**Kate:** Good evening, this is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 25th of January, 1994 and I'm in San Diego California at the home of Hilda Kero Alatalo who came from Finland in 1921 when she was 24 years old.

Why don't you begin by giving me your full name and date of birth please? What is your full name?

**Hilda:** Hilda Johanna Kero.

**Kate:** Kero?

**Hilda:** Yeah, K-E-R-O.

**Kate:** K- E-R- O alright, Alatalo.

**Hilda:** Alatalo [unclear 00:00:46] 1929.

**Kate:** I see, so when you came here your name was Hilda Johanna Kero, K-E-R-O

**Hilda:** Yeah.

**Kate:** And where were you born?

**Hilda:** Lohtaja.

**Kate:** In what month and year?

**Hilda:** I'm born 1897, April, 18th.

**Kate:** April 18th, 1897.

**Hilda:** Okay.

**Kate:** You said you were born where? Where were you born in Finland?

**Hilda:** Lohtaja.

**Kate:** L-O-H-T-A-J-A, right. And what size town was that, Lohtaja? How big was that town?

**Hilda:** I don't know [laughter].

**Kate:** Okay, and what did the town look like? What kind of town was Lohtaja?

**Hilda:** Okay, it looks good [laughter].

**Kate:** And what did people do for a living in Lohtaja?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:02:09].

**Kate:** So they were workers and farmers.

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:02:17].

**Kate:** There wasn't much industry then. And what was your father's name?

**Hilda:** Jako.

**Kate:** Jako, and what was his occupation.

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:02:41].

**Kate:** He was Finish and what he did he do for work?

**Hilda:** He was a farmer too.

**Kate:** He was a farmer and tell us what your father looked like. What did he look like your father?

**Hilda:** [laughter] [unclear 00:03:00].

**Kate:** You don't remember much.

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** Was he a big man or?

**Hilda:** Yeah, he was kind of big man.

**Kate:** And what color of hair did he have?

**Hilda:** Black.

**Kate:** Black hair and what color of eyes.

**Hilda:** Blue.

**Kate:** Blue eyes and what about his personality?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:03:28].

**Kate:** Finnish?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** Typical Finnish man.

**Hilda:** Yeah, he was a Finnish man.

**Kate:** And what does that mean really? What do you mean? How so? How was he typically?

**Hilda:** He was alright, he's working hard.

**Kate:** Yeah, he worked hard.

**Hilda:** We have 7 children.

**Kate:** 7 children [chuckle].

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:03:54] this one.

**Kate:** Ooh, you're the oldest.

**Hilda:** I still have 3 sisters living in [unclear 00:03:59].

**Kate:** Do you have a story about your father? Anything your father did when you were a child. Do you remember anything special about your father?

**Hilda:** No, not much [laughter].

**Kate:** Okay, and what was your mother's name?

**Hilda:** Eva Maya.

**Kate:** Eva Maya and what was her maiden name?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:04:23].

**Kate:** And then what did she do for work?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:04:31].

**Kate:** She worked as---

**Hilda:** Yeah, house wife.

**Kate:** Oh, she was a house wife. What did she look like?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:04:40] [laughter].

**Kate:** You have a picture of her but if you were going to tell us, was she--

**Hilda:** Light not so big [laughter], it’s a small [unclear 00:04:53].

**Kate:** She was a small woman and what color of hair?

**Hilda:** Brown.

**Kate:** Brown hair and what color of eyes?

**Hilda:** Blue.

**Kate:** Blue eyes and what about her personality, what was your mother like as a person?

**Hilda:** Finnish.

**Kate:** A typical Finnish woman [laughter]. Wait a minute, not everybody knows what that means so how was she typically Finnish? How?

**Hilda:** I don't know.

**Kate:** I don't want to give you the words but give me one word that says something about your mother besides Finnish. What type of mother? Was she a good mother?

