**Janet:** Today is July 21st 1995. I’m here in Worcester, Massachusetts, the Lutheran Home with Elsie Marie Pouttu who came from Finland when she was… we think she was 10 about to turn 11, in 1916 in the summertime.

Mrs. Pouttu came on the Frederick VIII, on that ship, and today Mrs. Pouttu is about to turn 90. She looks wonderful and is very delightful and very alert and I’m looking forward to anything you can remember. Let’s start at the beginning Mrs Pouttu, would you tell me your birth date?

**Elsie:** August 7th 1905.

**Janet:** Where in Finland were you born?

**Elsie:** I don’t know, I guess I was born at my grandmother’s home. I’d have to look on my passport.

**Janet:** Do you remember where you lived up until you were in fourth grade when you left Finland?

**Elsie:** When I left Finland I went to Elmont Street School. My teacher was Ms. Powers. They had an ungraded school there that all the foreigners who couldn’t speak English language went to that school first to learn the language and then they were put into grade equal to their education.

**Janet:** I see but before we talk about what happened in this country I’d like to spend a little time talking about Finland and what you remember. Do you have any idea of where in Finland you grew up until you left?

**Elsie:** My mother and father were in this country. My father was here and he became ill and he was taken to a Boston hospital. Then they let my mother know that my father was ill. He had been in this country for a long time because many of the men came here and worked in the quarries in Lanesville at Gloucester, that’s where they were.

**Janet:** Did you remember your father when you first came to this country?

**Elsie:** I’d remember him from Finland but I knew he was my father. We were always afraid of him because we had been fathered by everybody. Everybody was good to us in Finland just because we were going to America from that town. I guess my two brothers and I were the only people that they knew that went to America. They kept us like little heroes because we were going to go to America.

**Janet:** What was your father’s name?

**Elsie:** Otto, O-T-T-O.

**Janet:** And your mother’s name?

**Elsie:** Hilda.

**Janet:** Her maiden name?

**Elsie:** Her maiden name was Oittinen, O-I-T-T-I-N-E-N.

**Janet:** There were three children? There was you?

**Elsie:** And my two brothers.

**Janet:** Who was the oldest?

**Elsie:** The older one is in California. He married the daughter of the Governor of California.

**Janet:** What’s his name?

**Elsie:** Emil, E-M-I-L.

**Janet:** How about your other brother, what was his name?

**Elsie:** Otto. The brother over here he lives right here at Holden but I wonder if he died now or not, I don’t know. We lost track of him.

**Janet:** When you were growing up did you have grandparents? You were born at your grandparents’ house you say?

**Elsie:** Yes. My grandparents were very kind, lovely people. They were well [unclear 00:04:35]. He was a half minister and he used preach at the churches when the minister wasn’t there. He said, “I’ll take them any time at all” and so he took my brothers and me to live with them on his big farm.

**Janet:** What kind of a farm was it?

**Elsie:** They had cows and chicken, pigs and sheep. I guess they had everything that a farmer had. He had heads of chickens.

**Janet:** Do you remember any experiences with your grandfather? Any things that you remember him doing or ways he was with you?

**Elsie:** My grandmother and grandfather were very devoted to us children because my uncle was a bachelor, my aunt was a bachelor. My mother was the only one married in her family so we are the only children they had.

Every time that my folks went somewhere, like my father would come from America to visit and they’d go without us children because we would do much to make him enjoy their vacation because we were so small. My grandfather said, “You can always leave them here.” So my aunt came with us as a caretaker so that my grandparents didn’t have to take care of us.

**Janet:** How were you spoilt? How did your grandparents spoil you and your brothers?

**Elsie:** I can’t remember what it is when we lived at their place but my aunt was a maid. In the old country you wanted a job unless you were college-educated or high up in the world. She worked as a maid on a job and they hired them by the year.

