

NPS-129

ERIK KARLMAN

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GREEN: —February 27th, 1982, interview with Mr. Erik Karlman in his home in Brooklyn. Mr. Karlman, could you please tell me when and where you were born?

KARLMAN: Yes. I was born in a little island, what is called Aland Island, but it belongs to Finland.

GREEN: How do you spell that, please?

KARLMAN: A-L-A-N-D. It's a [several words unclear] and 9th of March, 1917. And we are Finnish subjects but we don't understand Finnish. We speak Swedish [unclear].

GREEN: Speak Swedish.

KARLMAN: We do speak Swedish.

GREEN: That's very interesting. Could you please tell me about your hometown?

KARLMAN: Well—

GREEN: What do you most clearly remember about it?

KARLMAN: Well, that's—[unclear] island way out in the Baltic Sea. And there's no trees near. It's small bushes. And when I grew up, the main—what should I say—living or make living was fishing. My father was a fisherman and very poor. And when we were kids, we were five kids—oh, six, a—actually, but one died in—five years old. And there we made our own [unclear]—all our— all our own—all our own boats. My father learned on the [unclear] of [unclear] we had. We didn't have too much [unclear].

GREEN: Excuse me, Mr. Karlman, did you—was there a—did you live in a little town or was it—

KARLMAN: That—

GREEN: —out in the country?

KARLMAN: It's a village.

GREEN: A village, a small village.

KARLMAN: A small village, very small village.

MRS. KARLMAN: Fishing—

KARLMAN: At that time—

GREEN: A fishing village.

KARLMAN: A fishing vill—village. At that time, it was, I think, about 350 inhabitants—or was it 400 in—this is 19—in early '30s and '20s, and now is only about 250 lives there [unclear]—

GREEN: A lot of people have left.

KARLMAN: Yeah, a lot, because in the modern days there we couldn't—we saw a better life [several words unclear]. But, well, when we were small, we saw them when they went out to sea, and that

was my intention too, [several words unclear]. And that [unclear].

GREEN: What was your home like in growing up? You were five children?

KARLMAN: Well, the house is still there.

GREEN: Still there.

KARLMAN: But very, very small, compared to our standards here and even the standards there now. It consisted of one big kitchen and another little room. We—at one time, we were nine people. And we—this was kind of crowded. And we were living there [several words unclear], just about. I remember that. Even the water froze on the inside.

GREEN: Ooh!

KARLMAN: [unclear] when you woke up in the morning. But you were healthy and you were hungry, and the only thing was bread. That was—my mother was a good baker. That was more or less—made that all [unclear]. And [several words unclear] and soon, [several words unclear] then we had fish. [several words unclear] fishing and [unclear] fish and, also, boats. And [several words unclear].

GREEN: Oh!

KARLMAN: At the time.

GREEN: Did you go—was your first school in the village?

KARLMAN: Yes. We had a schoolmaster there. He started doing that in 1908. And he was there through 1935, I believe. But then he got so—and so he didn't want to leave. The chased him out of there [chuckles], more or less at that time. So he got sort of a [several words unclear]. So I went four years [unclear]. That was compulsory, [unclear] four years. That—that's all they ever [unclear]. Of course, I started when I was young, when we called kindergarten, and then I was five years old. And then I was taught to read and—read and write and so forth and then [unclear] public school there, and that was it. [unclear].

GREEN: And you always had the idea of becoming a fisherman like your father?

KARLMAN: No, no, no. Because was no future in that at that time.

GREEN: But you wanted to be near the sea? You wanted to go to sea?

KARLMAN: Yes, yes, yes. Or—or go to some other country where I could make a better life and, naturally, it was America.

GREEN: You thought of coming to America.

KARLMAN: Yes, when I was a little one. But [unclear]—

GREEN: Where did you get the idea?

KARLMAN: Because I had two uncles here and, at one time, I had two aunts. But the aunts returned to [unclear] and they told me [unclear] America [unclear]. If you work hard enough, you can make it [unclear].

GREEN: So you planned to come here.

KARLMAN: More or less, yes.

GREEN: What was your picture of America, what you learned—besides what you learned from your aunt?

KARLMAN: I was the—I would say the first time, when I was 17 years old and through Europe, [unclear] so I—I could almost picture—I was quite a bit quite a bit in England, France, Spain, Germany. And so I—I had that sort of idea of how the country was and so forth. A funny side to that too and also in Russia, which I didn't like at all. Russia was, at that time, was not good. That was in '36, '37. And you [several words unclear] when you went somewhere. You always went [several words unclear]. And in England, was nice. [unclear] sort of culture there and the class different—different. At that time, you—you were poor, you were poor. If you were middle class, you were nice and you [several words unclear]. And in French I didn't like too much. I didn't [unclear] too much in French either. [several words unclear] naturally [several words unclear] so forth there were more or less—it wasn't a slum but [several words unclear]. And in Spain [unclear], this was nice—nice place—nice city. [sentence unclear]. And—

GREEN: So you got the idea in every country that—

KARLMAN: [unclear]—

GREEN: —that America was the place to be.

KARLMAN: Ah, even to—I haven't—I didn't—I haven't been to America before I came here when [several words unclear].

GREEN: Did you know English?

KARLMAN: A little but [unclear]—

GREEN: [unclear]?

KARLMAN: I—English [unclear], I learned it. I learned it here. I picked up a few words when I was sailing, naturally, and so forth, so I could get a glass of beer or shot of whiskey [unclear]. [chuckles] But really, to have a conversation and so forth, that's [unclear]. And I—they couldn't [several words unclear].

GREEN: Were all the ships that you sailed on Finnish?

KARLMAN: Yes, at that time. And they were small. And I remember some incidents—

GREEN: Excuse me, please. Cargo ship?

