

EI-1128

VICTOR SALMELA

BIRTHDATE: JUNE 7, 1907

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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FINLAND, 1919

AGE: 12

SHIP: THE BERGENSFJORD

PORT: OSLO, NORWAY

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is leap year day.

SALMELA: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: [chuckles] February 29th and the year 2000. And I'm here in Lake Worth, Florida with Mr. Victor Salmela, who came from Finland when he was just 12 years old from Finland. Oh, I said that. Okay. And he is 92 at the time of this interview. He came on the Bergensfjord ship. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Now, if we could start at the beginning, if you would say again your birth date and where in Finland you were born.

SALMELA: I was born 7th of June, 1907 in the—the community was Kaarlela.

LEVINE: Oh, how would you spell that?

SALMELA: K-A-A-R-L—L-E-L-A.

LEVINE: Now, that was what? That was the—the bigger area? Or—

SALMELA: It was a—a church—a church com—community.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: Finland had a lot of—churches at that time had a lot of land areas. And I went to school about three, four miles from where I lived. My original language was Swedish.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SALMELA: I—most of that area our family was Swedish speaking.

LEVINE: I see. Now, you mentioned earlier the name of the city, Kaarlele?

SALMELA: Kaarlele.

LEVINE: Now, how does Kaarlele relate to the church community?

SALMELA: That—that was about one kilometer from wh—where I lived. But now, it is a part of Kaarlele.

LEVINE: I see. I see. Uh-huh. Okay, so—so your what is called a Swedish Finn? Is that correct?

SALMELA: Finn Swede, yeah.

LEVINE: Finn Swede, okay. [chuckles] Okay. Well, what was your mother's name?

SALMELA: Breta Johanna. [PH]

LEVINE: And was that her last name, Johanna?

SALMELA: No—

LEVINE: Her last name too.

SALMELA: Oh.

LEVINE: Her—her maiden name.

SALMELA: What was—well [chuckles]—huh. Oh—

LEVINE: If—if you want to, we can just keep going and if it comes to you—

SALMELA: Yeah, okay.

LEVINE: —you can mention it. [clears throat] How about your father? What was his name?

SALMELA: Walfred [PH].

LEVINE: Alfred, uh-huh.

SALMELA: He—he was Finnish speaking.

LEVINE: I see. And your mother was Swedish speaking?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so now, was your father's family from this area in Finland?

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: No.

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: Where were they from?

SALMELA: He was from the—from the—what do you call it—state or—or Häme [PH].

LEVINE: Häme? How would you spell that?

SALMELA: H-A-M-E.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: That's a Swe—that's a Finnish—that A is for Finnish—it's all here. It's—here, it's a—A but it has two dots over it.

LEVINE: Ah. Now—and that's the equivalent of kind of a state?

SALMELA: State, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So was that very far from where you were born?

SALMELA: Several hundred miles.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SALMELA: I don't—I don't know exactly but it's several hundred miles.

LEVINE: So, did your father's family—were they there for generations?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. And—and how about your mother? Where was her family coming from?

SALMELA: She lived close to where—where we lived. Her—her parents had a small—small home, two-room home. And they had—there was—let's see now, one, two, three—four boys and one girl in the family. And all—all—all the men went north. Two of the boys went—went to America. The youngest son stayed in Finland and my mother's—

LEVINE: She stayed too?

SALMELA: Yeah, her—two of her brothers went to America.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you know your grandparents on either side?

SALMELA: Yes, f—for my mother's side, I know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What do you remember about them? Do you remember any experiences with either your grandmother or your grandfather?

SALMELA: Well, I remember a grandfather. Of course, I—I remember grandmother too. She was quite old and she used to walk a lot to the city, Kaarlela. That must have been about 10, 15 kilometers as walk—she walk. But my grandfather—I guess he had frozen his leg when he was young.

LEVINE: Let me take this away from you because it—it'll pick up, like, static in the—

SALMELA: Oh.

LEVINE: —recording. Sorry. Did he—froze his legs?

SALMELA: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you say your grandfather had frozen his leg?

SALMELA: Yeah. And, necessarily, he limped.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: And they had—one time, they—when they—they—usually in the spr—spring, early spring, they had—everybody gathered in the city, brought whatever they had to bring to sell or then buy and—and what do you call—gypsies would come and—for—mainly, for horse trading and—and my grandfather had gone there—there too and—and he had had a few drinks. He went—he—he went up—[chuckles] he went up to the—the—the city hall was in the middle of the marketplace and had went up on the city hall steps, stand—stood on his one good leg and—and crowed like a rooster. [laughter] The police came and put him in jail for the night and let him go in the morning. [chuckles] But after—after that, he was always Rooster Johnson. [laughter]

LEVINE: Now, you—when—did you happen to be in the marketplace when he did that?

SALMELA: No, no—

LEVINE: No. [chuckles]

SALMELA: I wasn't [chuckles]—I—I don't think I was born yet there.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Wow. Well, now, this market—the gypsies—did you ever see gypsies when you were in [unclear]?

SALMELA: Oh, yeah. And people there kind of afraid of them. They used—[unclear], I mean, in the house and asked for something to eat. And we didn't [chuckles] have food ourselves even.

LEVINE: Is—

SALMELA: But then they came mainly for horse trading and if they could see somebody wanted to [chuckles]—that was good.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So they—so they always seemed to have had a bad reputation?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you ever have any encounters personally with either gypsy children or—

SALMELA: No, but they stopped at the house but they left. We—we didn't have anything to give them anyway so they left right away. So we had no, really, problem with them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Was there any other—were there any other groups that were, let's say, looked down on or minority groups that you encountered as a boy growing up?

SALMELA: Well, there was—there usually was friction between the Swedish speaking and the Finnish speaking. Not bad, so [unclear], but there was—of course, now it's altogether changed.

LEVINE: Yes. But what—what kinds of ways would that friction show itself? In other words, what kinds of situations would you—would you see or hear that friction between the Swedish-speaking and the Finnish-speaking people?

SALMELA: Well, I don't know if it was very ser—serious but—but they didn't like each other.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did they—they attended different churches, did they?

SALMELA: Yes, the Swedish speak—Swedish-speaking people had their own church.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: I was with my grandson. I was there when they say—when the church celebrated its 600th year anniversary.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: Yeah, the walls were about three foot thick.

LEVINE: Stone?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, you were—you were kind of—you had the friction right inside you because you had [chuckles] a Swedish-speaking mother and a Finnish-speaking father?

SALMELA: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: So how—how did—what did that mean to you, being sort of one of each?

SALMELA: Well, I didn't know my father till I was over 12 years old.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: I—I was in my—I was in my cradle when he went, when he left for America.

