FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
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Interview by Paul Jalkanen
with Reino Suojanen  July 19, 1972

Paul: Mr. Suojanen, would you tell me a little bit about your background and where you were born and where your parents came from?

Reino: I was born in South Carver, Massachusetts, in 1902; went to Finland at 3 months old and stayed there until I came back when I was 21, in 1924.

Paul: What did your father do? What kind of work did he do?

Reino: He was doing all kinds of work in America; he was a mining man and cranberry bog man and in Finland he was a merchant, he had a country store.

Paul: Did you have what you consider to be a kind of a good life in Finland, it was kind of easy going and kind of enjoyable with your brothers and sisters and your parents?

Reino: Yes, it was pretty nice in Finland until that Civil War but then

Paul: What year was the Civil War?

Reino: In 1918. But then many things started going wrong after that. During the Civil War and even after, business was very difficult and there was all kinds of troubles, political troubles, people were hating each other, people who never quarreled before then, then they really started quarreling. But that didn't last long. I remember this now when I came to America six years later, they were quarreling here about that Finland Civil War very hotly; in Finland they had already agreed about everything and pacify.

Paul: What can you tell me about your first impressions when you came to America? When you came back to America in 1924? What it was like living in Massachusetts then?

Reino: I think automobiles, everyone seemed to have automobile and that was just some kind of wonderful and those "tar" roads, tar roads (blacktop roads) they were so different then what I had seen before. 'Course I landed in New York so those New York skyscrapers they were very impressive, overwhelming.

Paul: How did you get from New York to Massachusetts then?

Reino: Train. And my ticket was to Massachusetts.

Paul: What kind of work did you do then when you came back in 1924?

Reino: My aunt's husband was a cranberry bog bossman in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and he said that, the next day after I had arrived that "let's go to work, there's good times in America, nobody is loitering", so we started working that way on cranberry bog and all kinds of, what was needed and but then I started writing to newspaper also: Pohjan Tälti of Fitchburg, and after while, a few weeks I was working as manager of newspaper, August Kangas wrote me a letter that since you handle the Finnish language so well, we could need you on this paper, would you come to work with us? You'll find the work here. So I moved there and at my--became my journalist career that lasted 45 years.

Paul: When did you retire then?

Reino: At 69.

Paul: In 1969?

Reino: When they sold this Hancock station
Paul: Oh, yes, that's right, you were a part of that too.

What kind of work did you do then for the Fitchburg paper, when you became involved with that?

Reino: In Fitchburg, I became a bookkeeper and it was main job in the beginning but I was so interested in editing so I was doing part-time, helping the editor and I got quite a good experience in that; then somebody told me that you would make most money with linotype so I asked August Kangas, that manager if I could learn linotype, so said, OK, we might need you in that way, too. And I started practicing that and I learned that quite quick that linotype, and then after I was about—not even whole year in Pohjan Tähti, New Yorkin Uutiset lost linotypist, and they needed linotypist quickly and they wanted me to move there, they heard that I had practice and training there for linotypist.

Paul: How much money did you make on your first job?

Reino:

Paul:

Reino:

Paul: $21 a month?

Reino: A week!

Paul: A week? Oh, that wasn't—that was 1924-25. And that was working for the newspaper in Fitchburg, the Finnish newspaper there. And then you were just going on to say that you then moved to New Yorkin Uutiset.

Reino: Ya, well, I did not move to New York and I heard it right away, linotypists earn more money than editors or bookkeepers and so—even when I was linotyping New Yorkin Uutiset my mind was always in editing and I was helping editors writing stories and when they noticed, those editors, they save their own work, they just let me do anything, all the letters that came from people to paper; those times people were very diligent in writing

Paul: Well, what kind of things did they write?

Reino: About everything that happened in their home area and some people who were just correspondents of a church or Raitius Seura, Temperance Society, or Knights of Kaleva

Paul: And so you wrote these up and put these into the paper then.

Reino: Well, I was editing then with the linotype.

Paul: Oh, I see, at the linotype

Reino: Ya, so that saved quite a bit time, work from editors. And I was there about 2 years when they needed Editor in new newspaper in Fitchburg; the Raivaja, the competing paper that followed the Pohjan Tähti by getting one Pohjan Tähti linotypist to see if he would buy stocks and when he bought, he got the majority of the stocks and he gave them to Raivaja whose money he really had paid with so Raivaja stopped Pohjan Tähti and people got mad and established new paper, Amerikän Suomalainen, and they invited me to be an editor first, first weeks I did with Yrjö Sjorblom—he was in New York Times but he just came there to start that paper and then later on, I was editor with Onni Syrjäniemi. Syrjäniemi moved to, after
a couple of years, he moved to Ohio and I got left alone, I was editing 3 times a week, paid by a loan.

Paul: When you were about 25 years old?

Reino: Ya, I was busy and I had to help linotypist, also, and make-up men.

Paul: How long have you been working in the--for the newspaper? For this one that you went back, was is the Amerikan Suomalainen?