My aunt used to be in charge of the dairy. They had about 30 or 40 cows and my aunt had charge of all the processing of the milk, putting it through separators and all kinds of machinery that milk has to go through, had supervisor [unclear 00:07:24]. He had to take care of the cows because it was the uncle’s farm so he gave you the best job that there was on the farm. He would still be taking care of us children so we were there, we were like special creatures.

**Janet:** We’re resuming now and Mrs. Pouttu’s daughter, May Peterson, has joined us and Mrs. Pouttu is delighted to have her daughter with us. Let’s continue now with what you were talking about.

You were talking about your grandfather’s farm and the fact that you were spoilt, you and your brothers. I was asking you about any experiences you remembered with your grandfather or with your aunt who used to take care of you when your parents went away. What was your grandmother like? Do you remember that?

**Elsie:** They wanted to keep us over there but my father was waiting in America while my aunt was with us still. My aunt was going to go back to Finland after she deposited us with our parents.

**Janet:** Your father went first?

**Elsie:** Yes.

**Janet:** And then your mother followed your father?

**Elsie:** Yes, and the reason they did that was because people from Finland were coming over here and because they could speak the language they went to work in the quarries in Lanesville, part of Gloucester and they all worked in the quarries.

**Janet:** Your father did too?

**Elsie:** My father did too. He used to send so much money to my mother in Finland to pay for our support even though it was there uncle and he wants payment. My aunt said my father sending money from America to pay for us so we were just taken.

**Janet:** You mentioned before we put the tape on the fact that you and your brothers were going to go to America made you very special in your town.

**Elsie:** Yes.

**Janet:** Can you recall the name of the town?

**Elsie:** We were living in Vesanto, W-E-S-A-N-T-O.

**Janet:** What did you do for fun? Do you remember what you played as a child?

**Elsie:** There were some Finnish girls they were living in the same… we lived in a long building with several apartments. These girls knew that we were coming from America, and everybody wanted us for friends because I don’t know whether they thought we were different kind of monsters.

Everybody wanted to be our friend and of course you couldn’t keep them all for friends but we lived there anyway; we were swimming with them, and whatever they did we did. We couldn’t speak the language but the girls would interpret the Finnish language to us, what they were trying to tell us.

**Janet:** You didn’t speak the Finnish language?

**Elsie:** I spoke the Finnish language. I didn’t speak English at all.

**Janet:** What you’re talking about was in this country?

**Elsie:** Yes.

**Janet:** But back in Finland before you came, do you remember the house you lived in there?

**Elsie:** Yes I remember we had a house of our own but my father came to Finland and bought us a house right near a store so we could do all our shopping there. We lived there but then we moved to Vesanto to live with my mother’s uncle. He said we could live there as long as we wanted to. They had about 20 servants. They had servants of all kinds and those servants and people thought that we were very special because we were going to America. None of them had ever been there.

I never thought what being a celebrity among the people meant, because I was just me and I don’t know what they thought of me. I didn’t ask them. Anyway we got good care because he was a working dad. He had about 10, 20 cows, racing horses and he lived a life of a celebrity. He had servants; we had a servant for every occasion. We even had a servant to take care of us while we were in the house. My aunt said that my father paid her to stay with us and be our caretaker so that he and my mother could live in America until they scraped up enough money to get all the three of us children over here.

**Janet:** How old were you when your mother came to America?

**Elsie:** I wasn’t even in school. You had to go to school when you were six or eight years old. I don’t really remember but over there you had to know how to read and write before you go to school. Your parents have to teach you how to do those.

**Janet:** Who taught you?

**Elsie:** My mother or my aunt or whoever was taking care of us. In Finland they have a school, they call it some kind of a primary school and they teach you how to read and write before you go to school. It’s like kindergarten but it’s held at different people’s home and because my mother’s uncle was wealthy and he had maids and servants and all kinds of help, we had the school right at his house where we were living.

**Janet:** How many children would be coming to his house to go to school?

**Elsie:** It depends on how many people were living there. There were probably about 10 or 15. Some of them came from different parts of Europe and I remember living in Russia for a while learning how to eat their dark, Jewish bread. Those who were little ate the Jewish bread.