KARLMAN: Cargo, cargo. At that time, for instance, we saw a [unclear] ship [unclear] England with a American flag on it. We thought that—I thought—my [unclear] thought that it was something out of this world, because they are big ships and clean and so forth. [chuckles] But—and at that time, I didn't say—I really didn't have a chance to [unclear] around any Americans, even though I would have liked to. But I didn't have a chance to—to get on one.

GREEN: What type of work did you do on board ship?

KARLMAN: Oh, I started [unclear] as apprentice, which it was very, very little [unclear]. We were always broke, especially on there, [unclear] at that time in Finnish marks [PH]. We got 400 marks a month, started with, which, for instance, in English pounds, were paid 237 marks, one pound. So [unclear] two times a month [unclear]. And [unclear], for instance, is the [unclear]. I know I boarded ship with—of course, need 11 shillings, so almost a half a month's wages for the ship. But they had [several words unclear]. [unclear] sixpence, three pence [unclear] what do you

call—what should I call it [several words unclear]. [sentence unclear]. But you never had any money, [several words unclear] Norwegian and Swedish. They almost had twice as much wages and where [unclear]—Finns—Finnish seamen had [unclear]. Now, it's different.

GREEN: That's very interesting. Now, let us—if you would be good enough to tell me in some details the hard story of how you came to this country, all the circumstances.

KARLMAN: Well—

GREEN: You were now a Finnish seaman. In what year was it?

KARLMAN: Well, this is a long story.

GREEN: Well, [several words unclear].

KARLMAN: And [unclear] in '39 was a small boat that came from Russia and [unclear]. And it came from Russia with a load of lumber [several words unclear]. And as we're laying there, the war broke out between Germany and Poland, or England, because [several words unclear]. So—so there we went further north [unclear] and we went further north and loaded coal and went over to Sweden. There, I [unclear] off the boat and I went home and I stood home during the winter months, which was [unclear] war with Russia, Finland at the time. And then the war was over and then the north part of Finland was open over Atlantic. And it was quite busy there so I got a job where—on a—on a Finnish boat for—a boat that I come over from the island to come from. And I had a couple more friends of mine. They—they got a job too so they told me, "Why don't you come with us?" So I did. And that's how we started, from Finland, the north part of Finland called [unclear]. Now, [several words unclear] and we were laying there for about two and half months before we were loaded and—and loaded. And we left there the 14th of July, 1940. And we were two days out in the North Atlantic, the Germans—that quarters—quarters. All—they [unclear] in with the airplane, almost bombed us. [unclear] but the captain didn't understand the motion signals. So the second mate, he understood it so the—so he told the captain, "You better go into" what is told the [unclear], called [unclear] in Norway. And that's where they heading for. And sure enough, they were—they told the captain that one more circle around, they would have put a bomb right in that—in the smokestack. And so from there, we were two days and after—from there, [unclear]. In what is seven

days, we [several words unclear]. In what is seven days, we couldn't go on shore because there was [chuckles] things we don't like [unclear] here. Finally, the—they let us go to [unclear] because there, they said, "You have contraband in your cargo," which we [unclear]. So our destination was Baltimore, U.S.A., and he says, "You're going to India," because, naturally, the World War, the time, Germany and—and England. And we had some [unclear] from Sweden [several words unclear]. And that's the one [unclear] got mixed up with. Oh, that was—

GREEN: Mulberry [PH]. [chuckles]

KARLMAN: Mulberry. Mulberry School [unclear]. And [unclear] after that and they—there we were—we went through, as I said before, [unclear]. And we were there for almost three months and—and put her back again. We had put a—a load of paper from Finland over to Amer—and so far, they got it cleared up and [several words unclear]. Then they told us, "Now, you can get out of here." And we didn't have no coal [chuckles] and we didn't have any food, [unclear], middle of the worst storm with the little boat there. [unclear] in October, the 28th of October, 1940. And—and then they gave us a little coal, not too much, because they didn't have too much coal either at that time in Norway. They give us enough coal to [several words unclear]. And [several words unclear]—

GREEN: It must have been dangerous, crossing the Atlantic then, wasn't it?

KARLMAN: Sure, it was. And this skipper was—he was a bullheaded skipper too. He thought he was king almighty with that little 3,000 [unclear] there, an old—an old Greek boat or what it was. And they had a storm outside Iceland and the deck busted. So we were taking in water, so we had to go into Iceland and had to repair it, which we did and were in Iceland for about three weeks. And Christmas Eve—no, New Year's Eve—

GREEN: No contact with your family back home?

KARLMAN: No.

GREEN: They didn't know what happened to you.

KARLMAN: No. They didn't know what happened. They didn't know. [sentence unclear].

MRS. KARLMAN: Oh, they probably knew—

KARLMAN: They knew we were in [unclear] but the letters were very scarce [unclear]. But where I was at that time, they didn't know. They didn't [unclear].

GREEN: Well, you must have been worried at the time, weren't you?

KARLMAN: No, not really. Well, [unclear] worry? When you were young, [unclear] that was your life. There was war. If you—

GREEN: True.

KARLMAN: —were gone, you were gone. That's all. Home—they—home could have had more—more—mu—many more to attend to, real—naturally, my mother does worry. But there were two or three more home. They had—she one daughter and a couple of three brothers home, and that was it. And what could they do? They know their future was not in home. And from—then from Iceland, we—New Year's Eve, we went from there with that boat with same cargo, and that took us 28 days from Iceland to [unclear]. Then they called [unclear]. Then we didn't have no more [unclear]. And we had a terrific storm on 3,000—300 miles outside Greenland. We thought we were gone but we survived it. And that's how—then we came down the coast there and that's how we—how we came here to [unclear]. Took us—it took us [unclear] six—over six months to come over Atlantic with one cargo.

GREEN: So you landed in Baltimore.

