

KNUT STEN LINDFORS

Interviews and Recollections



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Speakers in the first interview

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Questioner in the second interview

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s Knut and Agnes frequently visited Austin during the Christmas holidays. Our father, who in his younger years had worked as a chauffeur, truck driver, and bus driver, enjoyed these trips and usually completed the 1300 mile journey from Boynton Beach in one and a half days. He would then relax by spending several days raking up leaves in Ben and Judy's yard, which was surrounded by five large pecan trees. These were always enjoyable gatherings, and starting in the 1980s, their home in Florida is where we all came together to celebrate their December birthdays and our Yuletide celebrations. These gatherings became a family tradition.

We had heard our father tell stories about his early life in Sweden and America and about how he took his young family to the United States during the Second World War. But we realized we knew very little about his life as an early immigrant and enterprising businessman. We were aware that he had first left Sweden at age sixteen and had taken a variety of odd jobs before buying a small diner in Mamaroneck, New York, without knowing how to cook and had somehow managed to turn it into a success during the height of the depression. He had then gone back to Sweden, started a bus business with two of his brothers, and married our mother, who had also spent some time working in America in the early 1930s. Their opportunity to return to the United States with their two sons came in August 1940.

Curious to know more, we sat our father down before a tape recorder in 1975 in order to ask him questions about his past. Susan interviewed him again four years later. We thought you might enjoy reading his responses, many of which had us laughing. Some of the photos included here were supplied by Art Duel, Nancy Lind, Jean McGilvray, Judy Myers and David Östlund. Others were drawn directly from cousin Ulla Clausén's booklet *Berta and Gustaf Eriksson and Their Children* and brother Ken's memoir *A Swedish Journey, an American Life*. Uncle Viktor's memoir *Glimtar från Kåge 1799-1975 samt Olof Lindforska släkten* was also useful in verifying certain family facts.

Bernth Lindfors and Sally Lindfors

INTERVIEW – December 1975

BL: We're going to try to record some family history because there's certain information that would be useful to have on record. Maybe we should start with when you came over to the United States, why you came over, and all that sort of thing.

KL: Well, the first time I came to the United States was on January 27, 1923. I left from Gothenburg. The reason I left Sweden was because there was no work to be found. It was not like it is now. I mean, there was no work at all. And that was the same all over Europe. I just had to get out of my home in Kåge to make room for the young ones.

SL: You mean there was no room in the house for that many children?

KL: Well, I tell you, we were 12 children. So you can just imagine us in one big room and then a little room. That's all. We slept about 10 or 12 in the kitchen.

SL: Wow. That's amazing.

BL: But you were one of the youngest, weren't you?

KL: Yeah. Well, there were two after me – Arvid and then Axel, who died when he was 7 years old.

SL: So who did you come over with? You didn't come by yourself.

KL: No. We were five people from the same village, or around the same village. So we knew each other before, and we got the same cabin on the boat. We had a very rough voyage. The water went over the deck as soon as we got outside the harbor.

You know, it stayed that way all the way over. A lot of ice. When we came to New York, the whole boat was just a sheet of ice, the whole thing.

SL: Sounds terrible.

KL: And the room, the cabin we had -- well, there were three bunks on each side, and in between the bunks, there was about 3 feet. And that's what we had. That was the whole cabin.

SL: And you just stayed down there the whole time?

KL: Yeah. The five of us were so seasick, and we couldn't get out almost the whole trip. So we were just vomiting on top of each other. You can just imagine the smell.

SL: Oh, gee, that's terrible. And how long was the trip?

KL: It took us 11 days.

BL: Some of your brothers were over in the States already, weren't they?

KL: Oh, yeah. Nils and Karl were over here.

BL: And when did they go over?

KL: I think Nils went around 1918 and Karl around 1916.

BL: So Karl was the first one to go?

KL: No, Anna was the first one to go. She was 18 years old when she left.

BL: What did she go over to do?

KL: Housework.

SL: Did she get a job before she went over?

KL: No, no. She had to look and look. We had some relations she went to. There were some relations in Norway, and some of those people were already in the States. Anna went to them. My father had two sisters that emigrated to Norway. 1867 was a year in Sweden when there was a famine, so there was no food. A boat happened to come into Kågehamn, a different town, and they found out if there was any way they could go with the boat. So they went with the boat and landed up in Norway, in Grimstad. They both got married there, and some of their children went to the United States. They were there before Anna came.

BL: But they're not relatives you ever looked up when you got to the States?

KL: No, we looked them up in 1960. When we went to Norway, we slept one night in Grimstad.

SL: So you did meet them then.

KL: Oh, yeah. And I met some of the relations in the United States. Their name was Larsen. The son of this Larsen—during the wartime and after the war—he got with the Marshall Plan, because we were in reconstruction then, so he was in Thailand and all over. He could travel all over the world.

BL: So he's your cousin?

KL: Yeah, he was my cousin. He's dead now.

SL: So Anna went and stayed with them. And then they all stayed in the New York area and worked there?

KL: Yeah, in Brooklyn. And Karl then came later on to the States, and I guess he stayed with Anna first. Anna got married after a while.

SL: And then you came in '23. So you stayed with them?

KL: I came to Karl. He was living in the Bronx at that time.

BL: Wasn't Viktor supposed to come over, too?

KL: Yeah, Viktor was supposed to come over, too, but he had to go in the army. Viktor was considered the healthiest one of all of us. He was strong, very strong, and muscular. I mean, he was over six-foot-three at that time. He went in the army, and then he was on a maneuver in November, lying in the snow and all that. It was 30 below zero, so he caught a really bad cold, and he got water in his lungs. He got TB. He was only given three months to live at one time. He was certainly in bad shape.

Then in 1927 I went home for a visit to Sweden. In fact, what we really went home for was they had found so much gold and silver and copper. And, of course, we wanted to make a fortune. And they found so much around, and we found some on our property, too.

BL: You became a gold miner.

KL: I had arranged to make a claim of this area. We had made a claim on it, and we sent in proof to the government, and they had to analyze it. They showed that it was a mineral. That spoiled the whole thing until [later when] they found a way of

separating that from the other parts. Otherwise, it was just pure porcelain only. But that's the stuff that really spoiled it. And we couldn't work it.

BL: That was all on the same farm?

KL: Yeah, it belonged to our farm.

BL: That's the same house that Frans was living on later on?

KL: No, it was in the woods. We lived in the village of Kåge—that's the Lindfors house—but then we had woods outside the village. And it was on that property.

KL: At that time, when we grew up, there was another family living at the other end of our house in the big room—what we called the salon. Aunt Ostrom and her family lived there.

SL: So you only had half of that house.

KL: Yeah, we only had that. Hanna and Hulda had their own little room until Hulda went to America in 1918 or 1919.

SL: So she came here before you did.

BL: And you had five brothers and sisters living here [in the States]?

KL: No, four [Karl, Nils, Anna, and Hulda]. Hanna came over after me.

BL: Did you have any work lined up here before you came? Or did you have to look around for jobs?

KL: No, I just had to take my chances.

BL: Where were your brothers working when you arrived?

KL: Nils was with the Standard Oil Company, working on one of those boats that goes into the harbors and leaves oil in different places. And Karl was a chauffeur with a private family.

SL: Wasn't that the job he had for a long time?

KL: He had it for 35 years.

SL: That's a long time. And then Anna did domestic work until she got married?

KL: Yeah, then she got married.

SL: And what was Hulda doing?

KL: She was doing housework. And then she got married to Karl's wife's brother. So there were two marriages in the same family. Anton and Magna were brother and sister.

SL: Were Magna and Anton immigrants, too?

KL: They came from Kongsberg in Norway.

BL: What jobs did you find when you came over?

KL: I was working in an old factory on Church Street in New York City, right behind the Woolworth building. They were repairing motors and dynamos, so I was rewiring motors, dynamos, and things like that. That was my first job, and I was

making 10 dollars a week. After 10 months, I was getting 22 dollars a week, and I thought I was getting rich.

BL: That was pretty good pay in those days, wasn't it?

KL: It was, but I couldn't stand the climate in New York. I felt really sick, so I went up to a farm in Mt. Kisco the following spring and started working there. I liked that kind of work and recovered very well.

SL: How long did you work there?

KL: About eight months the first time I went there. And then I was feeling pretty good, so I went back to New York and got a job at a place where they were making oxide batteries, and that was very unhealthy work. Some people got lead poisoning, and I was one of them. My hands were shaking badly after four months, so I went back to the farm. I didn't go to a doctor or get any medication, but I drank a lot of milk instead and cured myself, really.

SL: I remember a story you told when I was a kid about not knowing how to milk a cow. Was that on this farm?

KL: Yeah, I didn't know how to milk a cow. I thought it would be no trouble at all. You see, when you milk a cow, you have to squeeze the nipple up here first and then drag your fingers down to get the milk out. Well, I started squeezing at the bottom and got nothing.

SL: Didn't you have any cows on the farm in Sweden?

KL: Yeah, we had cows on our farm in Sweden, but the women always did the milking there. My mother did it. It wasn't considered very manly to milk a cow in Sweden. It was very degrading. It was women's work.

SL: Oh, really.

KL: Sure. In those days it was. Now it's changed completely. Now there are dairies, and they, of course, have milking machines.

SL: But you did a lot of farm chores when you were growing up?

KL: Yeah, I helped out. And on the farm [in Mt. Kisco] I was sometimes a gardener, too. We were working for a very famous doctor who used to serve kings. He was very rich, and he had a gardener. So besides taking care of the cows, milking them, and taking them out to pasture, I helped the gardener in the daytime.

SL: For how long were you there?

KL: Well, about eight months more. And then I went to New Rochelle, where I worked as a private chauffeur. I did a lot of travelling—Nevada, Canada, and all over with these people. But I couldn't see any future in this work. At that time, I was getting my meals at a little diner in Rye, New York, and I got pretty friendly with the chef there. He asked me if I intended to keep on working as a chauffeur. "No," I said, "I hate this kind of work. There's no future in it." I wanted to get into some kind of business. So he asked me what kind of business. Well, I was thinking first maybe a gas station, or something like that. He said, "Gee! Why not try the restaurant business? No matter how bad things are, the restaurant business is always good. People got to eat." Then he said, "I heard about a diner in Mamaroneck, New York. An elderly man from White Plains was running this place for six months and he closed up. He went bankrupt there. Why don't we go down tonight and take a look at the place and speak to the people around there?" So we went there, walked around, and visited the firehouse next door. Folks there said, "Hell, that man went bankrupt, but it was his own fault. He did a good

business when he started, but the place was so dirty. When you came in, there were roaches running all over the place."

SL: Oh, God. That's terrible.

KL: Business was bad. But I had enough money saved up to buy the place. The chef had no money at all, so I put up the money, and we got the business going again. He was supposed to pay me back, you see. So we got started, and I remember on the first day that we took in a few dollars.

BL: When would that have been?

KL: 1929.

BL: And that was the original Lindy's Diner?

KL: No, no. That was called the Country Diner then. On the first day, all we did was clean the place. There was dirt under the counter, so we got a knife and scraped it off. And people came in and looked around as if they expected to see roaches again. We kept the place clean and inside of three months, we were so busy that it was standing room only. And that worked out good as long as we were broke. But this chef I had as a partner was an alcoholic. And when we were broke, he had no money to buy drinks, but when he got money, then he just drank.

BL: Was he a Swede, too?

KL: No, he was Irish. He was a very nice fellow, except he was an alcoholic. And when he got started drinking, he would go away for three or four days.

SL: That's terrible. Did you have people working for you right from the beginning?

