

DATE : July 15, 1999
SUBJECT : Interview with Mae Peterson, Duluth, Minnesota
INTERVIEWER : Dr. Joann Hanson-Stone
PROGRAM : Swedish Immigrant Oral History Project
City of Duluth Sister Cities Commission

I'm doing this interview with you because both of your parents emigrated to northern Minnesota from Sweden. Father's name?

My father's name was Gustav Nordeen (sp?).

And where did he come from in Sweden?

A town by the name of Logdea with the dot over it and I'm not sure of the pronunciation.

When did he emigrate from Sweden to US?

He came to the US in 1902.

Did he come directly to Duluth?

That I don't know.

Where did he live in Duluth?

When they – he had brothers that came over too, and I think – and a sister and from what I understand they lived on Garfield Avenue. Then his mother I believe came over later and I imagine she lived there too.

Where is Garfield Avenue?

I don't think it exists anymore. It was taken over by homes. I suppose way back then there were small houses but now there is a place where the Goodwill Industries has a place down there and

Ok. So on the West Side of town close to the lake.

Yeah, close to the lake. Close to downtown really.

What was your mother's name?

We called her Christine but I think on her – on the birth certificate or whatever it's Christina. And she came from Vestern Demnemhag, Skurop, (sp?) Sweden? I know that very well because Mother always wrote to her sisters and brothers and relatives in Sweden.

Did she coach you how to say it?

I imagine so.

What was her last name?

Hedin. Before she married.

What were the circumstances that led her to immigrating?

I am not sure but she had half sisters that were over here. One in Biwabik and one lived in Ely and that I guess they probably heard about what they were doing and sounded like a fun place to go so she came over here in 1901.

You said your mother lived on a farm in Sweden. What do you know about the farm your mother lived on in Sweden?

Well I was there in 1981 so I know a lot about that farm. But also my grandfather was a blacksmith. So the house is in a U shape and the one part is the blacksmith shop and then the other part opposite of that is the house where they lived. But then there was also the section in the old days they would have animals there you know and I got – I really was interested in the fact that they had a pantry there and it had bars on it so no one could come in and steal their food or whatever. But then of course they had out buildings you know that are gone now because it's a regular house; it isn't a farm anymore and they do have gardens and they have beautiful strawberries.

When your mother was living on the farm what was happening?

Well the way she talks it sounded as if they had bunkhouses or whatever they called them for the men and women that were there. She used to tell me the stories of how the men would go knock on the door of the girls' cabin and ask if they could come in and have a little fun.

So they had more money than most?

I don't think they were poor at all.

So her reason wasn't so economic as others might have been?

Yeah that is true. She was quite young when she came here. It was 1901 and she was born in 1884, so-

Do you know anything about your father's life in Sweden?

I know that he took music lessons and that he used to walk a long ways just to take music lessons. I also know that the town that they lived in at one time burned completely to the ground -the whole – I don't know how large it was and now that might be one of the reasons that some of them came over here.

What instruments?

As far as my dad was concerned he could play the accordion, violin, piano, and he had a brother, my uncle, that played the accordion very very well and I am not sure about the violin -which uncle played the violin -but they had –when they were up in French River -this orchestra and of course uncle he played the accordion and Dad played the piano and they called themselves “Button -Hole Orchestra.” I know there were others from French River that were in it also.

Do you know about when that was?

That was before I started going – it must have been in the early 30's before I started going to – or even the late 20's because it was before I started high school.

Do you remember going to hear them play?

Absolutely; I went to all those dances. My brother and I after my sister moved to Marquette to go to high school so my mother and father took us with to the dances at town hall and I remember sometimes we had – we did square dancing or the Virginia Reel and we took part in that and later on they put us on the benches and we would go to sleep and I remember one lady up there that made the most fantastic chocolate cake and I always wanted to have a piece of her chocolate cake. One night when I woke up and Mother said she would save me a piece and she hadn't brought chocolate cake, she had brought something else and –

So you were young at that time?

Yes I was. I remember one time only when we were walking home because we had to walk about a mile and a half or something and for some reason or other my brother was kind of ornery. My Dad goes out and gets a little switch and gives him a spanking so, oh, I didn't want that.

Where did they meet?