KARLMAN: In, Baltimore, Maryland, yes, yes. And that's where we landed and unloaded the ship here and—and we stood on the ship and, naturally, the regular crew, we didn't have many left [unclear] disappeared. Some disappeared in Norway, went back to Finland and took Norwegian crew there and they disappeared in England or Iceland. So they went—the Iceland crew and so forth, when we came here, then they had formed sort of a organization here, what they called the Scandinavian Club. And their wages was much higher, almost half as much as we—we had. And [several words unclear]. One fireman was a [unclear] and a [unclear], we called him. Timmerman [PH] were good—we were—came from the same—same village. So we took a trip down to Cuba with the same ship, the same skipper and so forth. And he signed the crew here in Baltimore and even New York, and they were, more or less, no good. And they got twice as

much pay in—than we had. So—so finally, when we came back from Cuba to Philadelphia [unclear], so I said to this pal of mine, “Now, I’m going to go to skipper and say he want the same pay as they have.” [sentence unclear].” Naturally, when you pay on over there, you have a contract of 12 months, and this was 11 months. So one—one month less than what the contract was there.

GREEN: And it was such a difficult trip.

KARLMAN: Yeah. So I went in and told him that this is the story, says, “We want to have the same pay as they have. [unclear] for any less.” So he says, “Oh, I can’t do that because you have a contract with them for the owner. When you pay down, you’ve got to stay for the same pay.” I says, “Well, you’ve got to pay it for—with somebody else then.” “I will do that,” he said. “Well, you go ahead and do it and you’ll get bumped.” So I brought my friend over. We packed our suitcase and we went in shore that night or [unclear]. We went down to [several words unclear].

GREEN: You left the ship—

KARLMAN: The ship, yeah.

GREEN: —completely.

KARLMAN: Completely. I had a few dollars—

GREEN: Did you think that you would stay here or that you would find another job?

KARLMAN: Well, no. We—we did both of it. We find—we was going to go—we went to see—again, find a better ship, another nation’s ship, you know. I went—

GREEN: But you had no idea that you would stay here.

KARLMAN: No, no. Not at all. [unclear].

GREEN: What was your very first impression of Baltimore like when you—

KARLMAN: Well, was a lot of fun.

GREEN: —[unclear].

KARLMAN: A lot of fun. The little money, we have a lot of fun. We went to the bars and they had a [unclear] and everything [unclear] before or what do you call, the playing machines. [unclear]—

GREEN: Slot machines?

KARLMAN: No.

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]

KARLMAN: [unclear].

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]. [chuckles]

KARLMAN: Yeah. [sentence unclear].

GREEN: I guess that's an American invention. [chuckles]

KARLMAN: [several words unclear] all these—then the [unclear] come out. And [several words unclear].

MRS. KARLMAN: [laughs]

KARLMAN: The [unclear]. Yeah, [unclear].

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]

KARLMAN: We never had seen that before and [unclear] last time. And I, naturally, what little money I had, [several words unclear] too. [chuckles] Naturally.

GREEN: So you had a friend—

KARLMAN: Yes.

GREEN: You're—left with a friend.

KARLMAN: Yes, I left with a friend. But we parted there in the—we parted in—in the—in—in the boat. I didn't have much money and he had a little more than me. So we led cheap—pretty cheap. So I took—I got the Norwegian boat and he stood behind me.

GREEN: Excuse me, please, Mr. Karlman. What is the date of your getting off the ship in Baltimore?

KARLMAN: Well, that I don't remember but—

GREEN: No, I mean around—what year?

KARLMAN: Ah, that was in '41.

GREEN: 1941.

KARLMAN: Yeah, '41 and would say was in March—April [unclear].
[sentence unclear].

GREEN: So you found a Norwegian ship.

KARLMAN: Yeah. And I star—I was on a Norwegian ship for a month—or
one year. And then I left that ship and then I [several words
unclear]. And then—

GREEN: In Baltimore again?

KARLMAN: No, in Portland, Maine.

GREEN: Portland, Maine.

KARLMAN: And I—I took the train down to B—to New York.

GREEN: To New York.

KARLMAN: And then I [unclear] because when I came back here, then my
oldest uncle w—worked as foreman or superintendent on the—
on the—the construction, he had already died. I only saw him
once. So I was quite disappointed but I had another—I had my
cousin here.

GREEN: Your cousin in Manhattan?

KARLMAN: Yeah—here in Brooklyn.

GREEN: In Brooklyn.

KARLMAN: Yeah. So—

GREEN: Was he in the construction business too?

KARLMAN: Who?

GREEN: Your cousin.

- KARLMAN: Yes. Oh, yes. And I met him and says, “Oh, yes. [unclear]. You want to come to work?”
- GREEN: So you decided to change your—your work and to stay here in Brooklyn.
- KARLMAN: Yes, yes. Yes, all the [several words unclear]. They’d only take them [several words unclear]. Some of them—some of them have already gone through Ellis Island [unclear] took from their Danish ships. They released them from Ellis Island and you had to report every month [unclear] war was over and then notify, except if you married and so forth and got legal papers, which many of them did. And the [unclear]—I didn’t have the opportunity to go, because I already had come from a Norwegian ship. And so I was all legal here too and that’s where I met my wife.
- MRS. KARLMAN: No, you [unclear]. You must have been into Ellis Island [unclear]—
- KARLMAN: Yeah, that’s right. No, that’s right. They—yes, I worked with two—that’s correct—with two Finnish captains, were captains from the same island I came from. And there was quite a few seamen go off on this—they had a splicing business. So I worked there and my former captain came up there and he saw me. And I had a—two days later, I had an order from Immigration to appear.
- GREEN: Oh. For a deportation hearing?
- KARLMAN: Well, [several words unclear].
- GREEN: All right. You had to go to Ellis Island for it?
- KARLMAN: So I had to appear at—
- GREEN: On Ellis Island or—
- KARLMAN: At Columbus Avenue.
- GREEN: At Columbus Avenue.
- KARLMAN: So I—
- GREEN: Excuse me, please. Did you have a lawyer to help you?

