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AILI FLINT
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GREEN: First part of an interview with Dr. Aili Flint with Mrs. Amelia Green of the "Immigrants on Tape" project at the American Museum of Immigration at the Statue of Liberty, April 14th, 1982, in her offices at Columbia University. Dr. Flint—Aili, can you tell me when and where you were born?

FLINT: I was born in Helsinki, Finland and I was born in 1938, 29th of March.

GREEN: In Helsinki, right in the city?

FLINT: Uh-hmm. Right in the city. We—I lived—I grew up in Helsinki until I moved to this country. But I also had some roots in the countryside so those were both my home.

GREEN: Well, tell me your earliest memories of the town of Helsinki.

FLINT: Very early—I guess—I think I probably got to know the neighborhood where we lived in sort of Helsinki circles, like a little kid does who,

once they are allowed to cross the street and then get to know it, it was—it was right in the city but there were a great many rocks, really the granite bedrock, which is very typical of Helsinki all around. And so you graduated from the easier rocks to the harder rocks. And then, as you got a little older, you started—learned to wander around downtown as well. But Helsinki is a city—still is, and particularly was then, a city where you could—you could go off skiing two blocks from home, just put the skis on. The park was very—large parks were very nearby. And so I think I spent a great deal of time outdoors in the winter and in the summer and there was a skating rink right across the street from us where I spent untold hours during the winter.

GREEN: Oh, that must have been fun. Now, you say that you had country ties too, growing up as a child. What do you remember about then?

FLINT: Well, I think the day that schools were out, which was always the last day of May, we—the local children were put on the train when we were little with somebody. And when we got even to be eight years old, we just—we were put on the train even by ourselves to go to my grandmother's farm in central Finland, and we always spent the summer up there. And we lived as country kids for the three months of the year until we were city kids for [unclear].

GREEN: Were your grandparents farmers [unclear]?

FLINT: My—right. Yes, my—my grandfa—my mother's father was a farmer. He had died [unclear] I was born but my grandmother was, of course, alive. And she—she was alive. I think she tur—she was two 2 weeks short of 90 when she died and I was, by then, 16.

GREEN: Excuse me, but this was your mother's—

FLINT: My mother's mother.

GREEN: Your mother's mother.

FLINT: She was, in fact, the only grandparent that I knew personally. I was the youngest of the children so I hadn't known any of the other gran—I didn't know my father's parents.

GREEN: What part of the Finland were your father's parents from?

FLINT: From Helsinki.

GREEN: From Helsinki. They were—

FLINT: They were city people but, like all Finns, no matter how city people they are, they all have some ties to the country. So that even if you don't have a farm or there isn't a [unclear] that has a farm, most people either has a modest little c—have a modest cottage or some other way of getting to the country. So most everybody still will get to the country for some part of the summer.

GREEN: I see. Now, what did your mother do most of her life?

FLINT: My mother was a dentist. She is now 81, so she retired three years ago at the age of 78. She was a dentist all her life.

GREEN: A professional woman.

FLINT: Yeah.

GREEN: But her parents were farmers.

FLINT: Uh-hmm, yes.

GREEN: Wasn't this unusual for a young girl to become a dentist, coming from a farm in those days?

FLINT: In those days—okay, my mother was probably—see, she gr—she graduated from dental school, I think, in 1925 or '24. Yes, it was somewhat unusual for a woman from the farm to become a dentist but not unheard of at all. In fact, I think her dental school class, which must have had, maybe 15 people; at least six or seven were women. Dentistry has always been a women's field in Finland. In her day, it might have been—

GREEN: [unclear]

FLINT: —50/50. Now, I think it is about 80 percent women, 20 percent men, and it was even when she was practicing.

GREEN: Are dentists. So—and—and so she—she h—she raised children too. Did she continue to work professionally when you were growing up?

FLINT: Oh, sure. She was still remarking last summer when I was in Finland. She said, "Well, I was"—she said, "Well, I was born at a lucky time," because, of course, in 1925, which was she began her practice, it was—any middle class family would have maid or maids. And it was really possible. It was inexpensive. And so she—we always had a maid who did the work. And I think when we were little, there probably even was an additional nurse on hand. So she was [several

words unclear] in Finland. She's—well, really, young women today are having a much harder time, because maids are about as typical to—to have as here.

GREEN: How many children were you in your family?

FLINT: Five.

GREEN: And you came along—

FLINT: I was the last.

GREEN: You were the baby.

FLINT: I was the baby. Right. But she was—we—her dental—her dentist's office was—we had two apartments next to each other. And hers was at the—they were comb—they were connected with each other, and her office was at one end and then the rest of life went on at the other end. So whenever we needed her for something, we would just go in and she would stop filling a patient's tooth and listen to what we had to say. So she was always there. I never [unclear] she was gone. She was—

GREEN: This fits in with some that I learned about the women getting the vote in Finland in—in 1906.

FLINT: Uh-hmm. Yes, I think Finland was the first country after New Zealand. New Zealand was the first [unclear].

GREEN: So this must have given a certain impetus to women's equal careers.

FLINT: Probably. Probably, the vote was part and parcel of the same kind of movement, yeah. I would think so. I would think so. Also, just like my mother's move from when you think of women working, if you think of most women in the world even today, most women work. When you think of poor women in Africa, you really think of any places, women don't sit idle and dust the lacy tables. But Finland, in a way—I think of the fact that so many women are working and have been working really most of this century in Finland, that—is that there's been an enormously rapid move from the farms to more technological or educational or urban kind of life, that there really never was a very large—was a very large class that could afford idle women. There really simply was not the kind of—there was a very small number of household in reference—in comparison with the whole country, where the women would walk around with the feather duster, or even if that.

GREEN: Or embroider.

FLINT: Or embroider. Yeah. You know, it isn't that people don't embroider but [chuckles]—I embroider too. But it's just a number of people that would have lived on farms. And of course, if you grow up on a farm you start working as soon as you can walk. You will start doing a few chores. And so that that would be something that's expected of a farm child always, regardless of whether it's a man or a woman. And then that would sort of continue into—

GREEN: When you went to the farm during vacation periods, did you work on the farm?

FLINT: Did we ever. Oh! [chuckles] Did we ever! We did. We worked a lot. In fact, at this point, by now I can look back on it say, "Okay, it's most useful. It was—it served a purpose." But when I was 13, you could have interviewed me and I would have had totally the opposite opinion. Why did we have to work so much? But it was first—well, one thing, it was—when I was growing up it was pre-wartime and post-wartime, when so many men had been killed in the war or they were off in the war, and so that, really, farms were run by—by women, old men and children. So we—we learned to do absolutely every farm chore there was and—and we were expected to learn to do every farm chore there was, and we did them. It was sometimes that might be [unclear] a bit unnecessarily heavy. But [unclear] on, it's okay. I guess maybe also, I was the youngest so I, perhaps, didn't have to work quite as much as the others. But I still did my share.

GREEN: Along with your brother?

FLINT: I had only one brother and he died when I was four so I really—what work I did before I was four is negligible, I guess. So—

GREEN: So you were three girls—

FLINT: Four girls.

GREEN: Four girls.

FLINT: Four girls and one boy and he died at the age of 12 when I was 4, so he was not any part of my growing up.

GREEN: Uh-hmm. What did your father do for a living?

FLINT: He was a professor of social sciences or social policy, particularly, in the University of Helsinki.

GREEN: Professor of social sciences.

FLINT: That was [unclear].

GREEN: So I bet you grew up in a house of books.

FLINT: We did. They were forever spilling all over the place, yes, [unclear] books. That in itself, the fact that you have lots of books is not—not only professors' houses have lots of books. People in Finland, or just about anybody would—even, let's say, your really average home would have a rather—not a huge bookshelf but it would have a bookshelf. It would have a certain number of books. Finns are big readers.

GREEN: Finnish authors or authors from other countries?

