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**FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT
LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978**

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Aily Koski
August 8, 1973

Douglas Ollila

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INTERVIEW BETWEEN:

NARRATOR: Aily Koski

INTERVIEWER: Douglas Ollila

DATED: August 8,

O: Your name is Aily Koski and your oma suku (maiden) name was Elo. You're an American citizen?

K: Yes. I was born in the United States

O: What is your occupation?

K: I am Administrative Assistant to the School Superintendent. County

O: Where did your husband work?

O: He worked for United States Steel.

O: Here in Duluth?

K: No, here on the Range in the city of Virginia.

O: You lived in Virginia a good number of years.

K: Yes, I came to Duluth in 1949.

O: What is the national origin of your parents?

K: Finnish, they were born in Finland, in Eura, Turun ja Porin Laani.

O: Where did they come when they came to America?

K: They came to Boston, mother stayed in Boston to do housework to earn money for a ticket on the railroad to come from Boston to Virginia, Minnesota. My father came straight to Virginia because he had heard there were jobs to be had in the mines.

O: Did they leave Finland because of poor economic conditions?

K: Yes, and my father left mostly because of military conscription.

O: He didn't care to fight for the Russian Army?

K: No

O: In what year was this?

K: In 1906.

O: That was when a lot of people left Finland. Was your father involved in the Labor Movement in Finland?

K: No, he was not

O: He moved to Virginia and began to work in the mines, tell me something about his experiences in the mines.

K: Well first he came to Virginia in 1906 but in 1907 there was a panic so he and the fellows that he came with on the same ship, couldn't get jobs in the mines so he worked for the city of Virginis driving a team of horses. That was in 1907. My folks had two rooms and every time someone would come from Finland, they would stay with people they knew and I understand they alwayz had a house full of people. After the panic my father got a job in the Alpena mine and he worked there up until the steel strike in 1916. He was one of the leaders of the strike so after the strike, he was balck listed.

O: Was he a member of the IWW,, the Union was very active in 1916 in Virginia and Eveleth?

K: That I don't know, at that time I don't think he was in that strike, because it was in 1914 when the Finnish Movement split, didn't they?

O: Yes, that's right, did he stay with the Tyomies side then?

K: Yes, he was with the Suomalainen Sosialisti Osasto. The SSO they called it. He stayed on that side but in the steel strike they all stayed together.

O: The IWW led, that's what they called it then, did you say he was active in organizing a Union or was he a leader in a strike?

K: He was a leader in a strike and with these IWW people I suppose. Noone ever told me, I assume so. What they were fighting for at that time was an eight hour day. The strike was settled and the miners lost, they did not lay them off until the end of 1918 and 1919 because of the First World War. They needed the steel and these people so they kept them on until the peace was signed in 1918; then they let them go in droves.

O: Was your father let go then?

K: Yes

O: You mean after he had worked for ?

K: Yes, in 1918.

O: He was black listed then?

K: Yes, he was black listed then and United States Steel owned most of the mines on the Range. There were very few independent mining companies so he couldn't get a job anywhere.

O: What did he do then?

K: Well when you worked in the mines during the First World War, you were encouraged to buy Liberty Loans and of course those Finnish strikers and Union people didn't buy any Liberty Loans because they weren't going to finance any war with their money.

O: So the Socialists at that time were much opposed to war and the Finnish Socialists were almost united against the war.

K: If you could say you were investing your money in something else, you didn't have to buy Liberty Loans, they passed you up, they didn't expect you to buy any. It was in this period during the First World War when all those Finnish miners who were opposed to the war, put their money in these forty acre tracts of land. The Wirehouse (?) Company, Lumber Company, had gone over these so there was no timber on them, nothing, it was cut-over area and forty acres of land cost eight hundred dollars, that was a lot of money in those days.

O: For the kind of land it was, it was not fertile.

K: No roads, no nothing. In 1918 when those people were let go from their jobs they had no alternative but to move out to these pieces of land that they had bought. We had a house in Virginia, my father had built it in 1914 when he was working and so we sold that and with the money we built another house on the farm.

O: You moved out to the farm then?

K: We moved out to the farm in 1922.

O: What is the location of this farm?