LEVINE: I see. So you were raised speaking Swedish?

SALMELA: No. They had—there was four girls in the family and then two boys. I was about a year old when he left and then my mother was pregnant with my brother.

LEVINE: So did you—did you speak Swedish at home?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: And then when you went to school, what did you—

SALMELA: Yes, Swedish. I went to a Swedish school.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. I see. Did you know Finnish at all as a little boy?

SALMELA: I learned. It was kind of with a Swedish brogue but I—I learned to speak Finnish too so I got along with both.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And, like, the neighborhood you lived in, was it more Swedish or—

SALMELA: They were practically all Swedish. It was a pretty rough time. I think it was 1917 my mother came and told me that, "What are we going to do, Victor? We haven't got money and no—no f—no wood for the winter. But do you think you could tear down the sauna building?" I said, "I'll try." I was 11 years old at the time. Before that, we were—most of the family was home. But all the girls left when they were—when they got through the school. And that was, you were 12 or 13 years old. It was—depend on what time of year you were born. So they had—that time, we went all in the sauna at the same time and there was a terrific bang. And everybody jumped at what was that? I happened to glance in the ceiling. There was about a 10-inch beam there and it had broken at a slant. So I—I pointed out to Mother and said I'd run—run—run to the neighbor and have him come and put a—a—a support on there. I

ran [unclear] to the neighbor's and he came and took a log and a saw and came in and measured the distance and then put it on a slant, so that it closed the gap. Then, when I had to tear it down, I went and tried to [unclear] the post there, couldn't do it, you know. I got the axe and tried to hit it but it was kind of close quarters, no matter. So I stood in a doorway and hit the—hit the post and it flew away and the ceiling collapsed. And the pressure knocked me out of the building, my—my mouth and my eyes full of sand. There was about a foot of sand in the ceiling for insulation.

LEVINE: My goodness. Now, did—

SALMELA: So—so I tore—at 11 years old, I tore down a—a building built of logs.

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

SALMELA: And when the winter came, it was all sawed up and split and—and [unclear] sad.

LEVINE: Wow. It must have been sad to—for the family to lose the sauna.

SALMELA: Yeah, it was.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SALMELA: Then we—we used to go to—to the—oh, gosh—city sauna.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: So—and used to—used to—boys could go with the woman up to 12 years old.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: And so we always went—went with Mother to sauna in the city. Well, she didn't go—go. All of these—we boys got together and went and [unclear].

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like a sauna was pretty—pretty usual for most people.

SALMELA: Very important too.

LEVINE: W—why so?

SALMELA: Well, there wasn't much facility at home for—for bath—bathing.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: And of course, no—outdoors biffies. So it—we never had anything in the house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Did you have electricity in your house?

SALMELA: Early years, no.

LEVINE: No.

SALMELA: But I think was about—about 10 or 11 when we got electricity. But in the wintertime [chuckles] it was so—sometimes the—the—where we were they got the power froze up so [chuckles]—so—so the electric light glow real red. That's all—

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: But then when it broke up again, then the light was okay.

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

SALMELA: And I—I did a lot of work in summer especially, in haying, was always raking, raking and then in fall potato gathering. And then I—I got—so, usually when I got done a—a little pay and good meals and—and could get home some potatoes at the same time.

LEVINE: Oh, boy. Now, were you the oldest boy?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So a lot of responsibility fell on you, I would think.

SALMELA: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, was your mother in communication by letter with your father during those years?

SALMELA: Yes, in the early years he must have sent some money. But then, after World War I started, why, we didn't get anything. That's why I had to go begging, had to make those—some other village and then come back with a pa—pack on my back, bread. Some—sometimes, I got half a—half a loaf, sometimes a smaller, but I don't think I ever got a full loaf. But had a heavy load when I came, anyway.

LEVINE: Would you go to people's houses? Is that how you—

SALMELA: Yes. B—begging for it, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, hmm. Wow.

SALMELA: I—I didn't want to go in my own community so I went farther a field.

LEVINE: I'm sorry. Say that again?

SALMELA: I didn't want to—went in my own area so I—

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: So I went farther a field.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Wow. Well, let's see. So how many were younger than y—you?

SALMELA: One, only.

LEVINE: Just the one boy?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then the sisters were pretty much out of the house or—

SALMELA: Th—well, as soon as they got through school they left.

LEVINE: I see. Yeah.

SALMELA: They're 12—12 or 13 years old, they left. First, were taking care of smaller kids and then as maids or whatever.

LEVINE: So they would live where they worked?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that what they would do?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Wow. Well, your mother must have been a strong woman to have sort of reared you children—

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: —without your father there.

SALMELA: Yeah, she did a—summertime, she had—she did a lot of work for other people in hay—especially haying, and then in the fall, threshing it into machinery. They—hand threshing for—had threshing barns and they—those usually started threshing about, oh, three or four during the night because they had to be through with the threshing so they could start on the milking and—

LEVINE: Oh, my. Wow. What did your father do for work before he left for America?

SALMELA: I guess he worked several place. Once, he had worked in a—in a letter—preparing letter. They had big watch with liquid. I don't know what they could consider—I know it's a bark, [unclear] bark, but there was others too. And he had fallen in the big—big tank and Mother said he sure stunk when he came home. [chuckles]

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh. And so—so do you remember—well, you don't remember when he left. But have you—did your mother tell you why he left when he did?

SALMELA: Well, I guess that—that a lot left. Like I said, my uncles left too and hard to find any jobs or, if they were, it was all meager pay that they went—try to get to America. Is only one of the boys that stayed in Finland.

LEVINE: Hmm. So did your father leave with his brothers? Is that—

SALMELA: No, no. He didn't. He left with one of my cousins, that is my mother's brother.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: And—

LEVINE: But he had brothers—whose brothers were here? Who—the uncles who were here, whose brothers were they?

SALMELA: My mother's.

LEVINE: Your mother's. I see.

SALMELA: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: I see. I see. And where had they settled?

SALMELA: One in California but he was never heard of pretty much. But he had moved to California and the other one died in Duluth, Minnesota.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm. Well, so you went to school. How far along did you go before you left Finland?

SALMELA: I was in the—in the—there's—there's a beginning school, two years. You start at seven—seven to nine. And then, from that, you go to so-called false [PH] school, and that's four years. So you're—you'll get through by 12 or 13—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: Depend—depending on when you are born.