- KARLMAN: [unclear]. So I—this captain, his name was same as me, except—
- GREEN: Karlman.
- KARLMAN: Karlson. [PH]
- GREEN: Karlson.
- KARLMAN: And he got [unclear]. He says, “[unclear] America. It can’t be me; that must be you.” So me, I [chuckles] st—was dumb enough; I went up there. So they was very nice. So I says, “When can I go home?” He says, “You’re not going”—[chuckles] “You’re not going nowhere. You’re going to Ellis Island.” I said, “Ah-ha.” Says, “That’s it.”
- GREEN: You didn’t have anybody to help defend you?
- KARLMAN: No, no, no. [unclear]. So I was on Ellis Island at—for six weeks [unclear]—
- GREEN: Can you tell me anything about Ellis I—your—your—what it looked like at that time?
- KARLMAN: Well, it was not like a—I never been in a prison so I don’t know. I only read about it. But of course, you—at that time, you got—you had where you could go out and walk around there. But you were inside there and you were [unclear] sort of [unclear] and what—was playing cards there. And you got your means and so forth. But you were restricted to—
- GREEN: So you had food and—but the [unclear] quarters, were the comfortable enough?
- KARLMAN: They were. You had a bed and you had a shower. You could go to the shower. And it was not like at first and then—and nobody bothered you, really, there. But you couldn’t—[unclear]. You couldn’t [unclear] yourself or anything because then [unclear]. And—and naturally, when you went to the mess hall, you had to stay in line and go and do what [several words unclear]. And you had to pay. Other—
- GREEN: So you could pass time playing cards and reading?
- KARLMAN: That’s correct. That’s correct. And—and you could read and so forth. But you had—was no activities, except to work or anything

like that; we didn't have to do any work [unclear]. But from there—

GREEN: Was the understanding that you were going to be sent back home to Finland?

KARLMAN: Not quite at that time, no, because there was still—the war was still going on.

GREEN: Oh, but they couldn't send you back because of the war.

KARLMAN: Well, no, they couldn't. No. So they could have [several words unclear]. So I got—through friends, I got a hold—I got hold of a law—lawyer. And he—

GREEN: An American lawyer?

KARLMAN: Yes. But he was Finnish descent.

GREEN: So you could speak Finnish to him.

KARLMAN: No. He spoke Finnish but I couldn't.

MRS. KARLMAN: [laughs]

KARLMAN: And he couldn't speak Swedish.

GREEN: Oh, that's right. You spoke Swedish.

KARLMAN: Yes.

MRS. KARLMAN: [laughs]

KARLMAN: But I understand—I understood at that time so much English so, yeah, we—we—we—we understood each other quite a bit or all—all of it, for that matter. So finally—and I was for a hearing, naturally, with—for Immigration there. And there was [unclear]. And [unclear] was that so he said, "You have been released if you have money." So he says, "Have you got your money? Have you got \$500?" So I says, "I—I have."

GREEN: You had \$500.

KARLMAN: I—so I says, "I have \$500." And, well, that's fine. He says, "You post that with—with Immigration and you will be released, except

you have to notify them every month," which I did, and I got the release. And—

GREEN: Released on parole.

KARLMAN: On my own custody.

GREEN: Your own custody.

KARLMAN: [sentence unclear].

GREEN: Uh-huh.

KARLMAN: It's why—it's why—and that had to be U.S. Treasury bond. [unclear]. Any cash or anything, they didn't accept that. And then I had [unclear] captain what also was [unclear]. But he knew the bank procedure so he came—bring me to a bank down on Wall Street at that time. I don't remember which bank it was. And he—he got the bond for me and I paid it. And then I said—and then I got the release. And—but then, naturally, I got—then I got the [gap in tape]—

GREEN: —every once in a while.

KARLMAN: Yes.

GREEN: So you settled down in Brooklyn with your cousin?

KARLMAN: Yes. And I got a job [unclear] on the same company.

MRS. KARLMAN: Construction.

GREEN: Doing what kind of work?

KARLMAN: Construction.

GREEN: Construction work.

KARLMAN: Construction work. Yes.

GREEN: Did you live with your cousin?

KARLMAN: No, no. [unclear]. I lived on my own. And, no, I go back on that. That's not correct. Not correct. When—when I was released from Ellis Island, I did some other various job that was splicing and so forth. And when I got a notice to leave the country, I

went down to the Army base and I got a job as a seaman on the American ship, Army trans—Army transport. And I was there for, I think I was almost a year. And then I [unclear] there and then I went to shore, to [unclear]. And then I got—then I got in with my cousin's company as a construction worker—in construction. And I worked as a carpenter and I made out pretty good, and then I—I—after a few—couple of years, I [unclear] my wife [unclear]. I met her.

GREEN: And now, Mrs. Karlson, you came to this country in what year?

MRS. KARLMAN: Karlman.

GREEN: Karlman. Excuse me, please. [laughter]

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, I came, 1947. My father—my father had been here since 1939. So I came over—I was 19 years old. I was going to come to the United States and learn English very quickly, and—

GREEN: You had no idea of settling here. And then you met—

MRS. KARLMAN: No, I really did not have an id—but of course, I had my whole—my mother's family [several words unclear] my father. So I—I was kind of sad in coming here [unclear] a few years but then I met [unclear]—

GREEN: Where did you meet?

MRS. KARLMAN: Oh, I think the first time we met was on [several words unclear] a concert of [several words unclear] and [unclear] dancing. And I knew—must—I think I actually [unclear] dance [unclear]. He asked me to dance [chuckles] and [unclear] dance. And so, first time—

GREEN: And you were married, what—

MRS. KARLMAN: We were married in 1950.

GREEN: 1950.

KARLMAN: Sure. And—

GREEN: So you both had family here.

KARLMAN: Yes, yes. She had a larger family and it turn out, who the—contracted our boat for—for over about 23 years, turned out to be her uncle.

GREEN: Huh. So what a coincidence.

KARLMAN: [chuckles] Yeah.

MRS. KARLMAN: [sentence unclear]. [laughs] [sentence unclear]. That happened to be [unclear].