When Mother first came here I believe she went to Biwabik with her step sister and – so I have no idea when she came to Duluth but she was a domestic in homes and I remember mentioning a little bit about the people she worked for but she never did tell me specifically who it was that she worked for.

How did she describe it?

Well, she didn't really tell me much but she certainly learned how to clean the house well and pass that on to her children. But I don't know why that I remember some silly things but this one woman that she worked for- Mother- she ironed everything but she didn't iron the stockings and so this woman ironed some stockings, put them on the ironing board and told her that the stockings had to be ironed. Whatever kind they wore back then and I imagine -- I don't know. I thought that was pretty silly. I don't know why I remember that.

How did she feel about it?

Oh, no, she seemed to think that was great.

What was your dad doing when he got here to Duluth?

I think that he did carpentry work. It was possible to get something in that line.

How did they meet?

They did not know each other in Sweden. One came from the north and the other came from the south. They met at a dance and evidently they had a lot of dances because Mother tells an awful lot of things about what happened at these dances. Mother tells me that when she saw Gustav? she just thought he was the greatest and that was the guy she wanted and that was the guy she got.

Did she tell you about the dances?

Well I don't know but she always danced; she never had to sit on the side line; she always had someone to dance with, you know.

She enjoyed it?

Yes.

When did they get married?

It was in 1914; I am not sure of the month. Where were they married? No, I don't; if it was at -- if my aunt had been married before that and they got married at her house --

What did your parents do once they were married?

I don't know exactly because the Nordins were on the Ryan Road -- there was Uncle Oliver, Uncle Elif, Aunt Nancy and Uncle Wil and then my dad so they must have some how or other acquired that land approximately either that or some of them moved there before and the others followed suit and so my dad -- evidently he came up there right away after they were married. Where is there? On the Ryan Road in French River.

There is a town now as French River and I am associating that with the Lake?

Oh ,you mean at the lake and the community there.

Where were you?

We were I suppose a couple of miles -- up inland and I had to walk that couple of miles to school when I was little. Towards the lake to go to school. It was about two blocks from the lake because you come up and then you have to circle around and the school was up on the hill.

Did you walk on a road?

It was a road, it wasn't -- there were cars then but it was gravel. And so -- but in the winter time when it was -- the snow was high and knee deep there were some nice older boys who put me on their shoulder and help me along.

So you walked with a group?

Yah, most of the time. They would start off and then more and more would join as we went down the line.

Did you ever have bus service?

Later on but not at the school that we went to. It was later on when that school was no more and they went to Clover Valley or to another school.

French River? What did your father do in French River?

Well I guess really my father -- once in a while he would work up at the ? Most of the time it was his chickens and the cows and the produce you know -- he sold eggs and milk and that sort of thing. I don't remember -- he did -- he was a carpenter so -- and then there was -- he would work off and on when anyone needed that sort of thing. However my other -- this wasn't way way back and later on my uncles had jobs and I remember we had these dances you know and I remember before I think that there was these people that he was superintendent of fish hatchery and he and his wife had several daughters and I always envied the clothes they wore because they came from downtown and they had their shoes -they were so narrow, real pointed shoes and they came from Italy and I thought that was fantastic.

In the country you didn't have those kinds of shoes?

No way; we got them from the catalog and most of the time they didn't fit when we got them. They were too small and Mother wouldn't return them, so my poor feet. Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward's.

Your father had some educational interested?

Yes, he – being director of the glee club that didn't – no money from that I mean that's the thing he liked; he liked music and he loved singing so he did –

Being a director: what did that mean?

I was too young at that time to really know about it.

Duluth male choir?

Chorus: I am quite sure that is what it was called. My Dad belonged to that along with some other men that he was very friendly with and I don't know if – I don't think it was still in-going on when he came up to French River but when he was – he had these friends – we had friends come up to visit us from Duluth and I remember that some of them had been in that male chorus and especially one time when there were quite a few that came up and they sang and it was wonderful. And then – there were two that especially that would come. We also had a friend who came and he wasn't a singer, he was a barber so he would cut our hair.

What did your mom do to prepare for this?

Just about all of the company got chicken. Mashed potatoes and lots of vegetables. You could just go to the garden and get them and then Mother canned too; she – and we – they slaughtered a cow or calf or something.

Did your father hunt?

No, my father did not hunt. However my brother had traps for rabbits and one time he got a partridge in a trap.