**Janet:** Do you remember other foods that you ate in Finland?

**Elsie:** Finnish people… it’s a cold country and they eat very heavy food, substantial food. Sweets-like, you had sugar it was a luxury.

**Janet:** What kinds of heavy foods do you recall from Finland?

**Elsie:** Salted fish, they’d put away meat of all kinds; salt pork, from which they made gravies to go with our potatoes. That’s our heavy food.

**Janet:** How about religion? Were you exposed to a particular religion when you were in Finland?

**Elsie:** We were born Lutherans and we were Lutherans and everything that went on was Lutheran.

**Janet:** Was it a big part of your life? In other words was your uncle or your aunt or your grandparents were they big church-goers?

**Elsie:** Yes. Every Sunday in the winter time we’d go to church; they didn’t want to take us children because they wanted the servants to go to church too and of course when we piled the pool of children there’s no room for the servants. Mother’s uncle, we call him Job, and he piled sleighs outside around winter because I could lay my fingers on them. He piled sleighs full of people and made sure that all the servants they have a chance to go to church.

We all went to the service and they would have dinner in the town where church was. That was a big deal because they’d never take children to dinners. But because my aunt had been to America, we went to dinner. We were so special because we got all the special things that everybody over there wanted to take part in but they never took them.

**Janet:** When you went to dinner did you go to someone’s home?

**Elsie:** No, it was a place in town where the church was. They always had dinner over there so you could go and take your whole family there. I don’t know whether you had to make a reservation in advance but that was a high life because for us [unclear 00:17:30] to be taken off to dinner, that was something. My mother’s uncle said, “The children will have to do that in America so they’ll have to learn to go out to eat here”.

We got a lot of luxuries extended to us because our folks were over here. My folks didn’t know what we were doing and they do… we used to call the aunt that was taking care of us the crappy aunt because she was so strict with us. She was so afraid something would happen to us, anything, even a little scratch on the arm, or leg, or feet, my folks would worry in America. What happened to the children? Then they began to get us over here but during the war time you couldn’t come here.

There were restrictions so we had to wait till over there where the workers are red-taped to get us over here and everybody helped us. They thought we must have been very special because they didn’t know anybody who had ever gone to America.

**Janet:** Can you describe yourself when you were a little girl? When you were 10 or so and you were about to come to this country? What kind of a little girl were you? Were you shy? Were you aggressive or assertive?

**Elsie:** We were very excited about it because in the whole town there was nobody that had gone to America that we knew. There was a family that came to live in there, they had been in Pennsylvania and they came to live in the same town where we were. We met them in church. They came to visit us because they knew that we were going to come to America. So when we come to America they wanted us to go visit them and get acquainted.

**Janet:** Do you remember what they told you? What you expected about America?

**Elsie:** No, because they knew that my aunt was a supervisor and she was going to take care of us so and so it just [unclear 00:19:54] was ‘come to visit us’ so we went to Pennsylvania to visit them. Everything was so different, the sleighs that we rode, we went to church.

There’s a lot of snow over there and it stays a long time so they always packed us into sleigh and the sleighs were for [unclear 00:20:21] kids and we snuggled with [unclear 00:20:24] kids and we thought that was well because we had never done anything like that before. The boys would come back home and tell the other boys what we did, that we rode the sleigh and we went to church in a sleigh. There were some animal skins in the sleigh and we all snuggled in between to make sure we were warm enough. We were hoping always that the minister would talk such a long time that we will have a chance to ride in the sleigh a little bit. Kids are kids no matter where they are.

**Janet:** Are there any other fond memories you have of Finland from when you were a little girl?

**Elsie:** We didn’t have the kind of cookouts they have [inaudible 00:21:24] used to grow turnips in the field. Everybody had a little gourd do you know your roll stones and would open fire like holes. They’re the most delicious stuff to eat. We used to look forward to that.