GREEN: Y—you both sp—spoke Swedish though.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, yes.

KARLMAN: Yes.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah.

KARLMAN: Yeah.

GREEN: Did you always live in Brooklyn since you've been here?

KARLMAN: Yes. I—we always lived there in what are called Finn Town. It's no Finn Town no more. They all died out or moved away. That time, it was a nice place to be. I liked it very much in—in—in South Brooklyn.

MRS. KARLMAN: Uh-hmm.

GREEN: Has it changed much since you [unclear]?

KARLMAN: It has changed. That has changed terrific.

MRS. KARLMAN: [sentence unclear].

KARLMAN: Down in—on 43rd—42nd and 43rd Street and Eighth Avenue, between Seventh and Eighth Avenue, around [unclear] Park, it's a shame, actually, because it's, more or less, deteriorating, the whole community.

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]

GREEN: Oh, that's too bad. Now, this leads me into a—this—do you have any thoughts about the group of Finnish immigrants living in this community? You told me before, the other side of the

tape, that you found some young men who you had grown up with who had come to the city like you, from home in this community.

KARLMAN: Yeah, that was—that was actually on the boat, but they didn't—it was only one, which was a little older than me, like [unclear] here, got here but he went back to the Old Country. And he was up—up in—he lived up in Bronx.

GREEN: I see.

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear].

KARLMAN: Anton [PH] [unclear].

GREEN: Now, in this community, what ways did the Finnish people, living here, you know, keep alive their customs, traditions? For instance, how did they celebrate Christmas? Maybe you could tell us.

MRS. KARLMAN: Oh, I would say about the Finnish community—

GREEN: The Finnish community.

MRS. KARLMAN: I would say that around Central Park area you can still find the cooperative ho—houses—

GREEN: Cooperative hou—

KARLMAN: [unclear]

MRS. KARLMAN: Yes. You had—you have four—four-story-high cooperative apartment houses [unclear] Central Park, and they are still there. But of course, they—they are mostly older people. The young people—our—even our age or even younger—our children, they get married and they move away. They move away from Brooklyn. So—so it's not quite what it used to be.

GREEN: The people who stayed behind, did they try to keep alive the old customs?

MRS. KARLMAN: Oh, yeah. Sure.

GREEN: H—how would they do it?

MRS. KARLMAN: Ah, [chuckles] I don't really know what—

KARLMAN: [unclear]

MRS. KARLMAN: And you have—you had the Finnish—Finland's Aid Society. That still has a h—a small meeting hall—hall on 40th Street.

GREEN: That's the Finnish Hall you were talking about.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, that's called the Imatra [PH] and—

GREEN: What sort of things did they do in the hall?

MRS. KARLMAN: Well, they—they have—they—Midsummer, they have their festivities and they have a nice [unclear]—

GREEN: What was Midsummer? Excuse me, please.

MRS. KARLMAN: Oh, Midsummer, that's celebrated on—as being the ligh—lightest time of the year in Scandinavia at June 23rd.

GREEN: June 23rd.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, it's Midsummer's Eve. It's [several words unclear] through the whole night. It's [several words unclear].

KARLMAN: It's called the—called the Midsummer—

MRS. KARLMAN: Yes.

KARLMAN: —Sun.

GREEN: So you have lots of parties then.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, that's [several words unclear].

GREEN: Oh, I see.

KARLMAN: Not here, but over in Europe—over there, they have—dance all night and they celebrate—

GREEN: All night!

KARLMAN: —[unclear] over there.

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear] Midsummer—

KARLMAN: Here it is not as—as much—

MRS. KARLMAN: But—

KARLMAN: —but is still—

MRS. KARLMAN: —[unclear]. They have also [unclear], may—like maypoles. Then you'll find some communities, they put them up here and such. They put up these maypoles on Midsummer's Eve. And then, of course, Christmas, yes. The Scandinavian Christmas [several words unclear].

KARLMAN: Now, I go back to the community. We talk about co-op apartment. I think there what the Finns really brought it— [unclear] here, because I know where my uncle lived in his—his daughter still has his apartment. And I think that was built in 1915 or '16, a—a co-op apartment at that time. And it's owned by—was owned by Finns and still, they own most—well, they sold. Some other people have moved in. But that's the idea of a co-op apartment. I think they got that idea from Finland.

GREEN: [unclear]—

KARLMAN: [unclear].

GREEN: The Finns had very little formal government, didn't they?

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear] had a president. [chuckles]

KARLMAN: Well—

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]

KARLMAN: Now, yes. But at that time—now, we say 1915, '16, it was still during the czar time in Finland. But they must have got it from somewhere, the co-op, because there was no co-op apartment of—anywhere here in—so far as I know, in the United States, except here around this neighborhood. [unclear] Finns had. Those who got together and put in money and they built it. They had some contact there and they helped themselves and then, whatever expense it was there, they divided between the families. And that's how they kept it up and still keep it up.

GREEN: Still keep it up.

- KARLMAN: And still keep it up very nice and that—the rent is very reasonable yet in this nice apartment.
- GREEN: But you say the younger generations are leaving.
- KARLMAN: They are leaving but that—they—they come—sort of come back again because their rent is, like, high someplace else. And here in the co-op apartment you can live for 80, \$90 a month for four or five-rooms apartment.
- GREEN: So with the recession, you find that the younger people are beginning to come back?
- KARLMAN: They are, yes. So—
- MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, I would say so.
- KARLMAN: That takes time but I—
- MRS. KARLMAN: We know a few [unclear].
- KARLMAN: So—so long they can keep the [unclear] up pretty good, yeah. But they're used to [unclear]. Now, let me see. I think it's sort of three, five, six years ago it went down—it's gone down the hill. But I think it's level—leveling off now. I think probably it's climbing up a little, because I understand they couldn't sell even the co-op apartment years ago. Now, they're going quite high. We say about three or four years ago, for a four-rooms apartment, it sold for 5, 6,000. Now, they're 15—14, 15,000. And they're quite [unclear] because, in those apartments, you sort of have to be from Finnish descent. But—
- GREEN: [unclear]
- KARLMAN: —they're trying to do. But naturally, all this discrimination and so forth, they—they got to let up on the rules and regulations. So they—they got families in—but they're type of people pretty—pretty good anyway. But they usually [unclear] the neighborhood [unclear] or doing harm to it, so forth. The try to—they try to keep it up but it's pretty hard—pretty hard [unclear]. The kids [unclear] and go break in and so forth. And now, it's all the people what is 70, 80 years old but still lives there from those [unclear] childhood, more or less. And they're—and they're pretty hard for them. They get robbed in the hallways and so forth. There [unclear] security doors and all that, they don't have. That's—I understood—

GREEN: Excuse me, please. Are there any younger people coming over from Finland today?