Reino: Amerikan Suomalainen. If I could remember that now, quickly, there was 3 linotypists, And maybe 3 make-up men, 2 pressmen and 2 editors and 2 bookkeepers and few so-called advertising men who ran around to get advertising for the papers.

Paul: How big a circulation did the newspaper have?

Reino: They, I think, had about 4 or 5 thousand that Amerikan Suomalainen.

Paul: Was the other paper larger--the competing paper?

Reino: It was that time larger but it started getting down, also, those years already. The Raivaja, that time, was a paivä lehti (daily paper), it was coming 6 days a week. But it soon went to 5 days and then 3 days a week.

Paul: And basically they ended up being the same kind of paper you were, 3-day a week paper then. What kind of political views did you have to write into the paper, or did you write political views, you know, how did Finnish people feel about politics in the 1920's, let's say 1926-27, this is, when you were 27; back to Fitchburg again.

Reino: Raivaja was socialist paper and they were quite hard about that, Raivaja people, and they wouldn't even take church ads in the paper even with the money; they were against church for some reason.

Paul: All Finnish churches? It didn't make any difference which church it was, it was just against all of them?

Reino: Ya.

Paul: Were they communist papers or just a socialist paper?

Reino: Socialist paper. They were communist paper in -- Eteenpäin was in Worcester that time, Massachusetts, and I believe that Eteenpäin gave Raivaja much more trouble than we did with our nationalistic papers, our clientele was churches and temperance societies, Kaleva--Knights of Kaleva societies and--

Paul: How come the temperance societies became so very strong, it seems like, in the Finnish communities? Even here in the Copper Country and you also mention that there were temperance societies in the Fitchburg area, were there some in New York Finns, too?

Reino: Oh, yes, they were everywhere in East there were very strong, they had summer picnics that, I think, once in--there was a summer picnic in Worcestor and the Worcestor people would brag that they had 15,000 people together there.

Paul: For a temperance meeting?

Reino: Temperance society meeting, yes. I don't know if that was true but

Paul: You never went to any?
Reino: Ya, I went there but I didn't count the people, I was busy, they had for example sports there; soil fishing, measuring the distance how far they throw the javelin or shot put and of course then I wrote stories what the speakers said, all kinds of radio

Paul: Was the temperance movement stronger among the Finns, do you think, than it was among other ethnic groups that came to America in 1920's?

Reino: I think it was. They used to say that those other peoples they just went to saloons and Finnish people went to temperance hall. Of course there were some Finns who went saloons also but temperance societies, they were very inspired. Speakers, there were plenty of speakers and they were good, they were really telling the people how bad the alcoholic drinks were and so on. And how they lose their money

Paul: Was it a carry-over from the old country, from Finland?

Reino: Ya, I think that's where it came from, here, from Finland

Paul: Well, it seemed that you mentioned to me earlier that when we were talking before we started taping, that the good times in Finland were the weddings and sometimes when you'd be together building a house or something else or maybe helping other people building something, or maybe a new church or something, and that sometimes they'd have homemade wine there that they started drinking

Reino: beer

Paul: beer, I mean, yes, and that they'd have a good time and but then you say that this is kind of a feeling of Finnish people this temperance movement and it came to America with them then.

Reino: Ya, this was so rare occasion that drinking beer, because it might come only few times a year, not everyday, like those who go to saloons

Paul: it wasn't something that occurred all the time; they never drank it in the home then? There was no drinking in the home of any kind of alcoholic beverage

Reino: No, only those days that they brewed their homemade beer

Paul: Why this temperance feeling among the Finns then, even in the old country and then here?

Reino: There was some kind of a mentality amongst Finns that they get interested on extra values and they go very strongly believing, like they go to religion, they go very strongly to it, and then some kind of idealoical

Paul: like socialist or something that they become socialists

Reino: ya but they were very, very strong

Paul: so when they grab a hold of something, they go "full guns" at it than, they really push it.

Reino: ya, same way like yourself. Eteenpäin--its claim to have a better socialism than communism and the Raivaja people, they really took big chunk of subscribers from Raivaja and Raivaja suffered but when Raivaja was in the haymaking time, people were very strong for that line of socialism
What kind of line of socialism was it?

Reino: Well, they claim that they were same as Finland social democrats but, I think, there people here in America were much more radical than they were in Finland; for example, as I mentioned, this church, they were against church but in Finland they didn't make that an issue at all, because I happen to know people who were social democrats, they could go to church too, and but, this Finnish-Americans they were, I don't know, they were easier to lead I guess, there were some very, very hard leaders and they could sway them very easily

ya

Paul: Do you have any other feelings about temperance movement or how about the temperance movement in the Copper Country when you came here in 1930?

Reino: They was very weak already they had already passed there was no drinking anyway in the United States at that time

Reino: ya it was illegal but Roinu and Soihtu, they were still going on when I came here and it was--there was something that they didn't get the young people

Paul: they were middle-aged?

