

NPS-130
AMUNDSEN LILLIAN
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INTERVIEWER: AMELIA GREEN
INTERVIEWER LOCATION:
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY:
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

FINLAND 1922
AGE 14

SHIP: FREDERICK Vill
PORT: HELSINKI
RESIDENCES
FINLAND: Ikaalinen
US: NY; LYNBROOK, LI; NY

GREEN: Lillian Amundson at the Lenox Hills Senior Citizens Center on March 2, 1982. Interview with Mrs. Lillian Amundson at 343 East 70th Street, March 2, 1982. Mrs. Amundson, when and where were you born?

AMUNDSON: I was born in Finland, 1908, February 13.

GREEN: Oh! Now what was your home town, the city?

AMUNDSON: It was a very small country place. It was not a city; it was just like a small village.

GREEN: Oh, it was a village, and its name?

AMUNDSON: Ikaalinen.

GREEN: How do you spell that?

AMUNDSON: I-K -- I-K-A-A-A-A-L-I--- L-I-N-E-N - N-E-N.

GREEN: A small village of how many inhabitants?

AMUNDSON: I'm sorry but I don't even know how many people were there that time. In - in whole Finland at the time I was there, there was only three million people.

GREEN: Now what do you most clearly remember about Ikaalinen as a child?

AMUNDSON: Well, my home, how my mother used to take care of, oh, seven children all by herself. My father left and came to this country, went to Canada, when I was one year old. And we were living on a very small farm, but we never needed to go hungry because we work and planted our

own vegetables and the potatoes, the wheat. So the only thing we actually have to buy was like sugar or - or some white flour to make cake, you know, Finnish coffee bread, what everybody liked very, very much.

GREEN: Did your mother run the farm since your father was gone?

AMUNDSON: Yes, by herself.

GREEN: By herself!

AMUNDSON: And with the children's help, yes, including myself. I worked on the fields when I was very, very young.

GREEN: You were seven in the family?

AMUNDSON: Yes. And I was the youngest one.

GREEN: The youngest.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: How many boys, how many girls?

AMUNDSON: Three boys and four girls.

GREEN: Three boys and four girls.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: And you all worked hard.

AMUNDSON: We all worked hard, but we didn't mind (laughs) it was a pleasure to go out in the fields early in the morning, you know. Really and truly I mean it. And we were very healthy. Nobody was ever sick. I never went to the doctor when I was there and neither did anybody in my family. That's right.

GREEN: What did you do for relaxation or entertainment since you worked so hard?

AMUNDSON: Well, the only relaxation that I could remember was the Sundays. That's the day that we didn't work hard. Then I went to church with my mother every Sunday. And I remember there was a lake between where the church and where my home was. And I made, what do you call it now, saw boat, you know, how you call it again when you -- well, anyhow, we have to go over the lake so my mother did the rowing until I was old enough to do it. And she would sit in back of it -- the boat, small boat. But it was a pleasure.

And Christmas time we have to have a horse because the lake was frozen. And it was too cold to walk in the snow through the lake to get to the church. But we went to church six o'clock in the morning and to me I still remember every time I go to church now on Sundays. . And when

somebody, an elderly lady, sits next to me, it's just like my mother is sitting there in that church next to me.

GREEN: A Lutheran church?

AMUNDSON: Yes, Lutheran church. There is one here on 86th Street.

GREEN: I know it.

AMUNDSON: Near the Park Avenue. Yes, and that is the church I go on Sundays mostly every Sunday. Not when I was younger, but now because I am old I go to church on Sundays.

GREEN: Was going to church your only relaxation?

AMUNDSON: Well, there Saturdays, like in afternoons -- Saturday aft-- we went in to school Saturday for half the day.

GREEN: On Saturdays!

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: Not during the week?

AMUNDSON: Yes, all day, all week, but even on Saturday we went to school half a day. So then afternoon that we didn't have anything specially of hard work to do. That was the one day that--

GREEN: Saturday afternoon.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: Was for fun.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: Tell me something about your education. What type of schooling did you have?