MRS. KARLMAN: No.

KARLMAN: No way.

GREEN: Why?

MRS. KARLMAN: There is no quota.

GREEN: No quota?

KARLMAN: No quota.

MRS. KARLMAN: None of the Scandinavian [unclear] Finland.

KARLMAN: First, they took away. They gave it to—to some other countries.

GREEN: Oh, I see. It makes it very difficult. So unless they do what you did, leave the ship, they can't—

KARLMAN: Now, they don't do that. They n—they was doing that time. Not anymore, because they have pretty good over there.

GREEN: They got it better than here?

KARLMAN: They just have it a lot of—the friend who I told you about at the start of the tape, he, more or less, like it here. But here, he—he—now, he's getting disgusted. He's going to go back. So it's the world, you've got to have a—

GREEN: [unclear]—

KARLMAN: —special trade and he is quite [unclear]. Of course, he don't have a high school diploma, which he's taking right now. I think he went for an in—or this week or last week [unclear]. But when he gets back [several words unclear]. But he don't—he don't make no head and tails with anyone.

GREEN: So he's not going to stay here.

KARLMAN: No.

MRS. KARLMAN: No, he can't get a green card and if you don't get a green card—

KARLMAN: He can't get a [unclear].

GREEN: Oh, because it's difficult to settle here.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, he can't—he can't—

KARLMAN: [sentence unclear].

MRS. KARLMAN: You can't—

GREEN: He can't get a green card.

KARLMAN: Even this [unclear] in the—and a—a decent person—I don't know. It's a very—it's very—I—

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear].

KARLMAN: My—I wouldn't say on the tape my—my belief, what I could—I could say, but it's very funny.

GREEN: I get the point. I understand—

KARLMAN: You do?

GREEN: Now, do you ever go back home to visit? Do you have friends or family back home?

KARLMAN: Oh—

MRS. KARLMAN: Oh, yeah. We have sisters and—I have—my—my parents died. They [unclear] my mother in 1978 so we haven't been back since. But I have a sister and a—my home. It's owned by my sister and me [several words unclear].

GREEN: What's—excuse me, Mrs. Karlman. What is the name of the h— of your hometown?

MRS. KARLMAN: This is also [unclear] islands but I come from the part that's called Sund. [PH]

GREEN: Oh, you're from the same group of islands?

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, yeah.

GREEN: Sund.

KARLMAN: But we are quite far in between. I didn't know she existed before I met her here. [laughter]

GREEN: It was a fortunate voyage. [laughter]

KARLMAN: Yes, that's true. But I've been there twice since—in '58, I was there the first time with the whole family. They were there six months. [unclear] three months. In 1976, I was there then, oh, probably the summer [unclear]—

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah. [sentence unclear].

GREEN: You told me your family home is still there.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yes.

KARLMAN: Yes. But that's owned by Bjorn [PH], my younger brother. My mother passed away in '76. I didn't get there to see her. She died. She passed away before [unclear]. My father died in '72. So we gave the—the home to my younger brother, who stay—still staying there. So I—my—I had a little piece of the homestead there so [unclear] and look at it.

GREEN: May—maybe when you retire. [chuckles]

KARLMAN: Well, I don't have too long to go until I retire. I only have 14 more days. Then I retire.

GREEN: Oh, really! [laughter]

MRS. KARLMAN: [sentence unclear].

GREEN: What would you do about the winters there, though?

MRS. KARLMAN: They are pretty cold. [laughs]

KARLMAN: Yeah. And I don't like the cold winter. Then I go to Florida.

MRS. KARLMAN: [sentence unclear].

GREEN: Summers in [chuckles]—winters in Florida. [laughter] That's terrific. Now, coming back to Finnish people coming to this country, [coughs] what sort of things do you think the Finns have brought to this country that are interesting in life, customs, food, art?

MRS. KARLMAN: The sauna.

GREEN: Oh, the sauna! [laughter]

KARLMAN: Yeah, [unclear].

GREEN: And that question—I just [unclear] Scandinavian. The Finnish sauna—did most individual homes have their own sau—saunas?

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah. Well, you had—at least every little village had a couple that—at least every Saturday night you went for a sauna there.

KARLMAN: And the real Finns—

MRS. KARLMAN: They—

KARLMAN: That was the first thing they built was the sauna.

GREEN: Before the house?

KARLMAN: [unclear] house.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah.

KARLMAN: They got the—they got to be clean before they built—

MRS. KARLMAN: [laughs]

KARLMAN: Clean is—is their motto.

MRS. KARLMAN: [laughs]

KARLMAN: Honesty and hard work. That's [unclear].

GREEN: Well, how did the Finns feel about the American saunas? Because back home they used hot rocks and here they used electricity. I mean, how did they think about that American variation?

MRS. KARLMAN: I don't know. But we have one in our summer place and that has hot rocks, burn wood, then hot rocks. [chuckles] So we kind of like that. But it's—there is nothing wrong with electricity.

KARLMAN: [unclear]—

GREEN: So you have—a sauna is a Finnish invention and what's a—the smorgasbord, that's Scandinavian.