KL: Well, we had a night man, but the first day he went off. He must have been preparing for it because he had a lot of food cooked up ahead of time in the refrigerator. So I got a fellow that worked in a taxi station nearby. He told me he had worked in a diner before, so I asked his boss if I could borrow him for a day or two, and he let me have him. And that's the way we started. I was supposed to do the cooking. I had never done any cooking in all my life, but we had the meat prepared and the meatloaf and the roast beef and all that. But I figured I had to make a soup, too. I thought that rice and tomato soup must be the easiest to make, so I opened up a bag of rice, put a lot of it in a pot, and boiled it all. Then I added some tomatoes. But, you see, I didn't know that rice expands when cooked, so by the time the soup was ready, we could have sliced it with a fork. And I kept adding more and more water, so the soup tasted like nothing.

BL: Were you open 24 hours then?

KL: Yeah, we had a night man. And there was the chef and I, but he got worse and worse. After a year, I had to buy him out because he was going off all the time, and then I could hire a new chef. I stayed there in Mamaroneck until 1934, and then went home to Sweden.

BL: So you started a business right during the crash?

KL: Yeah, just when the crash started. And, boy, you know, you should have seen the people who came in. They were so broke. A nickel looked like a silver dollar to them. There were a lot of colored people around there, and they were just as broke. They had nothing. I had to admire them, though, because they were standing outside the diner laughing and hopping. They were just having so much fun.

BL: And that place, originally called the Country Diner, was later renamed as Lindy's Diner?

KL: The same place, yeah.

SL: Why did you decide to go to Sweden if the business was so good?

KL: Well, my mother was very ill. She had heart trouble and high blood pressure, and we expected her to die almost any time. So I sold the diner and went to Sweden. And then when I got there, I started in the bus business with my brother Viktor. In fact, I had already bought shares in that business before I went home. Viktor was already in the bus business by then.

And then I got married there, but I didn't want to leave Sweden while my mother was living. I always wanted to go back to the United States, and your mother always wanted to go back there, too. But we didn't want to leave my mother because it looked like she might die very soon. She took it to heart every time anybody in the family went to the United States. She had to go to bed for three days. She felt like it was sending them to the grave. She would never see them again. But in the end she got killed when hit by a car. And then, of course, we were ready to go right away, but we couldn't go because the war had started.

But then one day in 1940, we got a letter from the American Consulate in Stockholm. Harriman was Consul there at that time, and he wrote to say that there was a lot of Americans staying in Scandinavia. Hitler had chased them from one country to another. Many of them came to Scandinavia, and they were stranded. But America decided to take these American citizens out of the Scandinavian countries, so they were sending a boat over to Petsamo, Finland, and asked me if I wanted to go along and take my family with me.

I had gone every year to the American Consulate in Stockholm to register my status as a citizen, and that was a good thing. But right away when I came to Stockholm this time, Harriman called me into his office and said, "Gee, I'm very

sorry in your case. You're really not registered as an American citizen anymore. I feel very bad about this, but if you want to pay for a telegram to Washington to prove that you have a clean record in the United States, I'm sure I can help you get over there." I said, "You go ahead." And it turned out good.

In the meantime, we had been helping some English sailors who had come to Jörn from Norway. This was at a time when Germany had invaded Norway. There had been some British merchant ships in Narvik harbor, and the Germans came in, captured them, and took the English sailors as prisoners. They first put them in a schoolhouse in Narvik, but they had no food for them, so they decided to send them over to Sweden. There is a railroad that goes down to the Swedish border, which is only about three Swedish miles from Narvik. They marched them onto the railway track heading east. Some of the sailors had left their ship in such a hurry that they had no shoes, just socks, and they had to walk like that on the tracks in the freezing cold. A blizzard came up and it started snowing like anything.

As they started from Narvik, walking was really hard, and a German soldier told the young ones to help the elderly people because there were some old men with them. One British fellow replied, "To heck with them. I got enough to take care of myself." So the German soldier got down on his knees, put his finger on the trigger, and clicked it as if he was about to shoot him. The sailor later said, "I got so strong I almost carried the old man."

Meanwhile a British fleet came into Narvik harbor and sank all the German ships there. They made a clean sweep. They saw people fleeing on the railroad tracks, thought they were Germans, and started shelling their own people. There were three or four German guards accompanying the prisoners, and they hid in a little signal hut along the railroad, but that hut took a direct hit, and all of them were killed. But the British sailors hid in big ditches alongside the tracks, and not one of them even got wounded. They kept on going, but some of them were badly

frostbitten, so when they reached Sweden, some had black toes and fingers that had to be amputated. And when they got across the Swedish border, there was no village to put them up, so they got sent down to Jörn.

The British wanted me to act as an interpreter for them. They were eating in a hotel, but there was only one old man working there, and he couldn't handle all that. When they found out I had been in the restaurant business, they asked me to do the feeding for them. I tell you I never made so much money in all my life because they paid good. And it was easy to get help because there had been six ships with stewards on them, and they had almost like a college education. They could sit down with a piece of paper and figure out exactly how much food you had to buy for so many people. So I just had them to work for me. But then I suddenly had to leave all this. Inside a week we were on our way to Petsamo. I just had to drop everything, so Viktor took over.

BL: When you came back to the States, you then bought the diner back again?

KL: Yeah, that's right.

SL: First tell us about the trip over.

KL: Well, we took the train up to Haparanda. And then we took a bus from Haparanda to Petsamo in Finland. Petsamo belongs to Russia now. And when we arrived there, they told us as soon as we got on board that the boat was going to leave the next day. But then later on in the afternoon Crown Princess Märtha of Norway and her family came on board. The Germans were at war with Norway, and when they found about this, they told us we couldn't depart. They had promised to give Americans free passage, but once the Crown Princess of Norway came on board, there was just no way. So we were called into the dining room where the captain explained everything to us and said, "We can't go anywhere until this matter is cleared up."

But the same night around 3 o'clock in the morning, the captain and crew had lifted anchor against the German orders. We were zigzagging forth and back in all directions. We went far north from the beginning. They told us they were going to go north of Iceland. But later on, they told us we were going to go south. They decided to change the route to south of Iceland. But after a few days, one Norwegian sailor was talking to us, and he said, "Don't believe what they tell you. They can't fool me. If we go in this direction for another day, we're going to be in England tomorrow." And the next morning around 10 o'clock, we saw a lighthouse flashing. The waves were going over the boat. It was so rough.

And then they rang the bell, and the captain said, "See the lighthouse over there? That's Orkney Islands. You're right in the minefields now." But he said, "Don't get in a panic. It won't do you any good. Just try to be calm. We're going to do all we can to get out." Then someone on the lookout saw mines floating around. We were so close to them.

So most of the passengers ran down and put on their life vests. They stood ready then; they wouldn't sleep or nothing. And we went through there all right. The next day it cleared up for a while, and we saw some British airplanes flying over us. We were at sea 11 days, and there was nine days it was so foggy you couldn't see more than about a hundred feet in front of the boat. And they claimed that was really what saved us because we couldn't see anything, and nobody could see us.

The first news report we got – we couldn't send out anything – was that Roosevelt was criticized in the American Senate for sending the ship to Petsamo because for six days they hadn't heard from us, and they thought we were lost.

Then we got fog again, and that was good, you see. When we came to Newfoundland, we got two American destroyers that met and escorted us. And, boy, did they celebrate on the boat. There was a lot of theater groups that came

over. They had been stranded in Europe, and they had been traveling all over Europe. And, boy, they gave a show that was really something. And Victor Borge came over on the same boat.

You don't remember this, but every day we had drills on the boat. Every day. And you cried every time. There were just three beds in the room where your mother was staying, and there were nine in that room. Kenneth was supposed to sleep with me downstairs in the freight room. They had hammocks hung up there, but he didn't like it. He slept there only one night. The hammocks were swinging forth and back, and there were about 300 in that room. A lot of passengers were complaining about Crown Princess Märtha of Norway. She got a whole suite of rooms while we were so crowded there. That really was some trip.

When we came to New York, of course, nobody of course knew we had arrived. We landed at the Navy Yard in Brooklyn, so we took a taxi up to the Bronx. When we came to Harry and Hanna's building, we rang the doorbell and started up the stairway. They lived on the fourth floor, and Harry stood there waiting. When he finally saw Hilda and I come up the stairway, he jumped right up in the air. He had just received a letter from us that had been on the way for a month, saying that we were still waiting in Sweden and feeding those Englishmen. And now he sees us, and he almost had a stroke. Nobody knew we were on the boat because there was no airmail in those days. Boats in Sweden could get free passage, too, but they sometimes ran on a mine. They could go out every once in a while, but not very often.

SL: So how many people in Jörn knew that you were on the boat?

KL: Oh, everybody there knew it. They knew that right away.

SL: Who was paying you all this money to help the English sailors in Sweden?

KL: The British government.

SL: So the Germans had just said, "Okay, you British sailors, you just walk up the tracks to Sweden"? And then they arrived.

KL: The Germans sent guards with them. The guards just sent them across the border and said goodbye. The Swedish people on the border took care of them, you see. But a lot of the sailors were in the hospital, having their toes and fingers amputated.

SL: So how many of them were you taking care in Jörn?

KL: I was feeding about 134 members of the crew, and then there were an equal number of officers staying in the house. Hilda had a girl helping her with all the cooking she was doing for them in the house.

BL: Did Mom come over to the States at about the same time you did originally?

SL: No, I remember her telling us that you went over to her family to say goodbye when you first left for America. She remembered that she was 11 and you were 16, this big hero going off to America. So she must have gone over later.

KL: Yes, she came over around 1930. She came back to Sweden in 1934.

SL: But you never saw her while you were in the States because she went to Chicago and stayed with the Lundgrens?

KL: Yeah, the Lundgrens. She was sick in Chicago. She had rheumatic fever, and I think it affected her heart a little bit, too. She was very sick, and they thought she would die. I think that sickness had a lot to do with why she died so young later.

BL: But she was working in Chicago, too?

KL: Oh, yeah, she worked. Then she went home in 1934, but she intended to go back again.

SL: So she returned to Sweden at about the same time you did.

KL: A month earlier, I think.

SL: And why did she come back?

KL: She wanted to come home and visit.

BL: But she, too, was planning to go back to the States.

KL: Oh yes, sure. After we got married, we planned to return right away. But we had it pretty nice in Sweden there, you know. Really very nice. And I'll never forget the first Christmas we were in the United States. Your mother was in the diner cooking on Christmas Day. And boy, the tears were running because she was thinking about the Christmas we had the year before. But I didn't give her any sympathy. I told her, "I don't give you any sympathy because you wanted to get here. So now you're here, and you've got to try to make the best of it."

SL: Well, things were a lot easier in 1934 in Sweden than they had been earlier.

KL: Oh, yes, it was a lot easier.

SL: There was a lot of improvement in the economy?

KL: Oh, much improvement. Sure.

SL: So was it true? I remember you said you moved something like 13 times in the first year you were married or something like that?

KL: No, no, no, no.

SL: Is that an exaggeration?

KL: No, we moved four times in 11 months. We were going to put wheels on the furniture to make them easier to move.

SL: And Frans was helping you move because he owned a truck?

KL: In 1927 when I was home, I started Frans and Viktor in the trucking business. I was home for four months. Before that, they had just been sitting on the farm, with nothing to do, just looking at each other.

SL: There were no other jobs in the area?

KL: No. They were just starting with the trucks there, real good, taking lumber from Lapland, and I said, "Boy, why don't we get started?" So we got going on that. And they couldn't drive! I taught Viktor a little bit, and he drove nights because he had no license. And I drove in the daytime. That's the way it started, and it was much easier to get a license in Sweden in those days than it is now. There was no problem at all. They bought a truck and started in business and inside of three or four months, they had paid for the truck. They were going very good; they got work like anything. The truck was going day and night, all the time, you see. We were doing a very good business, and they wanted me to stay home, but I wanted to get back to America.

SL: You went home in '27? Did that happen while you were still on the farm?

KL: No, I was on the farm before, and then I was working as a private chauffeur.

SL: So while you were working as a chauffeur, you returned to Sweden in 1927 and began driving with Frans and Viktor?