Did you eat it?

Yes we did. Rabbit? I have no idea why he did that.

Did anyone fish?

Later on when we were older but not when we were younger.

What did your mom do on the farm?

Well I guess Mother sewed you know and she sewed all my clothes and my brother's clothes too and my sister's and she – then of course washed clothes and I remember the boiler on the kitchen stove and – I had a tub on each side and a wringer that sort of thing and then she would be – we always had home made pie and so she – then there was the chickens and the eggs that had to be put into cartons and the milk that had to be separated and I guess I suppose when she was – before we got old enough to bring in the wood or whatever she did it because Dad would take the trailer and the horses out in the country or the back woods or whatever and cut down trees and bring home chopped wood to put in the stove.

He also built?

Yeah, he did a lot of carpentry work on the houses – for sure his own house and he helped with the others.

What happened to their first house?

It was about four years after they had moved in their house; unfortunately there was a forest fire in Cloquet and for some reason or the other the wind decided to blow a few sparks throughout the territory and it came over in our territory and so – then there was no way to save the house; it burned and unfortunately they had had company I guess that same day early and my Dad had been all dressed up and everything and he had just changed his clothes, put his gold watch on the dresser and whatever and then they went out and they were almost trapped in the – because they went out to the field to take care of the cows or whatever and they were practically trapped out there and couldn't do anything about saving their house. I don't think they could have done anything anyway; where would you get the water and so they saw their house burn and the – Dad always talked about that gold watch that he lost in the fire.

How did they get out?

Well, I don't know because the way Mother told it I just – she never did go into detail on how they managed to get out so –

Your brother William – Uncle William.

Uncle William he had – that is where Grandma Nordin- lived with Uncle William-he never married- and he was right next door to us except that next door was about a block away and we would go and visit Grandma and Grandma never learned to speak English so we should have learned to speak Swedish and you know – she spoke Swedish to us and I am sure we understood Swedish and what she was saying and spoke a little bit of Swedish back to her but I guess you don't unless you keep it up.

How did Grandma Nordin come to the US?

I think because all her sons and daughter was here.

What about her husband?

Well now I was never quite sure about it but evidently he was not very reliable husband so I am not sure.

Your family had hopped a train to get out of a fire?

Well when the fire started then -- a cousin and some other people were there too and they took my sister who was about three years old and took her and they went down to the train and managed to get to Lester Park and there was a train and in those days -- I remember when I was a kid the train would come up in the morning and go to Two Harbors and then come back at night or vice versa and so we used to take the train. I don't know if earlier there were more trains -- there weren't any cars and so there probably were more trains that came --

Tape 1, Side B

How did your mom feel about living on the farm?

Well I really didn't know that she did not like living on the farm until just recently when my sister told me that. So it really -- I can understand now why she reacted to people the way she did. She didn't -- at one time she didn't have anything to do with any of the relatives and I couldn't understand that. Well, then, finally, at one point then she and my dad's sister -they got friendly or whatever and that was fine and Aunt Nancy used to come over and Uncle Wil, but Mother didn't want to have anything to do with anyone and she didn't come -- a lot of times she did not come. I had to be in things in plays and sing and do all these things but she didn't always come to hear or see me in these things. So I don't know, I always thought she was shy and was afraid of people but evidently that wasn't the case. She wanted to live in the city.

How did she make up for that?

Well she -- earlier before I was born she would go down to Duluth and visit her sister. When -- at one point when my sister went to Marquette MI and she graduated in 1934 my mother decided that she wanted to be in Duluth so my sister and then that is when I started going to school in Duluth so my sister got a job and I -- we had an apartment and we lived with a friend of the family and she had a boarding house-small apartment. My mother came along too, and did day work to get away from the farm.

Day work?

She would go for the day and clean the house, wash clothes or whatever they wanted her to do. That is what she did starting in 1934.

Did she go back to the farm?

Yeah, we would go to the farm on weekends and things like that and I suppose there were times when she would be there and other times when she would rather be in town working. Working, working for somebody else.

Did your father stay at the farm?

Yes, took care of the chickens, cows.

Your dad had a couple of things outside of music?