AMUNDSON: Well, the only school I went to was a regular grammar school like here. But we have to go to school when we were eight years old. And I stayed in school until I was fourteen. And that was the time when I left and came to the United States.

GREEN: You did not go to school before eight years old.

AMUNDSON: We went like kindergarten.

GREEN: Oh, you did go to kindergarten.

AMUNDSON: Yes, that's it. But that was, we didn't have to go if we didn't want to. But the regular grammar school when you were eight years old, you have to go. But I learned to read and write before I even went to grammar school.

GREEN: Your older brothers and sisters taught you?

AMUNDSON: My mother.

GREEN: Your mother.

AMUNDSON: And you know I, this is the truth, I learned to read and write from the Bible because I have to write the, my mother couldn't read and I have to learn to do it, but I learned to spell, "Our father who are in heaven." And from that I learned to read. Would you believe it? It was a pleasure when I, you know, I read that - that - that, you know, to my mother on Sundays. And sh-she made me spell it. You see, she only remem-- she couldn't read it, but she remembered it because the other people, the older children, has told her, you know. I had a very, very good mother. Nobody could be any better.

GREEN: She ran the farm and yet she was your teacher, too.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: That's very amazing.

AMUNDSON: That is only a good woman could be like that.

GREEN: Now how did you get the idea of coming to America? You said you got the idea when you were fourteen years old.

AMUNDSON: Yes. You see, I could not go on to school. I wanted to go, keep on going like to a high school in Finland. When you go -- get through the grammar school, that's eight years, that is like two years of high school in here, in this country. And I wanted to keep on going, but my mother didn't have money - books -- to - to buy the books and keep sending me to school. And over there you have to buy your own books and everything cost.

So then my cousin who had been living in New York City, she came over to Finland to visit her mother and father. And she was telling me how wonderful it is in United States and how ea-- easy it is for people to make money when they are willing to work. That's how I got the idea. "Mother," I said, "in Finland I can't help you, but if I go to United States, I will be able to send you money." And that is how I came, and that is how I did help my mother.

GREEN: So you had a picture that you got from your cousin of America as land of opportunity.

AMUNDSON: That's right. That's exactly.

GREEN: Did you know any English?

AMUNDSON: Not a one word.

GREEN: Oh, that was very enterprising. And how did your family feel about your leaving and how did you feel about going? You were only fourteen.

AMUNDSON: I was only fourteen. I -- I missed my mother so much, my - my sisters and brother, and all my school girlfriends. I used to write to them all the time, all the time. And I always promised my mother when I am here long enough and make enough for money, I will come back. But when I did have the money, then I didn't want to go back to Finland anymore because it was much better living and working in the United States.

GREEN: Did any of your family come to visit you?

AMUNDSON: No. Never.

GREEN: Now tell me about the trip that you made from Finland to America. How did you come and how did you make arrangements? You were just fourteen. Did your cousin help you?

AMUNDSON: Yes, but she has to, over there in Finland already, she has to promise to take care of me until I would be sixteen. Because that was the law that then at sixteen you could start working. And she promised just to keep me as her own daughter until I was sixteen.

GREEN: She promised. Yes, but the travel arrangements, how did you go about making them?

AMUNDSON: Well. What, my - my mother had to sign the papers that she would let me come here with her. That she would more or less release me to her.

GREEN: Oh, you made the trip with your cousin?

AMUNDSON: Yes, oh, yes.

GREEN: What was your cousin's name?

AMUNDSON: Ida.Biktamen [ph]

GREEN: Ida Biktamen..

AMUNDSON: Yes, she's dead a long time.

GREEN: And--

AMUNDSON: She was married and had a family.

GREEN: So she brought you back with her.

AMUNDSON: She brought me over to this country. Yes.

GREEN: And tell me what you remember about the trip and saying goodbye to your family and the trip.

AMUNDSON: That was horrible, saying goodbye to my family. I tell you, I cried and cried until we landed on the ship. That time there was no airplanes.