My aunt would let us go and pick the turnips out there. We would pick the very big but just enough for one person to eat, about this big and everybody wants to pick their own because you felt that you were part of that big doings.

So many exciting things because we had lived very restricted life because my aunt was told not to let us play around; that they wanted to bring us to America and they didn’t want us to run around the neighborhood and getting wild over here. Father and mother had been in America for years and there we were we had a bunch of wild cats come down there to disturb their life, to bring us up way a little.

**Janet:** How about singing and dancing? Do you remember any instances of that in Finland?

**Elsie:** No. I always wished I knew how to dance but I never did find out how. I’m still a stupid dancer.

**Janet:** How about other people singing and dancing? Do you remember seeing them?

**Elsie:** It depends on… you know there were Socialists and Communists and Congregationalists and Lutherans. You had so many factions that depends on which one you belonged to.

**Janet:** How about in your uncle’s home when the servants would have a party, do you remember seeing that?

**Elsie:** Yes, if nothing else we would hide… in the place where we lived they had a big room over there where all the servants slept. Everybody had their own bed and they slept in there. So when they were having a party, we children would sneak under the beds. We’d lie down on the floor under the bed and we’d see what they’d do. They’d play kissing games and they danced and they had lights in the ceiling and my older brother was given the chore after the party was over.

He would take a big coat and he’d flush it like a… rub it on every lamps were rubbed by oil and so he’d stand down under the lamp on the ground. We had to go to bed but he could stay up because he had to put the lights out so they gave him a coat to wave like that to put the lights out. After that he’d come to bed too. Our beds were outside the hall; they weren’t in that room. That was just an activity room.

**Janet:** Do you remember getting ready to leave to come to America?

**Elsie:** Yes.

**Janet:** What did you take with you?

**Elsie:** We took all our clothes; whatever we had. We didn’t have any clothes that were different. My aunt used to make them and they used to have a tailor come to the… they had a big activity room, probably like this whole building on one floor and that’s where everything was held. We’d always be around there, make an excuse to go right through there. They wanted us children to be in bed and we didn’t want to be in bed, we wanted to see what they do in the activity room. We’d always get chance to get through there and we’d make some excuse and after a little while we were escorted by my aunt out of that room. She said, “You had no reasons over here.” They used to play kissing games, and dance, and do all kinds of things.

My father and mother would write from America and tell them not to let the children run loose that they become wild that you can’t take care of them. My father had not a care in the world. He was in America and my mother was taking all the cares.

**Janet:** Did you have special clothing made by the tailor before you came to this country?

**Elsie:** No, we had the same kind of clothes. I think we had better clothes because we had a tailor that came to town and they used to go town and buy the material and tell the good tailor to make a dress for this little girl, or make a blouse for this little boy and the tailor would make them. So we had special clothes but we didn’t know they were special. I thought everybody had their clothes made but they didn’t. I found out now when I lived over here that we were being handled in a special way because my aunt was in charge of the dairy there; the cows and the milk and putting the milk through the separators. We had to stay out of the bond. They wouldn’t let us go in there because we’d just be in the way.

**Janet:** Do you remember saying goodbye to your uncle and your grandparents?

**Elsie:** Yes. It was a very sad occasion. We had my mother’s brother over there and then we had my mother’s uncle and all his sons and their children. There was a whole mix of us children over there.

**Janet:** They all got together before you left?

**Elsie:** Yes. They had a party for us. They’re all great for parties. Every Saturday night they’d have a dance. They had to give the servants something because they didn’t have normal bills and they would have some fun. They’d have a dance and they’d have one band by an old relative that would play accordion for them and they would dance to that. We children we’d hide behind chairs and we do all kinds of things so that we could see but they discovered us. We’d get a real escort out of there to our beds.

**Janet:** When you left the town where you were to get to the port where the ship left from, do you remember that trip? Leaving town and getting to the port?

**Elsie:** Yes.

**Janet:** Was there anything that happened along the way that you remember?

**Elsie:** No, except that everybody was crying; even the servants were crying because they thought they’d never see us again. Something so special about it except that my aunt had to get clothes for us, had a tailor come to town to make special clothes for us so that we looked nice when we were presented to my parents.