- K: Wolf, Minnesota.
- O: Is that south of Virginia, west of Eveleth, six miles out of Eveleth? What did your Dad do on the farm?
- K: In the Winter he used to work in the Hibbing area, they had small independent mining companies then, and even the black-listed miners could get jobs out there and in the Winter he used to work in the mines. Sometimes when there were no jobs to be had in the mines, he used to work in the lumber camps. In the Summer he always wanted to stay on the farm.
- O: Oh, you farmed then?
- K: No, we farmed but not enough to make a living off of it. You can't live off of forty acres.
- O: Of course there were hundreds of other people who had the same experience, they had very small farms, they were black listed, they had small farms, they had to work at many jobs.
- K: Even the area around Cherry, Wolf, Iron Junction, there was a very definite demarcation where they were settled. Do you know where Cherry High School is?
- O: Yes.
- K: All that area was settled in the 1907 panic by these Finnish farmers; and then Old Smoke, which used to be an old railroad, it was along this railroad that they bought these pieces of land in 1918 and that area was settled in 1922. From 1920 to 1922 these were the black-listed miners.
- O: The same pattern holds true for north of Virginia, in Idington. They were the people from the 1907 panic, and then the people from Alango and that area, and the people who moved there in 1920, 1921 and 1922 so the same pattern of settlement holds true for the south of Virginia as well as the north of Virginia.
- K: It must be around the Deer River area too
- O: Yes. Deer River, Cloverdale, north of Nashwauk, and Keewatin and that area and around Ely, places like Embarrass particularly, was full of people who had left the mines because of black listing etc. The areas closer to Ely and Tower were people who had left because of the 1907 panic so the patterns remain pretty much the same. There were dozens of

communities that were settled in that manner. Tell me about your father's ideology, was he heavily involved in the SSJ, SSO, and so on? (Tyomies movement)

K: Seven nights a week.

O: Seven nights a week, was he a part of Haali, Kultturi, and political agitation?

K: Yes, that was his way of life.

O: Where was this now, in Virginia?

K: Yes that was way back when they were in Virginia, in 1907 and 1908.

O: Well then he belonged before the "hajennus", he went to the Sosialisti Opera, what happened when the "hajennus" took place in 1913?

K: These old SSO people went to the Hall on Main Street upstairs of Clink's Bar on Fifth Avenue and Chestnut Street, they had that Hall for years. That's how come I remember people who were leaving to go to their farms. they used to have farewell parties, they had dancing and someone would speak, that's why I remember people going to Deer River, three families in particular.

O: Do you know the names, does the name Anttila or Hokkanen sound familiar?

K: Yes, the name Anttila, Hokkanen, and Filpus.

O: They live in a little community called Suomi, I know all three of the families. Why didn't your father become an IWW syndicalist, did he ever reflect on that?

K: I don't know, I was seventeen years old when my father died and I never found out these things from him, some of these things I learned from my mother, I know he was always involved in these things. I was born in 1909 so I was just a kid up to that hajennus, about four or five. and then I remember when we went to that Hall on Chestnut Street upstairs of Clink's Bar, Fay (?) Opera they called it. Every night my father and mother went to the Hall, there was play practice, there was a meeting, there was Ompeluseura, there was Kehitys Seura, there was some kind of a choir, some kind of a band, all that stuff, and in those days you didn't hire a baby sitter, you took the children with you.

O: So you became a part of that picture too, then?

K: Yes, that was our way of life. I remember I always liked to go there but it was terrible to come home from there as we lived over a mile from the Hall, there was no transportation and you walked. I remember my father carrying me piggy-back and that's how I got home. That was every night and you'd get tired out but on the kitchen side, the dining hall, they had these long tables, they would spread their coats and lay their kids there and they would go on with whatever they were doing. That was seven nights a week.

O: So the Hall was really the center of his life?

K: Most of the people like that, the Finns, I'm not talking about the church people because I don't know, I was never in.

O: They had their own little kulttuuri-----?

K: Yes, but the Hall people were out there every night.

O: Tell me now what your father and mother did when they moved to the country side, besides work terribly hard, was there much Hall activity?