GREEN: Now you left Ikaal--.

AMUNDSON: Ikaalinen.

GREEN: Ikaalin--. How did you leave? Did you go to Helsinki?

AMUNDSON: Yes, that's where we went.

GREEN: You went to Helsinki.

AMUNDSON: Yes. And - and my -- my cousin's brother drove us to the nearest place where we could get the train to get to Helsinki, you know. But when I was traveling, I mean just leaving, come -- I get crying and crying. I couldn't even look at -- outside. I just kept crying. I was so lonely.

GREEN: And the date, the time of the year.

AMUNDSON: It was in Sept-- August, August the tenth when I left home.

GREEN: The year again.

AMUNDSON: I don't --. Wait a minute now. Twenty-two, 1922.

GREEN: Nineteen twenty-two.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: So this was after the war.

AMUNDSON: Yes. We landed in Ellis Island.

GREEN: So we'll come to that later. Now tell me, you drove--

AMUNDSON: On a horse and buggy until we came to the city. And from there Tantti [ph] and me took a train to Helsinki.

GREEN: To Helsinki.

AMUNDSON: Yes. And from there he caught the boat, the ship.

GREEN: What was the name of the boat?

AMUNDSON: Frederick VIII.

GREEN: What kind of ship was it?

AMUNDSON: That was a - a - a Norwegian boa-- ship, you know.

GREEN: Norwegian boat. And do you remember anything about the people on board the ship?

AMUNDSON: Well, only thing I would remember-- remember that there was a lot of people that who could talk my language, you know. I know some were Swedish people or Norwegian people. And another thing was I was awfully seasick. As soon as - as soon as we got to the ocean and the big waves, I was sick. So I just stayed in my room, and I was praying the Lord that we would just land (chuckle) on the ground so we could get away from the ocean.

GREEN: Well, that was very brave of you, wasn't it, to leave alone at fourteen.

AMUNDSON: I had something to look forward.

GREEN: You were looking forward to being able to continue with your education.

AMUNDSON: I couldn't go--

GREEN: To send money back to your mother.

AMUNDSON: To send money -- to work.

GREEN: To work.

AMUNDSON: And to help my mother because I know how hard she was working.

GREEN: Oh, that was very good.

AMUNDSON: She was fifty years old exactly when I left.

GREEN: And none of your brothers or sisters thought to come?

AMUNDSEN: No.

GREEN: That indeed was brave. Now the Frederick landed on Ellis Island.

AMUNDSON: There September the four - the second because it was the Labor Day weekend and it was a holiday when we landed in Ellis Island. So we could not get off the ship. We have to spend a night on the ship. My cousin, she - she , because she was a United States citizen and her husband was there to meet her, she could get out of the ship, but I couldn't. I have to spend the night over there.

GREEN: All alone, and you couldn't speak the language.

AMUNDSON: All alone. Right. Speak the language. No.

GREEN: On Ellis Island, but on the ship.

AMUNDSON: No, we had to get off the ship.

GREEN: Oh, you stayed overnight at Ellis Island.

AMUNDSON: We have to stay over in Ellis Island. Yes, that's right.

GREEN: Can you remember anything of how Ellis Island appeared to you, anything you can remember about it?

AMUNDSON: Well, there were a lot of people in the first place that I haven't seen in my life before. And to me that was just something I just wanted to see the way, you know, that they would be living. What would they be eating when we were, but they seemed to be eating the same thing that I did, which was surprise. But I just admire all that was something new to me.

GREEN: So anything about the buildings?

AMUNDSON: Yes. Of course, when I--saw --. Then when I got out of there, when I saw the big building, we didn't have anything like that in Finland that time. In a big city, yes, in Helsinki, but they were not that high. They was maybe about four or five floors, but not twenty and thirty floors up. When I saw them, I just kept staring. I thought they were going to fall down. (Laughter)

GREEN: And what about the people who were working at Ellis Island, were they good to you?

AMUNDSON: They were all very nice, very pleasant, although I couldn't understand what they were saying. But I just --

GREEN: How did they talk with you if you didn't understand?