FLINT: Both, both.

GREEN: Translations—

FLINT: Translations, yes.

GREEN: Yeah.

FLINT: Both—both Finnish authors and probably, I would imagine, that, let's say if you had your really un—less-learned household, perhaps more books will be by Finnish authors than by—than translations. But there would certainly be a few. There's maybe a collection of a few; maybe 10 books that would be in just about every household. And then could be others.

GREEN: Well, with your mother a prof—with both of your parents as professionals, what was family life like, growing up?

FLINT: It was a very busy, bustling household. We had—okay, so there four when I—a couple of times that I remember best. I do remember my brother but that was earlier on. It was a very big household. We—not only did we have our family, but there always seemed to be any number of extra people coming through or spending the winter or studying. There was a cousin, several cousins who lived—lived in the country, whose homes were in the countryside, stayed at our house while they were studying in Helsinki. After the war and during the war, when some friends had lost their homes and had to be working in Helsinki, they lived in the house. How we all fit in—I don't quite know but, I mean, we did. It was a big apartment. And then during—after

the war when the American Friends Service Committee sent many—many Quakers came to Finland. My father was at that time the head of the Finnish Care [unclear]. And he dealt with all the Friend's Service Committee people, so they all streamed through our house. So there was a lot of English spoken when I was little and couldn't understand a word of it. So there were lots of other people who came to the work camps, who worked in Finland. Those people stayed in the house. My mother's patients, of course, were at the other end of the house. My father's students were—were there too, Thursday office hours, because the university at that point didn't have enough office space. So they all sat around the living room on the dining room chairs and the hall chairs waiting for their turn to speak with my father. So there was—it was a bustly, big household.

GREEN: Since your father was a professor of social science, did he have any particular—particular political interests?

FLINT: Yes, he did. My father made—he never joined a par—he's—never has joined a party and probably never will, since this time by now, 80 years old. He is not officially part of any—any political party. But his sympathies, I think, and his leanings in many ways are with the—with progressive—perhaps within keeping of the Finnish Social Democrat Party, which is not enormously far left. It really is sort of moderate left of center party. I mean, I don't know that he would have always agreed with all their aims, but his—I think that his feeling was very strongly with better—with sort of democratic evening out of the country's resources and better impr—and improvements for working people. He did his early research on the working class district of Helsinki and the development of that at the time of 19—in the turn of the century when Helsinki was becoming more of a city and more people were moving to the outskirts. And he interviewed lots of people who had moved from the country to the city, and he worked then in a settlement house. He worked with the working class population and workers around there. So I think that he is—he was from a—okay, "genteel, middle class family" himself. And—but he was—that was—that was very—was somehow a very big interest of his.

GREEN: Are your parents living?

FLINT: Yes. Yeah.

GREEN: In Helsinki.

FLINT: They live in [unclear] now, which is 18 minutes out of Helsinki, but it's officially in the city of [unclear]. But it's really like a suburb of Helsinki. It's a garden city where they moved in the late '50s.

GREEN: All right. Now, please tell me about your early education.

FLINT: My earliest education began—my education began in school. Education began when I was three years old. I remember the first day of going to nursery school, which was on the same street as we lived and I went to that for a couple of years. That was nice. That was just calm playing for three hours a day during the week. Then first grade, on was a—across on the other side of the skating rink, right opposite our house was the Alexis [unclear] Elementary School where I went for four years. That after that, I—in those days, you had what—what perhaps in Britain is called the [unclear] where you have to pass an examination to go onto the next academic school, which is then the secondary school. And so that was the school of eight years. And at that—after that, you graduated from the [unclear] get your white cap. So that was the [unclear]—

GREEN: Did you learn En—at what age did you learn English?

FLINT: I started English when I was, I guess, 11. Eleven, yeah, so that I had seven years of English at school.

GREEN: I see. Now, you tell me that there were four girls in this busy academic, professional family. Was there any particular feeling on your parents' part about how girls should be educated?

FLINT: Ah, it was the kind of thing that I don't think ever would have even been discussed as to how girls should be educated. I had my—I don't do—I have [unclear]—no data for comparison. But had my brother lived, his education up to the age of 12 was just the same as the rest of ours and absolutely, because I think the same expectations were held, or same assumptions were held for all. In fact, I think my father felt strongly that his daughters ought to learn to do any farm chore as well as any Finnish farmhand. And so it was extremely—it was very, very equal. I think particularly in my family, whether it's—I think it's relatively true for many, if not most, Finnish families. But in ours it was definitely that we were—there was nothing that we—they were [unclear], let's say, "unsuitable or untouchable" areas at all. So I think at the—the expectations and assumptions would have been the same for the girls as for any—for a son. My father had also been a—when I was very little—I guess when my oldest sister [unclear]—[unclear] was in the first year of the secondary school. My father was then the headmaster of that school. That after one year of coexistence, he

cleared on out and went to head some other institutions and then went on to university from there. So co-education, in fact, in Finland is almost—was even then a given. I mean, all—90—I would imagine 95 percent of the schools then would have been co-educational. Now, a hundred—absolutely a hundred percent of the schools are coeducational. There is no such thing as single-sex education in Finland.

GREEN: Aili, tell me. Wasn't Finland one of the early countries to have public education?

FLINT: It was.

GREEN: [unclear] school?

FLINT: State schools began in the 1800s. And of course, early education, earlier—there were state schools before that. But the earlier education—language of education would have been Swedish. By the—by 1860s, the—a law was passed that the education was to be given in Finnish. And, yes, there were—there was public education for both boys and girls.

GREEN: What sort of a picture did you have before you came here? Were there Americans coming and going in this busy household?

FLINT: There were. There were quite a few. There was some people of the Quaker movement, [unclear], and several others who came and went and who really were dear friends of the family. So—and many of the sort of—many of the Friends Service Committee, younger people, as well, they all seemed to—coming and out. Then—so that was the Americans that were [unclear] there. Then there were many other kind of presence of America. My father had studied here, University of Chicago in 19—1930s.

GREEN: Oh. Well, then—then the whole idea of America was not a foreign one.

FLINT: No. No, he had been here before I was born. So—so that he—they were—when I was very little, remember looking at the picture book that he had made and sent to the other kids, because he was gone a year. All—everybody else was born by then. And he was here a year to do post-doctoral research. And in fact, that he had studied as a history scholar and then, in fact, studied sociology in Chicago. And then when he returned, it was a certain kind of shift in his thinking, and then he wanted very much more to go into social policy and social planning. So that was one. And then, I guess, in '52 when I was 14,

my parents spent a whole year in this country traveling around. And he was lecturing and doing research in different universities. So they were gone a year at that point. And then all my sisters—two of my sisters studied here a year one time or another. So everybody had—everybody could—one sister or myself had been to this country. So it was—it was a—it was a—well, we hadn't been here but it wasn't an unknown quantity by a long shot.

GREEN: You must have had many friends who corresponded with and who came to visit you.

FLINT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there were quite a few. And then I guess in 1946 he made what he called a begging trip. That was for the—for the Finnish Care, for the Relief of Finland when many of the Finnish American communities and organizations were very, very helpful to help build up and to help send money to help send packages to Finland. So he went and [unclear] just about every Finnish American church and organization in the country and went, really clear across the country to [unclear].

GREEN: Lutheran churches.

FLINT: Yeah. Yeah, Lutheran churches. Finland's about 90—93 percent Lutheran, the country, 95, maybe.

GREEN: Did your family attend church?

FLINT: Uh-hmm. Yes, they did.

GREEN: And so you learned about this country almost firsthand.

FLINT: As if. Yeah, as if it were firsthand in some way and then, of course, you know, even—even then, by now, of course, the—so the media impact is even greater than it was then. But one read books and one—"Anne of Green Gables" wasn't exactly U.S. but it could have—you know, it more or less was. And so that even very early, girls' books and sort of wonderful scenes where you think, well, of course, all Americans live in little white house with green shutters and roses growing on the house. Right? Yes. [laughs] Right. So that you learn—you grow up with some early conceptions. That there was a whole series of cat books that I had read when I was a little girl, and one cat who had adventures in every American city. So there were [chuckles] certain filtered impressions of America.

