

The Vanishing Generation Oral History Project

Narrator: **Ruth Peterson**

Date of Interview: **June 21, 2000**

Location of Interview: **Seattle, Washington**

Interviewer: **Ted Peterson**

ORIGINAL

I'm doing an interview for the Vanishing Generation Oral History Project with Mrs. Ruth Peterson. She is my mother, and she's also the link to a native Ballard family, the O.G. Peterson family. And so, as representative of that family and early Ballard; she will be making the comments today.

It's good to be with you, Mom. It's good to be here.

It's always nice to have you here.

Yeah. Well, we want to start with as much as we can discover about way back in Sweden.

Uh-huh.

For some reason your father-in-law and your mother-in-law came to the United States. What were their full names?

Let's see, my grandfather's name was --

No. Your -- we're talking about your parents-in-law now.

Uh-huh. Okay. Let's see. My father-in-law was Olaf Gustav Peterson, and my mother-in-law's name was Hulda Marie Anderson before she married my father-in-law.

And do you know what cities in Sweden they came from?

I'm just guessing at that. Let's see. My mother-in-law came from -- oh, dear, I really should know some of these answers before I start giving them. You know, I have to -- let's see --

I've heard you speak of somebody coming from Skellefteå.

Well, but that's --

Who was that?

(Continuing) -- that's my -- my father and my grandfather.

I see. Okay.

But mother-in-law and my father-in-law came from more -- not really the southern part exactly, but south of middle anyway. And -- but what was the name of their --
Well, that's okay. That's okay.

Well, I do know them. I just can't think of them.

Värmland?

That's where Hulda came from, but it might have been -- maybe it was in the same province, but . . .

Okay. Well, do you know why they decided to leave Sweden and come to the United States?

I can't say that I ever really heard them say too much about that except that, you know, people were coming to this country from Sweden in those days, you know, by the shiploads, and they probably had heard that life was pretty good in this country. So -- but as far as I know, they just decided to come. Not any -- you know, they're -- they were from probably pretty poor families back there, and maybe that was another reason that work was plentiful in this country and that was one reason they came.

Did Hulda Marie leave Sweden with her parents?

No, I think she just left on her own, and she did have a sister that came over to this country too, but I don't know that they came at the same time.

Do you know how old she was when she came over to the --

I really don't know, but she was pretty young. She was really pretty young, I'm sure. Maybe she was in her early 20's or -- I would imagine.

And how about Olaf, do you have any idea how old he was?

Well, he was a pretty young man, too, but I would guess he was probably in his 20's, too, maybe. And he wasn't that much older than my mother-in-law. And they -- let's see, I think they -- well, my mother-in-law, when she came, I believe she came to Michigan, and that's where she lived for quite awhile. And I think maybe that's where she met my father-in-law.

Did he come with any relatives?

Not that I know of. Not that I know of.

So they met in Michigan?

But my father-in-law's father came to this country, too. Maybe my father-in-law had him come over here, I don't know. And he really lived with the Petersons.

What was his name?

Might have been Olson.

I'll bet his first name was Peter.

Well, I'm guessing that it was.

Well, looking at his son's last name.

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I think it was. Yeah.

Well, do you have any idea when they moved from Michigan out to Ballard?

Well, yes. They must have -- let's see, I think Albert, my husband's older brother, and two sisters were born in Michigan. And they came out here altogether, I guess. And it was about -- between 1900 and 1902 'cause they built a home up on Sunset Hill, and that was about 1902 where just where they lived before they actually built that house and moved there, but it was probably somewhere in Ballard.

Uh-huh. While they were building the house?

I would imagine. Uh-huh

Okay. What was the address of the house?

Well, at that time the address was -- let's see, 7710. Am I correct? Their house was first built and it faced 77th, and then they moved the house so that it was -- they bought five acres, I think, when they came to Ballard. And so they wanted the house to be, you know, on just one lot so that they could sell the other lots or whatever they wanted to do with them, and eventually they did sell the extra lots.

So, where did they move the house to?

They moved the house to 31st Avenue, which was just on another one of the lots, and -- but I don't think they changed the address number.

Well, you said 7710. 7710 31st Northwest?

Uh-huh. Uh-huh,

Okay. Would five acres be a whole city block?

Oh no, I don't think so. I don't think so.

Well, did you know the house when it was on its original site?

Let's see, did I? Yes, I think I did. Yes. I did. Uh-huh.

So you were around when it got moved?

Yeah. Yeah, I think I remember that. Yes, uh-huh.