I was in high school or something like that when I came across a – I think it was Sears Roebuck and someone was demonstrating this way of making rugs and it was really neat and the frame and sort of weaving and then bringing the yarn up and then cutting it so that it was kind of pretty and I told Daddy about that and I guess he was interested so he went down and looked at the frame and came home and made the frame and started making these rugs and then I don't know who it was that introduced him to the hook rugs because he made those too. Well he had to have something to do when his wife was downtown doing day work and I was going to school down there. Everett my brother was there because he went to school at Clover Valley -there until he graduated in 1942.

Did your mom retire on the farm?

Well, for a while when my husband was out of the service we lived on the farm once – one summer -and that was interesting. I had to have my youngest daughter there and so my dad and – we were there in 1946 - she was walking and whatever. And we were – memories – well this was- were married and she was born in '45 and that must have been about 1947 – we lived up there because -I don't know- he lost his job or he was looking for a job because he just got out of the navy and we were up there and Dad would take care of little Nancy even and there was – my- there was a time and someone and came and said that Dad had some problems and so I had to take him down to emergency so it's got to be later than that because he died in 1949 so it was in 1949 – ok, so then my dad was in the hospital for awhile and then eventually he died and we were up there at the farm for a while and then came to Duluth and mother stayed at the house and then mother sold the house. She sold it for ? and the land too. Yeah.

Then she could live in the city?

Yeah.

When did your mom pass away?

1978. 94 years old.

Did she do day work after your dad died?

Yeah, she enjoyed the work and the women that she worked for and you know she had some of the same people to do all the time and we got to know them and she was working for them even before some of those people – one of those – couple that she worked for had a Scottie dog -they gave for some reason or another didn't want the Scotty dog so we got the Scottie dog so we had the dog. That was earlier because that was before – I was young before I started high school.

Do you remember the name of the dog?

It was a Mctavish or something or other.

What language was spoken in your home?

Yes, my parents were – spoke Swedish and so that’s what was spoken. When my sister who was 7 years older than I and was already starting school you know when I – when she came home from school the very first day she said ,”I will never speak Swedish again.” And therefore my parents learned English and so I really didn’t have that much exposure to Swedish except for my grandmother over on the hill.

Do you have any idea what your sister’s motivation was?

I suppose she was embarrassed – but like I talked to some of the others that were in her class and we all spoke kind of broken and spoke Swedish or whatever they were all kind of in the same boat. It bothered my sister to the point where she was not going to let them talk Swedish anymore.

You knew English when you started school?

Oh, yes, I probably – I had very little Swedish and I had mostly English.

Your parents didn’t insist?

Oh, yeah, some of these people I know from talking to that they said we’re in America now and you’re going to speak English now so that’s the way it was.

Any special events?

I remember the one time that we went to Lincoln Park to celebrate mid- summer -the Swedish people. So I remember just that one time when we went there and it might have been there earlier but it was young and – but I think my folks probably had gone there every summer.

Did your parents belong to Swedish organizations?

My mother belonged to Vasa Lodge or whatever it was and I often asked her how come she didn’t go to the meetings and she always paid her dues and got information, whatever it was.

Did your parents attend a church?

There was no church in French River at that time. My aunt Nancy was very religious; she had – was a born -again Christian and she – I don’t know how she managed but she managed to get somebody to come up occasionally and have a service and also to get someone to come and have Bible school in the summer time so I remember going to Bible classes.... However my dad of course was a brilliant man and it’s too bad that he didn’t have a chance to do his thing – because he would – he knew the Bible so evidently they had gone to classes to learn the Bible when he was a child -to learn the Bible.

Was there a Bible in your home?

I don't remember a Bible.

Your mother was superstitious?

Well, my mother -- all the superstitions that anyone has heard of, she believed! But the one that really got me was when one Christmas and there was this beautiful Swedish song and my mother sang it and of course I would coax her, "sing it again" and I thought she had such a lovely voice; well as luck would have it, a few days later a calf died and Mother said it was because she had sung these Christmas songs that made that calf die - she wouldn't listen to me; she did not sing another note from that day on.

Did you remember any other times where she responded like that?

Not that I can recall. That just was in my mind. At Christmas time we had a sort of a tradition that Santa Claus would come to our house and the -- we always called my sister, "Sister." I didn't call her Elsa and of course it was 'sister' that went to hold Santa's reindeer and then she dressed up as Santa Claus and came and gave us our presents and one year when she did this little thing and she came back and I looked at her very closely and I saw that she had boots on just like sister so I said to Mother, "how come Santa Claus has Sister's boots on?" So that was the last Christmas that she had to pretend to be Santa Claus.