GREEN: Was that a Finnish book or—

FLINT: It was written by a Swede, [unclear], about a stump-tailed cat that, you know, met the gangsters in Chicago and did all kinds of things in New York. And so—whatever, but it even filter on the children's book level for certain bits of information, not all wrong. All pretty—actually, rather correct.

GREEN: When did you get the idea that you would like to come over here?

FLINT: Well, I got the idea after I said yes to my American to-be-husband who, when he proposed in 1958. [chuckles]

GREEN: Tell me, how did you meet him, Aili?

FLINT: Met him in [unclear], which is a city in central Finland in my sister's living room. And we got to know each other. He had come to Finland to be there for one year, possibly two, and he ended up staying for four years and returned to the States with a wife and son and furniture and, et cetera. So we were married while—we were still in Finland so we were married for two years.

GREEN: Oh, you met your old—this is your older sister, [unclear]?

FLINT: Yeah. Well, she—yeah, she—he was a friend of theirs and I had been abroad in Germany for a while. And I returned and he had already spent, maybe, six months in Finland at that point.

GREEN: He had come over to teach English?

FLINT: Yeah. He had come over to teach English and continue with his writing, and so he had a job as a teacher of English there.

GREEN: His field, I understand, is the teaching of English as a second language.

FLINT: Yes, that's one of the things he—he does now at Columbia University and then also is teaching creative writing.

GREEN: I understand that he's also written a book on teaching English as a second language.

FLINT: Yes.

GREEN: What is the title of that book?

FLINT: "Insights." It's an—it's a—the educated reader for very advanced foreign students who are quite capable with the language, but who still

have certain cultural—those things, you can take for granted if you grow up within a culture that you understand from literary references. But things that you—even in your language is very good, various cultural references you do not have, unless they're footnoted for you. So that's a reader that he edited last year.

GREEN: How interesting. I also understand that he, at one point, was the head of a program at Columbia University.

FLINT: Yes, the head of the language program. He headed it up for seven years. He was the chairman of that one. He's continued to teach since he—early on, he was there. The ch—the chairman and then he's continued to teach foreign students [unclear]. So he's teaching English American literature, [unclear] foreign students and creative writing to American students.

GREEN: So both of you are in the language field, so to speak.

FLINT: So it seems.

GREEN: Because we just left you with your early education. Then you went to the university and was it that point that you went into the field of language?

FLINT: Well, I really didn't. I made several detours. I was first in the field of medicine in the University of Helsinki. So I—

GREEN: So, following in your mother's footsteps. [chuckles]

FLINT: Well, sort of. Yes, I guess. I was going—I was—I made, first, one attempt to be accepted to Helsinki Medical School and didn't make it the first time around. And I spent the following winter in Germany learning German and studying it at Frankfurt University, living with a German family. But then I came back and made another furious attempt at getting in. At that time, I didn't get in and then, so I finished what's called in Finland the Candidate of Medicine, which is all the pre-clinical training and—in 1960. And in 1960, we came here and then I shifted back to languages. In fact, in high school, I had always been—in h—Finnish high schools, in the last three years you have to specialize whether you're going to go into heavy science program or more in humanities program. The humanities were always sort of much more of a given for me, so I had gone through humanities and things for the next to last year or so, well, I then decided I wanted to become a doctor. And I had to scramble [unclear] a great deal, physics and chemistry that I didn't quite have under my belt. So then, after coming here, then I shifted back into languages and English.

GREEN: So you—[clears throat] your son was born—

FLINT: In Helsinki.

GREEN: Well, first, the date of your marriage, please.

FLINT: Oh, the—July [coughs]—July 19, 1958. And my son was born—

GREEN: In Helsinki?

FLINT: That was in Helsinki, yes, or in [unclear].

GREEN: And your son was born—

FLINT: He was born in February, 1960.

GREEN: His name?

FLINT: Patrick.

GREEN: Patrick. Is he a dual citizen?

FLINT: Not anymore. I think that—he was a dual citizen when he was little and then I think at age 18, when it comes—when you have to—have to decide which courses you would begin [unclear], I think then you—I think the thing you have [unclear].

GREEN: Did he grow up speaking both Finnish and English?

FLINT: Yes, yes. I mean, since he grew up in America—he has grown up in America, obviously, more English. But he has also learned to speak Finnish.

GREEN: Now, is there anything you can tell me about coming over? You came over when—how old was Patrick?

FLINT: He was four months old.

GREEN: Four—a four-month-old baby. And to the America of the pussycat. [laughs]

FLINT: Right. Well, actually, I [several words unclear] by then. But we took the—we came on the—we took the boat from Helsinki to Stockholm and then the train across Sweden to [unclear] and to Gothenburg, and then the Swedish line, Grisholm [PH] across to this country, to New

York. And it was a marvelous—it was very nice at that point to have the period of transition, because before you would make the big move, it's an incredible amount of red tape and work and running errands. And—but then it was wonderful to have eight days in which just to collapse and eat and sleep and rest and have [unclear]. And also, just to shift one's—have a time to shift one's head and make them be aware of the transition. [unclear]. It was a very long trip. It was very exciting.

GREEN: Quite a different trip with a four-month-old.

FLINT: Yes, it was. Yes, it was. You know, just like traveling with any four-month-old anywhere. But four-month-old is rather handy time to travel, if you've traveled [several words unclear].

GREEN: And you land—where did you land?

FLINT: In New York.

GREEN: New York City. Did you know anybody here?

FLINT: Yes, my in-laws were meeting us at the pier.

GREEN: Had you met them before?

FLINT: Yes, they had come to our wedding so [unclear].

GREEN: So you didn't come really as a stranger.

FLINT: No, no, no.

GREEN: And they met you at the boat?

FLINT: They met us—met us at the boat and somebody said, "Well, this is a good introduction to New York for you." There was a wildcat strike and the dockworkers weren't carrying any luggage. So the waiters and all the—I guess all the crew on the ship had to do all the carrying, and they were extremely [chuckles] displeased with the fact that they had to it, but they had to do it. So the wildcat strike was the first impression. Then we got—it was a very, very warm day. It was in June and we got off the—off the boat and onto the pier and then took a taxi down to Penn Station. And I guess that was really sort of the first New York, New York experience. We were in the taxicab and my husband something to me. And he was sitting in the front and I was sitting in the back of the cab with the baby carrier and the—my husband said something to me. And the taxi driver said to him, "What

was that?" My husband said, "Oh, I was just saying something to my wife." "Yes, I know. I know you said something to your wife but what did you say?" So [chuckles] someone said, "Well, that's New York taxicabs for you."

GREEN: [chuckles]

FLINT: So—but that was my first human con—first unknown person in New York that I heard from.

GREEN: What city or cities and kinds of neighborhoods did you first live in in this country?

FLINT: The very first few months we were in the countryside at my in-laws and then the following fall—

GREEN: Where? In where?

FLINT: Delaware.

GREEN: In Delaware.

FLINT: And then in f—in the fall—October, 1960, we moved to New York and we haven't budged from the same apartment since. We've made one basic move.

GREEN: Lived in the same place?

FLINT: Same place, same apartment, same neighborhood—

GREEN: Now, what do you do for a living?

FLINT: I teach Finnish language at Columbia University. I also work in the Linguistics Department as a representative of the department in linguistics to School of [unclear] Studies, and I also work in the dean's office as a academic student advisor.

GREEN: Tell me something about your professional training.