**Hilda:** I don't know.

**Kate:** Okay, that’s alright. Alright, do you have a story about your mother at all? Any stories?

**Hilda:** Well, she was kind of always happy and could take good care of [unclear 00:05:51].

**Kate:** That tells us about her personality then. Could you name your brothers and sisters? You are the oldest.

**Hilda:** I'm the oldest.

**Kate:** And who's next?

**Hilda:** Hilia.

**Kate:** Hilia, your sister.

**Hilda:** Marti

**Kate:** Marti, then that’s you, Hilia, Marti.

**Hilda:** Johannes.

**Kate:** Johannes.

**Hilda:** Hilma, Helmi, Heli.

**Kate:** Hilmar, Helmi, Heli. Okay, I guess that covers it and what was your age difference? How much older were you?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:06:33] one of my sisters is going to be 90 and others are already 80 years now and brothers both die.

**Kate:** Your brothers both died.

**Hilda:** Yeah, and one sister.

**Kate:** And one sister too.

**Hilda:** Died, yeah she was 2 years later me.

**Kate:** Yeah, she was born 2 years later than you were. What about your house back in Finland, your farm house? Do you remember it?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:07:06].

**Kate:** Tell us about the house, what did the house look like in Finland?

**Hilda:** Ooh, a small house you know and small windows and that’s [unclear 00:07:16] [laughter].

**Kate:** And what color was it?

**Hilda:** Red.

**Kate:** It was a red house, small house. How many rooms in the house?

**Hilda:** 4.

**Kate:** 4 rooms and was it a wooden house? Made of wood.

**Hilda:**  Yes, I think so.

**Kate:** And how was it heated inside?

**Hilda:** Wood.

**Kate:** It was heated with wood and did you have a garden? [Foreign 00:07:44].

**Hilda:** Yes, we have a lot of [unclear 00:07:51].

**Kate:** That’s good and did you grow anything?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** What kind of things did you grow in your garden?

**Hilda:** Well--

**Kate:** Potatoes?

**Hilda:** Yes, potatoes and vegetables.

**Kate:** Vegetables, okay and inside your house. What was the furniture like?

**Hilda:** [laughter] [unclear 00:08:23] everything, nothing very good.

**Kate:** Nothing very good, so it was mostly plain furniture.

**Hilda:** Yeah, I think so.

**Kate:** And how far from the town was your house?

**Hilda:** 7 miles.

**Kate:** 7 miles from town.

**Hilda:** And it wasn't even [unclear 00:08:43] [laughter].

**Kate:** Did you keep animals? Did you have animals?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** What type? What kinds of animals?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:08:56] [laughter].

**Kate:** Did you have pigs?

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** No, who lived in your house then? The children, your mother, your father, anyone else?

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** Where did your grandparents live?

**Hilda:** They died before almost I was born. I'm just the one [unclear 00:09:22].

**Kate:** Oh, I see. So you didn't know your grandparents.

**Hilda:** No, I don't.

**Kate:** Both your mother's parents and your father's parents died?

**Hilda:** My mother's one had different [unclear 00:09:35].

**Kate:** Okay, so you didn’t see them then the others. Whom were you closest to you? Who did you like the best in the family?

**Hilda:** Oh, I don't know. I like them all [laughter].

**Kate:** Any brother or sister that you were very close to?

**Hilda:** No, I can't name it. I like them everyone.

**Kate:** What about church? What religious life?

**Hilda:** Evangelist Lutheran.

**Kate:** Evangelical Lutheran and did you go to church very often?

**Hilda:** Yes, I used to go.

**Kate:** How often? Once a week.

**Hilda:** Almost once a month and 2 times a month maybe.

**Kate:** One or two times a month you went. And was the church very close to your house.

**Hilda:** 7 miles.

**Kate:** 7 miles. Did you say prayers at home, any prayers at night- the children?

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** Before meals did you say prayers at all?

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** What was your favorite holiday in Finland as a child?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:10:53].

**Kate:** Christmas [chuckle].

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:10:57].

**Kate:** And Mid-summer right and what did you do at Christmas? What was special about Christmas?

**Hilda:** Well, we have waiting for [unclear 00:11:09] [laughter].

**Kate:** And so you liked the sound and Santa Claus. How about food?

**Hilda:** Rice putting on potato salad. Finnish potato.

**Kate:** Okay, what did you like about mid- summer? What was special about mid-summer?

**Hilda:** It was nice, I liked.

**Kate:** Why did you like it?

**Hilda:** They have a lot of lakes around here and we used to go [unclear 00:11:43] mid- summer night.

**Kate:** And what did you do at Mid-summer night to celebrate?

**Hilda:** Picnics [laughter].

**Kate:** Picnics, did you dance?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** What dances did you dance [laughter]? Do you remember?