LEVINE: So were you actually through when you—

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: —left? No, you were in the last—

SALMELA: I was in my last grade.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: And we had to always in—in the wintertime, we had—students were chosen two at a time to come and heat up the buil—school building before the school started. So we had to get up—I lived about two miles from the school, so I had to get up early to—to heat the building and before the other kids came to school. Then we—after the other school was over we had to clean the—the floors and gather in the wood for a morning's fire and—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: So it was dark coming and going.

LEVINE: Wow. And what did you do? Was it a—was it a woodstove that you—

SALMELA: Yes, there's two big—from floor to ceiling, about as high as this.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. About eight feet, yeah.

SALMELA: From floor to ceiling, they opened about two feet from the floor—floor and then you put wood in there and—

LEVINE: Well, was that supposed to be a privilege to be chosen to do that?

SALMELA: [chuckles] No, it—you had to do it.

LEVINE: Oh, everybody took turns?

SALMELA: The boys, yes.

LEVINE: The boys took turns.

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, was the schoolboys and girls in the same classes?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. And [clears throat] let's see. Well, did you have any ideas about America before you came here?

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And—and why was it that you came when you did?

SALMELA: Well, after World War I was over, Dad sent money to—so we could get there.

LEVINE: I see.

SALMELA: D—did you know what he was working at as a job when he was in this country?

LEVINE: Well, he had several but at the time when we came here he was working at a creamery.

SALMELA: Oh.

LEVINE: Where was that?

SALMELA: In Superior, Wisconsin.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So when you came through Ellis Island, that's where you went?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Superior, Wisconsin. Uh-huh, uh-hmm. Well, what did your mother do? Did she—did you have your own little house?

SALMELA: In Finland, yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. What did she do with the house and everything before she left?

SALMELA: We didn't do anything. We just left and then one of the old—older daughters had—had moved in but then she was chased out and the government took—took it over.

LEVINE: Oh, hmm. Do you know why?

SALMELA: They had, well, g—gotten a few sacks of flour from—from—from there. So they took it over.

LEVINE: Hmm, wow. So—

SALMELA: It's still standing. That's—there.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. Did you paint that?

SALMELA: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you make the painting?

SALMELA: No, no. I had a picture of it so a friend of mine made that painting.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: No, the area there isn't exactly what it was like but that house is.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, the house was made of wood, huh?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Wow.

SALMELA: There's two rooms. In—in the winter, very little was done in the kitchen where the food was made. But that's [unclear] we lived in the other room because the kitchen windows, they were about inch thick with ice all winter.

LEVINE: Hmm. And it was dark, right? Wasn't it dark in winter?

SALMELA: Yes. Well, it got early dark. In summer, beautiful.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: You could go out in—ou—out [chuckles] night. In fact, the kids—older kids built—in the woods they built platforms and went dancing—

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: —during the night.

LEVINE: Huh. Wow.

SALMELA: But I wasn't old enough at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. How did—did—did the—the—the lack of light in the winter and the abundance of light in the summer—did that affect much of the way you lived in any ways?

SALMELA: No, not really. But in the—in the school, as I said, we had—do the heating. On—once, I had—we have—ran out of any food. I had to skip a day of school and go begging.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: Came back. Next day, I went back to school. Teacher told me to stay after school and he went out and came back with a long stick and told me to lay on the bench and starts—start tendering up my rear seat.

LEVINE: Wow, wow. Well, that must have been very hard on you to go begging.

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

SALMELA: It—it's—it's no pleasure a job.

LEVINE: Yeah, wow. But I guess you realized you were providing for your family so—

SALMELA: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SALMELA: One—one pla—one community, I went close to my home community. [sighs] It was both—both bad and good, we went to one house where my—that was the only time my brother would go with me. And we went

and we were hungry and we asked had anything [unclear] so we could eat, said, "Yeah, I got something. I was going to throw it on a dung heap but God told me that, 'No, don't—don't do that, that some beggars will come that will eat it.'"

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SALMELA: I—I don't know. It isn't very common here. But it's made of milk, what had a starter and it's—it's—

LEVINE: Yogurt?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SALMELA: Yeah. So it was—she brought a yogurt. It was big, thick layer of—of green.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: So—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: I couldn't eat it and both of us start crying and say, "Ah, some beggars. They're—God's good food isn't good enough for. Get out of here and don't show your face here again." Little while later, we went to another house, altogether different. There was—she looked li—like a young girl. Well, she—I suppose she was fully-grown but she looked like a young girl. And I asked her and says, "Well, I haven't got much but I'll see what I can do." So she brought some—some br—bread and milk and I don't remember all that she did. Said, "I haven't got much but"—"That's fine. It's—this will help." And we start eating and I looked at her. Tears were running down her face, turned around and went back in the [unclear]. And after a while she came back. "I'm sorry. I [unclear]." I said, "That's okay." Then before she left, she said, "I have a—a couple of potatoes. Would you like them?" "That would be nice."

LEVINE: So you [unclear], uh-huh.

SALMELA: See, we were already [unclear] and she brought them there and—and I start crying and she g—she hug me and say that, "I'm so sorry. Please go now." [voice breaking] Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. Wow. But you really had a—a very hard childhood.

SALMELA: Yeah, yeah. Then in the fall, usually—usually, I went potato digging. This one time, the kids used to get together and we always up to some—some—something. One—one time, we—we found a purse. It was em—there was no money in it. But there were—so we—we went [unclear], put it on the middle of the highway and put a string on it and laid in the ditch. So the purse showed but not the string. [chuckles] People come and tried to pick it up and jerk the string away. [laughter] Then a couple of times did it. Then one fellow stopped and looked at it and walked up with [unclear] and picked it up, tore the string off and walked away with the purse. [laughs]

LEVINE: Ah.

SALMELA: So that ended that.

LEVINE: Wow. Did you—were there many automobiles at that point in time in your—

SALMELA: No. Just before we ca—left in 1919, some cars came but very few. And even a airplane—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: —flew through the city. But—but very few. There was some motorcycles but then the—one or two cars we saw there before we left. Of course, in Helsinki, there was more but still, most—even in Helsinki was horse and buggies and horse and wagons.

LEVINE: And that's what mostly was where you were? Horse and wagon?

SALMELA: We were—we stayed—I don't remember how long we stayed. We must—must have been, maybe, a couple of weeks before we got a ship down to Sweden.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Had you been to Helsinki before you left—

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: —for America?

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: No.

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: We never been to any other city. So it was—was kind of strange.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember any things that struck you when you—when you did get to Helsinki?

SALMELA: Yeah. We—we went to a—we—I don't know. We stay—I don't remember it, exactly how many days we were in Helsinki. But we stayed at—I suppose it was a hotel of some kind or—was the second floor. When we went in the toilet there was—you could see way down to the ground. [sniffs] So they didn't have any water or anything there at that time.