Did your brother react to that?

I think he believed it. He was two years younger so.

What kind of gifts did you get at Christmas?

No, I don't.

Did you have special food?

No, never. That's one thing about Mother; all these things that I hear about now being in Swedish Cultural Society- never was told anything about this --well, they talked about ?-I wasn't told about the celebrations. One thing that I do remember was that at weddings that they would celebrate for days and days afterwards. Over in Sweden.

Did they have Shivaree?

They did, yeah, but I don't --

Were your neighbors Swedish also?

Oh yes, there was another family that were brothers in the neighborhood so there were a lot of Swedes. Swansons and Hendricksons and there was one place or one farm where they didn't have a Swede but they had a store and they had quite a large farm and they had sheep on the farm and I thought they were awfully out of place and – because everyone was Swedish.

Do you remember the number of the school you attended?

I think it was number 90. St. Louis County? Yeah.

What ethnic groups in your class in school?

Mostly Swedish. Or Swede-Finns, you know. They are not all Swedish; they are a little Finns.

Was there rivalry?

Oh, Norwegians. The thing is that they were all Swedes and I don't remember if there were any Norwegians out there but yeah, my dad used to talk about somebody but they didn't live in our neighborhood. But he would talk about the Italians and Jews and –

What was he saying?

Well – my dad was pretty nice guy; he didn't look down on any of them. And there was a guy – Jewish fellow -that used to come in the neighborhood and looking for old iron and scraps of stuff and –

Are there any other organizations that might not have been Swedish?

No. I am not aware of any.

Newspapers or anything?

Oh, yeah, they got Swedish newspapers. I don't remember the name but it came once a week or whatever and it had a cartoon that I used to get a kick out of. But otherwise I couldn't read it but it could look at the cartoons.

Did both your parents read the newspaper?

Oh, yeah, Dad probably from cover to cover. Mom just – scanned through.

Did you have a best friend?

Not really. That school that we went to -number 90- evidently there weren't enough children in that school so they decided they would bus us up to 92 and I think that was when I was in the fourth grade and I didn't like that at all and I met some other gals my own age so there was a girl named Virginia and whatever that we – there was a fence around the school and it

had about that much board on the top of the fence. Not all wood, sort of wire –not barbed wire –and then it had this board so recesses we used to go walk the fences –

Was she Swedish, Virginia?

Oh, probably.

Did you socialize with Swedish kids or other?

No, we were all pretty much together and really I don't really remember anything other than Scandinavian. I know some Finnish –Makela -but that's ok; we were all together.

Do you remember any other activities with your family?

No, I don't know. There were programs at school- that sort of thing. Oh – just last week a gal downstairs -Frances Hoffman Levine- died and her dad lived up in French River and she would do readings and her dad would have – we had programs you know entertainment of some sorts at times that would come from Duluth and she used to come and do readings and I thought that was just great. When I was in the 6th grade maybe we happened to have declamatory contests so I was going to be in that so Virginia and I were participated in that so we went to school -other schools -to compete but unfortunately I was never good enough to compete for a third time. I would win on one level and go on but I would never win again to go on.

What did you do?

They furnished these little stories for us and they were just humorous and serious and we memorized it –about 2 pages long -and did it. And presented it – like a skit. Just have one person. That Frances Levine was the one that got me thinking about doing that sort of thing and my dad pushed me into singing. Yeah, I sang when I was little. I sang “Jolly Old Saint Nicholas” right on the stage and the community hall that we had. No, that wasn't a school program; I was in the school plays– we almost all had to be in the school plays so of course I would sing.

So singing was carried on?

Yes.

Any practices that were brought over from Sweden that were continued in your home and it sounds like there weren't too many?

When I was little it was the mid- summer celebration.

Did they ever talk about why they left Sweden (parents)?

End of tape 1

Mae Peterson – Tape 2

Oh, yes; I asked questions but I didn't – the things that they told didn't really because I was too young to understand you know what they were talking about really; so later on I tried to find out more things from Mother but she just kind of kept on talking about the same things and it was mostly about her home in Sweden, not what happened here in the US.

Did your family keep in touch with relatives in Sweden?