K: I remember my mother telling my father, now we are going to rest for a while, and we are not going to go to the Hall for a while. We had been there for a couple of months and these farmers started visiting the way they do you know, and they started telling they are having this and that at the Hall and you should come and meet the people and after a couple of months, it started all over again. Now in the country Hall in Cherry, in fact there were three Halls within a radius of three miles, all Finnish.

O: Were they different groups?

K: No, about the same groups, now it was more of a mixture, the old Wobblies (?) and the old SSO people. There was the Onnela Hall, Cherry Hall and the Cherry Club Hall and they were all Finnish Halls.

O: The pattern on most of the Iron Range in most of the communities was when the "hajennus" took place in 1913 and 1914, most of the communities except for Nashwauk, went Wobbly, IWW. The impression that many of the historians give you is that those who stayed in the SSJ and the Jarjestö, Parliamentary Socialist, was a very small group but I'm beginning to get the impression that those who stayed with the SSJ and Tyomies was fairly sizeable, they had quite a bit of activity and started their own groups.

You mentioned the group in Virginia and then, I take it, there was certainly a strong group in Wolf.

- K: Yes, in Cherry, that's why Mesaba Park is where it is. Because of these, now Cherry had a very strong Finnish SSO movement and this after 1922, they had athletic clubs, they showed plays, had a band, and they had a very, very effective Women's Group. In fact way back in 1930 during the depression, my father died in 1928, they were building Cherry High School, the High School was about a year old, these women started saying they should have hot lunches in school. They didn't have the transportation they have now and the children sat in sleighs hauled by horses or else they walked, which was an awfully long day for a kid and then they got back home again about five or six thirty. You left in the dark and got home in the dark, you usually left at seven o'clock. I remember my mother being on a committee that came to see the St. Louis County Board of Education, they wanted hot lunches for their children, they got them, they had petitions all over the farming areas. Because of the SSO being a national organization, these were brought up at national meetings in different localities so they carried it out.
- O: Before we talk about the rest of your education and your involvement with the St. Louis County school system, tell me about the kind of education you received from your parents and the education from Haali Kulttuuri; you obviously, as far as I can tell, learned some of the principles of the Movement and have stuck with it and have accepted many of the principles. Did you learn a lot from Haali Kulttuuri?
- K: Yes, most of what ^{I know,} I learned at Halls and at home, I think.
- O: You mean that was your real education?
- K: That was my working class education
- O: You distinguish between working class education and other kinds of education?
- K: Yes, this is ^{it} the kind of education I learned in textbooks in school.
- O: What would you call a working class education, a sense of class consciousness?
- K: Yes, and the different customs and traditions, and Finnish literature and poetry, and Finnish music. This is what I call my working class education.

O: It's terribly important to you?

K:

O: What about self-consciously imposed Marxism and ideals? How much of a part was that? Did you accept or absorb all of the Marxian principles, did you go all the way or how did you relate to that? Or was it just a kind of a working class consciousness or how? That's kind of a hard question to answer.

K: Mine was a working class consciousness. I suppose you learn things from your parents, my parents thought that was right, if my parents thought that way, that's it. I was never interested in sitting down and reading a book on politics, for instance, but I would sit in a hall and listen to a speaker, be it Finnish or English.

O: You know this is terribly important, the Marxian view, that is the straight line Marxian principle, did it really mean that much to you?

K: How could I put it? When I was a kid I was at their social affairs and of course to a youngster that appeals more. The dances and the plays, and the Sunday schools, and what you can put on stage, that appeals to me more than politics does. But then you hear the political and the Marxian angle, I'm calling the political the Marxian angle, sittings at meetings, listening to my folks, listening to the other people who were older than I was, mine was more a class consciousness than it was Marxian theory.

O: Is your experience kind of typical, the working class movement, the industrialist movement, the Eastern Socialist, _____ and the Tyomies movement and so on, which was parliamentary then moved into other directions and so on, have always been defined as purest and they were Marxists and so on, but I'm getting the feeling that, from you and many other people, that there were some theoreticians and people who read Marx and they were philosophers but perhaps the majority of the people had developed a sense of self consciousness and they didn't really care if a person was a Bolshevik or not. is that right? The rank and file didn't care that much for political things?