LEVINE: Now, who was traveling with you?

SALMELA: My mother and my brother. Then we did—we got a ship to Sweden, Stockholm. We spent a couple of days there and we went through some areas that I have read about in my school, my books. And then from there we took a train to Norway, what is now—[unclear] was there, but now Oslo. And we—had a ho—hotel there for over a week before we got a ship again. So I and my brother went—ran—went walking around the city looking, where we got lost. So my—saw a policeman. I want to talk to him and told him we were lost. And he—he said, “What hotel are you staying at?” I don't know [unclear]. He said, “What—what station did you come to?” I—I mentioned a station. Or did I? Oh, no. He didn't ask about a hotel. He asked about a station. And I said, “I—I—I don't know. Is—is there more than one station?” “Yes, there is.” Shrugged and walked on. So we walked quite a while in—around and we finally found [chuckles] it by ourselves. [sniffs]

LEVINE: Well, that must have been scary.

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. So what was your brother's name?

SALMELA: Reuben.

LEVINE: Reuben. And what kind of a personality did Reuben have, as a boy, coming here?

SALMELA: He was—I was always skinny but he—he was more stubby. He—he died many years ago.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, how—how would you describe yourself, coming here as a 12-year-old boy? What—what kind of a little boy were you? What—what kind of temperament did you have? What kind of personality?

SALMELA: Well, it seems I either was real shy or—[chuckles] or real open. I—I couldn't say which. I think I was more shy than—but—at—at other times—and, well, I learned to smoke when I was about seven years old.

LEVINE: Really? How so? Careful with the—

SALMELA: Oh.

LEVINE: How—why did you learn to smoke at seven? [chuckles]

SALMELA: I don't know. We just smoked and we made—we made pipes on clay and put in fire and put darning needles and [unclear] plug—plug [unclear] into the pipe and then darning needle through and then put it in the fire so it got hard. And then we—then we picked up butts and if they were real—longer, we smoked them. But otherwise, and then when they were—we picked up lot of small butts and opened it up and took tobacco out and—and [unclear]. Then, if you can—couldn't find anything else, we—we picked up some moss and smoked that.

LEVINE: Wow. And did you remain a smoker?

SALMELA: I quit when I was 45.

LEVINE: Huh. Wow, wow. So do you remember anything your mother brought with—with you or anything you, yourself, took along when you left Finland?

SALMELA: What little clothes we had. It wasn't much.

LEVINE: Was your mother—was religion a—a—a big part of your life or not?

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: No.

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: Wh—what religion were you?

SALMELA: Ah—

LEVINE: Or did—or didn't you have—you have one?

SALMELA: Well, the Community Church—about the only time we went there was Christmas time.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: So it—it was quite a walk, long walk anyway. But people came to church. They had—from longer distances. They—they had hard bricks that they—[unclear]—it wasn't heated at all, the church.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: They had hot bricks packed up and they opened and put them under their feet, you know, when they got to sit down in the church. [sniffs]

LEVINE: Yeah, wow. W—was—this was a Swedish church?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Was it a Lutheran church? Is that—

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: —what it was?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-hmm.

SALMELA: Well, about school when—when I [sniffs] skipped that day, next day—oh, I think I [unclear] to mentioned that about—

LEVINE: The—the—

SALMELA: —being beat up.

LEVINE: [unclear], yeah. Wow. Well, now, when you finally got—let's see. Where did you leave from? What port?

SALMELA: No—Oslo, Norway.

LEVINE: Oslo, uh-huh. And [clears throat] what was the journey like, the voyage?

SALMELA: I spent most of my time on deck when I could get there. It was so rough that they closed all the doors or you'll get [unclear]. My mother and my br—brother, they—they were seasick the whole time. And—but I spent my—as I said, I spent most of my time on deck. And a couple of times I fed the fishes. [chuckles]

LEVINE: [chuckles] Oh.

SALMELA: But otherwise, I felt pretty good. The seasickness didn't bother me much. Once—one time, it—we went to—to a dining room, a big dining room. They—that has changed too. They had real long tables and we were waiting there for—[unclear] dishes were on the table—but the food wasn't yet. So we were waiting. I was there in the doorway and there was an old man behind me. He was—he had a peg leg. Suddenly, the ship, like it just stopped and start shaking like that. And, oh, the dishes on the floor and the peg leg guy all across the dining room floor to the other wall. [unclear] we could have got scared but not—I don't know. Nothing seemed to happen and the—the people serving there didn't seem to be excited about it. But it sure was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wow. So was—were you—were you sleeping in a cabin or, like, a dormitory situation?

SALMELA: There was—there was four—four beds in the room. The—they were narrow. Mother and—there was a young girl in the same room and then two boys in one room and then a mother and a girl. She—before we got to New York, she throw all her clothes except what she wore into the ocean. And so I had a—I had a shirt too that a Russian soldier had gave me. It was—it opened on the—on the shoulder, two, three buttons on the shoulder. I—it fit me pretty nicely. He was a very small soldier. [chuckles] I—then I throw that—held it up and—and breeze took it away. [chuckles] But that—of course, we had—we had some other clothes too but that girl was—when we landed then in Ellis Island, she got in trouble because she didn't have any—any—any—anything with her.

LEVINE: Why did she throw her clothes away?

SALMELA: I don't know. She said—oh, some people came—were supposed to come to meet her and I guess they did. So she didn't want any clothes that—she wanted [chuckles] new clothes, I guess.

LEVINE: New clothes, right.

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah. [clears throat]

SALMELA: That—then another thing, at Ellis Island, when we got there, there were taxi drivers and they start fighting among themselves for passengers.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, now, [clears throat] do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor? Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

SALMELA: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you know what that was when you came?

SALMELA: No, I suppose somebody told—told me but, otherwise, I didn't know anything about it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—and were—how did you feel? Were you excited? Were you scared? Were—can you remember what you were thinking when you—when you finally got here?

SALMELA: No, I don't know. It's—well, there are soldiers—soldiers are coming back from World War I. There were some there. I was smoking and they looked at me and shook their head and didn't pay any attention. And then they also—teller came out and he had coffee cups and—and a third coffee and ice cream. So we didn't know what that ice cream was and Mother took a cup of coffee and we got the ice cream cone between the two of us. It—start looking at it and tasting it and a piece of that cup broke off. So—so we ate—ate the whole cup too. [chuckles] Then the fellow ca—came to gather the cups when—what we go—what we gonna do now? We ate the cup and he's coming to pick them up. We hid behind Mother and [chuckles] nothing was said. So we felt okay.

LEVINE: Was this on the ship or at Ellis Island?