KL: Yeah. I remember when I was teaching Frans to drive. We had to pick up lumber on private property there. They had a gate going into this lot. Frans was driving and I was sitting beside him. And he drove right through the gate without slowing down. So I said, "Why in the world did you do that? Didn't you see the gate?" "Well, the gate was open yesterday," he said.

Oh, I tell you, we were so mad at each other when I was teaching him to drive. So finally he said, "Well, I really should have an instructor instead of you because I make so many mistakes." Viktor was driving at night after only a couple of lessons.

SL: Well, didn't Frans stay on the farm all that time? He was the oldest son. He didn't have any desire to go to America?

KL: No, he didn't have any desire to go to America. And then he bought the property of that other family that lived at the other end of the house. That's also when they had land reform in Sweden. Farmers had farms in so many places. When they married, they got a piece of land here and a piece of land there, so some of them had 10 or 12 plots. This made it too hard to do the farming. They had to move around from place to place. During land reform, the quality of the earth was tested to see how fertile it was. If it was of poor quality, they gave you more land. If it was of good quality, then they gave you a little land. So Frans had a small amount of land. But he got it right in the center of town. He really made out good on that because he sold it all for lots later on. Then my father had to move out to a house about a kilometer from Frans.

SL: Frans's house was considered to be in the village?

KL: Right in the village, yeah.

BL: Was that the place where you originally lived?

KL: Oh, yeah. That's where we were born.

SL: Well, where did the Erikssons live then? What was your relationship with the Erikssons? You knew Harold when you were young.

KL: Harold and I went to the same class at school so we were about the same age. I was 13 days older than Harold, so we grew up together.

SL: But you were neighbors?

KL: No, we were not neighbors, but we were always together. When he was 13 or 14 years old, he started to work for a baker right next door to us. There was a bakery there, the second house away, so we were always together. Later I visited Harold in Chicago many times. He arrived, I guess, in 1925 when he was 18 and went straight to Chicago.

BL: So he wasn't on the boat with you when you came to the States?

KL: No. He was in the States at that time.

BL: Well, how did the second diner, Lindy's Diner, get started?

SL: Wait. Before we do that, just one more question about Harold because I remember him telling about his falling down a well. And I got the impression that it was your mother that came over and helped him get out.

KL: No, no, that was my father.

SL: Well, how could he do that if you weren't neighbors then?

KL: Well, Harold was working for the baker by then. It was an old-fashioned bakery. Harold had to run out and get water all the time. A bakery needs a lot of water. And it was wintertime, 30 below zero, so the well was full of ice all around the opening. You had a pail on a rope; you had to wind it up to pull up the water. And Harold slid and fell into the well. This baker had two little girls, one about 5 years old and another who was 6, and they were outside playing. Harold had landed in a corner. The well was very deep, but he bounced and wound up in a corner. It was a good thing he stayed right there because if he had fallen further, he would have drowned. He hollered for help, and the girls could hear him, but they couldn't see him, so they went into the bakery and said, "We hear Harold calling for help, but we can't see him." The baker knew right away he was in the well, so he ran out, looked in the well, and said, "Are you all right?" "Yeah," Harold said. "I'm all right. I'm fine." The baker said, "Stay where you are. I've got some cookies in the oven I got to take out." He was worried more about the cookies than he was about Harold. In the meantime, the girls ran over to our house and called my father. He was quick-thinking, and the first thing he did was run for a rope. Now all the neighbors came around and started helping. And when my father came back, they lowered the pail and the new rope to Harold. But they told him at the same time to put the new rope around him so they could start pulling him up. They started winding up the rope for the pail and the new rope. As soon as Harold got right near the top, the pail he was standing on fell. The rope saved him because it was strong enough to hold him. When he came up, they grabbed hold of him and pulled him out. We really had a close shave there.

SL: So Harold came over in '25, and then Mom came over in 1930. Did you see her in Chicago then?

KL: No, she was always working then.

KL: After the boat from Sweden landed in New York in 1940, we went to Harry and Hanna's apartment. The next day I went up to Mamaroneck to see how everything was going there. I had sold the diner to a fellow who liked to be a big shot. He didn't like working, so he had other people working for him, and they were alcoholics. There was a tavern next door, and they were running back and forth there. If customers came in, they had a kid or somebody run in and get them so they could serve the customers. They didn't have many customers. This owner of the diner had run the business down to nothing, so he was ready to close up. He asked me, "Do you want to come and take over?" So I paid him, I think it was \$1,500 or something, just to get him out of there. And then that same night I called Harold in Chicago. They didn't know we had arrived, so they got all excited. Harold asked, "What are you going to do now?" "Well," I said, "I'm going to start a new business here. I'm going to try to start a new restaurant business like I did before." And I said, "Why don't you come and join me and be my partner?" "Oh, no," he said, "I can't do it." "Well," I said. "There's no future in being a chauffeur. Think about it and come." "No," he said, "I won't do that." But, you know, the next day I got a special delivery that he was coming. And that's the way we started.

SL: Where was it I heard you paid a \$10 down payment on a diner?

KL: Well, you see, this diner was all worn out. I have to tell you about this diner. The owner really had let it decline. Water from the toilet was running directly underneath the diner. There was no connection to a sewer line. Isn't that terrible?

SL: Oh, that's disgusting.

KL: And rats and mice had eaten holes in the door. I saw mice right away when I opened the door. So every time I was going to open the door, I had to shake it to scare them out of there.

We started to do good business because people heard that I was back. Harold didn't come until about two months later because he had things to straighten out in Chicago first, but I started right away. I was in a hurry. One morning when the grill was full of wheat cakes, somebody asked for a toasted roll. I lifted the drawer, and a little mouse jumped out right onto the hot grill. "Peep, peep, peep, peep, peep." He was running all around. And the people sitting at the counter were watching. I just kept myself calm. I got a pan, took everything off the grill, wiped it off, and put new batter on it. And people ate it! If it had been me, I would have walked out. No, that really was some experience.

And, you know, it was a struggle. When we left Sweden, all we could take out of the country was \$500 in American money, and they wanted us to pay \$25 apiece for our places on the boat. There were four of us, so \$100 went right there. Then by the time we started the business, we had only about \$300 left.

But we began to do so much business that the diner got too small right away. So I went to see a fellow I knew downtown—his partner was named Johnson, I'd met him before—and he asked, "Why are you starting this business? We've got a rebuilt diner here, and if you give me a \$10 deposit, you can have the diner." They had modernized an old diner, taken everything out and replaced it all. I think it cost around \$4,500 or \$5,000 in all. But, you see, I couldn't pay any more than the deposit at that time because I also had to get the place hooked up and all that, you see. From the beginning, we had three or four new bills coming in every week.

BL: How did you pay the \$1,500 to the previous owner? You got a loan for that?

KL: I paid him with a note.

SL: So the rebuilt diner was brought down to the same location, and you had to remove the old diner.

KL: Yeah. We had to remove the old one. And then we had to have plumbers, an electrician, and all that. So the \$300 was gone all of a sudden. One fellow had done some work for us, and he wanted to get paid. He was a little funny in the head. Some young fellows kidded him and said, "They are so hard up. They can't pay you." We went to Brooklyn one day, and he sat waiting in the diner all day until we came home in the evening. Our credit wasn't so good.

Business only kept increasing, but everything we made went back into the business. Harold was really very discouraged at the beginning. He was ready to throw in the towel. He said, "What's the use? Everything we make goes right back in." I said, "Don't you see the business is increasing? Sooner or later, we're going to catch up."

By the end of the first winter, we were so poor that we had to live together, Harold and his family and ours. You don't remember that.

BL: I don't remember that.

KL: We lived in Larchmont then, two families living together with kids and all that. Everything that went wrong – the boys were blamed for it. The first winter we had to live like that until we could afford to get our own place.

BL: The place you got was down the hill from Carpenter Place, wasn't it? I remember living in such a place in Mamaroneck. We lived in an apartment building.

KL: Oh, yeah, that was on Rockland Avenue. We remember it well. Neither Bernth or Kenneth spoke English. We moved down there, and kids were out playing baseball. And somebody hit Kenneth, hurting him, and he started to cry. So Bernth took a baseball bat and said, "You're a bad boy," in Swedish, and banded the fellow right on the head. He was only two and a half years old, and he was already defending his brother.

Yeah, when you think back, you really wonder how we managed. We could not afford to hire help at the diner, so we only had a night man then, and Harold and I used to go to work 6 o'clock in the morning and come home 11 o'clock at night. We would just go to bed and go to work early the next day. Hilda and Helga had to bring the kids down to the diner so they wouldn't lose contact with us altogether because they never saw us. They were sleeping when we went to work and sleeping when we came home.

JL: How long did that difficult situation at the diner last?

KL: Well, that was about three months. And then we started to draw some salary. We had to start taking something out with the business increasing all the time. When you see it going the right way, you've got to look forward, you see. By the time we left Mamaroneck, we had 8 people working for us. But in Fairfield, we had 42 people working for us. It was a bigger place.

BL: Why did you decide to move to Connecticut?

KL: Well, we figured we wanted a change in climate. We decided to look at California. In the meantime, we sold the diner and put a \$1,000 deposit on a diner in Norwalk, Connecticut, just in case we couldn't find anything in California. But first we went to Florida to look. Harold's father-in-law and father came along with us, too.

After Florida we went to California, and we looked all around there. But everybody was moving to California then. There were restaurants all over, three or four on every block. The only business going good was Big Boy Hamburgers, but you needed a whole city block for one of those, and we didn't have the money for that.

So we decided to go back East to Connecticut. In the meantime, somebody told us about this place in Fairfield, so we went up to look at it, and we liked it much better than the diner in Norwalk because there was much better parking there, and it was on a highway. So we spoke to the owner there and decided to buy that. He told us they were making around \$1,600 a week in business. He was sick, so we figured that wasn't bad because if he could do that much when he was sick, we could do better since we were healthy and could do the work ourselves. Anyway, we went to work, and it turned out good. Inside of three months, we had doubled the business. Inside of six months, we had tripled it. Of course, we lost the \$1000 deposit we had put down on the diner in Norwalk.

SL: You used to say it was good work and that you liked doing it.

KL: Yeah, I really enjoyed restaurant work. You meet a lot of people and you get to know everybody. It's really a wonderful way of working. It's a lot of hard work, and you get tired out many times. But when you're young and somebody doesn't show up to work, you just laugh. You think it's a funny experience. But as you get older, when two or three don't show up every day, and you have to jump up in the middle of the night to fill in for them or something like that, it's not fun.

SL: Brenda wants to know what you sold most in the diner.

KL: We sold everything. Hamburgers, meatloaf, meatballs, and lots of other stuff including coffee. Coffee was my bestseller.

JL: Susan wants to know if you sold cheeseburgers.

KL: Oh, my goodness, yeah. I was the best customer then.

JL: Tell us what a super duper was.

KL: Well, a super duper was a big bowl of rice pudding with whipped cream and two scoops of ice cream with string beans on top.

BL: That's what he served Thurp all the time.

SL: Thurp never ate vegetables with his meals.

KL: But one thing I have to tell you is that we cashed a lot of checks in the diner. Truck drivers always said we were the only bank that was open day and night, weekends, all the time. They always could count on their checks being cashed with us. So we always had a lot of money coming in. And we were always afraid of hold-ups. One night when I was going home around 1:30 or 2 o'clock, the dishwasher warned me, saying, "There's a car with two men in it, and the motor's been running for half an hour. They're standing in the backyard." And I said, "You watch when I get in the car."

And I went and got in the car, locked the doors, and started to back out so I could get onto the highway. And this car comes up right behind me. I immediately put the gas pedal to the floor and went as fast as my car could go. When I got to Grasmere School, there was a red light, I went right through it, and the car following me went right through it, too. And when I came to a big rotary traffic circle, I got in front of some big trucks, and this car got stuck behind them.