MRS. KARLMAN: Right. And then, of course, Finlandia [PH]. [chuckles]

GREEN: Sibel—Sibelius, certainly, was a contribution.

MRS. KARLMAN: Right. And we have [unclear]—what's his name? [unclear].

KARLMAN: Well, he is—

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]

KARLMAN: He's dead now of naturally—

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]

KARLMAN: —[unclear] architect. He designed the Pan Am Building [unclear]—

GREEN: Of course. So you have the architect and then, of course, [unclear]—

MRS. KARLMAN: [sentence unclear].

KARLMAN: [unclear] is another architect [several words unclear] Finnish design. But [unclear], he is well known over the world—all over the world. [several words unclear] there. Capitol building here, I think was designed there and over in Far East, he has designed quite a few buildings. Same thing up in Boston [unclear] design. Naturally, they—I think the—his architect firm is still going. But I don't know now if his wife is running it or if she passed away also. [sentence unclear]. [unclear] very active, very famous architect [unclear]. So they—they are—they are—and naturally, then they have the Finlandia Sibelius—

GREEN: One thing you mentioned earlier in this tape too that's an important contribution, you said that the idea of the cooperative—

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah.

GREEN: —came from Finland.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, I would—

KARLMAN: [unclear]

MRS. KARLMAN: I don't know but I would say so because they almost had—

KARLMAN: That's early. That's early here. That's early.

MRS. KARLMAN: Actually, when I—I came in—must have been [unclear]—when I came, we [several words unclear] Sunset [PH] Park, they had their cooperative store and rest—they had the restaurant, the bakery and the grocery store. That was all one cooperative by shareholders.

KARLMAN: And before that, they had even garages.

MRS. KARLMAN: Oh, yeah. That—

KARLMAN: Co-op garages. But there, when somebody had a [unclear].

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah.

KARLMAN: And that went bankruptcy [unclear]—the shareholder [unclear]. So—

MRS. KARLMAN: So—

KARLMAN: So that's—that's [several words unclear].

GREEN: [unclear]—

MRS. KARLMAN: And then [unclear]—

KARLMAN: In the '30s and '20s, the co-op—co-op [unclear]. Those pe—some—most of the people is dead. Then some—most of the people now [several words unclear] or not—80, 85 years.

GREEN: Mmm.

KARLMAN: [unclear]

GREEN: Now, you told me about the Finn Town [PH] in Brooklyn. I'm just interested. You—you say you also left the ship at one point in Baltimore. Do you have any knowledge, maybe through friends and acquaintances also, of other cities in America where there are groups of Finns who settled?

KARLMAN: No, except, now, I haven't been up to far north in Minnesota. Minnesota—

MRS. KARLMAN: No, but they have—Fairfield, Connecticut has a big group.

GREEN: Fairfield, Connecticut. Oh, that's—

MRS. KARLMAN: They have a big group, the Scandinavian Club.

KARLMAN: Yeah. Well, that's really—

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah.

KARLMAN: —Finn. Yeah.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah.

KARLMAN: Same as we are.

MRS. KARLMAN: Well, [unclear].

KARLMAN: [unclear] Finns up in Minnesota, there they have—

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah.

KARLMAN: —[unclear]—even speak Finnish, only. And, naturally, they talk English [unclear] the kids and all that. I understand they have even Finnish in school in some places—some towns up in Minnesota.

MRS. KARLMAN: And 125th Street used to be a Finn Town.

GREEN: Oh, 125th Street. I didn't know that.

KARLMAN: Yes.

MRS. KARLMAN: [sentence unclear].

KARLMAN: When I came here, that's [several words unclear].

GREEN: Oh! Th—

KARLMAN: They had a big thing [unclear] with restaurants and dance halls. And then they had a couple of nightclubs [unclear]. Or [several words unclear] on 25th Street from Third Avenue to Lexington, 225th, 226th Street.

GREEN: Around what year did that change?

KARLMAN: Oh, that changed in—in—we'll say in '50s.

GREEN: In the '50s.

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear].

KARLMAN: [unclear] '50, it changed—

MRS. KARLMAN: Before—before 1950—

GREEN: Changed to Spanish.

KARLMAN: Yep, yep. Before that, you could hear Finnish all over the place.

GREEN: And what about the Finns in New England? I've heard there are quite a few in New Hampshire and Vermont.

KARLMAN: Well, that—

MRS. KARLMAN: Rhode Island. Rhode Island. [sentence unclear].

KARLMAN: Yeah, [several words unclear]. And, naturally, they—they keep to themselves. They're saying their—their own language and so forth. [unclear]. They don't talk English very much—if they had to. And the first thing they learn—learn their kids how to talk Finnish.

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]

KARLMAN: When the—when the kids come out on the street, then—then when they learn English. Not before.

GREEN: Now, you were telling me about the Scandinavian clubs. I'd like to know more about them. Would you tell me about the Finnish, Swedish clubs? You were just telling me about them.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah. When they used to spend—as I said, in Fairfield, Connecticut, they have a—what they call Scandinavian Club. But it's really mostly made up of Finland Swedes from the north and northwestern parts of Finland—well, the western part of Fin—Finland. And then, of course, we had the Aland [PH] Society, which we belong to.