FLINT: Well, my professional training in this country really has then continued in—taking place at the Columbia University. I—I studied linguistics and, particularly, [unclear] languages at Columbia University [unclear]. Also, teaching Finnish language courses first early, early, early years, just a couple of courses, and then later the program was expanded and, presently, I'm teaching four courses a semester, Finnish language and linguistics literature. And this semester I'm also

teaching a graduate course. So I got—let me see. I got my MA in [unclear] and Finnish—in [unclear] linguistics and Finnish with special emphasis in Finnish in 1966, and then I got my Ph.D. in 1979. So I'm a Columbia product [unclear].

GREEN: A Columbia product. [clears throat]

FLINT: I've done a good bit of the research in Finland and fieldwork in [several words unclear].

GREEN: Do you make return trips?

FLINT: I do make—quite often. Yes. Yeah, in the early years, perhaps maybe every three or four years. In the past few years, I've gone almost every summer. Some summers I've done a good deal of—worked quite hard on research during the summers sometimes [unclear]. But it's usually—cur—currently, there's always some work involved because I keep in the—just by the nature of my job as instructor of Finnish, a Columbia University lecturer, I keep in touch with, first of all, Finland, in general, and specifically, the Finnish minister of education and the services that they have for the universities abroad where Finnish is taught. And so there's an annual meeting.

GREEN: Oh, they had services abroad—

FLINT: There's an annual mee—there's an annual meeting of the lectures of Finnish in foreign universities. It's now taught in about 60—60-some foreign universities. And so there are several thousand people studying it annually. And so that once a summer, all the lecturers are gathered together, those who can make it to the meeting and with a three-, four-day conference of all those people. So they fly in from Paris, London, Rome, [unclear], et cetera, and then are—then disperse again.

GREEN: What role do you feel this continuing interest on the part of the Ministry of Education plays in your work?

FLINT: It's a very big help in terms that one can stay current with what is going on, because if you're teaching Finnish language, you invariably necessarily are also teaching Finnish culture. You cannot teach the culture of 20 years ago. You can talk about culture 20 years ago but you do have to keep current as to what is going on right now. And it's very important for that, and then it's very important for language because language changes constantly.

GREEN: I was going to ask you this. You told me about a graduate course. Do you teach literature and culture as well? Do you include this in your courses?

FLINT: Absolutely. I don't think you can teach—

GREEN: On ever—on every level?

FLINT: Every level. You cannot—I don't think that you can successfully teach languages unless you—there's no point, to my mind. I don't see any point in teaching language unless it is really deeply imbedded in the cultural context, because you lose a good deal of the [unclear] of the language. And that's what the language is there for. That's what it's part and parcel of, so that even very early on, as soon as the students have just many—really, a miniscule vocabulary, we start doing something in poetry and—and just references to Finland come through all the time. Just yesterday, we had, around this table—one day's notice, we had seven—eight people from the University of Helsinki who were visiting Columbia, the people in the administration of University of Helsinki, who were visiting Columbia to meet with various people about American university administration. And so the Office of Visitors called me and said, "Well, they are coming. Would you like to see them?" I said, "Sure." But I didn't have any free time, other than, "Well, let them come during my last class." So we had a—we held a seminar in the middle of the afternoon with my [unclear] students discussing why they wanted to study Finnish and—and the people from the University of Helsinki discussing it from their point of view. So I think this kind of interchange is really crucial.

GREEN: This is very interesting, leading up to a question that I was going to ask. In what ways do you think that your Finnish background has influenced both you and also this Finnish-American exchange, the American thinking on education?

FLINT: I don't—American thinking on education in general or—I, frankly, don't know how much of an impact, let's say, Finland or Finnish culture would have made on, say, the whole of American education. I guess there would be certain areas, like in design, some in music, when—[unclear] mention specific areas where certain Finnish authors or artists would be sort of household words. In terms of my own work, the Finnish background is essential. I mean, I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't have the Finnish background, so that's it's in a way a [unclear]—

GREEN: Now, about the students in your classes, what types of reasons do they come to your classes for?

FLINT: There are always some students who are, in general, and the six who are in—who are in theoretical linguistics, in general, and want to study and learning the European language, which gives them all kinds of challenges in their thinking, how, “language works.” Because Finnish works very, very different from English or German or French or Russian or Latin, the languages that they’re most likely to know. And yet, is within the sort of sphere of western culture, and so that it can be entered reasonably easily. So that’s one group. Then there are people who actually want to specialize and center on Finnish linguistics or [unclear] linguistics. Then, having people from music; there’s one dissertation on Finnish [several words unclear], a former student who studied Finnish here. There’s currently one from—a Ph.D. candidate from Art History Department, who’s going to do post graduate work in Finland on Finnish art and architecture. There have been people from anthropology. Currently reading a dissertation, a former student who spent two years of doing fieldwork in Finland in a small village. People from political science, paleontology; you name it. The fields from which the students come are very, very varied. Many of them will have—will go to Finland to either do res—do a the—additional language courses, or many of them have gone for advanced graduate work, and they need the language for their research. Some fall in love and want to learn Finnish. Some ex—anticipate Finnish-speaking grandchildren and—one particular woman studied Finnish and now ha—has since then retired to Finland, has become a major force in Finnish literary circles and has published [several words unclear]. So the fields are really very varied and the reasons are many. It somehow seems to be a particular reason or, at least, some particular reasons why people take it on. And so, in a way, it’s self-selected groups. So I very, very rarely get people who do it but don’t want to. They really—if they come here, they basically want to do it, and if they want to, they can do it.

GREEN: This brings to mind a question I’d like to ask you. Are there Finnish students in the universities here?

FLINT: Oh, yes. From—Finnish from Finland?

GREEN: Yes.

FLINT: Oh, yes, yes. There are quite—quite a few at Columbia currently. There are people in political science, in law school. There’s often somebody in the business school. There’s somebody at P&S [PH]. So there are. There all—there are [unclear]—sort of a handful of Finnish students, in fact, a quite a few of them living international, large quantity.

GREEN: Do any of them stay once they come to study?

FLINT: I guess some do. The ones that are currently here sound to me as if they're short term. But I know—yes, I do know of Finnish students who have come to study for a few years and then have stayed, and certainly, in linguistics. One particular professor in—in Texas and, oh, yes, there are still quite a few. In fact, [several words unclear]. Linguistics is a field where Finnish is of interest. It's a very "good" or interesting or useful or a fertile language to do research in. So many Americans [unclear] become quite interested in it. And so some Finns will come here to study linguistics and have stayed on.

GREEN: Didn't it take a long while for the Finns to really learn their own language after the Swedish occupation?

FLINT: Well, see, the—the people always knew the language. The people always knew. I mean, the language was always spoken—

GREEN: I mean, [unclear].

FLINT: —by the—to have it be taught in schools, to have it develop to become a sort of standard lang—to be—have it be developed into a standard language that was fully capable of coping with dealing with questions of philosophy, mathematics, government, law, et cetera. Yes, that took some time. Re—in fact, the earliest writings of Finnish are from the really early [unclear], 13th, 14th century. Then 15th century saw the translation of the New Testament and some prayer books, so that the first writings were really church-related and tied to Reformation in the sense where the vernacular was important. And then—but by the time—it was by middle of—middle of the 19th century, one could say that the standard language was ripe to deal with anything. See, from 1809—until 1809, Finland was part of Sweden. Then the Swedish language was very much the only language of education, the educated classes, et cetera. 18—from 1809 to 1917, Finland was part of—was a—end of autonomous [unclear] of czarist Russia. And then the political separation from Sweden, in a way, propelled the whole status of Finnish language more. And there were all [unclear] of nationalistic language-oriented groups pushing for it. And so then, 1835, the first edition of the [unclear], which is Finnish folklore collection, collection of folklore poetry, was—

GREEN: Isn't that the folklore that influenced Wadsworth Longfellow?

FLINT: Yes.

GREEN: "Hiawatha."

FLINT: Yes, yes, yes, yes. The meter and the type of story. Yes, it did.