**Janet:** Who travelled with you? Who did you travel to this country with?

**Elsie:** With my aunt.

**Janet:** And your two brothers?

**Elsie:** My two brothers and me.

**Janet:** What port did you leave from?

**Elsie:** We had to go into Norway because we couldn’t go to the English Channel. The Russians would bomb all the ships so that we got to go through Norway. First go into Sweden, and then go for Bosnia, way down to [unclear 00:30:10] in Norway and there we board the ship; Frederick VIII. He was a Norwegian ship because the Russians had everything [unclear 00:30:24] so that they had to have to figure it up. My father went to hurry up and get us out of here before the Russians became too ruly.

**Janet:** You left during the war, the First World War?

**Elsie:** Yes we came during the war but then we got on Frederick VIII and they had to make all kinds of statements that we were not any kind of social workers or anything else except that we just came here to meet my parents. So they let us go but it was awfully hard to get a passport over there because Russia ruled Finland. They kicked people out of their homes and went over there so they were the bosses now. We had to wait till they’d give us a chance to come whenever they wanted us to. My folks said that they wanted us out of here before the war breaks out.

**Janet:** Did you see anything of soldiers or anything like that during the First World War?

**Elsie:** Finland was full of Russian soldiers. We used to live right in the center of the town, right in the center of Finland. We liked living in a building like that. There was a place where you could buy candy all the time. The Russian soldiers used to give us kids money if we kept quiet and didn’t tell that they were around. We’d take the pennies and run into the store and get some candy and we thought that was great.

People of the town where we lived when they came to find out we were there, they said, “We want to go there too.” So they came there and the Russian soldiers didn’t know the difference which was whether we lived there or not. We couldn’t speak Russian and they couldn’t speak Finnish. They gave us money and we bought candy, and we bring some into [unclear 00:32:53].

We thought that was great because we had lived in the country and we never had the money because there was no stores near where we lived so there’s no place to spend it. But now there was a store right in the same building where we lived so we were down there all the time. As long as the soldiers were there, we had money.

**Janet:** How about Frederick VIII, do you remember anything that happened during the time when you were taking this journey across the ocean to America?

**Elsie:** No, I don’t remember. We had a very early vessel trip. We didn’t get sea sick.

**Janet:** How about when the ship came into New York Harbor? Do you remember what you saw and what you thought about it?

**Elsie:** They took us right away, they called our names and they took us to this great, big hall. [Unclear 00:33:55]. All the four of us that came off were taken there and we stayed there till somebody came to take us away, relatives.

**Janet:** Were you examined there? Did you get physical examinations?

**Elsie:** Yes. Over there they examined and asked where we lived. But we were healthy kids. We’d been skiing and skating and swimming and we lived a life of [unclear 00:34:26].

**Janet:** Do you remember any impressions you had of Ellis Island?

**Elsie:** Ellis Island that’s an awful thing. I acquired some fever when they examined me. They put me in a little wagon like they put animals in and they took me away and they never told me where I was going. I said, “This is awful. I come to America they put you into little wagon with animals and take you away and they don’t tell you where you’re going.”

They told us that I was being taken to hospital because I had acquired some kind of fever and they wouldn’t let us into the country until the fever was done away with. I felt that was cruel because my brothers stayed with my aunt but I had to go to this little pig pen.

**Janet:** What do you remember about the hospital?

**Elsie:** I remember there was a rat running out the windowsill all the time and I was trying to tell the nurses with my fingers like that. I couldn’t say anything because they were Russians, they wouldn’t understand me so I’d take them to the window but of course the rats wouldn’t come near us.