K: Oh no, I think they cared. I'm not smart enough to be a Bolshevik.

O: You think it takes a special amount of brains?

- K: Yes, to even learn it. I don't understand all the Marxian theory but I do understand what is wrong in the country, for instance, where you have inflation, and you can't buy stuff and I know I'm on the working class angle of this. I don't make profits or anything on a situation like this, an economic situation like this.
- O: What you're saying to me is that you are not a purist in any way?
- K: No, I don't think I am.
- O: There were a lot like you, they knew what was right, I suppose, in terms of class consciousness, union organization, and what's wrong with the country type of thing, but they tended to sit kind of loosely on some of the theoretical stuff. They weren't that dedicated, I suppose like church members who went to church several times a year, well, theology and that sort of thing, that's alright for the preachers.
- K: You know, in my mind, a person who studies, for instance, the Marxian theory, is not bothered or interested again in dramatics, music, I like the humanities, they appeal to me more than cold theory.
- O: So that you, at least in your own experience, want to define the working class movement, and it is not really right to call it Marxian, that's a bad term, it is Marxian in some ways but in others it is not. It was so much more to a Finnish community, it was a whole new way of life. It included Art, Music, and the whole bit.
- K: That's the part that always appealed to me, but then of course the leadership in these organizations was Marxian so in order to be able to express my own thoughts, and be on stage and be in plays, which I liked very much, the theorists had to be there too to keep the organization together. To this day it irritates me when people tell me that programs should be a propaganda number. I don't believe that. I had an argument with our new editor of Tyomies, Helena something-----, the young gal that came. she calls anything that isn't a propaganda performance a "porvari" deal, I don't think that.
- O: You mean you like Art for Arts sake and that sort of thing?
- K: Yes, I suppose that's what you would say.
- O: This is a vital part of life and it doesn't have to preach or teach anything.

- K: Not always. It's good enough and it doesn't appeal to people if you put up something to make money on it, so you're not always going to give propaganda things.
- O: I see. Now in terms of defining the Tyomies movement then you are suggesting to me that in very clear terms it involves many things and many kinds of people, many persuasions, and it is not right to identify it with any particular position.
- K: No.
- O: You see most people don't know that, and the movement is largely misunderstood. Now my guess is that the Industrialist movement tended to be extremely narrow minded.
- K: They are, that's one thing with them, and that's why they don't have anything else but their newspaper now
- O: That's right, Tyomies tended to be many things to many people and it moved in many directions. Are you saying that the 1926 period of Bolshevization is just one other phase in the Tyomies movement? That is to say that not everyone in the Tyomies movement went along with the Bolshevik movement? Or anything like that?
- K: My folks did, in fact when my father died I got the Biggest surprise at the funeral when they said that he was the leader of the Communist Party. He died in 1928 and this came out at the funeral, I never knew that.
- O: He never said that to you?
- K: No, he didn't.
- O: But that was an important phase in the Tyomies movement as it developed in Superior, but again, just one of the phases. Is that right?
- K: Yes, that's right, that is how I interpret it
- O: You never joined the Party yourself?
- K: No I didn't.
- O: You weren't interested?
- K: Well to tell you the truth, I had experienced already when I remembered when my father was black listed for being in the strike, and not having a job, in 1933 I got a job with the United States government. That was during the

depression, I was getting to be 21 or 22 years old, and could think for myself. I decided that if I was going to work for the United States government, I'd better stay away from anything that could bar me from working. That was the way I figured it out during the depression.

O: Of course a lot of people thought the same way

K: And then I remember this Party leadership was kind of making insinuations and fun of people who thought like that.

O: They encouraged you to go to school then?

K: All the time

O: Now let's talk about some of your employment, you mentioned before to me that you had worked in Washington for the Department of Labor for a number of years, you were a young kid in the 40's but afterward you came back to the Midwest, is that right?

K: That's right, came back to Virginia. During the Second World War the government wanted to decentralize their people because in time of war, I suppose they thought the Capital of the country is always bombed first, and so we with families received some salary and a year's leave of absence, to go back home especially in the Midwest. To get us off the _____ post.