Reino: ya, and my feeling was that they were too solemn, they didn't have anything for young people to have special moments, they didn't allow dancing, they didn't allow plays or dramas but in the East, the young people really had good times in those temperance halls where they danced at the same time as the temperance meetings were going on

Reino: ya, they learned all those folk dances from old country, kansa heippapallans and they learned to sing there and choirs and play drama by the very strong--like in Fitchburg Ammukoito had just built a $75,000 theatre-house for themselves when I arrived there and they might have 3 plays going on at the same time; one was shown in home, one was rehearsing in back rooms and in tour all around New England. And that was going on all the time then. People who were active in the society, they had to really work there hard without pay.

Paul: Do you think there were any fraudulent people in the temperance movement? You know people who talked about not drinking but kind of went on the side and had a little bit; I suppose there's always a few of those in every

Reino: I think so, I didn't happen to know anybody but I heard stories about them

Paul: you heard stories about them, they go behind and have a little drink afterwards or something; we're kind of in a position here, 1927-30, before you left Fitchburg and came to the Copper Country, came to Calumet, what happened in the last 2-3 years in Fitchburg that you finally decided to leave and come to the Copper Country?

Reino: Oh, Fitchburg, ya, the big depression hit and it hit very hard there; I was sometimes compare that when I came to Copper Country, people here didn't even know anything about the depression yet

When did you come here, what time?

Reino: 1930. Mid-winter. And in Fitchburg, end of '29 it was so bad that people came to
editorial office, Amerikan Suometar, crying, many good old friends, because they had lost their house and they had been buying stocks in March and then suddenly they were called to pay and they didn't have savings enough so they had to lose their house and all, their automobiles

So you stayed there when the crash came in October, the stock exchange, but the depression already started about that time in Fitchburg right away

Reino: ya, it hit there right away, it stopped everything.

Paul: Stopped everything. And then you left there in December or January, end of '29 or beginning of '30.

Reino: I left January; it was the worst time that I had ever experienced, it was even worse than Finland's civil war time

Paul: Did the Amerikan Suometar close up at that time, the newspaper you were editing?

Reino: Well, there was one businessman who had loaned money to it and then there was neighbor-paper's people induced him to get his money now or you lose everything so he foreclosed our business, couldn't even get in. And we were waiting for its opening for many weeks but it seemed to be so slow that when I got invitation to Copper Country, Michigan, I decided to leave. Because there were so many people who said, it's hopeless. We had already planned to make a weekly paper instead of 3 times a week and we could have, I guess, made it go even in depression time if he could get open the place where printing presses were

Paul: So that newspaper closed up then when you left

Reino: Ya.

Paul: Did they open ever again?

Reino: No.

Never did then when depression stopped. What about the competing newspaper in town? The socialist one?

Reino: They survived because they had a bank, with the paper they had some kind of luoto bankki, the people who believed on Raivaja, they had put all their savings to their bank and bank helped paper to stay up but it went down to many meager paper company it had been and 2 times a week and now they are still coming but very small.

Paul: they're still going today?

ya

Paul: So it's lasted from the late 1920's all the way up until today. But very small in comparison. Finnish population in Fitchburg can't be that large any more, is it?

Reino: Well, of course they had their coast to coast subscription so these Finnish papers, they were really never local papers, they had subscribers in—everywhere where Finns were living around the country.

Paul: And then you came to the Copper Country in 1930. The depression, you said, was hardly affecting anything here? How did you come? Train?

Reino: Train.
Paul: By train thru

Reino: Canada.

Paul: Thru Canada, Detroit,

Reino: No, from Canada, thru Sault Ste. Marie,

Paul: and then came across that way. What about your experiences, what newspaper after, how did you even find out that they wanted you up here? Did they write to you?

Reino: Ya, they wrote to me; I didn't even know that there was anything available here but they had heard from some travelers that I was available, that I wasn't working there, and then I got the letter there and they need me

Paul: What was the name of the paper?

Reino: First it was Suometar, Amerikan Suometar, they needed here but Opas was established that same spring time and they induced me to go to Opas so I went to Opas, supposed to be a big modern paper, they said, of course, we tried to make it good paper but then even that year wasn't very good yet, my first year, but I was assistance to Victor Burman then and he was that kind of nervous personality that when the Valvoja needed editor, I was glad to move from Opas to Valvoja.

Paul: Had you ever been to the Copper Country before you came here in 1930?

Reino: No

Paul: You had never traveled out here before?

Reino: No, I had never been

Paul: What did you think of it when you came here?

Reino: I was horrified! (laughter)

Paul: For what reason?

Reino: Because of the winter, I wasn't clothed for this kind of winter and I didn't open my suitcases even before the winter was over and the summer came, then I felt different; I was still expecting to go back to East right way after they open the paper but they didn't get it going.

Paul: The winters here you think were worse than even in Finland?

Reino: ya

Paul: More snow.