- GREEN: The—oh, from your—from your—Aland—of the island—
- MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, they are [unclear]—
- GREEN: Aland Society.
- MRS. KARLMAN: Right. And that got started in 1915.
- GREEN: And it's here in Brooklyn?
- MRS. KARLMAN: Right now, they just moved the meeting room from Brooklyn to the Sw—to the Church of Sweden in Manhattan. But this was started [unclear] in—I guess in Bronx they was—was for years and years located on 149th Street that there was a [unclear] Hall, was the meeting place.
- GREEN: Organization just of people from your island.
- MRS. KARLMAN: Right. And I think it started, you had to come from there or be married to somebody from there. And it started [several words unclear] at that—19—'16, '17, and was to take care of your—you know, if somebody got sick, they had no sick insurance or [unclear] at that time, you know. And then you [unclear], I guess, in [unclear].
- GREEN: So you find that the people who came here liked to help one another.
- MRS. KARLMAN: Definite. Oh, yeah. Oh, [unclear]. They always had that. They were sort of a haven for those that came over and needed a—my aunt was very good. She was—belonged to this society. She was, otherwise, very much the—the [unclear] like my husband that came. We always had a haven to come—come there and meet other people that spoke the—I know myself when I came here, couldn't speak a word of English. [unclear] [chuckles] start to spin in your head. And you felt very good when you heard somebody speak your language, that you could understand and you could even kid around, because you found—found [several words unclear] having a good time and you didn't understand what they were laughing at. [chuckles]
- GREEN: What sort of an idea had—did you—do you find that most Americans you meet in the street or on the job have about Finland? What sort of ideas—maybe misconceptions do they have?

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear] misconception. I felt very proud when I came here, because this was 1949—no, '47, right after the war. And when I said I came from Finland, nobody really knew anything about Finland, except that that's that little country that pays its debts, because we were paying our war—war debts. I mean, our debts to America during the war and that stuff. And that seemed to be something that—common knowledge, that some—somebody [chuckles] knew very much about that. Otherwise, a lot of people, though, they didn't know [unclear]. And of course, it's very confusing when you speak Swedish and come from Finland.

KARLMAN: Well, when I came to this—this side of the ocean and so forth, when we say you came from Finland, naturally, they—they—they only said, "Oh, you come from Finland [unclear] give the Russians a licking in '39," which it did. And then Finland got noticed really, really well when the [unclear] was over. And before that, they never heard—they say, "We never heard of it before."

GREEN: [laughs]

KARLMAN: They could—they could have given the [unclear] Russia a licking at that time.

GREEN: So you found the Americans friendly.

KARLMAN: Yes. Some are and some aren't.

MRS. KARLMAN: Some aren't.

GREEN: Hmm.

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear] how America is, especially New York. It's—it's a friendly city.

GREEN: Hmm.

MRS. KARLMAN: And you don't have to—I know I—about 10 year—I was [unclear] almost a year before I dare to open my mouth and speak English. You [unclear] speak so bad. That's a—you can't speak so bad that somebody doesn't try to help you and try to understand you. It's a lovely town, a good [unclear]. [unclear] change. It's always change. I—you read all things and you hear—they think it's a terrible time [chuckles] and then it gets better.

GREEN: Now, you began your work as a seaman and then you went into the construction business. What type of work did the other Finns coming here—did they do this type of work too?

KARLMAN: They—they—m—majority had a [unclear] construction.

GREEN: Majority in construction. I didn't know that.

KARLMAN: Oh, yeah.

GREEN: What about the lumber business?

KARLMAN: Well, here—well, I can only speak for around here in New York. They [unclear] and—and up further north in the [unclear] business, in the [unclear].

GREEN: I see.

KARLMAN: [unclear] Scandinavian things and in the lumber camps as years past during the turn of the century or in the '20s, I worked with a guy was—also was in the lumber camp at that time. [unclear] lot of Finns. The Swedish Finns was up north in the lumber camps.

GREEN: Hmm.

KARLMAN: [unclear]—

MRS. KARLMAN: I think my father started on the lakes.

KARLMAN: Yeah, he started on lakes.

MRS. KARLMAN: On the lakes.

GREEN: Your father was in the lumber business?

MRS. KARLMAN: No, no.

KARLMAN: No.

MRS. KARLMAN: When he started—and when he came—he came in—the first time, 1904.

GREEN: What was his trade?

MRS. KARLMAN: When he came, is on the boat too.

GREEN: Oh, he was a seaman.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yeah, he came on the boat, him and his cousin with his uncle, the captain, I think, and the—and they—he sent them off the ship and—and I don't know. My father was—was [unclear] the [unclear] in Canada. [chuckles] [unclear].

KARLMAN: He was—he was a jackass of all trades [unclear].

MRS. KARLMAN: No. He was the black sheep. He was [unclear] kind of [unclear]—

KARLMAN: No. He—he was on the lakes.

MRS. KARLMAN: Yes. He was—

KARLMAN: He was fishing there and I think he worked in the mines too. And—but he [unclear]—

MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]

KARLMAN: Then he came back home. He had a few—save—he could save a dollar or two. So he went back home and then he came here.

MRS. KARLMAN: Then he married my mother and then came back here, and then he came back home again. Then we had two sisters. Then in 19—in '39, he came [unclear] there was Depression and so much bad times. When he got—he—in his job then. And he worked Washington Bridge. [chuckles]

KARLMAN: Yeah, he worked—

MRS. KARLMAN: But that was really bad, 1930, '31, '32—

GREEN: It must have been very helpful for the Finns to have the cooperatives during the Depression.

MRS. KARLMAN: I would imagine so. Yes. [unclear] Maybe that was, more or less, the reason for it. Probably a few of them was—

KARLMAN: Yes, yes. But we go back to the co-op. They were built [several words unclear] that time, the 1920s, '22, '24, was lot of construction going on at that time. [unclear] in '28, '29, what I understand, then it start to go down. But those—

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MRS. KARLMAN: [unclear]—

KARLMAN: —those apartments was built before that. In 1928, when it [unclear]—like, this house here was built in 1928.

GREEN: I see.

KARLMAN: And this is one of the last houses here on this block. So in 1920s—her uncle said at that time all of here below Eighth Avenue was only farmland at that time. in—in 1919 or '20 [several words unclear], was only a few—few houses [several words unclear]. And after [unclear] there was only farmland so there they took these small, private—small contractors. They had—they threw up houses right and left at that time. That's how the—but they threw up at that time, but they left before that and then [unclear]. But I understand it was [unclear]. It was managed right, they had a good investment. They had good—lived decent and quite reasonable. And that's how they—how they built that. And—and someone—

[END OF INTERVIEW]