AMUNDSON: Well, they - they couldn't. You see, I had to wait until my cousin came back the next day and explained, you know. She also had to sign the paper that she would put me in school until I was sixteen years old. That was the law at that time. You have to be sixteen before you could start working.

GREEN: I see.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: So she took care of the arrangements for you.

AMUNDSON: Yes, that's right. Like she promised my mother that she would take care of me, yes.

GREEN: And once she signed the papers on Ellis Island -

AMUNDSEN: Then I could get off.

GREEN: --- then you were free to go home with her.

AMUNDSON: Yes, that was right after breakfast then, you know. We only had the breakfast that day in Ellis Island. But I believe she was there about 10 o'clock in the morning, and then I was able to get out. So when I put me foot on the la-on the [not understood], the street on the sidewalk, I just couldn't imagine because over there in Finland we didn't have cement sidewalks like we having here. We just have gravel. And I said, "My gosh, is the all the streets like this in here." (Laughter) To me, everything was so new, all very different. But I enjoyed everything.

GREEN: Were you frightened at all?

AMUNDSON: Well, I suppose maybe a little, but not much. I just tried to do -- enjoy everything, take everything in and see what it is.

GREEN: Where did your cousin live?

AMUNDSON: That time she was living in 123 Street.

GREEN: One Hundred Twenty-Fifth Street.

AMUNDSON: That is where a lot, a lot of Finnish people was living.

GREEN: That's changed since then.

AMUNDSON: Well, now none of the Finnish living there no more. No. No.

GREEN: Nineteen twenty-two, Finnish neighborhood.

AMUNDSON: That's right. Was beautiful. They - they had a Finnish church and they have Finnish recreation places, you know, like Sunday afternoon we would go--

GREEN: Finn Hall?

AMUNDSON: Finn Hall, yes. You could go and listen to the beautiful music and dance Sunday afternoon. That's right.

GREEN: So you lived on 125th Street, and did you indeed continue with your education until you were sixteen?

AMUNDSON: I'm sorry to say, no. She disappointed me. She did not put me to school.

GREEN: And you were interested in continuing your education.

AMUNDSON: Yes, very much. She just said that, well, you have to go to work to earn your living. And that is what I did.

GREEN: You started at fourteen.

AMUNDSON: I did. She took me into the Finnish employment agency, the maid service.

GREEN: At fourteen!

AMUNDSEN: At fourteen. I had long blonde hair so they just made it me a knot for it in the back of my head and she brought me a dress that was long to make me look like six -- sixteen instead of fourteen. I went to work doing housework. And people were so nice. I couldn't understand one word what they were saying to me, but when the ladies showed me how to do things, how to clean the house, how they would do the washing, I learned very quickly because I was interested. I wanted to do it.

GREEN: Tell me about your first job, please. What kind of people were they?

AMUNDSON: There were three people only, lady and a gentleman and they had one daughter. But the girl -- daughter was grown up already.

GREEN: Where did you work?

AMUNDSON: It was someplace in Long Island near Mamaroneck.

GREEN: (?)

AMUNDSON: Yes. I can't even-- I have to learn to travel from there to come to New York, and that was the hardest thing, you know, to come to New York on my day off.

GREEN: And not knowing much English.

AMUNDSON: Not knowing much English. But the lady put me in the - in the train and I came to New York. And I learned how to get to 125th Street. My mo--my cousin came to meet me a couple of first -- first couple of times at the station, put me in the station, just to bring me up to the (?) so then I learned my way how to get there.

GREEN: So you traveled (?). This woman taught you how to do housework?

AMUNDSON: Yes, she did. She was very, very nice.

GREEN: You worked how many hours?

AMUNDSON: Sometimes twelve, fourteen hours a day. I get up at seven. We had to have breakfast at seven o'clock because the gentleman have to go to New York to a business. So he had to have his breakfast early.

GREEN: You slept there?