O: Did they give you work?

K: In time of war, Civil Service operates under the military orders and I had been in Virginia three weeks and I received a telegram from Washington to report for work at the Virginia Light and Water Department to substitute for men who were leaving for the Army.

O: After that you got involved in the St. Louis County School system?

K: Yes, in 1929.

O: What is your job at present with the School system?

K: I am Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent.

O: Now it is well known in Minnesota that the school system was a very unique school system, now what do you know about the St. Louis County school system, in what ways is it unique, what does it do, why do people make such a big deal about it?

- K: St. Louis County covers 6,000 sq. miles, which makes it the largest in Minnesota, and our school's northern-most post is Buyck, Minnesota, which is near the Canadian border. Our southern-most school is Albook, between Elhorn and Brookston which is 22 miles from here. Way back in 1923 and even further back, maybe St. Louis County had as many as 164 schools, now in 1923 you have the little red schoolhouse, one room, two or three rooms perhaps, where teachers are janitors, nurses and firemen and the kids helped. The biggest problem was to consolidate these small schools among their own district and find finances to build bigger and better schools. Today the 167 schools are 15 schpols with seven high schools and eight elementary schools. We hire 250 teachers and now in the last seven or eight years, our schools have made a particular point to give special services, for slow learners, speech therapy, home tutoring, kids who can't get some particular thing, if our schools aren't able to take care of them, if they have a speech impairment like a cleft palette or something, St. Louis County will pay their tuition into some special school. They will also pay their transportation and room and board which even the Duluth schools will not do. Our uniqueness I think, is the fact that we keep a 6,000 sq. mile area with 15 schools with transportation. We have 125 buses, ane this is a rural area with 125 buses and drivers. They bus the kids to High schools, the High schools are in central points like Albroom, Cook and Orr have two High schools and take care of Koochiching County, the Indian reservation. Net Lake comes down to Orr, and Silverd#le which is close to International Falls, and this I think is one of the most admirable things, is to move those kids and get them to places.
- O: So the St. Louis County school system ended up in a highly efficient school system with a good educational program. They did as good as any world system could possibly do especially way up in the north woods which makes it especially difficult.
- K: We have modern schools, we just built, but not during this superintendent, he tried to do away with schools, six years ago we built an addition to the Cook school, that cost over one million dollars, beautiful. We never had one thing and that's what people are criticizing, we don't have swimming pools, but we have lakes and creeks. That's what our superintendent said one day, look at all those swimming pools we have, every school is right beside a lake or creek. Another thing, these schools in the rural area, they are still the community center.

- O: Where did they get the idea that the school ought to be the community center?
- K: I think that goes way back to 1910, 1911, when the Finnish farmer went out into the woods and built a log cabin, one room, and already then when they didn't have a school building, school was kept in people's homes if the home was particularly large, that was during the day, and in the evening they used it as a Hall. I have talked to old Finns especially in the Brimson area, they remember this, when during the day the homes were a school and in the evening it was a Hall where they could have dances, dinners, and have discussions, and the newspapers would have these agents (tupaaki tatturi), they used to walk or bicycle or something if these agents were around selling newspapers. The whole community would come to the Hall and that's why I think the schools are still the community centers. After the schools, the church or the Finn Hall, not in the cities so much but in the rural areas.
- O: They provided a kind of folk life, education, social life, adult education on the rural level for people, dances, the whole bit. It has been said that the founder of the St. Louis County system patterned his school system after the ideas in the schools in Denmark. That is to say that the school was for all the people of the community, that's what it sounds like. The way they ran the schools it does sound very much like the Danish model. Now tell me something about the people you have known in the St. Louis County school system, going way back to people like Lampi and Salmi, and people like that, what you heard or what you remember.
- K: Lampi I can't say much about, he was superintendent during the depression. He had the foresight to get government funds like WPA funds into the school system and with these monies he promoted what they called a Leisure Department.
- O: What in the world was a Leisure Department?
- K: This was where the Winter frolics came, Laskiainen and all that.
- O: Your school promoted Finnish festivals?
- K: Yes, that's what I'm telling you. I should have brought you the whole story about Laskiainen, about how the school set it up, how you make a ripa kelkka, and the story about Laskiainen and how it is. It's just before Ash Wednesday, the day before. Mardi Gras day, and that's when all these Finnish customs were brought into the schools.