And what did they use the five acres for? Was it just woods or --

Well, my mother-in-law was quite a gardener and she loved flowers and they made use of the ground space that they had, and she always had vegetables and, you know, they had their own corn and other vegetables. And they had an apple tree. I don't know if they had -- well, anyway they -- she grew beautiful chrysanthemums. She even had some specimens of chrysanthemums. She loved her chrysanthemums. She would take them down to church, you know, and be real proud of those chrysanthemums.

Okay. Did they have any livestock?

I never saw them, but my husband, Ted, he talked about how he came from Bothell with his mother and one cow.

Walking?

Walking, yeah. He always said they walked 22 miles, but I -- that's hard for me to really believe, you know. We can imagine a lot of things in our mind that's a lot further than it really is. And I suppose they walked across country, you know, but it

used to be like 22 miles from Seattle to Bothell. But anyway, he talked about how he and his mother walked with a cow all the way. So that's the only cow that I know that they had.

And how did they use the cow once they got it?

Oh, well, they milked the cow, and Ted, my husband; he delivered milk on 32nd Northwest to several families down on 32nd.

Do you know how much they charged for a quart or a gallon of milk?

No. It was probably not very much, a nickel or a dime. And I have the milk can up there. See that gray can up there?

Yes.

Uh-huh.

That's the can he used to deliver the milk.

Uh-huh. Yeah.

Wow.

Yeah, it is.

That's beautiful. Okay. How about chickens?

Oh, yes, they had chickens. And Ted, my husband, he used to say -- tell how his mother had him go out and ring the neck off of the chicken. They'd have chicken, fried chicken on Sunday. And, you know, he talked about those chickens because I guess, you know, they dipped them in boiling water to get the feathers loose, and he would have to -- his mother made him go out and pluck -- pluck the chicken.

Well, that was life in Ballard.

That's right.

I suppose they got some eggs also, didn't they?

Oh, yes. I imagine they did. And, you know, when they first built their house, they didn't even have an inside bathroom. They had an outhouse. And I think I was in it a time or two.

Well, how old were you when you got to know the Peterson family?

Well, I met them at Ballard High School. I met his sister, Florence, who was in my class at Ballard, and then I also met my husband there.

What class were you?

I was in the class of '26, 1926, and Ted was in the class of '24.

Well, what was the work that O.G. Peterson did?

Well, let's see when he first -- when he first came to Ballard, I remember Ted talking about how he worked for a dollar a day. I don't know just what kind -- it was just day labor of some kind. I don't know just what it was, but --

That his dad did? That O.G. did?

Uh-huh, uh-huh. That his father did. And I guess he was down around -- well, down around the Lock -- well, the Locks wasn't even built yet, but anyway somebody -- he had an opportunity to dive, go diving, and someone --

As a hard hat diver.

Uh-huh, as a hard hat diver. And they said something, "Oh, you've got a tough head" or some kind of a hard head or something, you know, why don't you try it. And he did. And from then on he did submarine diving work for many, many years. And he also took Ted, my husband, with him on some of his diving expeditions. He also worked on the Oakland-Alameda tube in California, and my husband was already down in California working at different jobs. He worked as a car salesman and worked as -- well, I don't know what some of the other work that he did. But he was the one that got his father to come down to California because they were building the Oakland-Alameda tube. And so it was Ted that really got him the job. He called and said, "You better come down here; I've got a job for you." So he was on that Oakland-Alameda tube until it finished.

Well, it's interesting you said he called. Did they have a telephone from very early?

Well, as long as I ever knew them, I -- yeah. Well, I think he called. I just -- I never heard that he wrote a letter or anything, but -- yeah, people had phones in those days.

Well, I'd sure like to know more about that neighborhood. Were there many houses around where they built?

Oh, no. There were -- no, theirs was probably the only one in the -- well, there was their house and then another house up at the end of the block. Maybe they were the only two houses.

That would be up on 80th then?

Up on 80th. And I think they were fisherman that lived in that house. And let's see, I don't know if he ever went on a fishing trip with them or not, but I don't remember him saying for sure.

What school did the Peterson children attend? What elementary school?

Well, let's see, they went to Webster, they went to Webster. And then, because Webster didn't have manual training, my husband went -- wanted to go down to Adams because they had manual training down there. So he finished the eighth grade there. And then, from there he went to Ballard High School. But while he was in Ballard High School, he worked on the side a lot. And I know his teachers said, "You better not work all night because you can't do your work here at school."

Yeah, fall asleep in class.

Yeah, that's it.

Well, how did they get to Webster to Adams to Ballard High?