**Janet:** Was this in America?

**Elsie:** In America, at Ellis Island.

**Janet:** They would be Americans there, right? Not Russians.

**Elsie:** Whatever they were I couldn’t speak English either. They could speak any language except mine. I made them speak my language. Anyway, I was so scared that the rats were coming to my bed because they’d roll out of the windowsills and the windowsills were real wide and long and those big rats jumped off that wall and they run like heck chasing each other. I was shivering in my bed. I couldn’t tell the nurses what was scaring me and it was a horrible experience.

**Janet:** Do you know how long you stayed there?

**Elsie:** Till the fever went away.

**Janet:** So it was a few nights would you say?

**Elsie:** Yes. They examined me every day to see if it’s gone down and said, “No, go back to bed.” So I’m back to bed again.

**Janet:** Do you remember when you were reunited with your brothers and your aunt?

**Elsie:** Yes I remember. When I got back they had an apartment and [unclear 00:37:12] lived there. There were some people that spoke Finnish language. They became my playmates and so they took me everywhere they went.

**Janet:** Where was the apartment? Do you remember where?

**Elsie:** It was some place along Orchid Street.

**Janet:** The house?

**Elsie:** Yes, it was a big, long house and it seems that anybody new that came to that neighborhood they had an apartment for them in there. My aunt had her apartment. I don’t know whether it was hers or whose it was, a kid that age doesn’t worry about bills.

**Janet:** Did you see your mother and father right away?

**Elsie:** Yes, they were down there. They came to Worcester.

**Janet:** What do you remember about the neighbourhood where you were when you first came?

**Elsie:** We were living in the country so coming into a crowded city all of sudden you can imagine what a kid would do. I’d look it at it, of course we’d been in the city in Finland; my relatives all lived in Helsinki, the capital, and there were regular city apartments.

**Janet:** You remember things that were new and different that you saw when you were first in this country? Things that struck you as different?

**Elsie:** I excelled at everything. Jumping rope, playing hide and go seek, running races; they’d give you a price if you were a good runner. We were kids of the country and we had a lot of fresh air, all sort of business running. I remember that we were very good at all the games and the girls used to wonder why I was so good at them. They all spoke Finnish. They looked after Finnish girls over there. They brought us around from house to house, we were like curiosities; they all want to look what these people look like. They’d stare at us, they’d feed us, they’d give us all kinds of goodies, and if you went to visit their house they tried to have something special to eat.

**Janet:** Was this in Worcester or is this in Orchid Street?

**Elsie:** In Worcester.

**Janet:** Did you stay in Orchid Street for any length of time?

**Elsie:** We stayed there till my folks bought their own house. They bought an eight-room house and then we went to live with them.

**Janet:** Then you started school?

**Elsie:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was that school like?

**Elsie:** Honestly, you’ll never know unless you go to some country where you don’t speak your language. You try to put something across and they don’t understand. We felt that they were very stupid. My brother had gone all through grammar school and he knew how to read, how to write, and they thought he was stupid. I didn’t like that because he had a better education than the children over here had. He had gone through grammar school but…

**Janet:** Were you put in a special class for children who didn’t…?

**Elsie:** Yes, they called it ‘ungraded’. We learned our language there and before the year was over I was at the top of the class. My brother was two years than I but we had the same birth day except that he was a little older than I was but I didn’t really mind it because we spoke Finnish at home. My father and mother spoke English; they wanted us to learn the language so they spoke English all the time to make us learn. I really learned the language and before the end of the year I was at the top of the fourth grade in school.

My brother wasn’t quite so because he was busy making money. He and some other boys in the neighborhood would collect some old liquor bottles that the drunks had thrown around the neighborhood and they sold those to the rag man; peddler. He used to peddle call “rags, rags, rags” and they’d get five cents per big bottles and one cent for a little bottle.

**Janet:** Which brother was this?

**Elsie:** My older brother.

**Janet:** What was his name?

**Elsie:** Emil.

**Janet:** Was Emil in school too?

**Elsie:** Yes he was in school but in spare time he used to take his rag bag to school with him and the teachers would ask him, “What you got that rag bag for?” He said, “I collect bottles and I sell them to the rag man.” The rag man comes to the house, he knows the boys had bottles and I don’t know whether they filled them over again.