Yeah, my mother did. My father as far as we know they all came over – all the brothers and their mother came over here so we had no way of knowing if there was ever any over there and Mother kept in touch with ... – then one of her brothers came over here and I don't recall how many years he was here but he sailed on the boats for one season , and then he went back to Sweden and he stayed there.

So he worked on the Great Lakes ships?

He did for one season and I don't remember what else he might have done. His name? Thorston. And his son is the only one that is alive in Sweden and I have seen him twice.

Did anyone go back to visit?

I wish Mother had but she didn't. Oh, yeah, Mother went back and her mother died and I guess she decided to go back. I don't know if that was her idea or her stepsister's idea but anyway they went and there was Mother and Aunt Betty and my cousins and Leonard and I don't recall how – I don't know how old Mildred was or Leonard but Leonard took sick when he was on the boat and died and so he was buried at sea and Mother was over there for about a year and well, anyway, her brother had stayed in Sweden but I guess Mother liked America better so she decided to come back. And so she – there was this nice new boat called the Titanic and she wanted to get passage on the Titanic, and her half- sister suggested that they go on this other boat together at a later date so –

Had the Titanic sunk before they left?

Oh, yeah – so she went back in 1911 and returned in 1912.

So she did go back for a very personal reason that her mother died?

Yeah, she went back there for a year. But she couldn't convince her youngest sister Elma to come to the US and Elma stayed in Sweden and there were a couple of other relatives who never came over here.

Did any relatives come here to visit?

I wish they would have –

Do you remember if your mother made or carry on any Swedish- food?

Oh yes. ? brown beans and I wasn't too happy when she made that because I didn't care for that, Swedish pancakes and of course she made the most wonderful pancakes. I don't make Swedish pancakes but my grand kids all got the recipe –well, she never had a recipe but -and they managed to – and so they always said, “don't you know how to make these – it is so easy.” I try but they don't turn out like Mother's. And let's see what else – and then what they called ? when a cow calved they take that milk and made this sort of pudding thing; it was baked in the oven. I remember that. And then of course they made -with the intestines- they made whatever the sausage that they made and –

Potato sausage?

I suppose some kind of a mixture that they made. And then syltla -head cheese- that sort of thing. And I don't know.

Any kind of bread?

She made the most wonderful rye bread; everybody wanted her rye bread. Not in French River. When my sister was working then and we would have people over from downtown and they tasted her rye bread and they wanted her rye bread. So she'd make rye bread for everybody. Pie – she made lemon pie to die for.

Any drink?

No, we just – oh of course we made root beer, you know -our own root beer, our own beer and so we had – we didn't have to begin with a basement so it was just down and we walked down there and it was all earth -about half the size of this room -and that's where they made the root-beer sat and the beer sat to get the whatever it has to age or whatever and so sometimes when we were sitting there we would hear a pop. I remember they had a certain kind of contraption and you put the beer in the bottles and ,yes, I remember those.

The top would pop?

Yes, the top would pop.

Any heirlooms?

Everything that they had from Sweden was lost. But how these pictures that they had were saved I don't know unless they had copies or so that like when they got married they had copies for the other relatives because we do have a picture of Mother and Dad when they were married and we have a picture of some of the other relatives.

Were you married and who and when and where?

I married a sailor during the war in 1944. I went out to the east coast –Cape May, New Jersey- and when – his name was Charlie and when he heard that – of course I got pregnant and when he heard that they were about to ship out he said, “I think I better take you home,” so he took me home to Duluth and I stayed with my sister and then sure enough as soon as he got back he was shipped out to the Philippines and that of course was the year of everything happening so I didn’t know where in the world he was so then he was discharged in 1945, I suppose. And so he was here because I imagined that I was going to have the baby all by myself and he came home a couple months before Nancy was born on December 14, 1945. And we lived- I think we stayed with an aunt for a while and then we found a little house and I don’t know what the reason was we decided – we wanted to go out to the farm so we were there for a while and that is when Grandpa and Nancy got to be very good friends.

Was Charlie’s last name Peterson?

Yes ,Charles A. Peterson – Arnold everyone calls him Arnie. I am the only one who calls him Charlie. All his sisters and relatives call him Arnie. Well , to begin with I started with this Charles A Peterson business – no. “C. Arnold Peterson”- but that was how – so I thought nuts to that noise; you are going to be Charles Peterson whether you like it or not.