They walked. They walked across lots of empty lots, including Ballard Baptist Church, which was there -- always was their church in Ballard. And my husband used to talk about how his dad would carry the youngest on his shoulders down to church, and they'd walk across all the empty lots. Probably more empty lots than there were homes in those days.

Well, what importance did they give to their spiritual lives?

Well, it was their main interest in life, and they were Christians before they came here, the parents. And my father-in-law was also the superintendent of the Sunday School Department, as far as I remember.

Okay. Well, let's go on to when you got connected with the family. You say it was at Ballard High School.

Uh-huh.

And you were in the class of '26.

Uh-huh.

How did you happen to become such a good friend of young Ted Peterson?

Well, let's see now. He was -- the football players were very popular, and the girls were all interested in the football players. And so I guess someone had said to Ted, "Well, there's a girl that wants to meet you" or something, and he said, "Who and where? Where is she," or something like that. So that's how I met him.

And so, by the time he graduated from high school, you were going together, going steady or whatever.

Oh, no, not going steady, but we knew each other and we'd go out. Ted would -- Ted's -- my husband's father bought his first automobile, and it was a Ford sedan with windows, you know, all around, you know. It was one of the early Fords, and it was a big treat if Ted ever got to drive that car. I think he had it a few times at school.

Oh, really. And did he take you on a date in that car?

Oh, well, no. I think I rode in it after -- just after school several of us, you know, just around there.

Well, so you were getting to know the family. Can you tell about what went on in the house, what their home life was like?

Well, they were just a very close knit family. And all of the children all went to Sunday school and church, and that was their main -- their main activity. Even during the week, I know they -- the girls would go to -- they had different clubs at church and -- and, well, let's see.

Well, do you suppose O.G. carried his faith visibly in his submarine diving?

Well, that, of course, I don't know, but I'm sure that if he had an opportunity, he probably would say something about that as well.

Okay. I was asking you about the goings on inside the house. How about the kitchen, what went on there?

Well, on Sundays, I was there many times for Sunday dinner. And they would come home from church and there'd be a big roast a lot of the time, and the whole family would be there for dinner. And dinner was at 12, 1 o'clock, maybe as late as two, but that would be very late, not like it is today, had a big Sunday dinner every Sunday.

Well, it's interesting. You said they lived on 77th; and they went all the way to Ballard Baptist Church. On what street?

That was on 20th and 63rd.

And they were able to all walk home in time for a big dinner at one?

Well, yes, that's what they did.

They were great walkers.

Well, at that time I guess they didn't even have a car yet then.

Well, okay, that was Sundays. Of course, you weren't in their home during the weekdays, I guess. How about other means of transportation? Did the whole city walk or were there buses or what other transportation?

There weren't buses, but there were streetcars. And I remember from where they lived on 77th, they didn't have sidewalk, but we had two planks. We would walk from their home down to 28th where the streetcar ran. I'm talking about when we lived there the few -- you know, the few years that we lived there.

After you were married.

Uh-huh, that was after we were married, of course.

You don't know what date the streetcars were initiated.

No, I really don't.

Where was -- was that the end of the line 28th and 77th?

Well, 28th and 85th, I think, was the end of the line, I believe.

And when you got on that streetcar, where could you go? Where did it -- what was its route?

Well, it went down through Ballard, and then it went down 14th Avenue. I remember the telephone company building was on 14th and about 63rd or something like that. And then they built a new telephone building. But anyway, I remember that it took its jogs from -- went down 28th to about 67th, and then it went over or it went east on 67th to 20th -- let's see, 20th -- 24th I guess, and then . . . and then it zigzagged around.

Well, as it got to 14th, it went pretty close to the high school.

Oh, yeah, it did. It did come close to the high school.

And --

But I think my husband and the rest of them, I think they probably all walked to school, though. Nowadays they have buses picking up the kids. They don't walk anywhere.

Yeah. Do you think they were healthier then?

Well, they were pretty healthy.

Okay. Did the children in the Peterson family enjoy the neighborhood? You said Sunset Hill. Did they get down to the water much? Did they go hunting? What did they do?

Well, the girls were not very athletic, any of them, but my husband, Ted, he was. He was the athlete in the family. When he went to high school, of course, he played football every -- all the time he was there, but the girls were not very athletic.

Well, they never talked to you about fishing?

Not that I can remember. Let's see. One thing they also did was go down to Shilshole and they crossed the canal there, I think, in a rowboat. That was before the Locks was built.

Uh-huh. So they would cross at Shilshole and not farther inland.

Well, I think it was down around Shilshole.