SALMELA: Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Ellis Island, uh-huh. Do you remember anything about the examinations or the processing at Ellis Island?

SALMELA: Th—not much. There was a family of four, two kids and—and a father and mother. We—we had to go through that doctors [unclear] checked our eyes and—and I don't remember what other they—else they did. When this—when this couple or this family came there, they check—went through the—through the kitchen. Then a woman—then when the—check them in, I get—he didn't pass. They sent the whole family

back to Finland. I don't know if it was his eyes or what was it that they se—sent him back for.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: That was a—that was a sad thing to see. They were all crying.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm. Well, then when you—did someone meet you—meet you and your mother and brother?

SALMELA: Uh-huh. You mean at—in—

LEVINE: In Ellis Island?

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: No.

SALMELA: No, we were—[clears throat] we went to a hotel in the city. We spent two nights there. Then they put us on a train to Chicago. When we got to Chicago, we went in the station again and they came and picked us up and they put us—put us in a—it was a—a horse and wagon behind it. They—they put us in that and closed the door. It was completely dark. [unclear].

LEVINE: Who did that? Who put you in there? In the horse and—

SALMELA: I don't know who [chuckles]—who—had somebody, I mean, sent to pick us up.

LEVINE: I see.

SALMELA: They—to the next station. So we were wondering what was there in the complete darkness at—this didn't feel good at all. But then when we got to the station they opened the door and brought us into the station and we waited there. The [clears throat]—

LEVINE: Were you and your mother and brother the only ones in there? In the—

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: We had a—a basket about, oh, a yard long and maybe half a yard wide that we had all our earthly belongings.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: And where—

LEVINE: Was it a straw basket? Was a straw basket?

SALMELA: Yeah, made—no, not straw but was made of real fine chips of wood.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: And we were there in Chicago there waiting and a fellow came up and start talking to us in Finnish, asked about—about us, that—asked if we are from Finland. I said yes. So he said, “Anybody come with me.” Where—asked where we are going. And he said, “Anybody to meet you?” And I said, “I—I don’t know but my dad works close to the railway station.” So when we got to Superior we waited in the railway station. He must have got in contact with my father because my father—or this old man with boots up to his hips walked in, pick up that bag on his shoulders, walks—like, walking out. Not said a word. Just picked up the—the basket or whatever [unclear] and walked out, starts walking out. Mother starts following him so everybody, well, follow him too. [chuckles] He—he had a—rent that room with some family and so we spent two nights there, I think, and then he—he had some friends [unclear] bigger house or [unclear]. We moved there and we stayed there a week or two before he found a house to rent.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So what was it like seeing your father for the first time?

SALMELA: [chuckles] It—he [unclear]. He hasn’t shaved and—and working clothes and not saying a word, just picking up that bag and walking out. [chuckles] No, he wasn’t much of a talker anyway.

LEVINE: Ah, so did—wh—what was it like getting used to him, hav—being around your father?

SALMELA: Well, I don’t know. He wasn’t—he—he didn’t say—say much. I don’t know. He was very soft spoken. I don’t—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: And he wasn’t vocal. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: Well, I wasn't either, never [unclear]. So, of course, I don't think we stayed—I think we stayed at that house two, three days and we moved [unclear]. There were friends also in [unclear].

LEVINE: Wh—thinking back on it, what do you think your mother felt when she—I mean, through this whole process of—of taking her two sons through so many cities just to get the boat and then through the trains and horse and wagon and then finally getting together with her husband? I mean, do you think she—what do you think she was feeling?

SALMELA: I don't know. I have no idea.

LEVINE: Oh. Did she seem to like being in this country?

SALMELA: Oh, yeah. Had enough to eat, anyway.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

SALMELA: And soon as we come, Dad bought us new clothes and—

LEVINE: And then did you start school soon after that?

SALMELA: Yeah. And, boy, did I have trouble. They put me in first grade and I stayed about a week in first grade. They transferred me to third grade. I started to work at 14 so I—there was one year that I had to go to school. I worked from 7 o'clock to 12 o'clock and then went home, a meal, and I went to school from 1 to 4.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. What kind of work did you do?

SALMELA: Run—I mean, a print shop.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: Print—a printer's devil. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, a printer's devil?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: What—what does that mean, a devil?

SALMELA: Well, one that's learning the trade.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

SALMELA: So that's—that was my work all through life.

LEVINE: Oh, you were a printer?

SALMELA: Yeah. Lino [unclear] operator and then foreman, supervisor.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, did the family stay in Superior?

SALMELA: Yes. Yeah, Mother—Mother died of cancer. And D—Dad had—had heart trouble. We had—we bought a summer home so they—they had—they—when—when I left home, they sold whatever furniture they had and they bought a piece of land. Dad built a hou—a small house there, two-room house. So they lived there and—and—

LEVINE: Was that in Superior or—

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: I got marri—when I got married, why, then they—we lived a year or a winter, anyway, with—with them. They—for many years, they had a rooming house.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: But then when—when I got married and left, got our own place, why, then they got rid—had an auction, got rid of all the furniture and—and moved to the country.

LEVINE: What was it like, having—were they mostly—were the boarders mostly immigrant people?

SALMELA: No—no boarders. Roomers only.

LEVINE: Roomers.

SALMELA: Yeah, m—men.

LEVINE: Oh, in other words, y—your mother didn't provide food?

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: It was just—it was room. And were the men coming from other countries?

SALMELA: S—some of them were but n—not all.

LEVINE: Now, what—did—was there any, like, common room where they socialized or—

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: No.

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: They would just go to their room.

SALMELA: They just worked someplace and then came back and stayed in their room. And of—they were fairly good-sized rooms.

LEVINE: Did you have contact with the boarders or with the roomers?

SALMELA: Very little. When—when I got a little older, why, when I got home from work, ate, and I usually went gallivanting to [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Oh. So you weren't hanging around. Uh-huh.

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, how about the—the [clears throat] roomers? Like, how many did—were there?

SALMELA: There were what?

LEVINE: How many roomers were there at one time?

SALMELA: Five, six, I guess.

LEVINE: Oh. And did they all have a separate room?

SALMELA: Uh-hmm, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, so you had a pretty big house then?

SALMELA: Yeah. Yeah, it was two-story house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: They rented that. They—otherwise, they—they kept the rooms clean and—and the sheets and the bedclothes and—clean.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And then, did your father go out to work besides—

SALMELA: Yes, he worked at a creamery. But then, his heart got so bad. Then my younger brother took over.