**Janet:** Was your father working in the quarry when you came home?

**Elsie:** No, that was in Worcester. He was working in the quarries in Gloucester before we came to this country. He had no hung overs depending… nobody depended [unclear 00:43:06] at home. Mother went as a housekeeper for some people and they taught her how to speak English so they were in good hands, gorgeous school…

**Janet:** What did your father do when he came to Worcester?

**Elsie:** He got a job at a shop I guess up at [unclear 00:43:29] Street. He’d been in this country a long time before and he could speak English but I think he worked in the quarries and stayed with the family in Gloucester which family became their very best friends.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about Worcester when you first came here how it was different then than it is now?

**Elsie:** We only lived in the rented house till my father bought his own house and then we moved in there and we never went back to rental house after that. We had eight-room house. They rented the upstairs, three rooms and lived in the five rooms downstairs so I don’t remember much about that. My kid doesn’t remember anything.

I gathered friends of family that my family had lived with before we came and they spoke Finnish and they used to take us everywhere.

**Janet:** She was a wonderful woman.

**Elsie:** She can take part. I never get her off to talking about my experiences. She’ll think I’m bragging it.

**May:** You should give me the right questions to ask so my brother would know what to ask her to get the information. I’m learning things that…

**Janet:** Let’s continue then. We were talking about Worcester and ways it was different. There was a Finnish community here in Worcester?

**Elsie:** Yes. There was [unclear 00:45:37] people. There were Socialist people, the IWWs. I don’t know what that was, that was a very extreme brand, and Baptist. I think every religion had their own church and their ministers, and preachers.

**Janet:** Your mother, was she a religious person?

**Elsie:** I was brought up in a religious home, a Lutheran home. All of my relatives in Finland as far as I know, were Lutherans. I was baptised in Lutheran and I guess I was a little Lutheran.

**Janet:** How about when you were in Worcester? Did your mother and your family practise the religion?

**Elsie:** Yes. My mother joined the Congregational church and so we all went that way and now I belong to the Congregational Church of Holden. Her household and all their family they were all Lutherans.

**Janet:** What was your first job?

**Elsie:** I went to work for a manufacturing [unclear 00:47:06] home accessories corporations. That’s a corporation that made home useful fixtures like soap dishes, any that you could use in the home, out of metal or wire and I used to sell those.

My uncle used to buy the wire to put them into shape as the different dishes. We kids used to go around the neighborhood selling those and the people would buy from us more than anybody else because we were protégés of American family and [unclear 00:47:55] something special.

**Janet:** How old were you when you started doing that?

**Elsie:** I don’t remember how old; old enough to tell them what this is and what that is.

**Janet:** Did you do it after school or did you do it after you finished school?

**Elsie:** After school.

**Janet:** How about your husband, how did you meet him?

**Elsie:** I met him at the church. A minister of the Congregational church was his uncle so we went to that. I was ready to go and my mother couldn’t go to work and ended up marrying because it cost so much to go to college so I didn’t enrol.

**Janet:** What did you do instead?

**Elsie:** I worked with George F. Booth, the owner of the Telegram Gazette. He had a better factory concern. They had a home accessories corporation and our booth, George F. Booth’s son was the boss of there so I used to take shorthand from him. I was a secretary.

**Janet:** What did you do for the rest of your career after that?

**Elsie:** After that then I got married and I guess I always worked but I don’t remember just what I did.

**May:** Edward G. Norman you worked for? Raymond Hays? You worked for Superior Court.

**Elsie:** I used to work for Edward G. Norman he used to be the district attorney and who else did I work with?

**May:** Raymond Hays, when you used to have a draft board.

**Elsie:** Yes, we had a drafts board. He was the headman of the [unclear 00:50:25], which was the largest ward in Worcester [unclear 00:50:31]. I used to work for him at the [unclear 00:50:35]. I was one of the first people curved into the [unclear 00:50:41] by the chairman and he said, “I’ll take this job if Mrs. Pouttou can be my secretary.” So I went to be his secretary.