GREEN: Where did he discover that?

FLINT: I felt—I have to look it up. Somebody asked me three days ago how—or what was Longfellow's connection with Finland? Did he know Finnish? I don't know. We'll have to find out. I really—I don't quite know how. He might have—he didn't know Finnish. He could very well have used some translations.

GREEN: I think we can stop for a moment and turn the tape. [tape off/on]—1982, "Immigrants on Tape" project, American Museum of Immigration. Aili, we were—we were talking about Longfellow's being influenced by Finnish folklore in writing of Hiawatha and how he came upon this collection of Finnish folklore.

FLINT: Yeah, I've got to get all the details of it, whether he knew Finnish or not. But if he didn't, he still had—he would have had access to the translations, perhaps the German translation, which is excellent, or the—then existed two English language translations by Crawford pp and Kirby [PH]. And the [unclear] translation in '70 came—no, '60-something, came later. So that wouldn't have been available to him, but the others, he would have been able to be introduced without knowing the language. I'll do research on that.

GREEN: So we're coming to the whole area of contributions made by the Finns coming—Finnish people and cul—culture coming to this country. We have Longfellow now. What other contributions?

FLINT: Well, if we think of people or the brain drai—well, let's [unclear] who—which people have we been [unclear]? [chuckles]

GREEN: Well, you mentioned the brain drain. Let's talk—

FLINT: Yeah.

GREEN: —about the brain drain.

FLINT: Let's say someone, an architect like [several words unclear]. [several words unclear] were both born in Finland. [unclear] was the elder of the architects and then the—was the father and [unclear], his son, both really then continued to live here. [unclear] insisted that all of his work was in this country. [unclear] did a great many works in Finland

but then lived all his mature years in this country and only went back to Finland for, just, summers in between. Then—so that would have been the field of architecture. There have—there is—again, one—one [unclear] listing names, but perhaps in the field of design there have been some influence. Certainly, pe—perhaps names that would be known by Americans would be Sibelius and his music, perhaps then more recently.

GREEN: And you spoke about your student, who's writing a thesis about—

FLINT: Yeah, he—

GREEN: [unclear]

FLINT: He wrote a thesis. His [unclear] participation for teacher's college was on the post-Sibelius symphonic music in Finland, which we had not been known that much about in this country, since there were so many people in Sibelius' shadow in so many works. But since, in the past—I would say within the past 10 years, works by Kofkan [PH] and Sullivan [PH] and [unclear] and other Finnish composers have been heard more and more on American radio stations and in concert halls. So they—Sibelius, by now, has been just part of normal repertory for [unclear], it seems. That would be music. I guess in linguistics, there have been, you know, isolated—some—some people who come to this country and—and, again, it's a question wh—I think contributions were made in so many different levels. It's not just the ones [unclear] the big names and, like, silly way, the kind of quality each person brings to the community they live. And I think if one thinks of the bravery of the early immigrants, they have to surpass the bravery of any latter-day comers. I mean, it's a whole lot scarier to pick up and leave when you're—you were talking about the girl who left at 15 and come to this country—

GREEN: I'm just wondering, in—among these people that your father interviewed who had come from the farm, how many of them, instead of staying in Helsinki, went on to America?

FLINT: Well, he interviewed the ones who stayed in Helsinki. He didn't interview the—the ones who came. He did do a study of the American Finns when he was here in—was that in '52? He did do some and there's a lot of material about that in his—and I imagine somebody's going to work on it some more. But the—I think that the whole history of the American Finns is quite rich, and I don't even begin to pretend to know it terribly well. There's an interesting film that has just been made by Mike Logan in Michigan of the Finnish immigrant lives, for which I acted as a—well, helped a bit in the very—

in the final editing of the film, I did some help with the translations of a Michigan family where I think the patriarch of the family was about 90-some years old, and then the following generations, so that I think that you find, particularly in the Middle West still very cohesive Finnish communities. And I was really startled to find in Minnesota between Minneapolis and Duluth where we had a conference, in fact, a few years ago, of all the lecturers and professors in American and Canadian universities where Finnish is all part of the offering. We had a bus trip then from—we had a conference in Minneapolis and then were taken on a trip to the University of Minnesota in Duluth. On the trip, we stopped by at a—we were invited by the local Finnish club of Askov [PH], which is a Finnish man's name. But it was a town, a village of Askov. And they had a small home, kind of village museum where there was a farmhouse and the drying house and the—just, they had gathered all the old things. It was amazing. It was really amazing to come up on this place.

GREEN: Took you back to your childhood.

FLINT: Absolutely. In one of the rooms, there was one old woman sitting in a rocking chair, who just absolutely could have been my grandmother. I could hardly believe that place. It was really very, very interesting. They were—I hadn't, in Finland in recent years, known people from—you know, really backwoods folk. And they really were and they—it was—was really amazing, as if time had not touched it. And of course, very often in a very cohesive, small community within the framework of another culture, certain, much more conservative traits are really preserved than, say, in Finland where Finnish culture is so much part of their lives, that they keep changing too. So it's very often—it's even been clearly shown that dialect, certain regional dialects are better preserved in the vinegar or chloroform of another culture where English is not going to interfere with the dialect, other than becomes, like, [unclear]. But really old ones, their Finnish was remarkably pure and it was just absolutely the early old—older dialect. The—I think that [unclear] has even been written about, say, the Finn's activities in the—in labor movement and various kinds of Finns beginning—starting out, starting cooperative movements and cooperative arrangements.

GREEN: I heard about the c—there's a cooperative out in Brooklyn. Uh-huh.

FLINT: Uh-hmm. Yes, yes, yes. There are a couple of—yes, some—some houses, which are now enjoying some very little mini-Rennaissance, because Brooklyn used to have—used to be, to have a rather booming Finn town. And there still is the Emaster [PH] Hall, which was the social hall. And it still is there and five, six, ten years ago, it

looked as if it would just all go by the wayside. But there are quite a few younger Finns now settling there and are very enthusiastic, so that they're even—

GREEN: Oh, the younger ones are coming back.

FLINT: Well, there's some. It seems to be—it's not—it's not the same numbers at all. And it may very well be more [unclear]. It may very well really be not there [unclear]. And the whole area, of course, is changing. It's getting to be less and less Scandinavian but there still are a few—there seem to be, to my mind—I hear more about it now than I would have 13 years ago. And there's more activity than there was 10 years ago among those people in Brooklyn.

GREEN: Cooperative housing. Are—are there any other types of cooperatives?

FLINT: I think of in cooperatives, absolutely every kind. You know, any kinds of stores. I certainly—I know that, say, towns like Fitchburg, Mass, which is a very Finnish town, has [coughs] cooperative grocery stores and cooperative things, about anything. And same with them in the Midwest, because that was—the cooperative movement was very early. That was started very, very early in Finland. In fact, again, I don't have the figures in my head as to what—what the ratio of the country's sort of commerce represents. But it has to be very h—very, very high. The two, as it were a competing cooperative, chains, one a little more sort of like political middle and one more left—

GREEN: Maybe your father would know.

FLINT: Well, I know he would. I know he would. In fact, I think my grandfather coined the name for one of them. So I think that they were all more or less—somehow involved. So it—the cooperative movement probably is something that was started early on. And then, of course, you had even right near here, which is now—it's a different area, but in Harlem in the corner of—I think it's Park Avenue and 35th, or Han—or up 5th Avenue on 125th Street, there was one social hall, what—Finn—Finnish hall, which was for the socialists, and one that was for the communists. And there [unclear] is—there are very few people as, you know, fiercely far to the left as some of the old-style Finnish communists in this country.

GREEN: Are these old-style communists or American communists?

FLINT: I [unclear]—

GREEN: [unclear]

FLINT: Well, both. Both, I think. I mean, I think it's—there was very much the sort of early seeking, the utopia. And they really were sort of—

GREEN: Oh, seeking the utopia.