Reino: Well, it came—sauna, fishing, swimming and Copper Country seemed to be alright. Next fall I bought skiis, I been skiing ever since

Paul: and you've been skiing ever since (turn tape over)
Mr. Suojanen, you were talking about the--coming newspaper here, editing here in the Copper Country in Calumet, said you switched newspapers then in 1930-31, why did you change newspapers?

Reino: Well, I was assistant editor in Opas, I was doing long pages and world news was specialty, course I was doing anything here and there also, but in Valvoja, they needed chief editor so it was a move up when I went to Valvoja.

Paul: Yes. How much money did you make, would you mind telling us?

Reino: $45 a week.

Paul: $45 a week at the Valvoja.

Reino: Ya, but it didn't last long because when the depression came, I didn't have it

Paul: it went down there after a while; did the--was the Opas a paper that was nation-wide?

Reino: Ya, like all the other Finnish papers, the they been nation-wide

Paul: and the Valvoja was the same way then you moved/ that one, became chief editor

Reino: Ya, it was subscriptions coming from Canada and coast to coast of United States and some from Sweden and some from Finland

What kind of newspaper did you want to make it? What kind of newspaper as chief editor did you want to have? What was your goal as editor?

Reino: When I went to Valvoja?

Paul: Yes.

Reino: Well, I guess I wanted to make Valvoja modern newspaper so it would look like a newspaper; they didn't even have headlines in front page, they called that erämaa so I put headlines there and some pictures so that it looked more attractive than it had looked before. Of course, then there's some kind of other feelings too, this former editor had let people write very harsh letters against Heideman people who didn't--Heideman church didn't come along with Laurium church to establish a national organization and there came a big quarrel, they were really quarreling, bad names to each other, and I asked Board that could we stop this kind of name-calling, it doesn't help anything but quarrel is just getting worse, and it looks very bad even to outsiders and it surprised me, they said, OK you are editor, you make it the way you want it, if you want to stop them, stop them. And since they gave me that kind of work I followed that and brought those bad letters to a waste basket, course the writers then came after me! They said that we would need Tuira, former editor. They wanted to continue that war.

Paul: Do the feelings continue to be bitter yet even after 1932-33?

Reino: Ya, they were bad but at least in Valvoja, we didn't publish any more of those kind of letters.

What kind of editorials did you write? What was your goal in editorials? I know that many of the editorials would deal with specific issues but what kind of dealings did you have editorially when you wrote?

Reino: Well, of course, the Valvoja was Republican paper, what they wrote about, critics had Republican leanings but then when Roosevelt came and was successful to get us out from that depression but then in 1936 was election year and it seemed that Roosevelt had succeeded in turning the wind so that Republicans were not very
good shape, I asked board again that why don't they take that Republican name away from Valvoja, just put the Valvoja Publishing Company instead of Finnish Republican Publishing Company and I was surprised also there, they right away agreed with me.

Paul: Who were the board members?

Reino: The original board members were established, they was a Jacob Uitti, President was Edward Kelsu, and businessman like Jyva, Eilola; Frank Eilola was a very good
Well they were all businessmen from the area or C & H?

Reino: Most of them were
Mining people or something?

Reino: They were mostly businessmen

Paul: You got along with them quite well

Reino: It seems that way

Paul: They agreed with you some of the times and dropped the Republican name.

Reino: Oh yes, those first Board members were very good and nice to work with. We never had any troubles then. They started dying off and too weak to serve and we started getting new board members and many of them were much weaker persons and many of them didn't seem to understand anything about a newspaper.

Paul: Did you buy into the newspaper after a while, or did you become a part owner?

Reino: Yes, I bought stocks there so I had stock there. I don't have them any more, I sold them.

Paul: I just wondered if you had a personal interest and became part owner. Did you endorse Roosevelt in the 36 election then?

Reino: We didn't exactly endorse it but we tried to be as partial as possible and we didn't put what was in there before. After the election Roosevelt won.

Paul: Did you have Board meetings every month?

Reino: Yes, every month

Paul: You got married during this time also.

Reino: Yes, in 33.

Paul: You met her in Laurium while you were there?

Reino: Yes, she was a bookkeeper at Valvoja

Paul: So everybody got involved then

Reino: Yes, she helped me read proofs and all kind of little things.
Reino: I was really training her

Paul: Did you give up the newspaper then in 1937?

Reino: No, I kept on editing and broadcasting everyday

Paul: What was the station that you broadcasted for?

Reino: WHDF in Calumet

Paul: When you gave the news, the broadcasting Finnish news in Calumet did you editorialize at all?

Reino: I think I was slamming again Hitler and the war time.

Paul: What happened when we became Allies of Russia, how do you feel when the war was finished?

Reino: We had directions from editors and broadcasters and we had to try and restrain ourselves. We couldn't say too much against the Russian.