LEVINE: Working at the creamery?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: So—so you had—you actually advanced in the printing trade and became a supervisor and—

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, how did they—oh, wait. I'm going to stop here and change the tape because we're at the end of this tape.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

LEVINE: We're starting out with tape two. And we were—I'm speaking with Victor Salmela and we're here in Lake Worth, Florida. We were talking about what happened after you stopped school and you were in the printing business. Now, when did you meet your wife and how did you meet your wife?

SALMELA: I met her in the printing shop. She worked in the office. And I and my—one of my friends that came la—later than I, was the same job. And we used to go in the office when lunchtime. We had lunch with us. We used to go there and tease—tease her. And once when I went there, I said—go looked at her and said, "What dump did you pick up that dress from?" [chuckles] She didn't say anything but I never saw that dress again. So finally—finally, I asked her to go out with me and we went out. She was 10 years older than I was.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, was she—was she Finnish or Swedish or—

SALMELA: Finnish.

LEVINE: Finnish, uh-huh.

SALMELA: The paper where I worked was Finnish too.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SALMELA: So then I—I started—when I started work there, the Finn Howl [PH], they put on a lot of plays. So they wa—wanted me to be in some of them and so I started and I was in a lot of them after I—

LEVINE: A lot of plays?

SALMELA: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

SALMELA: I played—oh, first—first, when I—when I got—when I started as a young—a young—well, I was around 15, I think when I started. I got mostly older man's parts or there—and villain's parts. Then when I got older, [chuckles] I started getting better parts, lover's parts and things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, were these play—these were in English or in Finnish?

SALMELA: Most of them were in Finnish but then—then, during the Depression they got English teacher, government-supported English teacher. And they wanted—they wanted me to take apart—well, my English wasn't—pronunciation wasn't so very good. So—but one of the girls [unclear] worked was, she helped me so I—with my—certain words, I—it was hard for me to pronounce correctly. So she helped me with that and I—I got through with it all right.

LEVINE: What was it that you liked about doing that, about acting in plays?

SALMELA: I don't know. I just did like—for English play, the first one was a one-act play. I was a—a priest leading a yo—young man to execution. And then where we had been rehearsing for some time and I—then before we went on, about a couple of days before we went on, the—were rehearsing again and a teacher come and talk to me. She said, "Victor, you know, this fellow that's supposed to be executed, he's—he's—has the top part. And you put so much—so much"—what do you call it? I can't [chuckles] find the—

LEVINE: You—you put so much energy or—

SALMELA: No, so much [unclear] or—or what was the other—other word for it would be emotion—"so much emotion that—that no way he can match yours. But think about it." And she walked away. I said, "If she didn't like the way I did it, why didn't she say it?" But I did—I—I did start to think about it. I thought that a minister can't get emotional in a case like that. That—so without any emotion at all, I—I—my part with—I did my

part without any emotion at all. She came—then the teacher came and told me, “You did—you did it just right.”

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

SALMELA: I thought, ‘Well, why—why didn’t you tell me how to play it?’ She said, “I know you’re—you know how to play it if you just thought about it.”

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SALMELA: So I had all kinds of parts.

LEVINE: Hmm, nice. Well, now, how about the Depression? How did that affect you or your family?

SALMELA: I can’t say—apprentice had pretty good wages. So I worked the whole—during all the Depression and—and there—there was no problem at all—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: —as far as I was concerned.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about World War II, when that—when that started? How did that affect you?

SALMELA: I don’t know if the Depression affected me much. I know a lot of young men that worked, it affected them much more. But it didn’t—it didn’t really affect me much.

LEVINE: How about World War II? Did you—did you serve in any military—

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: They—the company I worked for sent—I’m needed.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: I’m needed at work there so I didn’t—and I—I—I was pretty close to the age too that it wouldn’t have made much difference. So—

LEVINE: I see.

SALMELA: Well, of course, if I had—once—had got into there, I suppose I'd have to have gone—gone too. But—but as far as this goes, I was close to the age when they stopped taking them for—for—

LEVINE: Right.

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Right. Now, how about—when you think about being Finnish and—Finnish Swede and thinking about being American, how do you think about yourself in those terms?

SALMELA: Well, no—no, life in Finland was rou—rough and the hunger and cold. But it's never forgotten. I—as—as long as I—I've been there, I don't remember how many times now, 10, 12 times. I never forget it. It's still the country of my birth. I never forget it. That's why I've—I went and I got relatives there. I—I still got a niece and neph—nephew just died there. I celebrated my—my 90th birthday there at a military base, officer's club.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: And my niece's husband is—he—he's—he was at—when we go there, we go to the officer's club [unclear]. Then we—we—once we were there we were shoo—target shooting there with pistols. So she said, "Let's go and see if we can do—do some shooting too." So we went and asked them and, yeah, "Oh, sure." "We haven't got pistols." "Oh, we've got plenty of them here." So we—went and both start shooting too. And I didn't do too bad but n—not too good either. Then they—the officer, when—asked how old I was so told him. He said—he said, "Well, you're the oldest place to ever fire on this range."

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh. And how do you feel about being American? Did you get your citizenship at—

SALMELA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: As soon as I could, I [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: I mean, we had to go to school at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: Study citizenship and had—they had a test, had to know the states' officials and U.S. officials.

LEVINE: Did you go to night school?

SALMELA: Evening.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—and what was that like? Do you remember that as a pleasant experience or—

SALMELA: Yeah. Oh, yeah. It was—it was nice. [chuckles] I had a lot of F's there too.

LEVINE: Oh?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: It's hard to remember some of them and got sometimes mixed up. But we got through it somehow. But—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: Yeah, both boys and girls there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, did you—was there a Finnish community in Superior, Wisconsin?

SALMELA: Yeah.

LEVINE: So there were—were there, like, clubs and—

SALMELA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —organizations?

SALMELA: Well, that was a—strictly a Finnish club where I had my acting career.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SALMELA: Then later, we had—during the Depression then, they had—those English teachers where we had English plays too, but mostly Finnish plays.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Let's see. Well, do you think—do you think coming here as a—as an immigrant and as a 12 year old, do you think that made a difference in, like, the kind of person you became? The fact that you changed countries and had a hard life and—I suppose life wasn't that easy here either at first.

SALMELA: It made a big difference. I won't [unclear].

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: That's for sure.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: I went back. No, none of my friend's still alive.

LEVINE: Wow.