**Hilda:** It’s a lot of young people you know [unclear 00:12:06].

**Kate:** Oh, sorry, the microphone is on. Okay.

**Female:** Just small, we're going to re-put this on here.

**Kate:** What about school did you go to school? You went to school in Finland.

**Hilda:**  Sorry to say I haven't been in much school.

**Kate:** How much school did you go to then?

**Hilda:** [chuckle], they have a [unclear 00:12:33] near. We couldn't be able to go. [Unclear 00:12:37] was couple of weeks so we went there. Then when I come in America even night school.

**Kate:** Okay so where was that school that you said wasn't very close? How far away was your school?

**Hilda:** It was around 7 miles [unclear 00:12:58] and when I was old there was one [unclear 00:13:02] and I didn't happen to go to school. That’s part. Someone may feel [unclear 00:13:11].

**Kate:** I see so you learned to write?

**Hilda:** Yes, write and read [unclear 00:13:20].

**Kate:** So you took care of the children in your family? You helped with the children at home?

**Hilda:** Yeah, mother had to work you know then I have to take care of the children.

**Kate:** Alright, so your mother worked on the farm?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** And anywhere else?

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** On the farm mainly?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** Who did the cooking in your house?

**Hilda:** My mother.

**Kate:** Your mum did and what was your favorite food?

**Hilda:** Oh I don't know [laughter]. I could eat everything [laughter].

**Kate:** How did you come to the United States? Who decided?

**Hilda:** Well, I came [unclear 00:14:06] to come to [unclear 00:14:19].

**Kate:** Alright before that though. Who's idea to come here?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:14:27]. Oh my [unclear 00:14:31] they used to live 9 of them that I came then took.

**Kate:** Where did they live?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:14:41].

**Kate:** Duluth Minnesota?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** So you knew people in Duluth Minnesota.

**Hilda:** That’s what place I came, Duluth Minnesota.

**Kate:** Okay, was it your own idea that you wanted to come here?

**Hilda:** Yes, I came here about 1964.

**Kate:** Oh, to here- to California.

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** When you came to the United States, what did you pack in your suitcases?

**Hilda:** I got some kind of suitcase, my sister’s husband make [laughter].

**Kate:** Made the suitcase?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** And what did you put inside? What inside?

**Hilda:** Well, some clothes and some people give us some lunch you know then [unclear 00:15:31] [laughter] and I throw them out [unclear 00:15:40].

**Kate:** So you brought food, you brought food with you too.

**Hilda:** Bread and butter and [unclear 00:15:48].

**Kate:** Okay, how’s that? So you brought bread and butter and anything special from home?

**Hilda:** Cheese.

**Kate:** Cheese too [laughter]. And anything from your house? Do you have anything now from your old farm house?

**Hilda:** Not much, they told me not to bring anything, clothes or anything like that that they're going to buy here.

**Kate:** I see and how did your family in Finland think? What did they think about you coming all this way to the United States?

**Hilda:** They didn't want me to go because my mother so crying so much.

**Kate:** So your mother was upset and cried.

**Hilda:** Yes, she was upset.

**Kate:** And so they didn't want you to come here.

**Hilda:** Yes, they didn't want.

**Kate:** Why did you want to?

**Hilda:** Well, they had sent me a ticket and they know me you know me then that’s why I come here.

**Kate:** So the family sent you a ticket.

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** Did you they give a party? Goodbye when you went.

**Hilda:** I don't know.

**Kate:** Did your family--

**Hilda:** That’s enough today [laughter].

**Kate:** Where did you leave from? What port? Where did the boat leave from?

**Hilda:** Boat [00:17:17].

**Kate:** No, when the boat left Finland [unclear 00:17:20].

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:17:23].

