think of the teacher of today, of the teacher in them days. They were getting thirty-five dollars a month...that was their salary, teaching seventy-two kids, walking about four blocks to where they were boarding, they'd walk home to dinner and then they'd walk back to school and all this teaching that they had to do...oh and they really put their life into their work. That was...I often think to myself, that a teacher's life maybe's never a happy life, but them days it certainly wasn't; but now when I think of the kids how mean they are, why the kids are just...I don't know where the parents are...I do not know where the parents are; but I often say when I worked in the school that the biggest wrong that the government ever done for a school was to take the authority away from the teacher. While the child's in school, the teacher's the boss or should be; but nowadays they seem to think that their children are made to glass that if you go to work and touch them they break.
I: Now, the teacher could discipline you at the Watton School?
R: You bet! You know what, I went to work one time...I was sittin...I used to have long braids and a girl sittin in the back of me she used to take ahold of my braids and drive me like a horse, you know, she thought she had ahold of a horses' lines and oh, she done that a little too often and I turned around and I slapped her and of course the teacher hadn't noticed what she'd done to me first so I slapped her and she started to cry. So I got punished for it and we used to wear our clothes, you know, longjohns and then long knitted stockings...Mother always knitted them all...put them so they were way up high, so
she sent me out to the woods to get a switch that she'd give me a lickin and I had to pull my longjohn up, my stockings down and I got it on the bare legs and I tell you I had just like some hotdogs on my legs when I went home that night...big welts. I didn't even dare tell my folks about it, because I would have got another one. So, I just kept quiet and then I went to bed in the evening. Well, naturally under the covers there was three and four of us sleeping on one bed, well them welts hurt and they started to kind of smart so I started to cry and Mother came upstairs and asked me what was wrong. I said, "My legs are hurting." When she seen them she was kind of peeved a little bit and she did have a talk with the teacher; but the teacher said that, "Well, she had it coming." Well, my mother said, "Well, why didn't you kind of look for what the other kid done to her before she hit her?" So, there was no more argument than that, that was all there was to it. But oh, I tell you, I used to get into some hot ones with the kids there once there...we come out of such a poor family and one time even we were going across a field, you know, and we didn't always have the best of clothes or anything, so went through a barbed-wire fence on kind of a footpath, you know, we were going home...wind blew my dress up and I suppose they noticed what kind underpants I had on and oh they made a regular song out of that and I tell you, did I suffer with that...oh. We all kinds of ups and downs...we were always the underdogs...the poor kids in the school. And the ones that were a little richer, they thought they were something. Oh, they laughed at everything that we done...even at...once in awhile, you know, we didn't always have the best of lunch either. We had a...like a...you know, it was enough nourishment for a person and that like a sandwich with meat and that in, good butter and then probably some good homemade rolls or something and milk, well once in while we'd get a piece of pie or something in the pail and oh boy, some of them other kids used to come and look and "Oh, look at them richbucks, now where did they ever go to work and get all that stuff to eat now...they're eatin better today than we are." That's the way we were bombarded in school. When we ate...once in a year, well we'd get a good meal with us to take along, then we get all that BS on it.

I: Now, what about politicking and so on? Were there any special things that you remember about politics or trying for office?

R: Yes...lots of them on like Road Commissioners and all that small outfits. They used to get to be real hot outfits down there once in awhile. And then the one that would go to work and win, they'd go out and politic and they'd tell the young people, "Now, if you go to work and vote for me, we're renting the hall and we're gonna have a nice dance tonight."...and all that. Well, naturally they'd get a lot more votes. Well, that way they used to get to work that night, then, real government, oh them used to be hot ones. They almost got in fistfights over there around Covington in them and they used to...one would be a Republican and the other would be a Democrat and in betwixt the two of them, oh boy."I'm right?" and "I'm right..."well I guess that's the way it'll go although the world anyway, that the two parties are always gonna disagree. One is better than the other. Yeah, they used to have lots of hot affairs going there about politics and that. But, Polling Day was a real real good day over there when the Polls were open...oh, I'm telling you, that they really had a good turn out then and it was a
a regular holiday. Even the stores closed when they had those going on which they don't do anymore in this day and age.

I: And you had to go and get your mail from the Post Office?

R: Yes...well we hadda get...well our school was right next to the Post Office so we always brought the mail home when we come home from school; so there was really no problem on that except only on Saturday...if we expected mail, well somebody would have to go down and get it.

I: Now, did your family get any Finnish newspaper through the mail?

R: Yes, they got several of them. They got Suomitauter and they had the Daily Paper...Bagaletti or whatever you call it.

I: Altia.

R: Altia and oh they got...my mother was a great one for reading. My dad was always for politics from the paper even or anything going on like if there was a war on or anything, then he'd always...he'd know the war news, if anybody knew 'em, he did. And he was a man from the Bible. He could take any minister...

End of Side B