AMUNDSON: Yes, oh, yes. Where else could I sleep? I had my room. So I had my room and board and my own room there. Oh, yes. Those days all the, especially out in the country, people where they have maids they have a maid's room.

GREEN: Were there any other maids in that town from Finland?

AMUNDSON: Well, someone I met -- there was somebody nearby and we got together. And then we also traveled together. But that was about -- at least a half a year, six months, before I know that somebody was living. And I went through the employment agency. There was another Finnish girl in that neighborhood. Otherwise, I never would have known there was somebody there.

GREEN: Now the other jobs you had after this, did you get them all through this employment agency?

AMUNDSON: Well, some of it. But not all. Then at -- It all depends because there were lot other employment agencies like the Swedish employment agency, too.

GREEN: That Swedish employment agency.

AMUNDSON: Yes. But I - Johnson -- but I originally stayed, you know, long time. I didn't like to change, so when I got used to the people.

GREEN: You stayed a long time with these first people. How long did you stay?

AMUNDSON: Well, in the first place, I wouldn't stay too long, just for the simple reason, it was too far for me to travel. Then, when I left, where I was still riding about vuo -- one year. Then I came to New York and I find myself a job in New York City.

GREEN: Oh, to be nearby.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: In Manhattan?

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: Doing housework, too?

AMUNDSON: Doing housework, yes.

GREEN: Now we're coming to the time of the Depression. Did that affect you being able to get work at all?

AMUNDSON: Well, not that time. When I work, you see, you know, the people who had money, they still needed service, you know, maids. Yes.

GREEN: Did the Depression affect your life at all?

AMUNDSON: Well, I don't know. Somehow I guess it affected everybody's life a little bit because then, you see, at the time already the Depression was twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one. Well, I got married when I was seventeen years old.

GREEN: So you worked as a housemaid and then--

AMUNDSON: Then I met first husband.

GREEN: Where and when?

AMUNDSON: At the Finnish Dance Hall. Like all the Finns they used to go dancing. And that's where I met my first husband.

GREEN: And his name?

AMUNDSON: Veikko Wiberg.

GREEN: How do you spell that?

AMUNDSON: That's not -- the first name -- the last name is W-I-B-E-R-G.

GREEN: Yes.

AMUNDSON: It's not the Finnish name. It's - it's a more or less like a German name.

GREEN: Yes.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: First name?

AMUNDSON: Veikko, V-E-I-K-K-O.

GREEN: K-O, and you told me before when we were talking, this was your first husband.

AMUNDSON: Yes, that's right.

GREEN: And your date of marriage to him?

AMUNDSON: Would be 1925.

GREEN: Nineteen twenty-five.

AMUNDSON: June.

GREEN: In June. What was his occupation?

AMUNDSON: Carpenter.

GREEN: He was a carpenter.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: And where did you serve at?

AMUNDSON: Well, then when we got married, we bought , he bought rather, first a little further out - out in the country.

GREEN: Where in the country?

AMUNDSON: Lynbrook, Long Island.

GREEN: Oh, yes.

AMUNDSON: That's where my daughter was born.

GREEN: When was she born?

AMUNDSON: 'Twenty-seven.

GREEN: Nineteen twenty-seven, and her name?

AMUNDSON: Mildred.

GREEN: Mildred.

AMUNDSON: Now her last name is Brightman, her married name.

GREEN: Did you work for a while before you had your daughter?

AMUNDSON: I - I worked, while -- although I was married, I worked. And then my daughter was two years old when I separated from my husband. I find out he was an alcoholic.

GREEN: Oh!

AMUNDSON: And I didn't know it before we were married, that he was drinking because those days people didn't drink like he did. So I have to leave him because he was very hard to get along when he was drunk.

GREEN: So you left with the two-year old child.

AMUNDSON: Yes. Took my child, we're renting somebody else's house, somebody who also came from the same town of Finland that I did. She took care of my daughter and I went to do housework. And left my husband.

GREEN: So you supported your child the way your mother took care--

AMUNDSON: That's right. I never got any money for support from my husband because he never had any. I took him to court. He was told that he have to support the child. He never had any because he always as soon as he got paid, he went to the nearest saloon or wherever he spent his money, his drinking.