**Kate:** Yeah and [unclear 00:17:27] where did it go?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:17:28].

**Kate:** From Hanko, went from Hanko to where?

**Hilda:** Yeah Hanko then on that was a poor boat [laughter].

**Kate:** That was a poor boat.

**Hilda:** Yes, shaking too much.

**Kate:**  It was shaking the whole time? Were you sick?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:17:48].

**Kate:** Yeah, that was from Hanko, where did it go from Hanko?

**Hilda:** England.

**Kate:** To England and it was a very rough voyage, was it?

**Hilda:** England.

**Kate:** It’s okay. So when you got to England, what happened then?

**Hilda:** We stay here in [unclear 00:18:17] and you know we had [unclear 00:18:17] from winter time and you know [unclear 00:18:20].

**Kate:** So you were 2 weeks in England before the boat left.

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** And.....

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:18:33].

**Kate:** And it was very cold there.

**Hilda:** Very cold. [Unclear 00:18:41].

**Kate:** [chuckle] alright and when you got to the boat, where was it in the boat? What class did you go?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:19:03].

**Kate:** [unclear 00:19:04].

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:19:09] nobody knows.

**Kate:** But when you were in the boat [unclear 00:19:16].

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:19:25].

**Kate:** Were you below 3rd class or 2nd class or 1st class?

**Hilda:** 2nd class.

**Kate:** 2nd not the 3rd?

**Hilda:** They don't have any classes for that, I don't think so that time [chuckle].

**Kate:** And what was it like? Where did you sleep?

**Hilda:** Oh, poor bed [laughter].

**Kate:** It was the poor bed, was it your own room? Were you in your own room?

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** It was a big room?

**Hilda:** No, they have many many people the same place.

**Kate:** Many people in the same room.

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** You had your own bed.

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:20:04].

**Kate:** Okay so you said how long was that? From England to--

**Hilda:**  [unclear 00:20:13].

**Kate:** A week?

**Hilda:** Poor food [laughter].

**Kate:** Poor food you had?

**Hilda:** Yeah.

**Kate:** The food was no good.

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:20:22].

**Kate:** Why not?

**Hilda:** I don't know [unclear 00:20:27].

**Kate:** And were there other Finnish people.

**Hilda:** No [unclear 00:20:39].

**Kate:** And was it fun being in the boat from England to--

**Hilda:** No, not too funny because they have rough water.

**Kate:** It was rough, were you sick?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** Sea sick.

**Hilda:** Yeah, [unclear 00:21:00].

**Kate:** Yeah, other people were sick too.

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:21:03] most of us, that’s enough [laughter].

**Kate:** No wait, not yet [laughter]. Not yet, no wait. When you got to New York, did you remember seeing land? When you went to New York from the boat.

**Hilda:** Yeah, I came to New York in a boat.

**Kate:** Do you remember the statue of liberty? Do you remember the statue of liberty?

**Hilda:** Yes, [unclear 00:21:42].

**Kate:** But Ellis Island, do you remember Ellis Island?

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** What was it like?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:21:53].

**Kate:** So many people and you had to stand in line.

**Hilda:** Yes [unclear 00:21:59].

**Kate:** How about your eyes? You had a medical examination, yes.

**Hilda:** [foreign 00:22:12].

**Kate:** Many were sent back and did you see them rejected people. You saw people sent back?

**Hilda:** Yeah [unclear 00:22:24] they had so many [unclear 00:22:27].

**Kate:** How long did you stay at Ellis Island?

**Hilda:** More than week.

**Kate:** More than a week.

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** And was it clean?

**Hilda:** Well, not too.

**Kate:** Not too clean and where did you sleep?

**Hilda:** We'll we had some kind of [unclear 00:22:46].

**Kate:** And why did you stay so long? Why?

**Hilda:** Because I don't know why, there several things.

**Kate:** Were you frightened?

**Hilda:** Yeah, we had to stay so long over there.

**Kate:** [foreign 00:23:00].

**Hilda:** Yeah [laughter].

**Kate:** So you were frightened, yeah.

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:23:05].

**Kate:** Did you know English before you came here?

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** No, and so the Finnish boy translated [foreign 00:23:22].