- O: The school system actually promoted a sense of ethnic consciousness?
- K: Yes, they were trying to get other ethnic groups too but it just happened that all their employees were Finns, this is all they knew.
- O: Now you see this is very contrary to the policy in many of the Iron Range schools, they tried to make Americans and Anglo-Saxons out of everybody and this is a county school system promoting ethnic consciousness which makes it very unique, it seems to me.
- K: We had books that the Leisure Department published. Folk dances, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, the music and instructions and they were hard bound covers. Some day I'm going to get all this junk together.
- O: I hope you remember to do this, this is invaluable you know.
- K: Like I said, most of these were Finnish. Antti Tikkanen, have you heard of him? In these Leisure Department books there is a lot of music that he arranged, also Dorothy Virenius Holmes (?), with all these funds they got all these musicians, also rug weavers to give classes to the adults and also to the kids. We have in our office a wall hanging which is as high as that whole fireplace, and it is a Mexican scene, and it was made during that depression and it is hand hooked and is inventoried at \$1,500.00, it was made by those Leisure Department classes, the adults had evening classes and the kids had classes during the day. I can't explain it exactly but it was one department in the county schools. It still is, in Palo and Markham they have Laskiainen today.
- O: Yes, it is still a big thing, they advertise this all the Iron Range, it is still a big festival.
- K: Yes, and this is the time it really got going, during Leisure Department days.
- O: The successor of Lampi, was it W.W. Salmi?
- K: No, it was Art Strand.
- O: Do you remember much about Strand?
- K: No, he was superintendent for just a few months and he died.
- O: Then came Salmi, did you know Salmi?

- K: Yes, I used to go to school with him
- O: What kind of a man was Salmi, he was well known on the Iron Range, was he a good educator, did he know his stuff?
- K: Yes, a very good educator, clear thinking, he could talk to people so you knew what it was all about. Not a lot of fancy frills, but always easy to understand, easy to follow, a very good man, tops I would say.
- O: Would you rate him as probably the top man in the St Louis County system?
- K: Yes, I certainly would.
- O: And Salmi was followed by the present Administrator?
- K: Yes, his name was Ness, he is not with us anymore, it took us six years and seven months to get him out.
- O: I see, Ness was not appreciated as well as was Salmi?
- K: No, in fact, he is arranging his own retirement party because no one would arrange it.
- O: Are you saying the St. Louis County public school system is pretty much of a Finn program, that is the vibration I am getting from you?
- K: Yes, it's a liberal Finnish program, suited to the Finnish people of St. Louis County. Yes, and just let me show you how things have come down because of all the Finns. I sound like a Nationalistic but I'm not really. A month or two ago, I was talking with Hans Voline at his desk, and we were close by the back door of an office and a nice looking fellow comes in with hair up to here, nicely dressed, and he was carrying a bag. He stops to talk to us as he is making a survey for Harvard and he's only been in this area for two days and what he is trying to find out, he's making it from the schools. See we have those fair employment laws and practices that we have to follow--you can't ask for pictures, you can't ask nationality, you can't ask this and you can't ask that. One question he wanted to know, our application blanks, our school census, and scholastic records today do not show the nationality of the student. Moline looks at me and I said, "no, I guess not." I didn't really pay that much attention to it. So this man says, "How long have you had this practice?" I don't know, I've only been there thirteen years and it was years and years before that so I said I'm really not sure, but I can check back, go through the census cards if you

want to wait. So I got census cards from 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, all the way to today. Already in 1910 never had we asked a student's nationality. He asked why that was. So Hans Moline and I just looked at each other. We didn't have to, they were all Finns. It really was funny, but we didn't tell him that.

O: It was a foregone conclusion. You made the statement that the School System was liberal besides being Finn. What do you suppose they were after in the school system, what was their educational program. Was it to try to get the kids to go to college, type of thing or was it many things to all people type of thing?