GREEN: So you found yourself mother and father.

AMUNDSON: I was mother and father.

GREEN: And you continued to do housework.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: We've been talking, and I wanted to find out some more about the life of the Finnish community. Did you continue around 125th Street?

AMUNDSON: Well, I didn't live in 125th Street; that's where my - my cousin lived. I -- you know, but then I was living out in the country where my - my daughter was born.

GREEN: You continued to live in the country?

AMUNDSON: Yes, five years while my, you know, until my daughter got little older, and then I came back to New York.

GREEN: Did you live around 125th Street then, when you came back?

AMUNDSON: No, I -- wait a minute, now where was I living then? Seventy-Eighth Street.

GREEN: Seventy-Eighth Street.

AMUNDSON: Seventy-Eighth Street, yes. That's where. In this neighborhood, I've been living most of my life.

GREEN: And this was on the east side of Manhattan.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: Now it doesn't have to be just 125th Street; I would like to know a little more about the type of community where Finnish people lived. You were telling me about the halls and--

AMUNDSON: That's right.

GREEN: You lived on 125th Street.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: The music and the recreation.

AMUNDSON: Yes, it was very, very nice, yes. And as I said, we have our own church over there and --. That's where I - that's where I had my first commu-- I mean my communion. Because I was fourteen -- when I left. And you have to be sixteen in Finland before you could have your first communion. That is the Lutheran Church. So I went to church every Sunday afternoon, you know, just to make sure that I know all about the religion, the Bible.

GREEN: Thank you very much.

SIDE 2

GREEN: Second part of the interview with Mrs. Amundson. Now Mrs. Amundson, you are bringing up a daughter alone in America, and you're working here. Can you tell me something about the differences that you

found about living here and life back home in Finland? What were some of the differences that come to mind?

AMUNDSON: Well, it is so much easier for work, somebody who have to work like I did who was poor, to work and do the kind of work we do, what I did, like a housework' than over there in Finland. I could not have find this kind of a work over there. I would have to work probably out on a farm or if I stayed in city, I would have to go to a factory what I never would have done. I didn't like, I never did like even talk about the factory work. But the housework for me and to be with nice people, I always worked for very nice people. They was always very nice to me.

GREEN: So you enjoyed your work.

AMUNDSON: Oh, yes. I did. I like it, yes. That's why I worked until I was seventy years old.

GREEN: That's really something. And now in, you brought up your daughter in America. Did you speak Finnish with her?

AMUNDSON: Yes. Until she went to school. And then when the teacher told her. "Mildred, you have a Finnish accent." She didn't like that. She said, "Mama, we have to speak English from now on because I don't want anybody telling me that I have an accent."

GREEN: Oh.

AMUNDSON: And I knew that was wrong of that teacher to say that to her. But she still understands when I go to visit her and I talk Finnish to her. She understands, but she doesn't, she just says, "Where is your voice?" But she has forgotten it. And my grandchildren, of course, don't understand anything -- any Finnish at all.

GREEN: So in the beginning you did speak Finnish at home.

AMUNDSON: When she was little.

GREEN: Now that way did you try to keep Finnish customs alive in your home, for instance, the holidays in America?

AMUNDSON: Well, we had, you know, the Christmas holidays, for instance, we have it, too.

GREEN: Tell me about a Finnish Christmas.

AMUNDSON: We have two days of Christmas.

GREEN: Two days!

AMUNDSON: Yes. First day of Christmas and the second day of Christmas. First day of Christmas is a very holy day and you just have like -- when I was in Finland, my mother, grandmother and father always came visiting us. We had the Christmas tree and we had regular candles. We didn't have no electric lights and it was beautiful.. And we used to put a straw

under the tree -- Christmas tree. And when we were small, the kids would sit there or lay down on the straw. This was a great big pleasure. And Grandmother and Grandfather was always there. That's right. But then, of course, when you grow up, and when I was here, then it was different. I mean, we don't have that kind of a Christmas, although when my daughter was living with me, I always made sure that we had a Christmas tree. Yes.