FLINT: —utopia.

GREEN: Very, important part of the Finn's—Finnish [unclear].

FLINT: I guess so. I guess so. I guess so. I mean, it certainly—because quite a few of them came here. And then there was an interesting movement, which, again, the details are really lots of bits of history buried in that. But some of them felt disheartened. Utopia wasn't found here, after all. And then they left for the Soviet Un—well, which was then Russia and, well, Soviet Union with the Revolution. And then some returned yet from there to here, so that it—there's been a lot of seeking and a lot of looking for something. And—because a few years ago in Duluth, I visited the—the one little remnant of the ver—once very flourishing Finnish newspaper, Finnish language newspapers in this country, "Työmies-Eteeneäin," which you had been—

GREEN: Could you spell that, please?

FLINT: T-Y-Ö-M-I-E-S – E-T-E-E-N-E-Ä-I-N. [unclear], yes, which is worker, a working man, had been running the [unclear] paper, [unclear]. "Forward" had been another independent paper. And then when their—they fell on hard times, they—they—they joined to be one paper. They were ideologically far enough—both far enough to the left. And it was interesting moment when, a few years ago, we were all—this conference of Finnish teachers and professors, and there were a few Finnish government officials present too. And we stopped and visited the place, the printing press [several words unclear]. And one of the government officials made a speech and thanked them for the coffee and the cakes and the hospitality and guests. On behalf of the Finnish government, he wished them long—a successful existence. Then as we got—then we all got exam—samples of the paper and we got—got on the plane to go back to New York. And he opened it up and said, "Good heavens. What did I say?" [laughs] He said, "Oh." He said, "This is so far left. You couldn't even begin to print it in Finland." He said, "Well, even the most, most, most, most left-most paper in Helsinki [unclear] would seem like a divisionist rag compared to what [unclear] was writing." It was very strong language. Very interesting. Very devoted people, very, very solidly behind their

issues, it seemed like. Didn't have a chance to get to know them, particularly, but they were devoted.

GREEN: I understand that you have recently been conferred and honored by the government of Finland. Could you please tell me about it?

FLINT: Oh, that was [unclear]—

GREEN: The name—the name of the—

FLINT: I think it was the Knight First Order, the Finnish White Lion. This are some honorary merit badges, gold stars, brownie points, what will you.

GREEN: It sounds like more than a brownie point. [chuckles]

FLINT: Yeah, a big brownie point, I guess. These are conferred [unclear].

GREEN: [unclear] is Order of the—

FLINT: Knight of the First Class.

GREEN: Knight of the First Class—

FLINT: First Class of the White Lion of Finland.

GREEN: —of the White Lion? Thank you, sir. [chuckles]

FLINT: [laughs] Oh, yes. Well, anyway, it came as a huge surprise. I, obviously, [unclear].

GREEN: When was this conferred to you?

FLINT: It came—it was in January or February. I forget. February, I guess. I received a phone call from the Consulate General's Office [several words unclear]. "Good morning, Knight." I said, "What do you mean?" "Haven't you heard?" I said, "Heard what?" So he relayed the news. They had just got a telex on the matter. And then—then I did see it in the newspaper, once the paper came a few days later. Usually, those—the—any honors of whatever are—are conferred by the president at the Independence Day time, which is 6th of December. But this year had been an unusual year with President [unclear] resigning due to his ill health. So there was really an interim presidency in the—in December. So these were all then pushed later. So that's why the announcements came in February. Has not made a huge difference in my life; let's put it that way.

GREEN: And why did they tell you that they were making you a knight?

FLINT: I don't think they fully had why—told me anything. I imagine—

GREEN: [unclear]

FLINT: I guess I haven't had the idea that, knowing who else was receiving them, that he's given this as an award or a badge of merit for people who have worked in the various fields of culture and the arts. And probably—

GREEN: For my work in—

FLINT: For my work here, really.

GREEN: Here, at Columbia.

FLINT: Yeah, that's what I—

GREEN: In teaching—

FLINT: That's what I would understand.

GREEN: —of the Finnish—

FLINT: In teaching Finnish language here and then also arranging for various cultural interchanging [unclear] take place. So very often, Finnish writers and artists come here—

GREEN: Oh, you do—

FLINT: —and try to help—

GREEN: —arrange for inter—

FLINT: Well—

GREEN: —changes?

FLINT: I seem to end up doing that. Yes. I mean, quite a few—quite often, some come—

GREEN: So you do [unclear] on your father's work.

FLINT: I guess in some way, yeah. I hadn't thought of it that way, but I guess in some way. So that I did—you know, one tries to act as some kind of a bridge between the two worlds and interpret them to each other, which isn't always—

GREEN: Except he was doing it sort of the other way around.

FLINT: Yeah, right. Right, right, right. I guess so.

GREEN: Is Finnish taught in many universities here?

FLINT: No, not really. In addition to Columbia, the only other place where you can do both undergraduate and graduate work in Finnish, where you can go all the way to a Ph.D., is Finnish in In—University of In—in Indiana University in Bloomington. And it's also taught at the University of Minnes—Minnesota in Minneapolis, University of Madison in Wisconsin, UCLA, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. And then there's some other Marquette's Moore [PH] College up in Upper Michigan. There's Hancock, Michigan, a sort of a small Fin—college that Finn—early immigrant Finns start—Suomi College, called.

GREEN: Oh, s—how do you spell that?

FLINT: S-U-O-M-I College, which is a—I think—whether it's a two-year college or whether it's now a four-year college—so Finnish language is still a part of—even though, again, the population—it used to be very strongly [unclear].

GREEN: It was [unclear] to help the immigrants to assimilate?

FLINT: Probably, probably. But it was—it was for and by the church, by the Finnish churches here to give the sons and daughters of the immigrants an education. That still would have something to do with the Finnish background. I think, by now, the number of sons and daughters of immigrants have dwindled, so that college does not serve the same purpose anymore. In fact, they have many foreign students, as well, but it still is there.

GREEN: We've talked already about the newspaper and about the college. Are there any other institutions that help to keep alive Finnish culture and tradition?

FLINT: Oh, there are quite a few. There are lots—there are a great many organizations, local organizations and national organizations. There is one, the—called the Finland [unclear] Foundation, which has chapters in many cities. And there's a very active chapter in the New

York metropolitan area, which has monthly meetings, programs, films, talks and which has a scholarship for students, any students, [unclear] students to go to study in Finland. American-Scandinavian Foundation does some of the same. Then there are—there's an untold—they're really—not untold, but I mean great many local, and some of them national, organizations that the Finns have started that—some of which have really sort of petered out and some which are going on rather strong. So there's a lot of—I think a lot of local activity, a lot of—still, quite a surprisingly much sort of active participation. In Minnesota, there's a whole big family oral—family oral hist—writing down the family history project in Minnesota that people are volunteer—

GREEN: Ah! How interesting.

FLINT: Volunteer project where people have been helped how to go about digging for their roots. And I think if that's taken—there's a whole sort of—the Finnish Historical Society that is based in Minnesota. Then, see, there you would really have huge numbers of the second, third, fourth generation Finns, because the Midwest was the really heaviest settlement in Minnesota, Michigan, those places. Lakes, birch trees, what have you. That there in the [unclear] would be there, I would think. But so many active groups are certainly New York; Florida, of course. You know, lots of Finns have retired there and they, I understand, have enormous—

GREEN: I didn't know that.

FLINT: Lots and lots. There's—in fact, there are whole towns where nothing but Finnish is spoken, practically. That's rather recent. That's more recent. [unclear].

GREEN: That's a nice contrast to the Finnish winter.