**Hilda:** That’s right.

**Kate:** I see okay. So what happened then? They finally let you go, one week in Ellis Island.

**Hilda:** Yeah.

**Kate:** And then what?

**Hilda:** [unclear 00:23:40].

**Kate:** And then you went to Duluth.

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** Where? Do you remember the address in Duluth?

**Hilda:** No, I don't know but show me [unclear 00:23:59].

**Kate:** What did you do in Duluth? What was your job?

**Hilda:** Well, I visit in first you know my relatives and then I for the work you know housework.

**Kate:** House work and what did the people do you worked for? What was their job? The family that you worked for, what did the man and the woman do for work? What did they do [foreign 00:24:27]?

**Hilda:** [foreign 00:24:39].

**Kate:** And the father what did he do?

**Hilda:** My father?

**Kate:** No, in Duluth.

**Hilda:** He was a businessman in [unclear 00:24:48].

**Kate:** And the mother, what did she do?

**Hilda:** She was a housewife.

**Kate:** I see and you helped.

**Hilda:** Yes.

**Kate:** How did you learn English?

**Hilda:** I went a few nights in [unclear 00:25:03].

**Kate:** In the evening school you went through that and was it difficult?

**Hilda:** Duluth had school.

**Kate:** They were Finnish family.

**Hilda:** They were Finnish family first when I went.

**Kate:** And so you spoke Finnish to them.

**Hilda:** He was a [unclear 00:25:27] and his wife but they've been born in here and they speak Finnish.

**Kate:** So you could Finnish at first.

**Hilda:** Yeah, then I stay about 3 years with that family and then I went to [unclear 00:25:46] English people.

**Kate:** After it was English people then you had to speak English. Did anybody make fun of you for being a Finn? Did anybody call you any names or tease you?

**Hilda:** No.

**Kate:** No, okay. Were you religious? Did you go to church here in the USA?

**Hilda:** Yes, Duluth Evangelist Lutheran church.

**Kate:** And so you continued to go to church here.

**Hilda:** Yes, they still have that.

**Kate:** Did you ever want to go back to Finland?

**Hilda:** First when I came I thought soon I get enough money I go back.

**Kate:** Oh so you wanted to make a lot of money.

**Hilda:** I was so sad you know all my sisters [unclear 00:26:35].

**Kate:** So you wanted to go home.

**Hilda:** Yeah.

**Kate:** And then what changed your mind? Why didn't you go?

**Hilda:** No [unclear 00:26:49] friends.

**Kate:** So then it was easier then.

**Hilda:** Yeah.

**Kate:** Tell me what happened in your life then, tell me about what happened then. Did you get married or?

**Hilda:** Yeah, my life [unclear 00:27:10] many many years then I get married.

**Kate:** To Finnish man?

**Hilda:** Yes, well he was born in Sweden but then went back to Finnish.

**Kate:** Oh so he spoke Finnish.

**Hilda:** And [laughter].

**Kate:** English and how did you meet him?

**Hilda:** Living at [unclear 00:27:35].

**Kate:** A Finnish meeting.

**Hilda:** Yeah Finnish [unclear 00:27:44].

**Kate:** How old were you when you're married? How old?

**Hilda:** I don't remember that either [chuckle].

**Kate:** And you had children?

**Hilda:** One, I had only girl.

**Kate:** A girl.

**Hilda:** Yeah.

**Kate:** And what was her name?

**Hilda:** Airlie.

**Kate:** When you look back on your life now.

**Hilda:** Well it’s alright [laughter].

**Kate:** How do you feel about coming to the United States? Was it a good decision?

**Hilda:** Yes, [unclear 00:28:18]. I have alright here.

**Kate:** And do you ever miss Finland still?

**Hilda:** I like to obviously go and visit land [unclear 00:28:30] right now I can't go anymore.

**Kate:** But do you attend Finnish activities here. Are you still involved in the Finnish community now here?

**Hilda:** Yes, a few.

**Kate:** A few. I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Ellis Island oral history project and for helping us.

**Hilda:** Yes, that’s right.

**Kate:** Alright, and this is Kate Moore in January 25th, 1994 signing off from San Diego California.