He was a very much respected man. He’d been a district attorney. When somebody that saw me working for him and said, “Where do you get an opening here?” I said, “Don’t worry I’ll take you then.” So they were waiting to take me because I was good at shorthand and I wrote letters like heck.

**Janet:** So you met your husband through the church; what was your husband’s name?

**Elsie:** Lauri Pouttu.

**Janet:** How many children did you have?

**Elsie:** Here’s one, here’s my price package right here. Two.

**Janet:** Your children’s names?

**Elsie:** Her name is May Elaine Peterson.

**Janet:** And your other child?

**Elsie:** Lawrence William Pouttu.

**Janet:** How is this phase of your life? This phase where you’re retired and you’re in what we call old age. How is this time of life for you?

**Elsie:** This time of life is good, I like it because I don’t have to do any housework and suffer even when I’m sick. I don’t know why I’m sick or where I’m sick but I fell down twice before they brought me here and I guess that’s it. My doctor is Dr. George Dodlob, that’s my personal doctor but the [inaudible 00:52:49] I don’t know who he is but he looked at me once in a while.

**May:** Dr. Sedgwick.

**Janet:** When you look back on your life what makes you feel proud? What makes you feel satisfied about your life?

**Elsie:** I had good parents. They brought me up right and I was chained always to my aunt, Ida.

**Janet:** Is that in Finland?

**Elsie:** Yes. She brought us over here to America and she was very strict. We lived in a great, big farm; had 10, 20, 30 cows. We used to try to run and see the cows but they’d be reluctant over there. The maids used to be afraid that we’d get in their way and the cows might step on them or would kick off something so we didn’t go there too much but it was a big farm and they had children of their own out there but their children went away to college and we were left there with my aunt Ida to take care of us and keep us out of the way of the maids.

**Janet:** What did you feel proud of? What did you feel that you had done in your lifetime that makes you feel satisfaction?

**Elsie:** I can’t figure anything spectacular because I was such an ordinary person. I worked as a stenographer that lawyers worked all ways to get me because I was pretty good at shorthand. I’ve worked off and on, and wrote letters by the hundreds, and now I’m lazy I’ve taken my retirement.

**May:** Do you remember 25 years for Superior Court?

**Elsie:** Yes, I worked 25 years for Superior Court as a legal secretary at the clerk of court’s office. That was good job. The lawyers used to get mad at me and say, “Why do we have to ask that little slip of a girl what to do or how to do it or where to do it?” My head who hired me there said, “She knows more about the law than the other lawyers do. She’s teaching the young lawyers what to do.”

I retired from the Superior Court because I thought I’d worked long enough and I had charge of that pensions and I waited till I was able to get a good pension. When I was 65, the pension was just about the best so I thought this is the time to retire now because that would take care of me the rest of my life.

**Janet:** Is there anything you’d like to say before we close, about coming to this country as a young 10 or 11- year old and living out your life here, and what you think about your Finnish heritage and being American?

**Elsie:** I think it’s great to be an American. My children have had a good education here and they’ve been very well-behaved children. I have had no troubles with them, with the boy or with my daughter. To have brought up two children successfully, that’s my greatest accomplishment. They’re my great joy in my old age because they don’t neglect me and forget me just because I’m old. They take very good care of me.

My son came in from Virginia for his vacation last year at Easter time and he spent a whole week with me and he lived at her house. He didn’t have to go to a hotel. No matter where I go or what I do, my children are very supportive in every way and I think that to me, is the greatest accomplishment.

**Janet:** That’s a beautiful place to end this interview. I want to thank you so much. It’s very interesting talking with you. I’ve been talking with Elsie Pouttu, who came from Finland in 1916 when you were probably 10, about to turn 11 years old. Today you’re 89, about to turn 90 and its July 21st 1995. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.

**Elsie:** You’re a delightful person.

**Janet:** Thank you.