FLINT: Well, I imagine. Yes. Once people retire, they want to take their cold old bones down to the sun. And frankly, I remember someone from the Consult General was giving a speech down there, was asked to give some cer—some speech in some ceremony. And she said she got into the lecture hall. There were a thousand people there, all Finnish, with the visiting Finnish prime minister in the front row. It's an area where lots of Finnish tourists from Finland will come, who also—who maybe don't know any English. And they'll have a very easy time and it's like the better breaks on the motels, and so there's a whole community, which is growing rather than dwindling there, whereas the Michigan communities are dwindling at this point.

GREEN: You mentioned your Finnish government contacts. Do you and the Finnish educators visiting your class—do you attempt to bring together your students with government represent—

FLINT: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yes. Oh, very—whenever someone comes through who is interested, who would like to come and who is, you know, interested in meeting students, absolutely. Oh. And it doesn't have to be just government representatives. It's really people in—in the arts, we have had several Finnish writers, some—the current ballet master of Finnish—the opera of ballet was here once giving a talk on a—on the Finnish, so the history of Finnish dance and Finnish ballet. And at one point, he popped up [unclear] our table and showed all the—demonstrated the dance steps. It was an absolutely wonderful evening. So we've had—I feel it's very important for the students who are taking Finnish here not just to learn the language and not learn the cases and the numbers of infinitives and not just learn to decipher the code, but to really be in touch with the people whose language it is and whose culture it is. And also, if someone then goes on to Finland to do research, it gives them more hooks on the country, gives them more leads to who they might get in touch with. How can they best be helped in their research? And this, I think, has been—and can be—and Finland's more in the [unclear], that if somebody is doing work on—like this young man—[unclear] company was doing work on the [unclear] Finnish music school, I got him in touch with the cultural attaché at the time. He got him in touch with absolutely every single Finnish composer he wanted to write about, so he was able to visit their summer places and get interviews and ask questions about their scores, et cetera. So it's a small enough country that people who are working on some area [unclear] can get to the key people. So we try to help students with that.

GREEN: Have your own cultural exchange program here.

FLINT: Well, that's what [unclear]. I mean [unclear] should be.

GREEN: Now, here's a question I'm quite curious about. Could you tell me anything about the relationships between the Finnish community in the Great Woods here and those of other Scandinavian countries?

FLINT: In terms of their similarities or in terms of their contacts?

GREEN: Contacts. Interaction and—

FLINT: I think that, you know, for—for one thing, let's say, in Brooklyn, if you just think of even this area, in Brooklyn there were Finns, Swedes, Norwegians, Danes living close, in close proximity to each other. And

again, I think the same thing is true for the Midwest, that they have headed in the same directions. Again, they can rather happily to buy food from each other, special stores, because the specialties are quite similar. Say, for example, there's the—there are various Scandinavian societies where there's definitely a joined effort of Swedes, Finns, Norwegians, Icelanders, Finns. And so the Finns do play a part in those. So I think that there's a fair—the cultures are very, very similar in many ways. The whole Nordic area is—is a one-labor market there. You don't need—I mean, within that area in the countries. It's a one-labor market, the same—very similar social legislation, and so that all Scandinavians have free movement. All the Nordic—all Nordic countries have free movement from one country to the next. I think that there has been a lot of cooperation here but I guess, as always, when you get down to the grassroots level, people are quite capable of having their differences too. I—I remember once having a student from Wisconsin, whose small town in Wisconsin had seven Finnish churches, whose members didn't really speak to each other because they differed so.

GREEN: Hmm.

FLINT: That much for cohesiveness. You can have—you can have—you can get your differences. But I think that people feel it. Say, something like the American-Scandinavian Foundation definitely houses everybody. The Scandinavian Seminar, which is a student exchange program, definitely deals with all of them. So I think it—there's a lot of cooperation too.

GREEN: There—weren't there some differences between the—spoken about the church groups and the activist groups? Weren't—were there any differences between the church groups of immigrants and the activist groups?

FLINT: The—you said more [unclear] groups?

GREEN: Yeah.

FLINT: I believe there were. Again, I'm not totally—totally fluent in all the details of those. But like anywhere, you—you bring the—in a way, the—let's see. What is—it's [unclear]—

GREEN: A [unclear] the red and the black. [chuckles]

FLINT: You're right. You bring them to another place. They really don't seem all that much—all the—all the more that different, and so that some—some dis—basic disagreements will be there. And certainly, the

Temperance Movement was very strong among—so I think it—as far as the whole stratification of the different groups or different organizational activities, I think that there were some overlapping. And somebody who belonged to this might have also belonged to that. When you say—see, if you even talk about Finland, Finland is—just some of the interesting figures—Finland is 93, 94 percent Lutheran, people belonging to the church, which means that they pay two percent of their income to the church as church taxes, automatically. It's not just tithing, but automatic. And there've been certain times when 25 to 30 percent of Finland has voted communist. This—these are figures always startle foreigners. "[unclear] wait a minute. How is it possible?" Well, Finnish communists, is possible to be Lutheran or a Finnish Lutheran is possible to be communist. So it's a kind of Euro-communism of some sort where the church and the—that particular political thing aren't in—aren't always in conflict in the same person, although it's some kind of adjustment.

GREEN: How interesting.

FLINT: But then, Finnish—I think it's a very individual issue. There certainly are some communists who feel very, very strongly about church, but not enough to dwindle the church anywhere below 90 percent for the whole country.

GREEN: This is a very interesting statement because it answers a point that a colleague brought up about—

FLINT: [unclear]?

GREEN: —[unclear], that there wasn't a conflict between the—

FLINT: Really?

GREEN: —Lutheran church and—

FLINT: I see. That's interesting.

GREEN: —communism. She asked me that question—answered it for me.

FLINT: There's one of the things that may—I may not have mentioned earlier, that Finns tended to do, wherever they started off, is start local amateur theaters. Finns are big—Finns, I guess—

GREEN: [unclear]

FLINT: —in some extent, are rather big organization people.

GREEN: [sentence unclear]?

FLINT: Absolutely. I just talked with a p—with a—with a Finnish American architect recently who grew up in Finland, mostly straining there, but then moved here. And he was just reminiscing, putting on operettas in the Carlin Hall. And they were plays. Finns are—ever—even in Finland, you have always had small theaters, absolutely in every town, where people are either—it's been professional or amateur theater. So that's a very big—big part of the culture, has been and certainly played a very big part in immigrant's lives. And the other—I guess Temperance Movement was another big one, to be the cup of sugar that pulled people together. And then within that, you would have had your drama clubs and—

GREEN: The American Temperance Movement or the Finnish Temperance Movement?

FLINT: Again, I don't know what—there were so many Finnish American [unclear] in the book that we looked at, that you'll be getting a copy of. There are some huge pictures of the mass. Everybody gathered together, the Temperance Movement. They may very well have had some ties to the American Temperance Movement too. I, frankly, don't quite know the details of that. But they definitely were Finnish chapters.

GREEN: And this all revolved around the hall—

FLINT: Right, right.

GREEN: —[several words unclear].

FLINT: Yeah, many did. Yes, and very often, the people would start their local halls in the different places. Now, that's [unclear] pa—past, except even now, the Imatra Hall in Brooklyn, every now and then, they're—

GREEN: How do you spell that, please?

FLINT: I-M-A-T-R-A. And if you—the history of the Brooklyn Finns really is another really fascinating chapter. And again, there would be many old people in Brooklyn who lived there a long time and would be able to tell [unclear] sort of very second and third hand. I don't know the details of it but certainly a long, rich history, which apparently isn't written, isn't finished yet, so that it's continued. And you have to—

apparently, Imatra has a very good sauna. For me, it just always just seems too far to go so—but there it is.