Paul: When did you have the feeling that Hitler was not the best thing for Germany? He came into power about 1933 the same time that FDR did in the United States. Did you have some feeling in 36, 37 that

Reino: At first I was wondering if maybe he was a good man for the Germans. But when he started giving those harsh statements and persecuting people who didn't believe his way. Then I started hearing the news about what he was doing to the Chez's and Jews, I really turned against him then.

Paul: Before the War even started.

Reino: Yes.

Paul: Before 1939.

Reino: Yes.

Paul: Let's change the subject a little bit, how did the Finnish population since you lived in the Copper Country in 1930 and 1940 or '41 when the war started, how did they get along. You said that the Depression started to hurt the newspaper after a while, did it become just a weekly newspaper then?

Reino: No, we went through even in the war times.

Paul: Even during the Depression?
12.

P  But things got pretty rough then?
R  We didn't lose too many subscriptions but advertising
P  Advertising went down
R  Yes,
P  And the mines closed up in Calumet
R  Wages too at the paper went down so it was really trying times
P  Could you feel it personally as editor?
R  Yes, it was sometimes really difficult to meet the bills. They just cut the wages down so I guess the editor was in the same fix as everyone else. Even the businessmen couldn't run the business very profitably.

P  How did the Finnish population in Calumet get along with the Irish, Italians and others, say, before World War II or before 1945, the end of the war?
R  They seemed to get along very well, I didn't notice any friction.
P  Even during the Depression times.
R  Well they had forgotten those old fights that they used to have, especially Finns and Irish, they were fighting before and I heard stories about it, but they are good friends now.

P  Did you have anyone working in the newspaper who was not Finnish?
R  No, I believe they were all Finnish.
P  I just wondered if there were some who might have worked their way in.
R  No.

P  How were your neighbors here in the Copper Country?
R  They were very good. They were good neighbors as neighbors but there were some people who gave us a hard time because we didn't go strong Republican as before.

P  Were the Finnish people Republicans because of the Companies?
R  That seemed to be the reason.

P  The owners of the companies and the bosses were Republican and they told the workers to vote Republican.
They told them they were Republican or else.

Did they lose their job if they weren't?

Well they say that.

How could they tell if you voted Republican or not?

Well they had to ask what ballot they wanted. If you took Democrat you lost your work.

There was a lot of pressure on you then.

Yes, of course many Finnish people got the idea that the Democrats were Catholics.

They associated with the Irish people up here

Yes, The Irish Catholic would be the Democrat.

Yes.

How do you feel about the companies, the C&H, the Quincy, the Franklin and the others that were up here. As an editor and as a news broadcaster.

They often seemed to be high handed. For example, some friends of mine came from Mackinaw Island and we had to try to find housing for them. I remember one Engineer from Helsinki, was in Peterlin's house in Calumet. So I think the big shots at Calumet Hecla had a very bad policy but there were very nice people too at Calumet & Hecla.

How did they treat you as a newspaper editor?

Good I never had any trouble with them.

Did you ever write any editorials against them?

No, because we tried to keep our nose clean on either side.

You wouldn't try to write for the workers or against them. Then the union's came.

Yes, I think poor public relations was the downfall of it all

That might have been their problem all the way up until today, part of it anyway.
Part of it anyway might have been public relations. You mentioned here that the workers were called Communists, do you think there were many?

No. They were against the Communists.

The Finnish Socialists were not Communists then?

Most of the Calumet and Hecla workers were just horrified about the Communists.

Did you write editorials against the Communist position after the war then?

Yes, I guess I did.

During the war you broadcasted on the radio and continuing editing the newspaper? When did you move to Hancock then? You continued with the same newspaper throughout the war?

I was with Valvoaj until 1956. Then I went to California in the winter and returned to here the next year in 1957.

What were you looking for in California?

I went to see if I could get a position in an English newspaper. If not in the editing department then in the printing department. I know how to handle linotypes and make them up also. They only asked my age and I was already 54 and they didn't ask anymore of what I could do.

They didn't want you then at that age.

No, my age was against me.

Did you ever try before 1956 to get a job with an English newspaper?

I tried in the Depression years to get a job with a newspaper in New York.

During the end of 1929?

Yes. I was substituting for a man who was sick but he came back the next day and I had to start looking again.

Well did the newspaper close then in 1956?

Well they merged with another one after I left.