So I kept going full-speed, and when I got to the Chevrolet dealer, I turned sharply left, turning the corner almost on two wheels. I thought I had lost them

and that now I was all right, so I started to breathe easier. But just about halfway up the road, I saw lights coming after me, and this was a much faster car getting right in back of me. So when it started to go to the left to pass me, I went to the left, and when it went to the right, I went to the right, too. I was trying to get all I could get out of my car. And then I drove right up to the police station and hopped right out. And right behind me, two policemen hopped out of their car. They had picked me up at the Chevrolet place when they saw me coming around the corner back there.

JL: Did the policemen know that somebody had been on your tail?

KL: No, they didn't realize that, but when I explained the whole situation to them, they just laughed. They got a good kick out of it. And they said when they got about a block up the street, they saw it was me in the car. But they thought they would have some fun and try to pass me. And my heart was thumping like anything.

JL: Well, did they catch the guys who had followed you?

KL: No, they never caught them.

SL: Well, you did get held up once, didn't you?

KL: No, never. But somebody once broke into the diner on the one day of the year we were closed. They only got a few pennies.

No, I was never held up, and I closed the diner many times. One night I when I was leaving the diner and getting into my car, a colored fellow grabbed hold of the door to open it up from the side. So I said, "What do you want?" And he said, "I want to go to Fairfield." I said, "I'm sorry, I'm going to Bridgeport," and drove off in that direction. When I looked in the mirror, I saw he was walking towards Bridgeport. And I had \$1,100 in my pocket that night.

JL: Who was the funniest person who ever came into the diner?

KL: The funniest person who came in the diner was one in Mamaroneck. He was a little wacky, but he was funny. He came in almost like he was fighting. Then we would give him a bowl of soup, and that calmed him down.

SL: When did Helga come over from Sweden? Did she work in Chicago, too? And she met Uncle Harold there?

KL: Oh, yeah. She met him here in the States.

SL: When did Uncle Carl Fahlgren come over? He came over when you were working as a chauffeur, and didn't you recommend him for some kind of chauffeur job?

KL: Yeah, I recommended Carl for a chauffeur job. I went with this lady to Reno, Nevada, in 1928. She got married for the first time when she was 66 years old, and I went with her on her honeymoon to Canada. Then the next year she went back to Reno to get divorced. I stayed with her there three months; then I returned to Mamaroneck. In the meantime, she had gotten another boyfriend, and the next year, 1929, when I had started business, she wanted me to go with them to Reno again. No, I said, I can't go now. I'm in business.

So then I recommended Carl Fahlgren. He had just gotten his driver's license, and he had never driven before. And he went with the lady to Reno, Nevada. He kept on going to sleep while driving. Once out in the West, he was going very fast all alone on the road, and he went into a ditch. There was an iron fence there, for the cattle, and the bumper hooked onto it, and that swung the car back up on the road. He was so lucky. He drove to the next town 11 miles away, and then he found he had forgotten the bumper, so he had to drive back.

He had one accident after another. The car was so buckled up. The last accident he had was in Philadelphia, where the lady stopped to visit some people. The next morning they were going to drive home. So Carl gets in the car and starts to back out the garage, but he'd forgotten to open the garage door, so he took the door and everything with him. After that, his lady wouldn't let him drive to New York. He came back to the diner at around 7 that evening and started to tell us about the trip and all the accidents. He was still talking about them at 10 o'clock in the evening.

There was a rash of robberies in Bridgeport one year by someone who was called the Thin-Faced Bandit. And he was robbing everybody. He went for the taverns and liquor stores. They made sketches of him in the paper, but no one had caught him. We had a fellow come in the diner all the time, and we never knew him. He was the nicest, most honest fellow you could ever think of. One morning, by accident, he went out without paying, and about 10 minutes later, he came rushing back, saying, "Gee, I forgot to pay." Gee, I would trust him with anything.

And then all of a sudden he got caught. And the night before, he was sitting in the diner with some tavern owners. One of them was bragging, "If I had gotten hold of the guy, I would have killed him." And this fellow was sitting right next to him.

SL: Wasn't he about to escape to California with the help of May's maps?

KL: Yeah, he found out that the police were after him and were getting closer and closer. So he had made plans to escape to California to live, as he told May, our waitress. He asked her if she had any maps, and she gave him lots of maps of California. So, of course, we were kidding her afterwards that she was in partnership with him.

JL: Didn't May work for you longer than anybody else at the diner?

KL: Yeah. When we moved to Fairfield, she had worked for this other owner for five years before we started. When we came in, she took two or three months' vacation. So she didn't really work with us when we started, but then she came back and joined us. We asked her to come back. By then the business had already doubled, and she just couldn't believe it.

BL: What do you attribute the doubling and tripling of the business to? It seems to have been the case wherever you went.

KL: Well, you see, we treated the customers right. We gave them good portions and everything. And we always cashed the checks for truck drivers and others. So after a while, it got to be like a home. One would tell another one – they cash your check and they serve a good meal. We always gave them a good meal. And we kept the prices low. They were really too low because we didn't make as much money as we really should have made. We hated to raise a nickel on anything, but sometimes you have to.

JL: Didn't you get a lot of bounced checks doing that?

KL: It was mostly company checks, and they were as good as gold. But we got some bad ones, too. People would come in and we would get to know them, and after a while you cash their checks. That was a racket, you know. We also cashed checks for students at Bridgeport and Fairfield University, personal checks. Quite a lot of them bounced, but then we just called up the one who was in charge of the students, and he got after them. They had to come back and pay up every time. And we gave the students a break. We gave them 10 cents off on every meal they had. So we had about 300 students in the wintertime. And in the summertime, when the students went away, we had the vacation trade.

SL: I have a question about the farm back in Mt. Kisco, New York. Why is it that you left there? Did you just feel itchy to get into some more interesting work?

KL: The reason I left the farm is they were paying \$60 a month. And your food. That's all. You can stay there, sure. It's a good healthy life, the farm work, because I really recovered quickly there.

BL: And how did you find jobs when you went back to the city? You just looked around for what was there?

KL: We looked around. We went into the employment office. We looked in newspapers, things like that.

SL: How about Uncle Harry? He was born in the States, wasn't he?

KL: No, he was born in Halmstad in Sweden. I think Harry came to Canada first. He was working as a lumberjack in the woods and was always strong and healthy. He had some experiences there. There was an Irishman there who made fun of him because he couldn't speak English. Harry was getting madder and madder about this, and one day the man just happened to bump him a little bit, so Harry then really gave him a beating. And after that, they were best friends. This Irishman had respect for him.

BL: Did you have much contact with the family back in Sweden when you first came over?

KL: Well, the mail took two to three weeks at that time. If you miss one boat, you had to wait till the next one. And that might be two weeks later, and then it takes another 10 or 11 days to reach its destination. With the freighters, it took longer than two weeks.

SL: But did you see Anna and Karl and everybody else a lot when you first came over?

KL: It was Karl mostly. I didn't go to Brooklyn so much. I stayed with Karl for the first 10 months. After that, I was on my own and went to the farm. I was so young, only 16 years old when I arrived. I wanted to leave Sweden when I was 14, but my parents wouldn't sign the papers.

SL: So 16 was when you could go by yourself?

KL: Well, they had to sign for me.

SL: How much did it cost to take the boat then?

KL: Oh, I don't remember exactly, but I think it was around \$100 or something like that.

JL: How did you get the money?

KL: The ones that were here before always sent the money to help the others. That's the way we all got over.

JL: How did you learn English?

KL: Well, you learn by meeting people and talking. But then I went to night school sometimes.

SL: Well, you still have friends from the night school, don't you?

KL: Yeah, sure. I belonged to the debating club in New Rochelle when I went to night school. We went to compete at different schools in White Plains and Mount Vernon and other places like that. I was doing pretty good at that. I don't know how I did it.

BL: You should have become a politician.

KL: Yeah, but it took a lot of preparation. You had to read books. You had to know just what you were talking about. You had to go to the libraries and find books and read up on the subjects to debate the League of Nations, and the metric system, and everything. There were different topics every time. We debated the immigration policy a lot.

SL: Why was that? Because of the quota system?

KL: Yeah, some people were against the quota system, like the Italians. We were getting more people from the northern part of Germany and from Scandinavian countries. There were Italians in the debating club, and you just had to fight them, and tell them the reason we didn't want Italians. Yeah, it was a lot of fun. There were lots of funny experiences.

JL: If you had it to do everything all over again, what would you do differently?

KL: Well, I would go right back into the same business. That's one thing. But we were always too afraid of raising the prices. I would stay more up-to-date this time. But like I said before, when you are young and someone didn't show up for work, you just took his shift and worked another shift. And, you know, many times you had to work 12 hours, and then the night man didn't show up, you had to work 12 hours more. And then the next day – it was 36 hours before you could come home. I know when I first started, I was still working as a private chauffeur, and that happened quite often. The night man didn't show up. He would go and get drunk, and you had to work all day Saturday as well as Saturday night and all day Sunday. And my ankles used to swell up to twice their size. And when I came home, I just went in the bathroom, shaved, washed up, and laid down in my clothes, because I really wanted to be ready to go right out in the morning.

BL: I remember that old car you had, too. It had Lindy's Diner painted on it. This was an old Model A, and you always had trouble getting it started in the winter. It had a rumble seat in the back. I remember that.

KL: And we had an old dog that came to the diner and begged for food. Every time we went out, he wanted to get in the rumble seat. And he barked. He kept on barking from the time we opened. Some people in Mamaroneck finally started complaining about the barking, so we had to get rid of this dog. The chef we had in Mamaroneck was really a very funny guy, and he wanted to get rid of that dog in the worst way. Some people came in one day from New Jersey, and the chef started telling them what a wonderful hunting dog this dog was. The dog was so fat he could hardly move. He had never been hunting in all his life. When they asked him how much he wanted for him, he said, "I think I could charge \$10." So they bought the dog from him. And it wasn't his dog in the first place. But they took the dog in their car and went with him. That's the last we heard of the dog. And then the owners came around and asked us if we had seen the dog. And we said we didn't know nothing about it. We just made believe that we knew nothing. But they had never fed him. We were the ones that had fed the dog, bringing him scraps and everything.

I remember this one experience. You know, when we were leaving in 1940 for America, Hilda was very worried about the trip. And those Englishmen we were feeding, they were all excited. They all wanted to go along. "Wish we could go with you in the trunk," they said. I remember one fellow who told your mother, "Why are you so worried about the trip? There's only two things can happen. If the boat gets torpedoed, you go to heaven. And if you don't get torpedoed, you go to America. And both places are all right. Why are you worried?" In a way, that cheered her up. After that speech, she felt much better about the whole thing.

SL: They presented you with that silver plate as thank you gift, didn't they?

KL: Yes, that's right.

SL: Well, I'd like to ask you more about your early days, before you went to America when you were 16. We don't know much about what it was like when you were really young and also what your parents were like. We don't know much about your mother and father at all.

KL: Well, they were farmers, and they were very healthy, very strong. My mother had to be strong to bring up 12 children. Nowadays you have washing machines. I used to feel so sorry for her in the wintertime, when she was washing clothes in the barns. Then she and the girls went to the river, chopped a hole in the ice, and rinsed the clothes there standing on the ice. And their skirts and everything just used to be a sheet of ice when they came back. Just imagine washing for all these people.

My youngest brother, Axel, died of the Spanish flu when he was only 7 years old. Just a few months before that, he almost drowned when he went in the river down by the mill. He was going out with the current, and I went in the water and saved him. He died of the Spanish flu a few months later.

SL: That flu hit a lot of people.

KL: That's right, a lot of people. My mother really felt so bad about Axel's death. We had the doctor in; we all were sick with the flu, everybody except Viktor. And Axel was crying and saying, "I don't want to see the doctor." And my mother said, "You won't have to see the doctor." And then he died, and she felt so bad. She figured that if he had seen the doctor, he probably would have gotten some medicine and would have been all right.