GREEN: That's another important contribution. [chuckles]

FLINT: It is. It is. It is. Because sauna is something that in Finland is not one of those things that you even question or ask or talk about. You just take it for granted that you have it, because you need it. It's not a luxury. It's just taking care of a basic need, to relax, to get very clean, to be quiet, to just have it as part of your weekly sort of cyclical ritual. And so, certainly, Finns have built any number of those in this country. Also, I guess perhaps in the recent years, it's become sort of the—certain commercial interests in mind, I guess, some sort of status kind of thing. Finland never ever has that—or unless people want to show off, doesn't have that image, because even the poorest farmhouse would have its sauna. In fact, it was often the first building that was put up because it's simpler and smaller. So when the—let's say the pioneer moved up to the wilderness and changed, moved to a new place, they first put up quickly a small, square cottage, which then became the sauna. And then while they were living in that, they built the main house, so that it's something that has always been considered just very, very basic, and still is. No, I don't think there's any dwindling [unclear].

GREEN: Is there anything else you would like to talk about, Aili?

FLINT: I can't quite remember anything that—anything that, offhand, would come to mind that we've left out. Is there any other questions that you had in mind?

GREEN: Ah, just summarizing, you've talked mostly on the academic, intellectual level. I'm just sort of wondering about any Finnish customs or holidays that you keep alive at home.

FLINT: Oh, and how! I believe very—I, personally, believe very strongly in keeping any rituals alive and any sort of meaningful customs alive. And so, certainly, Christmas and Easter are very big times of—somehow, big holidays seem to incite baking in my household. If one doesn't have time to do a lot of baking at other times, one definitely does for those times. So the gingerbread houses have always been part of the Christmas—and gingerbread.

GREEN: Oh, that's an art.

FLINT: Right. In fact, the funny thing is that—which is, I think, very typical of, you know, immigrant psychology [chuckles]—I had not been long

enough here to consider myself an immigrant when—I think when my son was very little. I don't know. Oh, he's here and Scandinavian background; what good is it for him? Oh all right. Well, at least, let's make a gingerbread house. I never in my life made one in Finland.

GREEN: [laughs]

FLINT: Because, well, you didn't ha—I mean, you didn't. I mean, I think I had one cousin who was a home economics teacher. Well, she made them. But to the [unclear] fanatic types—

GREEN: You said about the Finnish communities in the Midwest preserving their culture more than they were [chuckles]—

FLINT: Oh, yeah. And so that, then, gingerbread house simply has become a very huge, fixed part of our Christmas. And by now, I've had sort of endless numbers of [several words unclear].

GREEN: [sentence unclear]. Right.

FLINT: Well, and they—but they—they can—they could run now endless gingerbread parties themselves. In fact, my daughter—

GREEN: They make—

FLINT: —takes care of it all. Oh, yeah.

GREEN: Oh, so they take [unclear].

FLINT: Well, they take—take care—take care of that. But I do join in too. So then the other Finnish institution that Finnish life would come to a standstill, of course, is coffee and boula [PH]. Boula is the coffeecake, which you constantly are having in Finland, which is baked. During the old days, when life went on a good weekly cyclical basis, was always made on Saturdays. So coffeecake yeast bread with cardamom, it's very, very good. So we made a huge batch for Easter this year and took a huge one to the church for people. Went very, very quickly. So baking takes place at—on—on big holidays. And there's certain decorations and certain customs. And I know that some historians of—you know, [unclear] the ethnic pasts of many Americans, that when—when, let's say, language—when people steal—they don't know the language anymore when they can't quite sing the songs anymore, where really most—the remnant—most little places of a particular ethnic past have been lost, the food still remains. The food is one that, you know, you remain nostalgic about longest. So I guess my household is sort of a combination of any

foods that we like, and there are always some Finnish foods that will be made at certain times. So that's a very kind of intuitive, basic level of certain customs, not just customs but just ways of doing things continue.

GREEN: You certainly have made a great contribution to keeping alive the spirit of Finland here. And you must be an invaluable resource for many people and groups who are looking to study about—as I am, about the Finnish outlook on things.

FLINT: Oh, yes. I—I guess there are quite a few phone calls and some of them are really rather hilarious. Some are very sound and sensible and, you know, and one can actually have an answer. I remember somebody called. There's a—there's a part of the Finnish mythology about this magic [unclear]. Some—I was in the middle of a class, I think. The phone rang here and, "Ah, could you please explain the sample?" And I said, "Okay." I hammer—stammered out a couple of sentences about it, because you—there are dissertations written about it. You can't describe it in a couple of sentences. And then say, "Well, what else could you tell me about Finnish mythology?" Okay, that's somewhat [laughs] a tall order on one phone call to fulfill—there are many—there are many inquiries that, just because one does this kind of work, I do end—and then I do end up having—knowing a certain kind of biblio—like anybody who works in any field, that you know certain things that—then it'd be easy to tell other people then how to go about finding this or that. And so that's—that's—that much is nice. I mean, I don't—I guess, just in painfully preserving things that ought to be preserved, I—you know, I think those things that will be preserved will be preserved. And if one can play any active role in preserving those things that are meaningful, I think that's—then it's a—it's a nice thing to do, just like one applies anything you know to anything else you do later. I guess the—one of the nice things about this—doing this work is that I end up using, not only, say, school training or university training or advanced linguistics training or whatever, but it's really anything I've ever experienced ever since I was one year old, or before that, in—back in Finland, where in Finland, it's still—it can—it's material. So for example, even st—teaching a language can be brought from so many different aspects. And so I make a great point of teaching the students at some point during their first year the song that every little—every three-year-old Finn knows, because, well, not that they can—they can't reproduce a Finnish childhood because they can't, because they won't. But still, some glimpses. And so, for example, every year we have a Christmas party for the students and have Finnish foods. And this year had—it ended up being a bit more spectacular than usual. The council of—coun—the cultural attaché was a wonderful woman,

[unclear] Zelemah [PH], who's been here for several years now, I'd asked her to please come. And she's often come and been very, very nice with my students and been very helpful. And so she's, "Oh, I'd like to come but, oh, I have to go to the airport to pick up the conductor, Nay Segesam [PH], who's going to be conducting in Carnegie Hall" the following Sunday. And, "Oh, I promised to be at the airport and I can't." I said, "Look. He's welcome." She said, "Oh, I can't believe that he would come. He's exhausted." "Well, if he's exhausted, just try to drop him off in a hotel and come." And I said, "Well, look. If he wants to come, bring him along." Sure enough, the both of them arrived and we continued, had our Christmas eats and Christmas [unclear] and all and then was time to sing Christmas carols in Finnish. So we had a somewhat better accompanist than usual. Usually, we do have some music students around, so who can do a pretty good job. So we had the—one of Finland's foremost young composers sitting at the piano. And students are still talking about it. Say, "Oh, yes. I go around singing such and such Finnish Christmas carols still because I remember." They learned it. Because songs even can only be learned if they're really sung in a really good group, and well, and so that was a nice moment. But those things are—they just sort of happen when they happen. And I almost prefer it that way, when people just sort of tumble in and then you take it from there. Some things, of course, you plan way ahead of time. But sometimes the things that you don't plan so long for really work out the best.

GREEN: A lot of hard work be—it sounds as though you really enjoy it.

FLINT: Yes, I do. I do. I guess there's a—there's an old Finnish proverb. It's very funny. As one gets older, I found proverbs coming to my head more. I mean, I think when you're a certain age, you don't even—yes, your grandmother always said them but you don't think of them. I guess there's one Finnish proverb that says, "Yes. Work will"—[several words unclear]—"Work will be the reward of the worker." Or, "Work will reward its doer," or however, the best translation for it would be.

GREEN: Very true.

FLINT: Then the other area where I've been doing more work recently—with my husband, we have done several trans—translations of Finnish literature for—for Finnish and American publications, the most recent of which is Poetry East, which is a per—periodical for poetry. And so several poems—they had a particular Finnish [unclear]—

GREEN: I think I should just add to the tape that your husband's first name is Austin—A-U-S-T-I-N—for the sake of the record. [chuckles]

FLINT: [unclear].

GREEN: Thank you very much, [unclear]—

FLINT: Thank you. This has been interesting.

[END OF INTERVIEW]