The two competing newspapers joined together then?
R Didn't they have different philosophies the two of them?
P
R They used to have but when they merged, they felt they were alike and they really had to get together the forces. But even then they couldn't make it somehow and they sold it.
P
R Did the paper lose subscriptions even before 1956?
P
R No, of course it was gradual that all the Finnish newspapers were losing little by little but they were quite strong yet.
P
R How much did it cost for a subscription?
P
R At that time it was $7.00.
P
R $7.00 in 1955 or around there
R
R Why did you leave?
P
R Well I got fed up with the winter, I was looking for summer country.
P
R Summer country.
P
R That was the main reason. I spent twenty six and a half years in Calumet and I wanted to see something else too.
P
R So then you went to California and came back the next year already?
P
R Yes.
P
R Did you go back to Calumet then?
P
R Well my home was still there, but I also went to Hancock office. One reason why I came back was my radio station offered me my own program. I had a program through the newspaper. There was friction and they said they might reduce my income so I thought I better do something about it.
P
R So you thought you'd leave then.
P
R Yes. But still the main reason was I wanted to get away from the winter climate.
P
R But when you got the opportunity for the new broadcasting and you're own program you decided that would be worthwhile coming back for?
P
R Yes, I thought maybe I should try that and it would be really profitable to come back.
The program did very well then.
You became part owner of the broadcasting company then.
Later on I did. Somebody got scared and wanted to sell and I wasn't scared and I bought. This is the way I became owner.
Was it an enjoyable experience being a broadcaster on the radio from 1956 on?
Yes. That was the best time from all my working years. Somehow they selected me as his business partner and he always wanted me to go along on his business trips.
So you and Fran got along very well, you as a manager, and so on.
Yes.
It was a very good time then?
Yes. Then he found out that all the good radio stations have editorials. He said we're a good radio station and we should have editorials too. So they decided to have editorials. They wondered who would write them. Fran didn't have any writing experience and he looked at me and asked me to write editorials. Fran was reading them and I was writing them for about 7 years.
You'd read them?
He'd read them and I'd write them.
What kind of editorials did you write?
Well we were asked that alot but I was writing what I pleased.
Did you write a couple editorials a week?
Every day, twice a day.
Did you get alot of letters?
Did you try to answer them?
Not usually, unless they were a harsh case, but most of them were usually trying to praise us. We didn't have much trouble about that.
Could you explain what the moral Rearmmary group was that came to Calumet?
That was an extension of an Oxford Group movement that the American Modern minister who was a minister at Oxford started at Oxford University. It became so popular that they changed it's name to the Moral Rearmament. It was very interesting and inspiring. It was based on four absolutes. I don't know if I even remember them anymore. I haven't been involved with them for so many years. There was absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love. It was built on those four actions. I guess the times were so bad especially during Hitler's time, that these ecological movements caught fire and there seemed to be high and mighty people in Europe.

There was once a meeting in Mackinaw Island and there were about 3,000 people from different countries.

This was before the war?

After the war.

Oh, after the war.

I got acquainted with many of Finland's representatives and when the strike was here they were asked to come and see if they could end the strike because they had succeeded to do this in many other places. They came here but couldn't do anything because Calumet & Hecla wouldn't give in anything and the union wouldn't give in anything.

What were they trying to do, what was the purpose of the Moral Rearmament?

They tried to have the world have a better moral place to live. It was an ecological movement that seemed to make a better understandment morally.

It died out then after the war after a while?

My private opinion is that they were poorly organized economically. They didn't even have any member's dues. They relied on private money I noticed on the meeting on Mackinaw Island that some big industry had come there and given money to it but they seemed to be talking about supporting the Republican side.

When did it start?

I guess it was in the 1920's. It grew little by little and by the 1930's and 40's it became a very big movement. So they had no more money and they had to give up their college on Mackinaw Island. The Catholic Church was against them very much.

Is that right?

Yes,

Why was that?
I think they were trying to compete with the Catholic Church. But then they changed their mind.

So they changed then after a while.

They wanted to try to organized people all around the world to make a better place to live.

We've talked a little bit throughout this interview about the church, what kind of feelings do you have about the Finnish Church in America? First talk about the one in America and then talk about the Finnish Church in the old countries.

Well I guess the American Finnish Church is more full of enthusiasm than the Church in Finland. The State Church is more formal and the American Church seems to be less formal just like other societies.

Did you like going to that type of a church?

Yes. I like the one in Pittsburgh but they never had any dancing there.

It was a good church but no dancing?

We were talking at that time about the splinter groups in American and why the Stadium Groups in Calumet and we started talking if there were any differences with the Church in Pittsburgh. The splitting up that was taking place in the 30's when you lived here. I wonder if you know why the Stadium movement even got going or why there was the church split. Was it just because of this Nationalist feeling of this one church?

It was a matter of personal differences and also it was a quite emotional church.

What kind of men were the men like Heideman who was the leader of the other group at that time?

First there was ________________ and then came Michaelson.

That's right. Had this split taken place before you came here in 1930 or 31?

Yes, it was split already.

Any other feelings about the church splitting here and any other differences in the Copper Country or the Apostolic Churches in the Copper Country or churches out east?

I think the National Church was very much the same as the Suomi Synod Church. They were much heavier after the turn of the century.

Oh, I see I didn't know that.
They stayed with them when they joined.

Did they stay with them now or are they back to the Suomi Synod.

I think most of them have stayed except for this Calumet Church. He wouldn't join them.

Back with the Suomi or the Missouri?

With the Missouri

What kind of position did your newspaper in the 1930's in the 40's and all the way up until 1955 there was a big strike in Calumet and Hecla in 1955. What kind of a position did you take as editor?