SL: There were two children who died early, weren't there?

KL: Well, we had a sister that died when she was only two weeks old. That happened before I was born. I never saw her. Otherwise, we are all living.

SL: And your mother lived until she was about 67?

KL: Yeah, that's right.

SL: And then your father lived till he was about 90.

KL: He was 90 years old and very healthy. He was only sick a couple of days. He got pneumonia and then he died. But before that, he was out walking every day. He walked 2 miles every day to the store. And on the way down, he stopped at Frans's house and had a cup of coffee. On the way back, he stopped again with Frans and had another cup of coffee. Then he walked home.

SL: So he lived until he was 90 in that house that was 200 years old?

KL: No, he lived in another house. He sold that old house to Frans because he couldn't take care of it after my mother died. He then lived down below where John lived, near the river. That house is gone now.

At home, there was really very little we could do. There were so many of us. We were always at the table when it came to eating and all that. Whatever food was put on the table, there was no question about eating it.

SL: But weren't you very poor?

KL: No, we were much better off than a lot of others who didn't have a farm because they had to depend on the little income they could get otherwise. But we had a farm. We could kill a cattle every once in a while or a pig or something like that.

And when you put something on the table, we were fighting for survival. There wasn't any question whether you liked it or not. Everything tasted good.

BL: Well, what did you have to eat mostly?

KL: Well, in the morning it was instead of cereal, we just cracked up bread and put it in the milk and ate that. That was mostly in the morning. We ate four times a day. At noontime or around 11 o'clock, we had palt or Swedish pancakes or something like that. And then around 4 or 5 o'clock, we had some meat or sometimes something else. And in the evening at around 7 or 8 o'clock, it was always barley or some kind of oatmeal, but with barley. That was the standard meal plan every day.

SL: There couldn't have been too much time for you to farm because you had so many months of the year with just snow on the ground.

KL: It was very hard at the farm because you had to have your cattle inside about eight or nine months a year.

SL: And you had pigs and chickens, too?

KL: Not chickens. Frans had a chicken farm after he got to be all alone. He had a big chicken farm. We had cattle and one horse named Payo. We had another named Merkel, but we sold that one.

SL: Was the horse for transportation?

KL: No, for working the farm. We had no tractors or anything like that. The horses had to do the plowing.

SL: What did you plant mostly?

KL: Well, it was barley and rye. It was too cold to grow wheat or anything like that. There was kind of a rye you could seed in the fall. It came up a little bit and the top froze on it, but the root was still there, so that came up the first thing in the spring. We planted quite a lot of that. And potatoes. We ate a lot of potatoes.

BL: And what did you do in the winter?

KL: Well, of course, we went to school. Frans and the older ones were out of school. They went in the woods and chopped down trees. We used quite a lot of wood the whole year round. And then they sold lumber to get some income. They would take a load down to the sawmills and sell it to them.

I have to tell you about how when the land reform was finished – it finished up after I came here – my father had been to a meeting about it and gotten what he should have after the land reform. And them that got too much wood had to pay others who didn't get it so good. And he was going to have to pay 8,000 crowns, and boy, he was all excited. He said, "I'm going to go broke. We will have to sell everything we have." So Viktor said, "Calm down. If you have to pay so much, you must have some wood we can sell." He got hold of a man who went and looked at what we had. And the wood sold right away, enough to pay the bill, and my father still had a lot left over. That was a wonderful system. After the land reform was finished, farmers had their land all around them, so they became more prosperous, and it was much easier for them to work their farm.

SL: Well, how big was Kåge then?

KL: Kåge is one of the largest villages in Sweden. I don't know the population. I think it was around 1,500 or something like that at that time. It stretches around and covers a lot of area. We were in the center, but people lived all around.

SL: So that's why the Erikssons were so far away. When did they move to Urskiven?

KL: It was a long time ago [1926]. Rönnskär started there, where they melt the ore, and [Gustaf] Eriksson started working there and decided to move.

SL: How many students attended the school you went to?

KL: Well, we were six classes, one for every year. There were six years of compulsory education, and that's all I ever had. You could continue if you wanted to go in the evenings for two years afterwards, but I didn't want that. I had my mind set on coming here. Now in Sweden students can go to school just as long as they do here.

BL: How old were you when you started going to school?

KL: Seven. We didn't start till we were 7 and then we went up till we were 14.

SL: Was all the teaching done in one room back then?

KL: No, each class had a separate room.

SL: How many were in your class with Harold?

KL: Well, I would say around 24 or 25 or something like that. We had very good teachers from the towns nearby, not from our own town. They always thought it was better for a teacher go to another town. In my last year in school, I had a teacher by the name of Oster. Boy, what a teacher he was. He had studied a lot, read all the time, brought home books from the library, and studied hard. Even after I came back to Sweden in 1927, I used to go and visit him, just to sit and talk with him. He was an interesting man.

SL: I heard somebody in Sweden who was in your class say you were the smartest one in the class.

KL: I don't know about that.

SL: Well, that's what he said.

SECOND INTERVIEW – April 1979

When Susan Lindfors Taylor was fifteen and a junior at Austin High School, her history teacher assigned students to interview someone about World War II. Susan knew that her grandfather Knut had not fought in the war but that his life had been changed by it, so she

wrote asking him if he would be willing to answer some questions about his experiences during that period. He agreed and sent her ten handwritten pages of responses to her queries. Here is the entire interview.

1. *How old were you during WWII?*

I was when the war began 32 years old.

2. *Were you married? If so, who was your wife and how old was she?*

I was married. My wife was about 27 when the war started.

3. *Did you have any children? How old were they during WWII?*

I had 2 children. One of them I think you know; it was your father.

4. *Where were you living at the beginning of the war?*

I was living in Jörn, Sweden.

5. *How did the war affect you and your family?*

We were very concerned. At that time it looked like Hitler and Stalin had decided to divide Sweden and we did not like Stalin and much less Hitler.

6. *What was going on in Sweden while you were living there? In other words, what problems was Sweden having (with Hitler, etc.)?*

It gave us a lot of problems. One of the things I will mention was that my brother Viktor

and I were in the bus business and when it started, we could not get any more gasoline for our buses so we had to convert our buses to run on charcoal. It was a problem to get the buses started in the mornings. We had to start the furnace about 45 minutes before we were to leave on our trip. We had a valve on the engine we could turn on after the furnace warmed up. If the flame was blue, you could turn it on for the engine, but if the flame was red and you turned it on for the engine, it could give you a lot of trouble. It could take hours before you could get the buses going. The spark plugs would get wet and the ignition would not function. Sometimes the charcoal would form like a cake in the furnace and the engine would lose a lot of power. The best way to correct that was if you saw a hole in the pavement or a bump on the road, to try to hit it as hard as possible. That would shake down the charcoal in the furnace and the power would return. It was a very cheap fuel and after a while they improved the engine so they could run on wet wood. That wet wood produced more gas for the engine's power.

Sweden tried everything to remain neutral. The Prime Minister told the Swedish people that the war was between the big nations and that we had nothing to gain during the war and after, and that he was going to do everything in his power to keep Sweden out of the war. He kept his word. One thing that helped was that Göring had a Swedish wife and he liked Sweden very much. When Hitler invaded Denmark and Norway, he wanted to invade Sweden, too, but Göring talked him out of it.

7. When did you leave Sweden?

We left Sweden in 1940, right after the Germans invaded Norway.

8. *Explain why you left.*

It was more or less by accident. When the Germans invaded Norway (the United States was not at war at that time), the United States government decided to take all her citizens out of Sweden. I had gone to Stockholm every year and registered with the U.S.

Consulate. I received a notice to come to Stockholm and they would arrange for me to get back to the U.S. When I arrived there, Consul Harriman took me into his office and told me he was sorry because they had made a mistake in my case. I was not a U.S. citizen anymore. It had expired after 2 years, and I had been in Sweden 6 years. However, he told me if I had a clean record in the U.S., and if I would pay for a telegram to Washington, he would help me to get over. I told him I had a wife and two children. "That is no problem," he said. "I can arrange for them to come, too." Inside of one week we were on our way to the good old U.S.A.

It was a very exciting week. When the Germans invaded Norway, 5 German destroyers entered the port of Narvik and captured the city. In Narvik there was 5 merchant ships loading iron ore for England. The German destroyers started shelling the ships and sank them. The crews ran ashore, with very little clothes, and some of them did not even take time to put on their shoes. They were all put up in the schoolhouse in Narvik. The Germans had no food to give them, so they decided to send them all across the border to Sweden, which is located about 15 or 20 miles from Narvik. As the English merchant men started to walk along the railroad to Sweden in a blizzard, British warships entered Narvik's harbor and sank all the German destroyers, and when they saw people walking along the railroad tracks toward Sweden, they thought it was Germans so they started to shell their own people. One little hut along the railroad tracks where 3 German

guards had taken cover got a direct hit, and all 3 men were killed. None of the others were killed. When they finally arrived in Sweden, many of them, walking in a blizzard in only their stockings, were frostbitten, and some of them had to have their toes amputated. They were put up in our town in Jörn. At first I was acting as an interpreter for them, and when the British consul found out that I had been in the restaurant business, he asked me to take over feeding. My wife fed the officers in our house, 135 men, and I fed the crew, 135 men. When we left for the U.S., we turned this over to Uncle Victor. It was a very easy task to do. All the ships had cooks or stewards, so they did all the work. All we had to do was to buy what was needed.

The answer I gave to question 5 explains why we left. I may add when I went to Sweden in 1934, I had no intention of staying there. My mother was very ill, and I decided I wanted to see her before she died. I did not have the heart to go back to the U.S. while she was living, and in the meantime I got married and started to raise a family there. She died after several years, not of natural causes. She was killed by a car while she was crossing a very icy road.

9. Describe your coming to the United States (your ship journey and arrival in the U.S.)

Our journey to the U.S. was a very interesting one. The U.S. government had sent a troop ship to Petsamo, Finland, to take us all out of the Scandinavian countries. As the U.S. was not at war at that time, the Germans had agreed to give the ship free passage. All went well going to Petsamo, but as we were going to leave, the Crown Prince's wife of Norway arrived on board. When that happened, the Germans cancelled the free passage. The reason was that they were at war and that she was a Norwegian. The next morning at

3 a.m. the ship went out of the harbor against the German orders. We were very concerned because we figured the Germans were looking for us to sink the ship, and we were just as worried that the British may sink the ship and blame it on the Germans to get us in the war. It took us 11 days to get to the U.S., and luckily it was very thick fog for 9 days, so it was hard for submarines to locate us. The first news report we received after 6 days, and it said that President Roosevelt had been criticized in the Senate for sending the troop ship American Legion to Petsamo to get the citizens out. It had been missing for 6 days and they believed the ship was sunk. We then realized we were on a very serious journey. It was very crowded on the boat. In the room where my wife slept it was 3 beds and 9 people were sleeping there (3 grownups and 6 children). Kenneth (then 5 years old) had to sleep in a hammock in a big room where 300 others were sleeping. After one night he moved into the room with the others and slept on the floor. I liked sleeping in the hammocks. I think it kept me from getting seasick. When we arrived outside Newfoundland, 2 American destroyers met us and escorted us to New York.

10. *What are some of your memories of the war?*

The shortages of everything both in Sweden and the U.S. The Swedes are known as great coffee drinkers. Coffee was almost impossible to get in Sweden during the war, and the little they did get they kept cooking it over and over again and then added coffee substitutes to make it last longer, even barley. After a while it got to be like syrup. Tobacco was very hard to get, too, and everything was added to that, too, to make it last.

11. *What are some of your most frightening memories of the war?*

Our trip over to the United States.