K: I think the biggest aim of these Finns was that their kids would get a better education than they had had. Regardless that they should be able to read, able to write, we at home can teach them Finn but we can't teach them English because we don't know it ourselves. No matter how many older people you speak to--No han ajatelle etta hanen kittit pitaa olla parempi kun han on. You don't have to work that hard for a living, that you can do something that is a little easier. That was the idea of the schools. They left Finland where they didn't have a chance at education even if they had wanted to. So out here it was one of the things they wanted to get an education for the kids.

O: Are you saying that it was the Finns themselves pushed for developing an education program like this?

K: Yes, definitely.

O: In what way, in terms of agitation for better schools and the whole bit, get rid of rural schools every place back in the old days, that sort of thing?

K: Yes, because in the small area where they didn't have schools, they had them in their own homes. And any area those were the three things the Finns always had: schools, a church and a hall--and later on a Coop store. That was what they wanted.

O: The Finns were heavily involved in setting up their own school system. It wasn't that it was just handed to them, or anything like that.

K: Oh no

- O: Are you saying that they developed it through political agitation and this sort of thing?
- K: No, I don't think politics was involved in it at all.
- O: It was just a desire to get a school and they worked at it until they got one.
- K: As far as school was concerned, if you went to a church or if you never went anywhere, or if you went to the hall, they all worked together on this thing. This comes out in those little annual books I was telling you about. Even as late as 1937 and 1938, schools put out these mimeographed jobs, and one one page there is an article in English written by someone in the community. On this half it's the same article in Finnish. This is in 1938.
- O: Is that right? That's remarkable, I wouldn't have believed it.
- K: I'll get those books for you and you will learn more things from those books.
- O: How did the Finns control their schools? Did they elect their superintendent or where there school boards or what?
- K: There were school boards. Areas had three people and the County School Superintendent was under the jurisdiction of these. They called them school boards but they weren't really school boards. To have a school board, you have to have a certain number of people like a superintendent and a treasurer and a chairman and all that. It was more like an advisory committee.
- O: They had these advisory committees and these were the pipeline of the people.
- K: Yes, and here's where the Finns realized that they didn't have the education, to get funds to keep schools going. They didn't know about state legislature, they didn't know how to go about getting taxes or anything that was higher up in the county--courthouses, assessors and auditor's offices. Here's where--I really don't know how it happened--but through legislature and state laws _____ for county taxes for schools and of course the St. Louis County has always been the poorest district. In terms of state funds.

- O: Now, you have suggested in no uncertain terms that the local schools tended to be closely related to the people and folk culture. They promoted things Finnish even, which is very remarkable of course, in terms of the kinds of things I remember in my school in the Iron Range in Minnesota and in Northern Michigan there was a self-conscious attempt in public schools to Anglo Saxonize the kids and make them think that the Anglo Saxon values were the best values in the world. And I remember we used to get a lot of garbage about the mining company is always right and the Unions are always wrong. They say that Capitalism is the best thing in the world. Did you think the teachers in the schools there reflected liberal politics? We talked about liberalism in the school system, was it liberal politically, could they teach labor history or working class history or anything like that?
- K: I don't know. I'm not on the curriculum end. I'm only on the administrative.
- O: I do know that some of the teachers who came out of the St. Louis County school system were people who were right from the community and they came out of working class families. And it must have been certain that they reflected some of the working class values in the school rather than standard curriculum materials and this sort of thing.
- K: And the same with our curriculum supervisors today. Let me think now who they are. They all come from miner's families, ___ their fathers were farmers, all make fun of Nixon, all are strong DFL'ers. That's our supervisors, our curriculum supervisors.
- O: So there is a liberal tint to the school?
- K: Yes, very. And especially those coming from the Range. When a new one comes to work in the office, someone who introduces him says, "Mr. Niemi, he's a Ranger." Right away you get your cue. He comes from the Range, so he's a good man.
- O: There's something unique about people from the Iron Range, I guess. In fact the Iron Range is supposed to have a special culture all its own, which is a mixture of Slovenian and Finnish. Tell me something about the school system that you think is important and that you think ought to be said? You obviously admire the system.
- K: Oh yes, very much.