We didn't take sides with the strike, just tried to explain things as we would get the information.

So you tried to keep a neutral position in all those labor disputes that took place up there. There was a big strike in 1913 or 14 and there was another newspaper and they had taken sides, they had to move away after that.

There was such bitterness left over

Yes.

Where did they go?

That paper went to Duluth. Then Valvoaj was started in 1915 and I think those who started Valvoaj were on the company's side. They were a little partial until I came along as editor. I told the Board members let's make this paper a real newspaper like the American newspapers and give both sides. So they accepted that kind of policy. We also started getting new subscribers too.

Did any of the Finns leave here in the 1930's and go to Russia?

I didn't know anyone who did but I heard a few stories of some who went to Russia. I guess somebody from Pelkie did too.

Did they come back?

Some have come back but I don't even know them.

You didn't know anyone personally who left at all?

No. I happened to have relatives in the Canadian Soo who lived in a camp. They had a neighbor who went to Russian and that man lost his father there. They just took him.

Is that right?
I think people who are so swayed by other countries they are not satisfied there either.

What was the attitude of the working class in Finland before you came here in 1924 when you were 21 years old?

At that time you were automatically a member of the State Church. Of course there were a few radicals who advocated against the church but I didn't happen to know anybody.

Can you describe a little bit the Civil war in Finland in 1917 and 1918? What was it like? It was going on right afterward the Russian Revolution.

It was a bad time, some people tried to sneak to Red side to fight against the whites.

Was your father a White?

He wanted to be impartial because we had a business. But we were of on the White Side. They came so near us with cannons.

Oh, and you lived in Western Finland and that area.

Yes. I know one night they sent me to ski through the night to see how far the red's had some. They said if adults went there they might shoot them if they got caught but I was only 15 so they might not.

They might not do anything to you.

No. I didn't see any though.

Were they Finnish troops, the Red troops or were they Russian?

They were Finnish but some of the Russian soldiers were so Revolutionary, they wanted to have a Revolution in Finland and they started helping Finland's Reds. Of course then the Whites got help from Germany.

You said it was really a horrible experience for your father because business really dropped off and it made kind of a hard life then after a while.

It made many difficulties.

Did the economic situation pick up then again after a couple of years? In 1920 or 21 just before you came back?

It got little bit better but not good at all. I remember when I got through with my school, I was looking for a job. Sometimes when I succeeded to get a job, I went there and the business had gone bankruptcy already.
Is that right? Just in the short time you had found out about it and went over it was too late already.

Yes. That's the reason why I decided to come to America.

Maybe you wouldn't have come here if there hadn't been such a bad Depression.

Maybe not.

When did you learn English?

In school.

In Finland?

Oh they taught English in the schools there?

Yes.

You had to take English.

I had to take two compulsory languages. I started German first but then I quit and started studying Swedish.

So when you came to America in 1924 you could get along pretty well with English then.

Yes, but I learned a different English and sometimes it was difficult to understand. I remember I had a travelers check when I came to Boston because my father didn't want me to carry any money. I only had about twenty-five cents in change. I started getting hungry and I didn't know what to buy with that so I bought bananas. Five cents worth of bananas. When I got hungry again I bought bananas so I used that twenty-five cents on bananas. See the reason was I had a traveling check and they had to telephone to Helsinki see if it was all right.

Is that right?

Yes.

The bank did.

Yes, the bank in Boston. This language question, they couldn't understand me very well at the bank and they asked me if I spoke any other language? I said I know Swedish and a little bit Finnish too. So they had a Swedish boy working in the bank and he came then they understood me.

You're Swedish was good enough for him then?
Yes. We had to study Swedish more than because Swedish was more important than English at that time.

You're English was too formal for them.

That's right.

After a few years you're Oxford English kind of faded away.

Right.

Do you have any other recollections of the Depression in Calumet and what it was like. We did talk a little bit about it previously but I just wondered if there were any other stories from the thirties. How it was to eat and the food and what kind of staple things you had.

In Calumet?

I went to a company boarding house where my distant cousin was running the boarding house. They had so much food that it spoiled my stomach because it was so rich. They were all the time eating heavy meals and always getting heartburn.

You lived there before you got married when you first came up here?

How much did you pay for a boarding house room?

I think it was thirty-five dollars a month. That included the room and meals.

Three meals a day?

That's not bad for thirty-five dollars.

I remember when I was working in Pittsburg when I worked at the newspaper, right next door there was a boarding house and I started going there to eat. They charged twenty cents a meal.

Twenty cents a meal.

They had big bowls of meat all the time.

You could eat and eat and never starve there.
What kinds of things did you write against personally at the paper? Were there such things as prostitution in Calumet for you to write against or some other evils that everyone thought of as an evil that you wrote editorials? Or were most of the editorials national editorials?

Most of them were national but I don't remember if I ever wrote anything against prostitution because there wasn't that.

There weren't those kind of houses up there?

No. Not that they talked about anyway.