12. *What happened to your financial status during the war period?*

Our financial status before we left Sweden was very good, but when we left Sweden, we could only take 500 dollars out of the country, and out of that we had to pay 25 dollars each for our trip over, so that left us 400 dollars, and by the time we started my own business we had 300 left. Harold Eriksson and I became partners in Lindy's Diner in Mamaroneck, New York. It was a struggle the first year. We had to buy a bigger diner and everything was on notes, even the cash register, so we did not have much to live on.

13. *How was Sweden's financial status affected during the war?*

It was very good, and they were able to give a lot of help both to the Finns and the Norwegians.

14. *Was there a high unemployment rate in Sweden during this time?*

No.

15. *When you were first living in America, how was your life different than it is now?*

Very much. When I first came over here in 1923, what puzzled me most was why people were so much in a hurry. I was living in the Bronx at that time, and when I went to work in the mornings I used to see people running to catch the subway trains. They ran every 4 minutes during rush hour, and as I came from a town in Sweden where one train ran once every 24 hours, it was hard to understand why people had to run for a train when they had

only 4 minutes to wait for the next one. The rush is still there, that has not changed.

When I first came over, you were safe to go anyplace day or night, and now you are not safe anywhere.

16. *If you have anything else you want to say about WWII, feel free to say so.*

I think I have said too much already. What I am really proud of is to be an American.

There is no country in the world that compares with this one. There is many problems but gradually they will be solved, that is, if they leave Carter in office. Susan I hope you will get some help with your project. I wish you had written sooner. I would have had more time to think things over.

Happy Easter to you all.

Love, Farmor, Farfar

P.S. When I started to answer your questions, I thought 3 pages would take care of it all so I wrote on back of your letter, but as you can see I had to add a few more pages. I also answered question 3 before 2. The pages are numbered.

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Love Farmer. Fairfax

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PHOTOS
and
RECOLLECTIONS



Lindfors homestead in Kåge



Knut's parents
Olof Olofsson Lindfors and
Ida Karolina Matsdotter Lindfors



Ida, Anna's daughter Ida, Olof, and Frans



Ida and Olof on the farm



Olof, Ida, and Viktor's daughter Kickan



The family on August 23, 1930. Fr the left Gerda 26, Hilda 19, Carl 14, Harold 24 and Hjalmar 16 years old. Sitting Berta and Gustaf. The picture was taken just before Hilda was to accompany Harold, when he returned to USA after his visit.



5 Sept 1932, Hilda in Lake Forest, Chicago



The Eriksson family (except Harold), February 1930 in Ursviken

1930, Hilda and Harald in Ursviken.
Harold home in Sweden for a visit.



1932 Hilda and Harold in Lake Forest.
Maybe the car he drove as a driver?



Hilda's note on the back of the photo:
"This looks good, doesn't it? We are ready to
do the town.
What do you think of Harald's hat?"



Hilda 9 years old



19 years and soon on
her way to USA

Hilda has written the following at
the back of the photo:
"I am standing here looking if I
can see Sweden, no wonder that I
wrinkle my nose. Everyone who is
long-sighted does that."



1932, April and September in Lake Forest, Chicago with Harold



*Harold and Helga got married
1937 in Chicago*



Greta, Viktor, Martha
Hanna, Harry



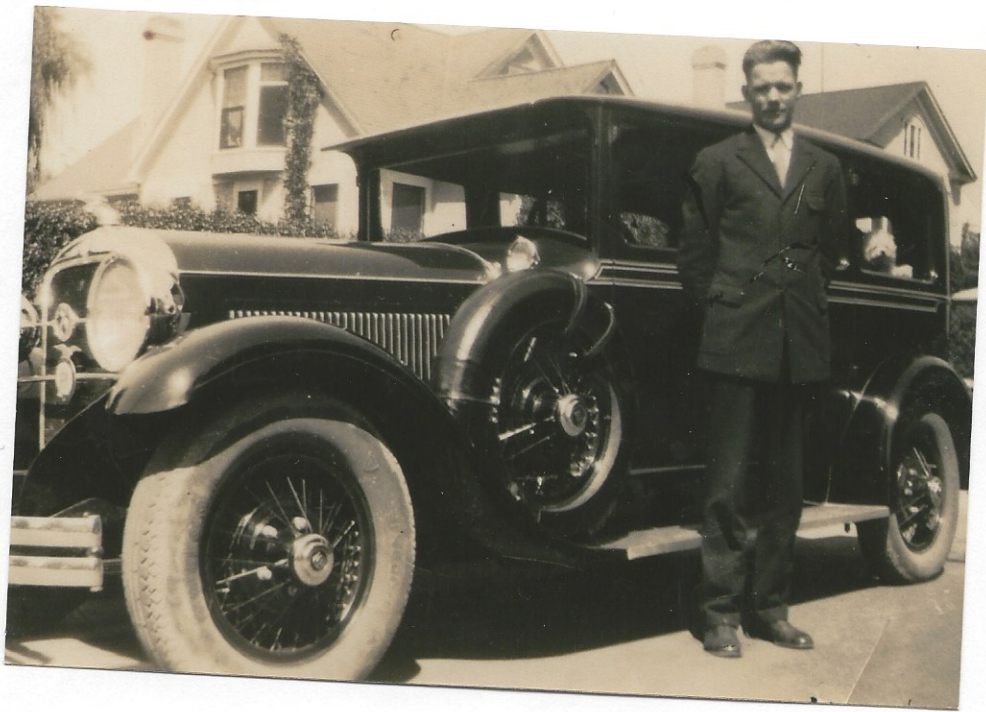
Karl, Ida, Hanna, Knut



Ken and Hilda



Axel
6 years old



Knut as chauffeur



Viktor's truck



Kågedalen bus



Ken and Ben in Jörn 1938 and 1940



Ken



Knut and Ken

PRESENTED TO
MR & MRS LINDFORS
By THE OFFICERS OF THE BRITISH
MERCHANT NAVY AS A TOKEN OF
THEIR ESTEEM AND APPRECIATION

SÖRN AUGUST 1940

Inscription on the silver plate - a farewell gift

REFUGEE SHIP NEAR AMERICA

TWO United States destroyers have picked up the U.S. steamer American Legion, which has 870 American refugees from Europe aboard as well as the Crown Princess Martha of Norway and her children.

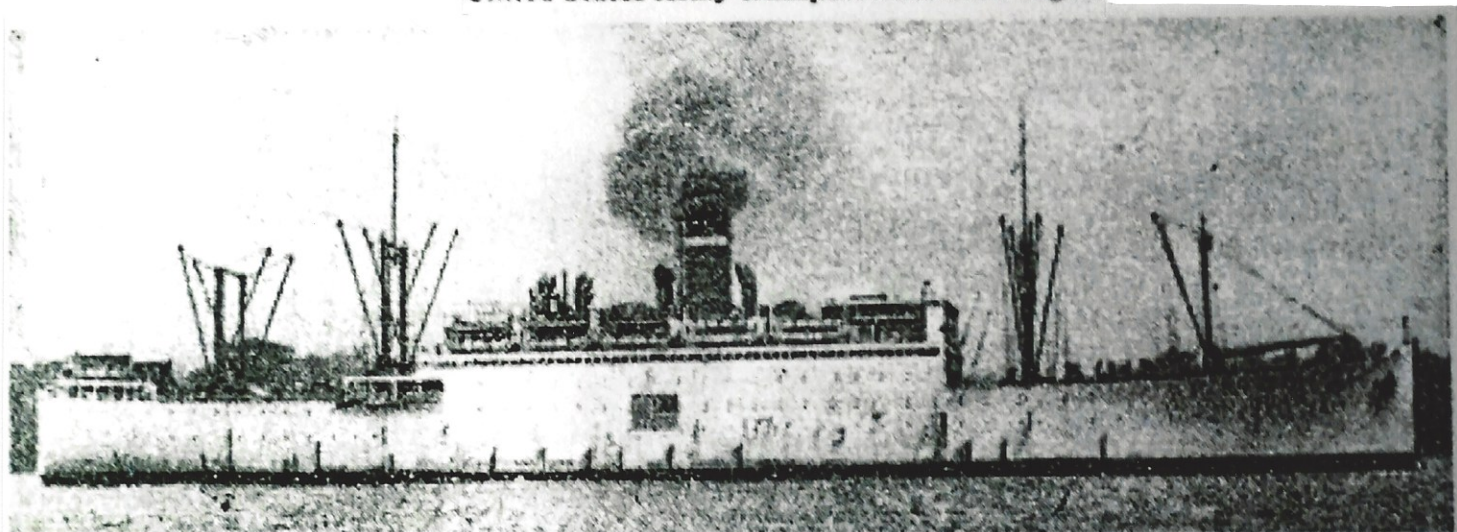
A message from the ship states that the destroyers met her on Monday night 500 miles off New York, and the refugees gave loud cheers when they were sighted.

Lifeboat drills have been held throughout the voyage and the lifeboats were constantly swung on the davits. All passengers wore their lifebelts continually.