Okay. Well, now, when you began to know this Peterson family, where were you living?

Well, I was -- I came to Ballard when I was about 14, and I was living at West Woodland with an aunt of mine on 67th and 5th Avenue Northwest. I would walk from -- walk there -- walk along 67th to Ballard High School.

That wasn't too long a walk, was it?

No.

That was short compared to them.

That's right.

Well, you came when you were 14. Did any others in your family come with you at that time?

No, no. Let's see. My brother -- well, let's see now, he also was at my aunt's part of the time, but I've sort of forgotten what -- how we lived at that time. Adolph, my brother, must have been there at the same time because he was that much younger and he would have had to been there when I was there. I know he was later, but he must have been the whole time. I don't really --

Now, your parents emigrated from Sweden also.

Uh-huh.

And did they ever live in Ballard or was it just you who did?

Well, I was the only one that lived in Ballard.

How close to Ballard would your parents have lived?

Well, when we lived in Seattle, we lived over in the Roosevelt District. In fact, we lived right almost across the street from Roosevelt High School in those days. We didn't live there too long, only maybe two or three years, and then we moved to eastern Washington where we lived for a number of years.

Why don't you tell why you moved to eastern Washington?

Well, we moved there from Seattle because my mother was not well. She had tuberculosis, and the doctors thought that the climate in eastern Washington would be a healthier climate. And so they gave her a choice of going to Firland's Sanitarium or going to a dryer climate and they chose -- she chose the dryer climate, but she didn't live long after we moved to eastern Washington.

Did the Peterson family have some major health issues also that you know of when you were along the way?

I don't really remember. It seems to me like maybe Ethel had one -- one of the childhood diseases that was pretty serious, but which one it was, I'm not sure.

Well, where could you get health care in Ballard in those early days?

Well, the only place that I heard of, Ted's mother speak of, a doctor was down in Ballard where the Ballard Bell Tower is now. That was, at one time, the police station and the -- and in that building up on the top floor there were some doctors. And my husband had his tonsils taken out and his -- my mother-in-law -- they walked down to the doctor's office and when they got close, Ted didn't want to go in, so he ran away -- ran away and with his mother after him. She said, "Well, come on, Teddy, now. We have to go up there and have your tonsils out."

Oh, great! Well, that was a little part of downtown Ballard. What else do you remember about downtown Ballard?

Well, it took me a long time to get acquainted with Ballard. I would always get confused.

Oh, really.

Yes, I did. The streets didn't seem to want to jell or something. I had a hard time, but I finally became acclimated to it, and it became home.

When you first started in Ballard, for example, on 5th Avenue, was the street paved?

No, I don't think it was. Now, wait a minute. Was it paved? Well, there was -- oh, I think -- I think it was paved. I think it was paved.

So, downtown Ballard was probably paved, too.

Yes. But -- let's see. The street up where my mother-in-law's or my in-laws' home was, I don't think it was paved when I first knew them. I'm pretty sure it wasn't.

Well, did your parents-in-law ever get to go back to visit Sweden?

No, they didn't. They didn't have an opportunity to do that.

But you did say that your father-in-law brought his dad.

Well, yes. Somehow he -- I never heard how he came or why he came, but he lived with the Petersons, and he died right there, up there at that home.

So, you got to know him?

No. No, it was before I -- before I met them, no I never met them. But it seems to me I heard my husband say that Grandpa -- "Grandpa is out in the yard and he's dead." I think he was outside, and I think he just kind of dropped dead as far as I remember him saying.

Well, maybe he came over as a retired person rather than to take up a vocation.

Well, probably, or maybe he was the only one left in his family back there, and his son wanted him to come, and he did live with them. And when he passed away, I remember my husband saying -- or he was crying because Grandpa had died, and my mother-in-law would say to Ted, *inte gråt*, which meant "don't cry," you know. And so . . .

Well, that's pretty hard for a child.

Yes.

It's pretty hard for anybody

Yes.

Was it pretty common in those days for a family to care for the grandparents, the older adults?

Well, I think probably, and that was the case. Uh-huh. They didn't have nursing homes like they do nowadays. And of course, he was the first one to go in that family, and the whole family now, or most of the family, is all buried up at Crown Hill Cemetery.

Do you think a lot of old settlers were buried at that particular cemetery?

Uh-huh. I think so. I think so.

You probably get a lot of history reading tombstones there.

Yeah. There's some pretty tall -- high ones, you know. And Rhoda's -- when Rhoda passed away, you know, they kind of built a little box and something like they did, I think for Kendall -- for Kendall, yeah.

