

Informants: Arnie Johnson ,
Ailie Johnson

Address: Oulu, Wisconsin

Ethnic Group: Finnish accordian/vocal

ETHNIC HERITAGE
SOUND ARCHIVE & RESOURCE CENTER
NORTHLAND COLLEGE, ASHLAND, WI

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Fieldworkers: Matthew Galimann
James Leary

Jim Leary and I had breakfast together and read over my fieldnotes from my last trip to the Johnson's. Jim's friend Phil had breakfast with us and then he headed home. Jim and I bought gas and then began driving out to Oulu. We made it to the Johnson's at about 12:55 p.m. Arnie was the only one home as Ailie was out driving her parents to the food store.

We met Arnie at the door and then entered into the house. We sat in the kitchen talking at first while Arnie was by the sink. Then Arnie sat at the kitchen table with his glasses on reading the newspaper and talking with us. He kept yawning and explaining how reading makes him drowsy.

We talked about a festival that Arnie and Ailie had just played at. It was called "Summerfest". It was the local Finnish summerfest. Then Arnie told us about his recent trip to Copper Harbor and we talked about the Upper Peninsula.

Arnie got us coffee and toast. Jim brought out the pint of brandy we had brought and asked Arnie if he would like some in his coffee. Arnie said that they had some brandy and he would pass for now. I did the same and Jim took a shot in his coffee.

Arnie searched around for a post card he had received from Finland. The man who sent it is from St. Paul, Minnesota and only visiting Finland. He apparently wants Arnie to play at a festival in St. Paul this coming fall. Arnie said he wanted to show us the post card because he thought that the

printing on it was very special. He couldn't find the post card but went on to explain the festival.

Arnie said that there will be oldtime music and dancing and a big event for three days celebrating mostly Finnish culture.

Arnie took some time and called up Ailie. She had forgotten who was coming to visit and Arnie wouldn't tell her who was there. After Arnie hung up he explained that Ailie was curious and concerned about who was there and he was ornery enough not to tell her.

We talked about Jim's wife and Arnie's kids a little bit. Then Ailie came home with a bag of food. She didn't notice us at first but then she realized who we were. She had never met Jim before and she remembered me from the time I met with her and Arnie.

Arnie asked Ailie if she knew where that post card from Finland was and she told him where it was. She asked, "What good is it since neither Jim or Matt can understand the Finnish language?" Arnie explained that he wanted us to see the printing on it.

Arnie found the post card and we looked at the printing which was very carefully executed. Ailie asked if we wanted more music and I replied, "Yes." She seemed like she didn't want to play any music. Ailie proceeded to make comments such as we should have come in the evening and she really hasn't been practicing.

It takes Ailie awhile to warm up. She is seemingly reluctant to play anything for us when we first arrive. But once Ailie begins to play music she is happy and opens up a little more and gets excited about what we are doing. I also get the feeling that Ailie isn't quite sure why we are interested in the old Finnish songs.

Well, about this time Arnie brought Jim and I outside for a tour of his workshop and machines and sauna. Arnie is obviously a good welder and a craftsman.

When we got into the sauna Jim took some pictures of Arnie and the sauna. Arnie obviously likes to have his picture taken. Arnie told me that you get the fire going and throw hot water on the rocks to make steam. Then, he said, if it gets too hot you throw cold water on the rocks. I almost fell for his trick. He also did a similar type of gag outside when he tried to tell me that he brought a wooden cart shopping with him.

Then we talked about the "old days". Arnie explained how it was for his parents. The "eats" weren't bad but getting clothes was the hard part he said. He explained how different things filtered into the area, as far as foods such as summer sausage, and animals such as sheep.

We left the sauna house and headed back to the house. We stopped at a huge pair of tires which Arnie explained were from his son's truck. While Arnie was speaking about the cost of the tires he said, "It's like the monkey that pissed on the cash register and said, "This is going to run into the money." On that note we went into the house while Jim told another monkey joke.

We went into the living room and sat down. Arnie said that he was going to get his wife's piano accordion. Ailie explained that a friend was coming over and that she had to entertain.

Meanwhile I had gone to the car and got the recording equipment and my button accordion. The Johnsons asked me how long I've been playing the button accordion and I said that it hasn't been more than about six months.

Ailie's friend arrived and so she entertained in the kitchen. Arnie was trying to call someone on the phone and Ailie asked me, from the kitchen, to play a tune on the button accordion. I played "Kulkuri Valsi" and she said that she had heard that one before.

Arnie came into the room and started showing Jim some of his song books. Then he told us how expensive this one hard cover book on the coffee table was.

Jim began to ask some questions about where the Johnsons played and Arnie

started talking about the old days. I asked him if we could record and he said, "that's alright but wait until Ailie comes in here."

The conversation began by Arnie explaining how people needed each other in the past. He theorized that insurance companies are breaking up a lot of continuity. He backed it up with an example. He spoke of how people used to have "shingle bees" but now, he said, you couldn't have one because if anyone got hurt you would get sued!

Then Arnie talked about how the dance halls were kept up by everyone lending a hand, but that doesn't work anymore. I think the tape went on at about this point.

Towards the end of the tape Ailie looked through her albums and lent me two Viola Turpenen albums. The formal interview ended when Ailie went to put coffee on the table.

^{Arnie}
Ailie sat in the living room telling us jokes. He was continually telling jokes for a seemingly long time. This seems to be Arnie's heartiest repertoire of folkloric materials. Once he gets going he loves to make people laugh. Jim asked if he ever used these jokes in his stage act when he sings with Ailie. Arnie claimed that he didn't, but he should. I packed up the equipment during this.

We sat around the kitchen table. The table had coffee, cheese, crackers, baked goods, homemade bread and milk. Jim and I talked about our status quo. Jim and Arnie exchanged some jokes and we talked about different things unrelated to music. I think that we all felt pretty comfortable by now.

Ailie made some comments early in the interview that I will relate here. I remember her saying that we should find people that are "really into music". She also commented that she forgot a lot of the old numbers.

When we left we all went outside to my car and talked about music. They said that they were sure I would be by again and to return the albums when I could.

Ailie asked me who taught me to chew as she saw the "Copenhagen" on my car seat. They were very friendly and nice.