GREEN: Still with candles or with electric lights?

AMUNDSON: Yes, just ordinary candles and no electric lights, no.

GREEN: And were there any other Finnish holidays besides Christmas?

AMUNDSON: Well, we had an Easter the same way. We had first and a second Easter -- Easter holiday. The first one is always a holy day. The second one, Christmas and Easter, that's when we go visiting everybody. Everybody, you know, that you all comes visiting when you go visiting people.

GREEN: And did you keep in touch with your family back home raising a child here?

AMUNDSON: I kept - I kept writing to my mother all the time, all the time, and my sister who was living there.

GREEN: Did she ever see her grandchild?

AMUNDSON: No.

GREEN: You just wrote her about her.

AMUNDSON: Yes. That's right. When I went to see my mother, I have only visited Finland once after I left, and that was twelve years ago.

GREEN: Twelve years ago. Let's see, when?

AMUNDSON: That was in the summertime but - but [not understood] was twelve years ago in August, '82. Sixty.

GREEN: Seventy.

AMUNDSON: Seventy. Yes. Seventy, yes. That's right. Seventy, yes.

GREEN: Did you go back to your--

AMUNDSON: You see, my sis -- my sister is still alive there, yes.

GREEN: You went back to visit.

AMUNDSON: Yes. I went back to visit. And everything is so different, you wouldn't believe it.

GREEN: How was it different?

AMUNDSON: Well, you see, for instance, now they have automobiles over there just like here. They have buses over there really -- just like here. Supermarket, but we never even heard of it when I was there. You could go to supermarket exactly like here, buy anything and everything you want. Same in the stores to buy clothes, especially out in the burg - in the city like Helsinki. I was there one week. I stayed in a hotel with my girlfriend and we went different places. It's beautiful. And what is so nice about it, the streets are so clean. They are not dirty,

GREEN: That says a lot. Now your sister has children?

AMUNDSON: Yes. My sister is dead now. She died two years ago. She has grown children, oh, I mean, you know, because she was - she was my oldest sister. She was eighty-four when she died.

GREEN: Did any of your nieces or nephews express an interest in coming here?

AMUNDSON: No. I'm talking about my sister here.

GREEN: Oh, I thought you were talking about your sister in Finland.

AMUNDSON: No, I have one sister here.

GREEN: [not understood]

AMUNDSON: No. no. wait. And she has four children. But it was just--I don't know. Should I say we were never really very close because I never have time to go visiting. And she never have time to visit me.

GREEN: Oh, this is your sister here.

AMUNDSON: Yes. Lives in Bayshore, Long Island.

GREEN: I see. But your sister back in Finland.

AMUNDSON: Finland, yes.

GREEN: Did any of her children show any interest about coming here?

AMUNDSON: No. She only had one boy and one girl, and they both in Finland living right nearby there.

GREEN: I see. Now coming again to the younger generation, are there any younger people coming over from Finland now?

AMUNDSON: There are some, but not as many as it used to be. Not only that, but the ones who do come here, they are well educated and they have a perfect English because in grammar school they teach English in Finland already. And the children all have to learn to speak English like they speak their own language.

GREEN: What type of work do they do when they come here?

AMUNDSON: Well, what they used to do, most of them when I was young, we all did housework. But now they all do office work. Nobody wants to do housework anymore.

GREEN: You did housework and I gather that the women usually did. What type of work did the men who came here do?

AMUNDSON: Most of them were carpenters.

GREEN: Carpenters.

AMUNDSON: Yes.

GREEN: And coming back to the men again, you tell me that you've married for a second time. Was your second husband Finnish, too?

AMUNDSON: No. Swedish descent over here.

GREEN: But he was, he had come from Sweden or from Finland?

AMUNDSON: No, no, no. He was born here - up in the Bronx.

GREEN: I see. He was American.