- O: Is there anything else you can think of that ought to be said about it?
- K: One thing that I think runs right through the whole thing, especially the older people, not so much the younger, the recent graduates. The younger are out only for a pay check. The older ones are the most dedicated people you have ever seen. If one kid has some problems in school, and if the principal can't handle it he will call the supervisors, call the nurses, and talk. Take time to talk about this youngster that what do you think is wrong with him, what shall we do with him, this is the kind of stuff. Each kid is paid a lot of attention to. Maybe that's because of smaller enrollment, rather than in Duluth schools or some bigger schools. They have more time to spend on them.
- O: You think they turn out a pretty good product in the final analysis?
- K: Yes, they do
- O: In terms of the number of kids going to colleges, and if that's one way to measure I suppose it is.
- K: And another thing _____ Washington Jr. Principal told me last winter. See they took over one of our schools, and the National Honor Society had thirteen students from the Duluth Schools and eight of them came from the Home Cross School. This principal called me for some of their grades in the sixth and seventh grade. And he told me it might interest you to know that out of thirteen, the County Schools got eight.
- O: That's very interesting. Let's move on then to things in terms of things you remember. After you came back to the Iron Range and moved to Virginia, what sorts of organizations did you belong to? For example, did the work people's movement, the Tyomies Society, did that remain important in your life? Did you leave all that like so many Finns did?
- K: All the time, that remained important. When I was in high school and I was connected with Baltimore and those Halls, I got the Women's Paper, and the Tyomies. When I came back to Virginia, you start getting a gang together. Those were the days when I belonged to the IWO, the International Worker's Order, Fraternal Organization that was abolished too during that McCarthy deal. They had the good insurance plans, this was the IWO days. The second trip I was in Virginia, it was the same old thing. You had programs, you had dinners, affairs,

and they made sweaters and socks for soldiers. The ladies would knit sweaters and socks and put their name in there. They would get a little pin which was a ball of yarn and knitting needles. That was during the Second World War period.

- O: So you stayed in the organization throughout your life. Again going back to those memories of those days when your parents had to move and were black listed, etc., there was an indelible impression left in your mind. It's pretty clear isn't it?
- K: Oh yes, there are certain things that you never forget. I told you once during the strike I remember a thug looking in through the window. They were some kind of Vigilantes. We had a two-room house and we had oil lamps. We had our neighbors over and they were playing cards. A boy and I were playing on the floor and all of a sudden we looked up and there was a guy looking in. Of course you screamed when it was dark. The other thing I remember about that strike, I used to get up in the mornings and my mother wasn't at home. I used to wonder where she was and my father said she was on the picket line. The strikers stayed at home and their wives went then, because they didn't bash their heads quite as readily as they did the strikers. I remember a funeral procession. And we still have a red ribbon and on it is a white paper and on it reads, "We Never Forget." That was a striker that the Vigilante's killed in Virginia, an Italian man. The only name I remember is Allerick, I don't know if it was a first name or a last name. And of course when you paraded you walked. I remember great big bands, music and I was a kid then, six or seven years old. I was shunted from lap to lap. They carried me and then somebody else would carry me. There were no baby sitters in those days, the kids were right with you. Those are the only two things I remember about that strike.
- O: Having been involved in the Tyomies movement for all these years, and of course presently you are the secretary of the Tyomies Society, were you subjected to ridicule, persecution, and that sort of thing?
- K: No
- O: You stood up for what you believed in and people respected you for it. Was your family ever, besides the thugs and the whole bit, after that, did you get any harassment of any sort? How did you live through the McCarthy era, was that kind of touch and go?

K: As far as I personally was concerned, the only thing was the worry about my mother.

O: Your mother was not in the good graces, I take it, of the McCarthy committee?

K: No, but people at the courthouse used to come and tell me that I hope your mother will come out on top on this.

O: The courthouse--what was the occasion? You mean your mother was being investigated?

K: Yes, and this was in all the papers you know. And Walter Elgoth (?), he was a correspondent, he came to me at the courthouse and asked me if he could write it up in the Duluth Tribune--in the magazine section. But I said no.

O: Your mother was how old when the McCarthy people were after her?

K: In 1952, that's 21 years ago. She was 67 years old.

O: She was a widow?

K: No, she was married a second time.