SALMELA: Even the first time I went, most of my friends were gone. I don't know if—there was—funny thing was, there was a—a couple and I went—I went to the family where most—they had a lot of boys and I wen—went to visit. And I saw a girl there. She—I guess she wasn't that—a young man there. I suppose she was his wife. [unclear] I told them that I was—I—I—that I was friends with their—with the—with the family and they didn't say anything. And looked at a girl and I—I got a shock. That couldn't be. She couldn't be that—that young. It must be her daughter. There was a young girl when we left just about—she could have been about 16, 17 when I—when I left. And the girl looked just like her when I went back there. They didn't seem interested in that so I didn't—I asked them about their brothers and one had—had died of tuberculosis and one had been knifed to death. And one still lived in town but he was a complete drunk. And—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: So most of the—most of the [unclear] saw me and knew that—were around my age were gone. There was a—a couple that I met. But [chuckles]—but when I—I was—what was I now? Forty? Forty-eight when I went the first time? Or for—I don't remember how first—I—I think I got it in my book. But I don't know.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: There was lot of consumption in Finland, poor food and—well, one—
one—one time, I remember I work—we went to work and met a fellow
coming from town. He was [unclear]. We were teasing him too and
he—and he didn't pay any attention. He just kept on going. Then—it
was quite a distance, come—he stopped and come over and say
[unclear]. [unclear], oh, they think that I'm go—we're going to [unclear]
get hold of us. I said, "No, I don't think so." And I walked over to him
and got very close to him and said, "Would you like to—to have some
work?" I said, "Yeah, sure." He told me where he lived. [unclear] said,
"You know, in all the letters." "Yeah, I know where it is." So said, "Well,
come. We start work at seven o'clock in the morning." So—and we—
or, "We serve breakfast at seven o'clock. So you come there for
breakfast [unclear]." So I went there, was there for a few minutes. A
fellow came in and there was people at a table already. And she said,
"And go to the table and eat." Well, I was going to. Here, he grab hold.
"No, don't go there." There was a fellow sitting, like on—not that wide a
bed but sitting on there. He said to go this way around. I went around
the bed and I looked why I—why, and I saw him. He was chained to
the wall. I've heard of it but I never seen it before. But crazy people
were chained to the wall at their private homes. So said, "Never go
near him." He warned me then that, "Never go near him."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, wow.

SALMELA: He sat there and—and [unclear] do much.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: Evidently, he was dangerous.

LEVINE: Now, this is before you left? This was—you were 12 or so? Eleven?

SALMELA: I was—I was, well, going on 12, I guess.

LEVINE: And what was the job that was being offered to you, the work?

SALMELA: Digging potatoes. Not dig—picking up the—well, open—open the rows
with the horse and whatever they call it that opens the row in—

LEVINE: Plow? No.

SALMELA: No, it's not a plow. It's—it just opens the potato row and you go and
pick 'em up then.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: Be—before, we always—but we had to use a hoe. But this—this house, they didn't use hoes. They just got a horse and auger or whatever you would call it, opened up the row and then you picked the potatoes up.

LEVINE: So wh—where you were having this breakfast, were there other workers there having breakfast?

SALMELA: Well, yes, there was—I suppose they were from around there or [unclear] people. I don't know.

LEVINE: And—and the person who was chained to the wall, do you think he was part of that family?

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SALMELA: Yeah, there—there was a old people's home right close to a—a school, [unclear] school I attended. And there were insane people there too and my—my sister worked there for a while and I went visiting her once. And—and she took me around and she said, "I—I don't think you'll like it." Then she asked me if I want to go in the basement and see. And that's when she said, "I don't think you'll like it but"—so we went down in the basement and [unclear] there open a little door there and looked into the room. This fellow was—it was [unclear] winter. He was absolutely—and cold down there. He was absolutely naked. I said, "My God, can't they g—give him some clothes?" "Yeah, they give him but it had—he takes them off and tears them up. And they—they can't do anything about it." [unclear].

LEVINE: Hmm. Well, the treatment of the mentally ill was pretty bad—

SALMELA: No.

LEVINE: —everywhere, I suppose, at that time.

SALMELA: Yes. And old people, so it wasn't anything you wanted to go in.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SALMELA: My grandparents both were in there and lice and [unclear] and—

LEVINE: Well, that's changed for the better, I'm sure.

SALMELA: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SALMELA: [unclear], yeah. Oh, yes. That's changed completely. I visited—in fact, I visited some—some homes there for aged people. And they have the—they have different—in some places, anyway, the—and I visited. People had their own rooms and they made their own coffee and—and I don't know if they had meals there. But anyway, they had—each had a coffee pot and—

LEVINE: [unclear] sometimes?

SALMELA: —electric and—so they could make their own coffee and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: It seemed very pleasant there.

LEVINE: Yeah. So did you visit your grandparents as a little boy in—in the—

SALMELA: Yes.

LEVINE: —nursing home?

SALMELA: Yeah. Yeah, I used to go with him. We went—when he went to the river to—he had a—a trap in the river.

LEVINE: For what? What was he trapping?

SALMELA: Fish.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SALMELA: One—one time when we went—when I went with him to the river, he—he took the cat and put it in a bag. I was wondering, what—what's—was he going do with that? When we got to the river he put some rocks in the bag too and threw the bag in the river. I said, "Why?" "Well, we can't feed him and might as well get rid of him." What we—I got back—back to the house, the cat was sitting on the side of stove and licking himself clean. [chuckles] He looked at [unclear] and swore and, "Oh, let it be then." [chuckles]

LEVINE: They say they have nine lives. [laughter] Wow, wow. Wow. So did—so would you, like, visit your grandparents in this home? Is—on some regular basis when you were a little boy or—

SALMELA: No. When my sister was there, I went visiting and that's the—that's the—and then when my grandfather died, I went and they opened his casket so I could see him.

LEVINE: Hmm. Was there anything else about the home that you can remember? The nursing home?

SALMELA: No. But anyway, they—they—they were—they—they were pretty bad. Nobody wanted to go into them if they didn't have to.

LEVINE: And how about the—the funeral? Do you remember a funeral over there? Was there anything different about the way it was conducted than—than the way we do it here?

SALMELA: No, I don't really—I don't really know. I don't—I don't remember ever attending a funeral.

LEVINE: How about a wedding? Was there anything different there? A—

SALMELA: A what?

LEVINE: About a wedding? Did you ever—

SALMELA: Wedding?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SALMELA: They usually lasted two, three days.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: And they were—they were big affairs. I—one—they lived not far from our house. Oh, couple of hundred yards, I guess. And we went to that wedding and food and drinks and—and dancing. Lasted—I think that one lasted two days.

LEVINE: Hmm. Wow.

SALMELA: And a lot of people. So that big doings when—when better off people got married. There was big doing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were there any other ceremonies or any other festive occasions that you can remember from Finland?

SALMELA: No. But—I can't say.