AMUNDSON: He is an American. He's still alive; we are divorced. He didn't die. He is there.

GREEN: I see. I see. So he is an American of Swedish descent.

AMUNDSON: That's right.

GREEN: And what year were you married to him?

AMUNDSON: [not understood] . '52.

GREEN: Nineteen fifty-two.

AMUNDSON: I marry late.

GREEN: New Year's.

AMUNDSON: Not the New Year's Day; the day before New Year's. So we have our wedding like on New Year's Eve.

GREEN: I see. So now he was a citizen, and tell me about how you became a citizen.

AMUNDSON: Oh, I came a citizen before I met him. I been a citizen now about forty years. Yes. I just wanted to get to be an American citizen. And I studied the book what you get when you want to get to be a citizen. There is ask questions and answers in that book, but you have to know what the judge is going to ask you. And I studied that book so good. When I went from out of the church, we -- I didn't let him finish the

question before I answered. So the judge laughed and he said, "Listen, young lady, you know the questions and the answers." (Laughter) I have two of my friends with me as witnesses. You have to have two witnesses, you know, when you go and get your citizenship papers that they know you certain length of time, that you are a good person, that haven't done anything wrong. And both those people they're dead now.

GREEN: So you became a citizen.

AMUNDSON: I then became a citizen, and I'm very proud to be a citizen of the United States. And every time I see the flag and I hear the national anthem, I still get the tears in my eyes. The only thing I have to do is think about it or start singing it. The most wonderful country in the whole world is the United States. God bless it.

GREEN: Well, that's very moving. Now people who you meet, you met, working and living here who knew you came from Finland, what sort of questions did they ask you about Finland?

AMUNDSON: Well, what I -- actually I asked those special questions. Everybody, all the people in the United States, have always been very nice towards the Finland and the Finnish people.

GREEN: Why do you think that is?

AMUNDSON: Because they are very honest. Finland is the only country that pay their debts.

GREEN: The war debts.

AMUNDSON: Yes. As poor country as it was, they paid their debts. And in my estimation, all the Finnish people are very proud. They will never want to go on the welfare. No, they'd much rather work. And anybody in this country who wants to work they don't need to go on the welfare. That is my opinion. And I'm very, very proud that I was born in a country like that, but I am even prouder to be a United States citizen.

GREEN: I'm so happy about that. Do you have any idea of how the students learn about Finland in geography courses in the schools here and any way it could be changed or improved?

AMUNDSON: I really don't know. I can't answer that question. No.

GREEN: Well now, perhaps you would like to finish this out, any thoughts about Finland and America, coming over here. We have some more time and why don't you finish it up?

AMUNDSON: Well, I don't think I have much to say anymore. Only thing I can say is that I am very, very happy to be here. And I am glad that my cousin did bring me over, although she did put me to work when I was that young.

GREEN: And even though it made you very unhappy to leave your family.

AMUNDSON: It made me very-- But that only lasted a while. I used to keep on writing to my school chums and friends and my home, but I never really had very much yearning to go back there. Never to live there; only to visit because, as I have said before, working over there doing the kind of a work that I have done, I was able to do--it is so much better here than over there. Not that I want to put down my ex-country, I mean country where I was born, but you see that is a very poor country comparing to United States.

GREEN: Did any of your school chums ever come over here?

AMUNDSON: Not so I know. I mean some of them probably have gone over to Canada or someplace else, but not, you know, anybody that I know from the school. I know a lot of Finnish people. I still do. There is still some Finnish people here in New York City, and I know a lot of the girls. But mostly [not understood], all of them, especially my age, we all have the same story. They all came and worked as I did doing the housework. And very proud to be doing it. At least it's a clean, honest work and you make a good living. I don't have to go on the welfare. I was able to save a few dollars. So now I can just relax and take life easy. Now tell me another country where people this age could say that.

GREEN: That's true. This has been very interesting, and I'm so glad that you're happy here.

AMUNDSON: I am very happy.

GREEN: Thank you for your contribution to the museum.

AMUNDSON: Thank you very, very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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