What is his ethnic background?

He had more Norwegian than Swedish. But the relative that I liked the most- Aunt Mary -was the one that had the most Swedish in her. She was adorable.

So you married another Scandinavian?

Yes.

Did your brother and sister do the same?

Oh, my sister married a Finnish person and her junior year she came home and they always had a lot of dances and I was younger so I didn’t get in on many of these dances but she went to this dance and she saw Onnie and she decided that was the guy that she wanted and so the next summer- that’s 1934 when she graduated, but they went together for 5 years before they got married. They got married in 1939.

My brother married a gal from Knife River and she -I don’t know if she has any Swedish in her or not. Probably a combination of things although her name was Anderson before she got married but I don’t think she – she might have some Swedish but there has to be other –

Scandinavian?

Maybe.

Did your mother talk about who she wanted you to marry?

She always told me that her half sister told her children it is better to marry someone rich because it's better to be an old man's hat than a young man's slave. So I thought about that but you know you can't just find a rich guy somewhere; besides that it was the war and everything and so I felt that I was fortunate to find someone, you know.

So no feelings?

No, I think – I imagine that they wanted me to marry – but I don't remember them ever saying anything. Dad was a real nice guy and he got along with his son-in-laws very nicely.

How many children?

I have five daughters.

Where were they born?

Right here in Duluth, Minnesota.

Names?

Nancy, Pamela, Diane, Sandra, Charlotte. And you know that I have given them names of relatives- all of them. So Nancy is Louise for Charles' sister, and Pamela Kristine with a K for my mother and then Diane Marie for this nice little aunt that I liked so well. Sandra Mae for myself. Charlotte which is a nice long name Johanna for my grandmother, so poor Charlotte Johanna when she puts her name anyplace and they chop it off where you – on a form or something her poor name gets chopped off.

So you wanted to remember people who were important to you?

And Nancy -that was Aunt Nancy, and she is very much like Aunt Nancy; nothing daunts her she can do anything , if she has to, so I did that very well.

Your Swedish heritage?

Well, I wanted to join the Swedish Cultural Society; in fact I asked Mother, "why don't you join?" but it didn't happen and so it wasn't until 10 – 12 years ago it was – so my sister had a friend that belonged and so we decided that we would join and so we joined and my sister dropped out, but I still belong and I belong to ASI – American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis and I have been interested in my Swedish heritage; now my sister and I and my oldest daughter went to Sweden in 1981. My sister – I don't remember anything she said from Sweden and of course Nancy jotted down everything to have a family tree you know.

How do you feel your children have identified with the Swedish heritage?

Well, Char definitely – she is the one who had the pictures. Nancy, too, she had the original pictures and she's got them on the wall and Char has negatives made and she has all the pictures on the walls. The others aren't all that – of course Char sings Swedish music every chance she gets and Nancy well she was interested in her family tree but she has so many other things right now that – takes up her time.

What did you do to make a living?

Well, he worked for Standard Oil and then he had his own station – Standard Oil and Fuel and then from there he went on the boats and he was on the boats for 11 years and then he worked for the post office and that is when he retired.

Did you work out of the home?

I worked at ? company that doesn't exist anymore and I worked for JC Campbell company that doesn't exist anymore and I worked for the College of St. Scholastica and that is still there. I was a bookkeeper.

Were you trained for that?

Sort of. I took a course in bookkeeping at night school because I didn't do that when I was in high school. And then I also went – I started at DBU but then I got this job so I thought well I might as well just work as long as I have a job.

You live in Duluth today?

Yes, I live in Duluth.

Are you retired?

Yes, I retired.

How would you describe your growing up in a Swedish household? For someone who never experienced anything like that?

My brother and I were pretty much alone so we got our own entertainment but our folks were very very nice and we had our chores to do which was fine; no complaint there. They were very good parents and I think – I feel as if I should be very thankful that I had parents like that because when I see what is happening in the world today and I just cringe when I think of it – I can't imagine people being brought up in a place where they are abused, etc. etc.

Family history?

Oh, I think it's great. I think that was very nice.

You could have been in Sweden?

Well, I don't know.

Your ethnic background- how do you answer?

Swedish. I am Swedish, that is for sure.

END OF INTERVIEW