- LEVINE: Hmm. Now, in Finland, when someone's born do you celebrate the birthday or the name day? Do you do name days in Finland?
- SALMELA: Yeah, there's name day but bir—birthday, of course, is more important. But I don't—I don't—I suppose some of them celebrate it more than others because poor one, they didn't have—celebrate—much to celebrate. So they—they—they went pretty unaware but, of course, wel—well to do, why, they had parties.
- LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything you can think of that we might not have covered that—well, how about—what—what would you say are your greatest satisfactions in your life?
- SALMELA: [chuckles] I—I don't know. I don't know. Maybe you can find out more from my memoirs.
- LEVINE: The—the other person who came through Ellis Island?
- SALMELA: No.
- LEVINE: Your memoirs. Oh, uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yeah. How about heroes? Did you ever have heroes? Did you—was there every someone who you looked up to who you even knew or you had just heard or read about?
- SALMELA: No, no.
- LEVINE: Somebody that you wanted to be like or who—inspired you in some way?
- SALMELA: No.
- LEVINE: How about people who maybe encouraged you personally?
- SALMELA: What?
- LEVINE: Who encouraged you? Were there ever people in your life who encouraged you?
- SALMELA: No, I don't think there were anything.
- LEVINE: Well, I suppose you got some encouragement from your acting career.
- SALMELA: Yeah, there—there I had. Yes.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. I don't think you men—

SALMELA: See, last [unclear] we had—she asked me to stay later and I wonder why she said that. “You know that the government is quitting, that they’re not going to pay us anymore. So we have to quit.” She said, “But I—I think that you should go to acting school.” I said, “That’s impossible.” She said that, “You have a lot of talent but you need direction.” I said, “That’s altogether—I—I’m married. I just have a—a—had a new son and bought a house.” I—I couldn’t. That’s out of the question altogether. So it’s—was left at that.

LEVINE: Mmm.

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Well, you didn’t mention your—your wife’s name and maiden name.

SALMELA: Oh, you’ll find that—

LEVINE: It’s in the memoirs. [laughter] Okay. We’ll get it there. And how about your son? What is his name?

SALMELA: He’s retired too. He’s got—he [unclear] a—a daughter and a son. He only worked for one organization his whole life. He studied to become a chemical engineer and he—he had—he had 10 offers of jobs when he left college. He had one in Michigan, big corporation, but he chose California. At that time, why, it was—what was it now called? Hmm, well, anyway, it’s now—oh. [laughter] I can’t—

LEVINE: You remember before you were 12 years old but the—the later stuff is harder to remember somehow.

SALMELA: Yeah, I—I can’t find the words.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. I know.

SALMELA: Th—that’s the trouble.

LEVINE: Well—well, that’s probably in your memoirs too. Is it? About your son? Yeah, good. Okay. And what’s his name?

SALMELA: John.

LEVINE: John.

SALMELA: John Melwin [PH].

LEVINE: John Melwin.

SALMELA: He worked for that—it's now—oh, [chuckles] what—that's on my mind and it skipped.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SALMELA: Anyway, it's—it's a big oil corp—corporation and he was in research for 13 years. And then they had a problem in—I don't remember the state now that—they had a packer that made artificial outdoor and indoor carpeting. And they—they had trouble with getting the colors right. So they sent him to see if he could correct it and then they'd sell the plant. He went—he went there and I think he was—what was he there? Over a year, anyway, and he got it going so good that, instead of selling the plant they decided to double the size of it.

LEVINE: Oh, that's something.

SALMELA: So when—then—then they sent him to a—another job in Maryland. They had another job there. And he had—but he had to stay at the old job until the building was ready and all the machinery installed. So he was flying between those work all the time. And then when he got—when I—that other company was built up, then he was free to stay in the one in Maryland. He wor—worked there. He bought a house there too. I spent several—I don't remember how many weeks. The house basement was just one big room. And he went—he wanted—he wanted separate. So I built a—a—a—a smaller room for—for canned goods and shelving and wine rack and—and then the other room they had a—he wanted a pool table. And it was—so I had to put a ceiling in there and—

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: —and no—walls, wooden walls and wooden ceiling. So I spent—I think it was about nine weeks I spent there on my way to Florida.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Wow.

SALMELA: But th—then, a little later, he was transferred to Puerto Rico.

LEVINE: Oh.

SALMELA: They had—had a big plant there. So I—I went there a couple of times too.

LEVINE: Nice.

SALMELA: Then—then the—there they had all these textiles. But that—that went bad too. So the company told him to get rid of it. So he had to sell that too.

LEVINE: Wow, uh-huh.

SALMELA: And then he—then they had a—that plant in Maryland they had yet, so he was—the manager retired so he was made the manager. But they decided to get rid of that too. So then he went back to California and [sighs] I don't know what—I know for a long time he just went around the country giving speeches. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, wow! Wow! You must be proud of him.

SALMELA: Uh-huh. They put a—they put up a [sighs]—a plant there, two of them, farm—farm—farm goods. That's all for the farmers but they c—they couldn't compete with the—or the co-op farmers organizations. So they sold that too.

LEVINE: Oh. Okay. Well, is there anything else you can think of relative to your immigration experience, coming to this country and settling here and living most of your life here? Anything you'd like to say in closing?

SALMELA: Well, I don't know. When I got here too, I start—I met a young Jewish boy and I don't know how I got acquainted with him. And he—his folks c—gathered junk and then sold it so I got [unclear]. There was a big ship building in Superior and after the war they closed it. So I start—start going there and found a lot of scrap iron and sold it then to that Jewish family. So I got acquainted with them and—

LEVINE: [unclear]

SALMELA: —earned my—earned my money that way, spending money.

LEVINE: Well, this is when—near when you first came?

SALMELA: Huh?

LEVINE: Was that soon after you came to this country?

SALMELA: Yeah, I had been going to school for a little while so I could get along somehow with English.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SALMELA: So I went—I get a—I went to the old—the old ship building and get—get all the spikes and metal that I could find and sold it to that Jewish family then.

LEVINE: Hmm. Do you think [clears throat] anything—when you first came, were there some things that you had never seen before that really struck you as different the first few days and weeks and months?

SALMELA: Well, I—I don't know. The cities—I've seen cities before, were big cities too, like Oslo and Stockholm and Helsinki. And so I don't know if there was so much difference, really.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, why don't we stop here? And I just want to say that we'll—we'll get a copy of your memoirs and that will be on file at the research office, the Oral History Research Office. And I—

SALMELA: Be sure that I get it back.

LEVINE: Oh, you will. Wait, let—wait. You're still hooked up. Let me just say I'm speaking with Victor Salmela, who came at the age of 12 from Finland. And this is Janet Levine from the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]