British sailors at meal time

United States Army transport American Legion



Coming up the harbor after her trip through mine-infested seas



One of the first photographs taken in America, 1940 - Putnam Lake, NY



Four cousins at Putnam Lake: Ken, Buzzy, Ben, Nils



Jean and Art Erickson



Ben Jean Ken



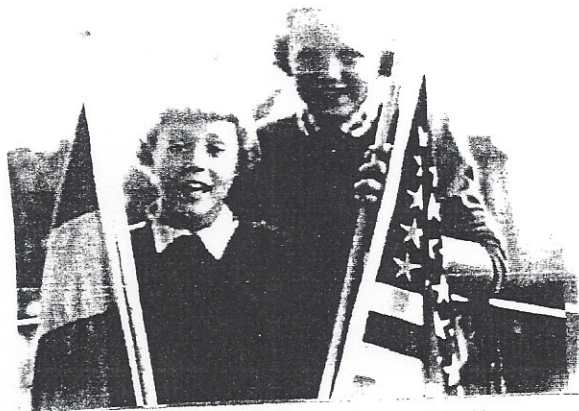
Sally and Art



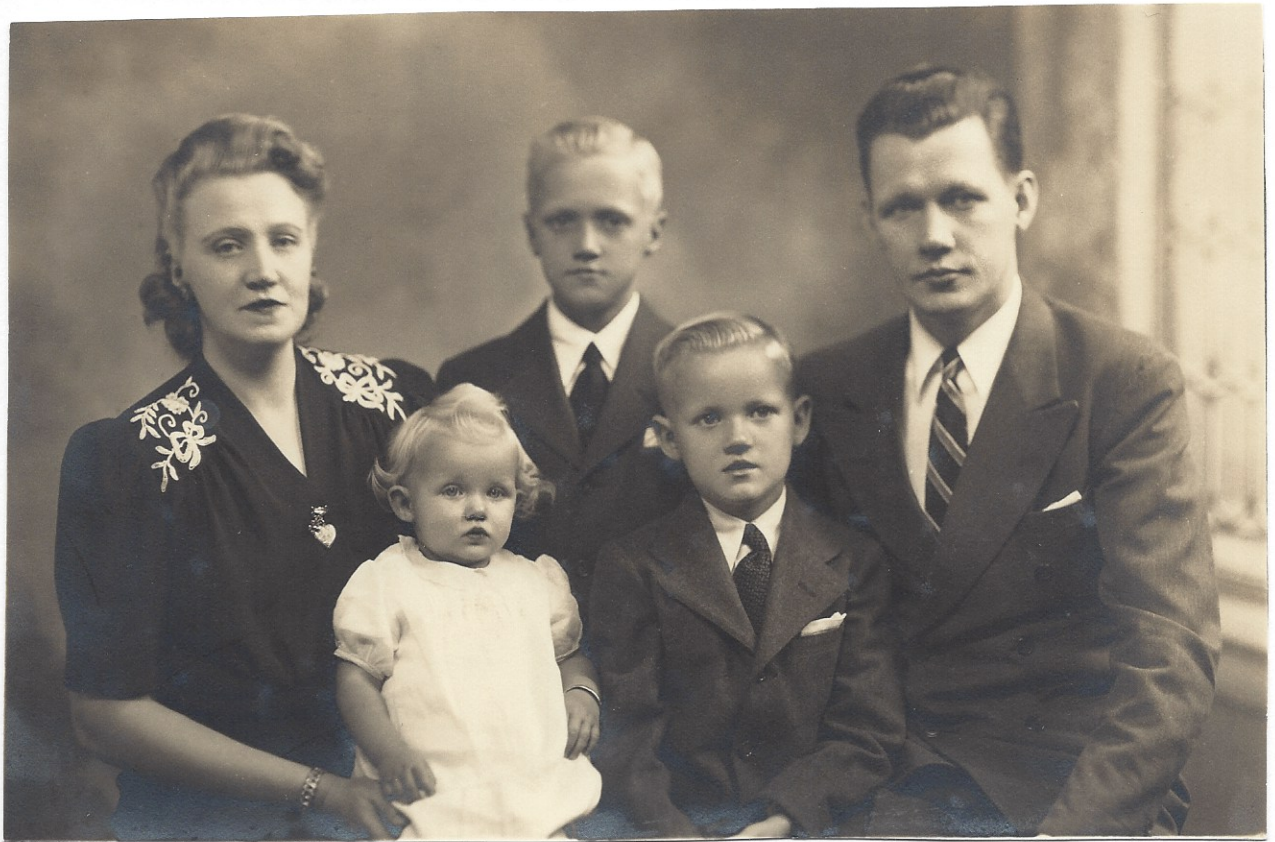
Art and Jultomten



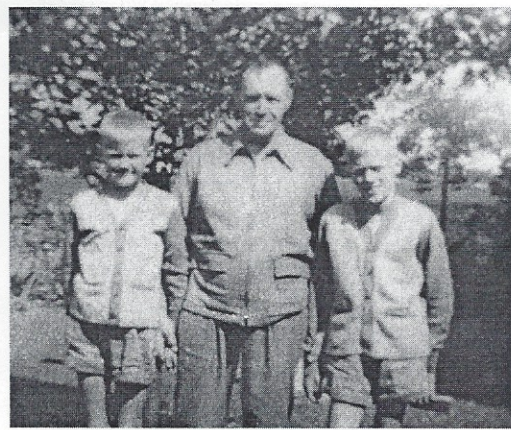
Sally and Judy Hall Myers



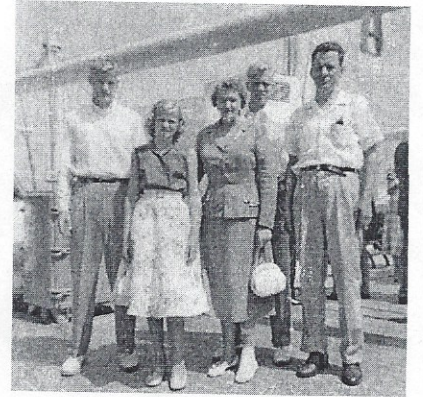
Ulla Eriksson Clausén and Sally

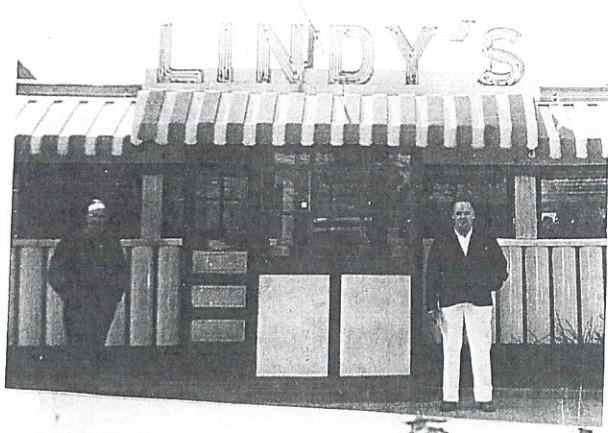


Sally and her grandfather
Gustaf Eriksson



Ben and Ken with Gustaf





UNIVERSAL MATCH CORP., NEW YORK

GREEN COMET DINER

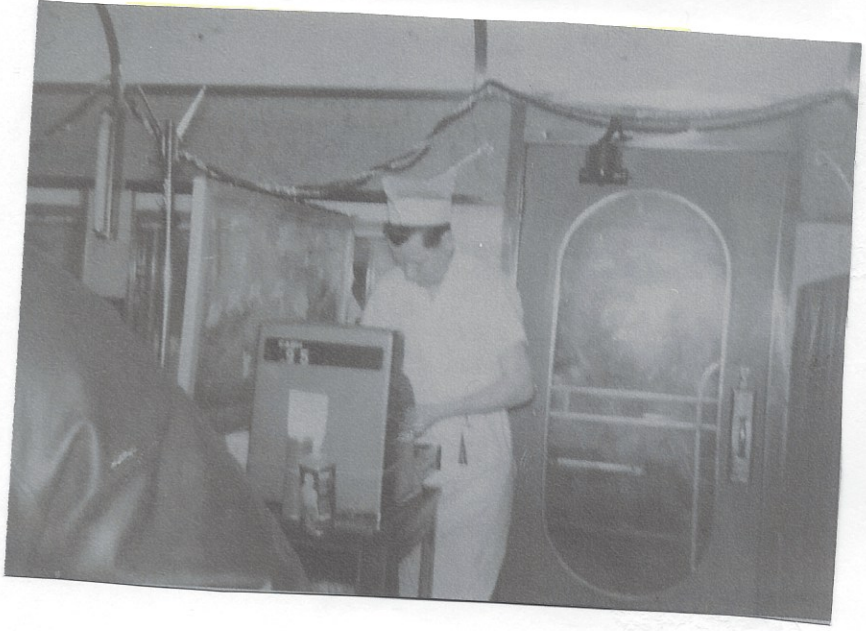


GREEN COMET DINER

CLOSE COVER BEFORE STRIKING

FAIRFIELD, CONN.

KING'S HIGHWAY · RT. U.S. 1 Alternate (near McKessons)





Frans, Hanna, Anna, Hilda, Knut 1955



Arvid, Viktor, Knut
Hulda, Karl, Anna, Nils, Hanna (1965)



Frans, John, Anna, Viktor, Knut (1960)



Viktor's daughter
Berit Östlund 2020



Carl Fahlgren



Harold



Knute Lindfors

**Meet Your Neighbor
— Knute Lindfors**

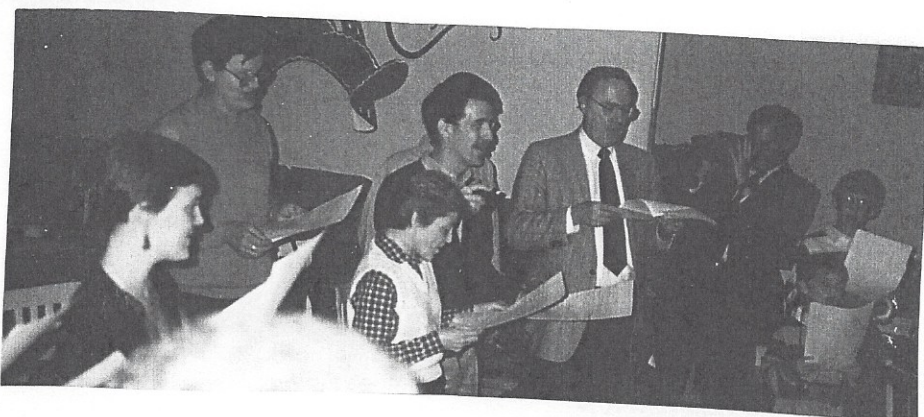
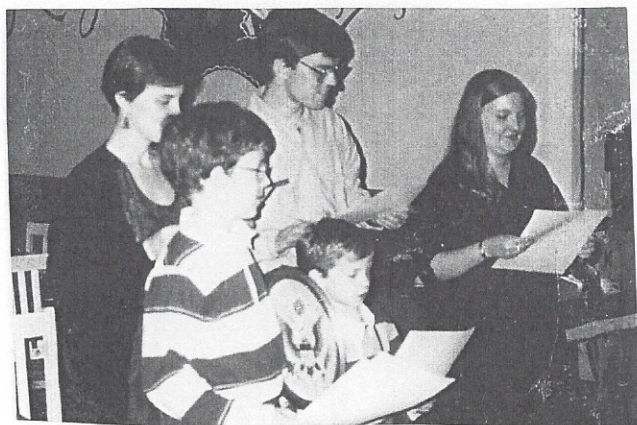
1201 S.W. 20th Ave.

Knute reached his 85th birthday December 14th. He and his wife, Agnes, will celebrate with family and friends on the 28th at Black Mountain, N.C.

He loves to work in his yard and keeps flowers blooming all year around. Also, he is very helpful to many others in the community.

Virginia Schotter

12/14/91 *Louisville Post-Courier*



Happy Birthday

Knut's 95th Birthday Party



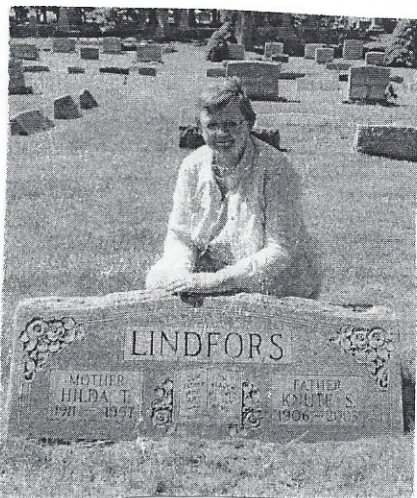
Cousins Ben, Ken, Nils, Sally, Berit, Ruth, Yngve



Knute Sten Lindfors

LINDFORS Knute Sten Lindfors, age 96, formerly of Fairfield, died on Wednesday, April 30, 2003, in Lantana, Fla. Born in 1906, in Sweden, he emigrated to the United States at the age of 16, proudly became an American citizen in 1930, and lived the American dream. He was a resident of Fairfield from 1948 to 1972, during which time he was the co-owner and operator of the Green Comet Diner, now known as the Fairfield Diner. He was also a member of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Bridgeport, and the Scandinavian Club. Mr. Lindfors was predeceased by his first wife, Hilda. He is survived by his wife, Agnes; two sons, Kenneth Lindfors of New Hampshire, and Bernth Lindfors of Texas; a daughter, Sally Lindfors Keegan of Virginia; their respective spouses; seven grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren. A memorial service was held in Florida on May 4, 2003. Interment took place on May 17, 2003, in Mountain Grove Cemetery, Bridgeport. Memorial contributions can be made to the Salvation Army, 110 South Dixie Highway, Lantana, FL 33460, or to the charity of your choice.

Published in the Connecticut Post on 5/22/2003.



Sally at Hilda and Knut's grave at the Mountain Grove Cemetery in Bridgeport, Connecticut (next to Harold and Helga's grave)



Ken and the two graves

Knute Lindfors, USA. Natten mot den 1 maj avled Knute Lindfors, Florida, USA, vid 96 års ålder.



Han var född i Kåge. År 1923 reste han till USA 16 år gammal. Han var gift med Hilda Eriksson från Ursviken och de fick tre barn. Fyra år efter hennes död gifte han sig med Agnes som stod vid hans sida till slutet. Knute drev en restaurang till 1934 då han återvände till Sverige och gick in som delägare och chaufför i brödernas bussrörelse Kågedalens trafik. Han återvände med sista lejdåten till USA 1940. Tillsammans med sin sväger Harold Eriksson drev han en restaurang i Connecticut. Som pensionär flyttade han och Agnes till Boynton Beach i Florida. Knute besökte Sverige cirka 14 gånger.

Närmast sörjande är hustrun Agnes och de tre barnen Kenneth, Bernth och Sally. En stor skara släktingar och vänner i Skelleftebygden instämmer i sonen Kenneths ord i dennes e-mail: "Han var en god och ovanligt fantastisk person".

