

Informant: Rudy Kemppa
Ethnic Group: Finnish/record collection
Address: Hancock, Michigan
Date: July 23, 1979
Fieldworkers: Sara Poynter
Matthew Gallmann

Sara spent part of the morning preparing a song list of Finnish songs that we collected from the Pelto's, Eino Parkinen, and Eva Koopika. Sara also got directions to Summit which is where Rudy lives.

We drove to Rudy's only to find that it was in walking distance from where we are staying. At first we agreed that we could have walked but then we realized that it was a good idea that we drove because that gave us the freedom of leaving the tape recorder in the car.

Rudy was waiting for us when we got there. He answered the door and we made our introductions. Rudy is a short man of 71. He has a small amount of grey hair that is cut very short. He wears glasses and he seems to hear pretty well. Rudy looks like he is in good shape for a man of 71.

Rudy directed us into the living room and had us sit down on the couch and then he asked "Well, what can I do for you?" I suggested that he could perhaps tell us about his Finnish radio program. Then we explained the project briefly to Rudy. Rudy told us about a man that is coming from Finland next month to look through his record collection. Rudy referred back to this story several times throughout the interview. Rudy also began explaining how the Finland radio station had come to the U.S. to record many of Rudy's old 78's. Rudy said that he gave them about half of his collection because he didn't want all of these albums merely lost if he dies. Rudy indicated this type of preservationist attitude a couple of times. When we were up in his listening room he showed us a stack of Finnish sheet music that someone was going to throw away. He told the person that they weren't going to throw that stuff

away as long as he was around.

Rudy told us then that he had some very rare records such as one of the first Finnish records ever produced.

It seemed that Rudy wanted to please us and so I went straight to the point and asked him if we could ask him questions and tape record the interview. He said that that would be just fine and so Sara and I went out to the car and got the equipment. Rudy said that we would have to go into the kitchen because his wife wanted to watch the television.

Just then Rudy's wife entered the living room and we all introduced ourselves. She commented that she had picked a bad day to be baking bread as it was very hot and humid outside.

As we entered the kitchen Mrs. Kemppa hurriedly wiped off the kitchen table and offered us chairs to sit in. Rudy said that we could put the recorder right on the kitchen table and I did just that. The seating arrangement is as it is in Diagram 1. (See Diagram 1.)

The interview began with Rudy checking over the songlist that Sara had prepared. He helped us spell words and clear up a few titles. Rudy has a vast wealth of knowledge about oldtime Finnish music.

Mrs. Kemppa was in and out of the kitchen making her bread during the interview. Rudy was willing to answer any questions we had to ask him.

It seems to me now that Rudy will be central in helping us identify songs, musicians, and sources from where our informants learned songs.

After the interview we asked Rudy if we could record some of his recordings. He said that there would be no problem with that. Then he asked us to come up stairs to his listening room.

The listening room is packed full of 78's, 33's, 45's, songbooks, memorabilia, and Finnish/English dictionaries.

First, Rudy quickly showed us his whole collection. Then he proudly produced a scrap book containing articles about him and his work. These were

articles in Finnish and in English, from Finland and the United States.

Then Rudy proudly showed us a medal he received from the President of Finland for promoting Finnish culture in the United States. This, it seems to me, is an indication of what a cultural advocate Rudy was at one time.

It seemed that Rudy was getting a picture of what it is exactly that we wanted. He pulled out a tape of two old lumberjacks that Rudy recorded about 15 years ago. They were playing piano accordion and fiddle. Rudy said that "you could never tell that those guys never had a lesson in their lives."

Meanwhile we continued to look through Rudy's "gold mine" of material. Then Rudy told us that his daughter picked up the piano accordion when she was young. He told us a story about his experience with the button accordion.

It seems that Rudy was a young boy looking through a Sears and Roebuck catalogue and he saw a button accordion. It cost \$4.50 but Rudy had no money. Well, this wasn't going to stop him so he went out into the woods and set some weasel traps. He caught one large weasel and then skinned it and dried it. He sent it off to a fur dealer with a letter exclaiming that if they couldn't send him \$4.50 for the pelt that they should send the pelt back. A few weeks later Rudy received a check for \$4.50 from the fur company. Rudy took the check and sent it to Sears and Roebuck and he received his button accordion.

After this story I told Rudy that I have been trying to learn the button accordion. I told him that I know two Finnish songs neither of which I knew the titles for. Rudy asked me if I had the button accordion with me and I said it was out in the car. He told me to go get it and I did just that.

I played the two songs for Rudy and he immediately identified them as "Kulkurin Valsi" (Vagabond Waltz) and "Nujulan Talkoo Polkka" (Nujulan Harvest Polka). Nujulan is the name of a farm.

After this we listened to some cuts of Viola Turpenen on an anthology album of American Finnish music. Rudy showed us on the album where the producer gives credits to Rudy for assisting him with his record collection. It

was written in Finnish though and I couldn't understand a word of it.

Then we listened to a cassette of old Viola Turpenen 78's. Rudy told us stories of different dances that he promoted. I told him that it sounded like he did a lot of "work" promoting Finnish music and he responded by saying that it wasn't work to him.

We got to talking about the dances that they used to have in the area. Rudy said that he loves to watch the Letka Yenka (Line Schottische). I asked if he could remember how many different types of dances that there were and he said that there were many. He mentioned the schottisch, mazurka, waltz, polka and Steerman's Waltz. Rudy said that the mazurka was a nice dance that you don't see anymore.

We told Rudy that we were interested in learning some of the older dances. Then I asked Rudy if he could teach us any of these dances. He said no he couldn't because of his health. Then we talked about Rudy's heart operation and his present health.

Sara noticed Rudy look at his watch and she asked him what time it was. He said it was 3:00 and she said that we should get going soon. Later, Sara mentioned to me that she was concerned that we were taxing Rudy's energy.

Rudy put on some 45's for us. These are popular American songs that have been translated and re-recorded in Finnish.

Rudy said that if he had a few more weeks to think he could help us out some more and might think of some things that we ought to know. I suggested that we might want to come over again this week or in September. Rudy proudly said that he will be there in September and then said that he expects to live another 50 years. Sara and I both smiled and he said, "What are you smiling about? Don't you think I'll live that long?" I said that we were smiling because we were happy to know he felt as if he was going to live that long. Then Rudy laughed.

We got up and started heading out the listening room door and I asked

Rudy if I could take his picture. He said that that would be fine. We went downstairs and I got my camera. Meanwhile, Mrs. Kemppa asked Sara if we could stay for some bread. Sara was happy she asked!

I took some pictures of Rudy up in his listening room. Then we went downstairs and Mrs. Kemppa fed us. We talked about various things. Sara and Mrs. Kemppa talked about baking for a little bit. Sara and I were eating while the Kemppa's abstained because they are both on diets. Mrs. Kemppa took delight in feeding us and apparently she bakes more than they can eat.

The interview ended on a definite up note.

There are a few things I must add. The first is that Rudy also has a recording he made of Olaf Rainkanen's father playing the accordian.

The second is that Rudy said he used to play the mouth organ, button accordian and a little fiddle but apparently records became his first love and joy.