No, they keep that under their hat anyway.

Mostly I tried to write ethics as I saw it.

What favorite books do you have?

I especially liked in those days

A history writer too.

Yes. He's a philosophical writer who has written many good books. Especially his first book which was a thick book and made a very good impression on me. It showed so much.

That's right, it gives credit to the Arabs where alot of people don't give any credit to the Arab's for anything.

Also China was a very important star there of many things.

Did you read alot of other philosophy at that time too? This is when in the 1920's when you came here.

Thirties

Oh the thirties.

I read almost all non fiction. If you could come to Calumet I could show you some of my books I have

I'd like to. Did you have your children read alot of them?

I tried to but sometimes they weren't too involved in reading books

Did you read alot of American newspapers at the same time that you were editing. What did you subscribe to?

I subscribed to the New York Times like my Bible.

That was your Bible right?
That's considered kind of a liberal newspaper isn't it?

Yes, and it's gotten more liberal now than it was back then.

Did you subscribe daily to the New York times?

Yes, then it got to be too much so I subscribed Sunday only.

The Sunday paper has enough in it to keep up all week long.

Then of course you read the newspapers around here locally.

I read them and the Detroit Free Press and the Chicago Tribune.

Did they send you or you read other Finnish newspapers?

Yes, we exchanged. I would send the Valvoaj to them and they would send theirs to us. We didn't exchange the Industrialist one.

Oh, that was a socialist papers

It was an IWW paper

What was the other one that you mentioned?

________________________

Where was that published?

________________________

Any other feelings about reading, or past experiences on the past what you've lived through?

Some interesting thing was the Finland artists who started coming here after the war. "They would give half of their income to Finland's relief. For instance, ________________ was a really good violinist, and I arranged the concert for her here. It was so full that they had to open Nigger Heaven.

Is that right? What other notable Finnish people have you met who came to America?

________________________ who was a very important opera singer, one of the best in Europe.

You must still have quite a few relatives living in Finland

I have a sister and brother living there yet. I just got my brother's picture yesterday.
Most of my relatives that I know are here especially in New England.

How did the Finns fit into the American culture, whatever the American culture is? Have they fit very well?

Well it's first been difficult because of the language barrier. They came as poor immigrants here and they didn't have any kind of knowledge of foreign language here. It was difficult to learn a foreign language. So they just had to do a lot of muscle work. Then came the one bad mistake of the first American born. The parents didn't understand their children and the children didn't understand their parents. It caused quite a bit of friction. But then their generation could understand the second generation language wise and they already had the American way. The third and fourth generation were much happier.

Than the third and fourth.

It wasn't a very pleasant time for them.

Right. A lot of conflict.

The young people when their parents couldn't talk English, they didn't respect them and thought them stupid. The young people were not only ashamed of their parents but ashamed of their Finnish nationality even. They tried to hide under some other nationality. Especially here in the Copper Country, who have taken different names and they say that they are Swedish. When I came here I could still speak Swedish and I found out they didn't have one drop of Swedish in them.

So that's one of the reasons that the Finnish people changed their names then, feeling that they were not good enough.

Yes. But the third and fourth generations started looking at it differently and began to be proud of the Finnish heritage.

Don't they always look to the Finnish Russian War as a great period?

Yes. They want to go to Finland many times a year even. They are finding many kinds of things that they can be proud of and explain to other nationalities.

Like the sauna is a good example isn't it?

Yes

Now the Finnish people want to make sure that they get credit for the sauna. So the people don't call it a Turkish bath or something else.

Yes, when they learn to study Finnish literature and art they find so many things that they can be proud of.
Suomi salutes the people who make this area great.
CHILDOOD DAYS

My parents were originally from Finland & America. After they married they moved to Finland, never back & forth.

My father worked as a miner in Finland.

Mother and Father raised 8 children.

Whenever anyone became ill, everyone came to help. The toughest problem we faced was when Richard (my father) was very ill. We had to stay with him.

As a family we took part in church activities. I remember going to church to help with the Sunday school and listening to the organ. We also had a good time together.

The teacher who influenced me was Kangas Kowinkle & Haig.

The good times we had were when we went to the dances and watched the band play.

MAKING MY MARK

When I started on my own in 1924, I was a newspaper carrier for my neighborhood.

Since then I have worked for a newspaper company.

The first time I voted was for U.S. President in 1940.

Getting married in 1938.

The local minister often came to visit. He was a very kind man.

The people in our neighborhood were very kind and helpful. We helped each other.

For a good time we used to go swimming and fishing.

People got together when there were no other activities. We went to the movies together.

When the mines began closing, many people lost their jobs. We were very poor.

In our community we looked up to the minister.

My biggest accomplishment was that I finished high school.

The best time of the year was July & August.

REFLECTIONS

Today my feeling about life is very interesting. Life has become more meaningful.

In this area we need more... more... more...

Visitors who come here should...

My prediction for the future of this area is...

Collecting these memories about bygone days is