Well, you certainly are a link to the past. Really, this has been extremely interesting. If you think of some more things that you'd like to say, we can turn this machine on again.

Uh-huh. Well, I can't think of anything right now.

Well, actually, you're a big part of Ballard history. You know, we could just tell your story, but you're not an immigrant.

No, not quite.

And what this project is about is the story of the immigrants. But I think we've got a good report here. And like I say, if another day you would like to tell more stories, we can do it. Okay let's stop it now.



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THE
VANISHING GENERATION:
AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
A Joint Project of the Nordic Heritage Museum, the Ballard
Historical Society and the Swedish Finn Historical Society

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE:

QUESTIONNAIRE

I. PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Full Name Peterson, Ruth Elizabeth Nation of Origin USA
(Last, First Middle)

Address 10204 Richwood Ave N.W. Seattle 98177 Telephone (206) 784-2035

Was the family name changed? _____ Original Name _____

All immigrants { Place of Birth (city and country) Bethel, WA, USA Date of Birth Nov 17, 1907
1. Father-in-law Olaf Gustav Peterson Sweden near Norwegian border
Parents: Mother-in-law Hulda Marie Anderson Sweden
2.
3. Father's Full Name Carl Johan Albert Frank Birthplace Norland, Sweden
4. Mother's Full Name Alma Alvira Victoria Bloomdahl Birthplace Norland, Sweden
5. Aunt's Full Name Anna Bloomdahl Norland, Sweden

Reason for emigration:

Economic Religious Educational Political

Other (please describe) _____

Port of Entry:

Ellis Island Canada San Francisco _____ Other

Date of Entry _____ Original Destination _____ Arrival Date in Ballard _____

II. SPOUSE INFORMATION

Spouse' Full Name Peterson, Theodore George Nation of Origin USA
(Last, First Middle)

Place of Birth Ballard Date of Birth Jan 4, 1904 Arrival Date in Ballard Same

III. EMPLOYMENT HISTORY (Check all that apply):

- | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture (eggs, nursery, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> homemaker | <input type="checkbox"/> service (maid, gardener, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> building trades | <input type="checkbox"/> hotel/restaurant | <input type="checkbox"/> tradesman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> banking/insurance | <input type="checkbox"/> lumber Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> civil service | <input type="checkbox"/> maritime, fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> war veteran |
| <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military service | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fire, police, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> professional | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> food (bakery, grocery, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> retail | |

Business names or locations: _____

Mail to: The Nordic Heritage Museum, 3014 NW 67th St., Seattle, WA 98117
Phone (206) 789-5707, email: nordic@intellistep.com

THE VANISHING GENERATION: AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

IV. YOUR LIFE IN BALLARD

Please list any organization, church, lodge or fraternal order to which you have belonged:

Ballard Baptist Church

Please list schools and grades which you attended in Ballard:

Ballard High School 10th, 11th, 12th

What is the most important event to occur in Ballard (before 1950) which you remember?

Change from streetcars to busses

V. CHECK ANY TOPICS YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Childhood days | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Schooling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Occupations and work life | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious experiences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community events and involvement | <input type="checkbox"/> Political involvement |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation modes and experiences | <input type="checkbox"/> Crafts, folk arts, customs, traditions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Encounters with the law | <input type="checkbox"/> Folktales, legends and superstitions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Musical experiences or talents | <input type="checkbox"/> Experiences and involvement with war |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorable characters and/or incidents | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marital experiences: first child, first date, wedding plans, etc. |

VI. WHEN ARE YOU AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW? CHECK DAY OF THE WEEK AND TIME

MON TUES WED THURS FRI SAT SUN
MORNING AFTERNOON EVENINGS

VII. IF YOU ARE REFERRING THIS PERSON, WHY DO YOU FEEL HE/SHE SHOULD BE INTERVIEWED?:

She knew the immigrants and has known Ballard since way back.
She has artifacts from her husband Ted's collection.

Your name Ted G. Peterson, Jr. Telephone (206) 789-9417

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTACH ADDITIONAL PAGES IF NECESSARY.

NOTE: THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE VOLUNTARILY PROVIDED ON THIS FORM MAY BE BECOME PART OF A PUBLICATION OR EXHIBIT.

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PLEASE SIGN YOUR NAME BELOW TO INDICATE THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THESE CONDITIONS:

SIGNATURE Ted G. Peterson, Jr. DATE Jan. 29, 2000

WE VALUE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO OUR COMMUNITY AND THIS PROJECT AND THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING.

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