André Östlund

KNUTE LINDFORS
Memorial Service
May 4, 2003

Remembering My Father – Kenneth Lindfors

We are here today to give thanks for the life of my father who was known by a number of names – Knute, Lindy, Dad, Pop, Farfar, Morfar, Grandpa, and Grandpa Lindy. Make no mistake – this was an extraordinary man who lived an extraordinary life of great adventure and great achievement. Let me explain what I mean.

My father was born in 1906 in a small village in the northern part of Sweden- the 10th of 12 children – and he came into the world at a time in Swedish history when poverty was common, educational opportunities were limited (they ended for nearly everyone in the 6th grade), and when nearly one quarter of the entire population of Sweden, in the late 19th and early 20th century, left the country to seek a better life elsewhere, most of them going to America. My father became part of that emigration.

In January of 1923, just a few weeks after his 16th birthday, he crossed the North Atlantic by ship, convinced that he could build a better life for himself and the family he hoped to have someday if he went to America and worked very hard. Upon his arrival he worked at a number of jobs – in a factory, on a farm, as a chauffeur – but what is interesting is that he decided pretty quickly that if he was going to be successful economically in America, he should not be dependent on someone else for a paycheck. Far better to own your own business – and have it grow and prosper through your efforts.

So working on the assumption that no matter how hard times might get, people always have to eat, he decided to “get into the restaurant business.” So he saved his money and bought a small diner in Mamaroneck, New York, that he aptly named Lindy’s Diner. Then came the Great Depression in the early 1930’s – a time of enormous distress for millions of Americans and a time when more people were leaving the USA than were entering it. At that time my father sold Lindy’s Diner, and he returned to Sweden.

What is important to note is – he returned to Sweden as an American. He had gone to night school where he had learned to read, write, and speak English; where he learned lots of American history, and where he became president of the school’s Debating Society. And then in July of 1930, he had become an American citizen. He thought of himself now as an American, and he saw the return to Sweden as temporary.

So it was that in 1940, when President Franklin Roosevelt decided to send a ship to Finland to evacuate all those Americans in northern Europe who wished to return to the USA from a Europe now plunged into war, that my father received an invitation from the American Embassy in Stockholm to book passage on this ship, and he seized the opportunity. This time when he came to America he was not 16 years old – he was 34 years old – and this time he was not coming alone - he was coming to America with a wife and two sons (and a daughter would be born three years later). He was about to start over, to start living the American Dream for a second time, but this time the stakes were much higher – he now had a family to father and support.

What is interesting is that he immediately went back to Mamaroneck, New York, and bought back Lindy’s Diner, almost entirely on credit. He then entered into a partnership with our Uncle Harold and together they built a business that was so successful that eight years later, in 1948, they sold Lindy’s Diner and bought a much larger diner in Fairfield, Connecticut, called the Green Comet Diner - which also proved to be wildly successful. He operated that diner until 1972, when he retired, and shortly afterward he and Agnes moved here to Florida.

When I think about these years, I am struck by:

*the courage and the optimism that it took to do all of this

* how hard he worked (when we were young children, he worked 13 out of every 14 days, and a twelve hour work day was not uncommon)

- * how comfortable he was with leadership. He enjoyed being in charge of things.
- * how much he believed in this country which he called "the land of opportunity"
- * how devoted he was to his family, both here and in Sweden
- * how committed he was to creating a better life for all of us

And all along the way there was a very strong will evident, and also a good mind, a gentle warmth, and a real goodness to his character that enriched the lives of all those with whom he came in contact.

I want to close my remarks by reading to you a letter written to my father by his granddaughter Karin several hours after she learned that he had died. It speaks very clearly to what I have just shared with you about my father:

Dear Grandpa,

I am filled with memories of you. I am so sad to know that you have left us. I am sad that I won't see your face or hear your voice again in this lifetime. But I am relieved to know that you had a peaceful death with Grandma and Judy beside you.

When I tell others about you, I always say that you lived a remarkable life. I speak with pride about your journeys to this country, about your hard work and successful business, and about the loving family you raised. It is astonishing how many opportunities you created for your children and in turn for your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. For me, one of your legacies is a belief in the transformative powers of perseverance and optimism. Through your life choices, you have taught me that change is possible. Your life reveals the ways in which blessings can multiply when someone lives and works with dedication.

I'm remembering time we spent at your house in Fairfield when I was a little girl. We would come for Grandma's delicious Sunday dinners. The mashed potatoes were always my favorite! Afterwards you would sit down to watch your beloved NY Giants. Kristin and I loved to play and explore in the enormous backyard. I remember the amazing player piano in the basement and the parakeet in the kitchen. You sold the Green Comet when I was still very young, but I remember going there. For some reason, what stays with me from the diner was getting a handful of delicious, melt-in-your-mouth mints from a bowl beside the register. When I spoke with you on the phone as a child, you would often comment on what I was wearing. For the longest time, I thought you had special seeing powers. Little did I know, you were getting all the information before my turn on the phone!

When Will and I came to visit you in Florida before our wedding, you were brimming with stories. We heard about your childhood diet of carrots, turnips, and potatoes. You told us the story of how you refused to milk cows on a farm when you first arrived in this country because that was considered women's work in Sweden. We heard about how you fed and housed British soldiers during the war. You described for us the foggy nine-day voyage to the States in 1940. You told us about the parakeet you once had that would ask, "What you doing, Lindy?" And you told us how smitten you were when meeting Grandma. When you first started dating, you took her to New York to see "The Music Man." You also said that you felt like you had won the lottery twice in life because you had the good fortune to marry two wonderful women.

We had a very special visit with you three years ago. I am so glad that you met Maya. One of her favorite things is to ask me stories about when I was a little girl. I tell her lots of stories, including ones about my times with "Grandpa Lindy and Grandma Gigi." As she grows up, I will share more stories about your remarkable life. She will learn about your playful wit, your kind heart, and your generous, loving spirit. We will make sure that she travels to Sweden someday. And we will make sure that she learns to play dominoes!

You are in our hearts Grandpa. We give thanks for the blessing of your life. We will miss you. We wish you peace. Much love, Karin.

Remembering My Father – Bernth Lindfors

My brother has told you about our father's life. I would like to say a few words about his legacy, about the gifts he gave us that enriched our own lives. I'm not referring to material things. Rather, it is the values he held and transmitted to us that have had the most profound influence on each of us.

Primary among those values was the emphasis he placed on the importance of education. He had not had much formal education himself, but he was not an ignorant man, and like most immigrants from the old world to the new, he wanted the best for his children.

So when he saw that high school education in Fairfield, Connecticut was not all it should be, he decided to send my brother to a private boys' boarding school in Massachusetts. This was a bold step because he had just started a new business, was deeply in debt, and had to make a number of sacrifices to pay the tuition. Two years later he sent me to the same school, and subsequently he sent our sister Sally to a related girls' boarding school. The quality of the education we received enabled us to go on to good colleges. It gave us a big boost at a formative stage in our lives.

But book learning wasn't the only kind of education he wanted us to have. He also wanted to broaden our knowledge of the world. Perhaps he thought we were growing up too American, without an adequate awareness of our Scandinavian roots. Or maybe he simply wanted us to become better acquainted with members of our extended family--those numerous uncles, aunts and cousins of ours living in Sweden. So he shipped us off to them--first Sally one summer, then Ken and me the following summer. This was our first experience of living abroad, learning a foreign language orally through the trial and error method, and traveling widely outside the United States.

Both of these life-enhancing experiences--our formal schooling in America and our informal education abroad--shaped the direction of our respective careers. All of us went to graduate school and ended up as educators involved in some aspect of international education.

Ken, after earning an MA and teaching for a few years at our old school in Massachusetts, became a teacher and headmaster at a private boarding school in Connecticut and then moved on to become President of ASSIST, an organization that recruits foreign students for placement in American private secondary schools. His work has taken him back to Sweden as well as to Australia, Germany and particularly to many of the nations of Eastern Europe: Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Moldova.

I moved to a different part of the world. After earning a couple of MAs, I went with my wife to Kenya where we taught for two years at a boys' boarding school. On our return I reentered graduate school and earned a doctorate by writing a dissertation on African literature, a field in which I have been teaching and doing research ever since. My work has taken me to more than a dozen African countries.

Sally took yet another global direction, earning a Ph.D. in Chinese language and literature, marrying a fellow Sinologist who entered the foreign service, and going with him to live and teach in Jamaica, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and mainland China.

Our father didn't plan all this. Indeed, he might have preferred for us to go into more lucrative professions than teaching. But after giving us a start, he left us to go our own ways. He knew that education would get us where we wanted to go. What he may not have known is that by giving us these opportunities, and most of all, by instilling in the value of education in each of us, he was by far our best teacher.

Remembrances of Dad – Sally Lindfors Keegan

Throughout his life, and especially in the past few years, Dad often spoke about how he knew that he had had an angel watching over him all his life. And he told us some of the incidents that convinced him.

For example, when he was about 14 years old, he and a dozen other young boys were splashing around in the water at a local swimming hole one summer day in northern Sweden. Dad ventured out farther than he should have and soon found himself in waters deeper than he could handle. As he yelled for help and started to drown, he realized that none of the other boys knew how to swim, either. Just at that moment, an older boy came by—the only boy in the area who knew how to swim and knew enough to rescue Dad. In looking back, Dad knew that it was an angel who sent that rescuer.

That angel was around when Dad was 16 and working in a factory in New York shortly after arriving in the States. He and another young employee had just carried a large machine in the elevator up to the fifth floor. The second that they stepped off the elevator and the doors closed behind them, the elevator's ropes broke, causing the empty elevator to careen down the five stories and crash into smithereens at the bottom. Had Dad and his coworker stayed in the elevator, they would not have survived.

Dad became a U.S. citizen, and later, in 1940, he was on a boat with his young family and several hundred other U.S. citizens being evacuated from Sweden. The boat was in great peril, in danger of being attacked by air and traveling through waters filled with mines. What saved them from the air attacks was the fog that wrapped the boat protectively during their most vulnerable days.

Much later in his life, after he had retired to Florida, he and Agnes often visited North Carolina to view the autumn foliage. He woke up one morning with a mysteriously large and unusual-looking boil on his wrist. By virtue of a series of completely fortuitous circumstances, within several hours five doctors who were experts in such matters were examining the infection. As the doctors handed Dad the appropriate prescriptions, they told him that had he not gotten to their offices as quickly as he did, the infection would have been fatal.

His angel also went with him to Disney World a few years later, when Dad slipped at the top of a set of concrete stairs a catapulted down headfirst. He scraped his arm pretty badly, but as for that head that had gone headfirst, it didn't even have a bruise.

These and other incidents—like the car accident that destroyed the car and merely bruised his ribs—convinced him that some angel was taking care of him. And he was humbly grateful. He often mentioned, especially in the past few years, how blessed he was to have married two such remarkable women—our mother, who died in 1957, and Agnes, with whom he shared a wonderful marriage for 43 years.

It's clear to everyone here that he took his angel as a role model, too - because he certainly knew how to be an angel to others. He was always ready to help out his many friends and relatives. When he lived in Connecticut, he visited people in nursing homes and just found special, inconspicuous ways to help out people who needed company and food. I could give you many examples-- I've heard some I never knew about during the past few days--and I'm sure that you could add many more. And we all know how eager he was to make sure that everyone had plenty to eat.

His angel specialty, though, was gardening. I suppose that because he was on earth, he couldn't be a Guardian Angel, so he became what you could call a Gardening Angel. Not only was he the Gardening Angel of his own yard at home, but he also nourished other people's, offering plants and gardening help. When he lived in Boynton Beach, for example, he often took care of as many as 15 families' gardens while they were up north--not for pay, but just for the joy of working in God's natural world of plants and for the joy of helping others.

He liked being an angel. He liked nurturing gardens and other people. I guess he did so well at it that God and the angels need him back with them now, full time.