

February, 1979

81-118-F

Contact: Arnie Johnson  
Address: Oulu, Wisconsin  
Ethnic Group: Finnish  
Fieldworker: Matthew Gallmann

I called Arnie at 6:30 p.m. and asked him if it was still alright for me to come out to his place. He said it would be fine and so with fiddle and tape recorder in hand I drove out to his place.

I was greeted at the door by Arnie, [REDACTED]. He was as jovial as the first time I met him. I walked into the living room and he introduced me to his wife Ailie.

Ailie's mother came over to America from Finland when she was three years old. I don't know where Ailie's father is from but I know he speaks Finnish and is 100% Finnish.

Arnie's parents were born in Bessemer, Michigan. Arnie's grandfather homesteaded the land that Arnie lives on.

The T.V. was on when I first came into the living room. Ailie was engrossed in a program on cougars. She told me that there was a basketball game (high school) on the radio that she wanted to listen to tonight at 8:30. She said that I probably should have come another night.

Arnie brought out the newspaper article on the project and asked me if this was what I was working on. I acknowledged the fact that this was the project and tried to explain why I was collecting. They seemed to take this fairly well. Arnie looked bewildered when I told him that Jim Leary was a "folklorist". I tried to explain what a folklorist did but I think Arnie wasn't quite sure.

Arnie was very perceptive and asked me if I was collecting only music from the Old Country or if I was collecting the music made in America. He ran into this trouble when an Upper Peninsula Finnish radio show told him that they weren't sure whether they wanted to play his Finnish-American album.

We started to talk about the "old days" (30's and 40's) when "people danced more" and "didn't have to be drunk to have a good time."

Ailie added comments here and there but seemingly paid most attention to the T.V. They explained that there used to be three different places where dances were held. The Waino Hall was one of them, the Oulu Hall was another and the "Co-op Village" was the other one. One of them was a round building. Walt said that they played basketball at these halls as well.

At some point around this time Arnie's nephew Richard walked into the room. Richard is a big man with a firm grip. We introduced ourselves and then Richard began to work on the stylus on their stereo which was apparently broken.

Arnie began to show me his music books. Some were songbooks from Finland that, according to Arnie, you can't get anymore. They were written in Finnish but some such as "Old Black Joe" and "Take Me Back to Old Virginy" were American popular songs. Some of the material he showed me had notation but most of what he had were word books.

The cat came in the room and soon made friends with me, the unsuspecting visitor. Ailie was in the kitchen now and Walt and Richard and I were sitting in the living room. Arnie and Richard both told me to just throw the cat on the ground. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

We went into the kitchen and Ailie served us coffee, cake, cheese and crackers. Richard told a joke about Toivo. Arnie asked me after the joke was over if I ever heard the "Finnish Toivo Jokes". I said no and he proceeded to tell me a few jokes.

The first joke was told by Richard. (None of these records are verbatim)....

"The Red Baron and Toivo (Savo) were fighting against each other. Toivo shoots the Red Baron down. As an honorable gesture Toivo visits the Red Baron in the hospital. The Red Baron is about to have an arm amputated. He asks Toivo if he could fly over Germany and drop the arm into Germany as a symbol of the Red Baron's dedication to the homeland. Toivo decides to grant the Red

Baron's request and flies over Germany and drops off the arm.

Toivo hears that the Red Baron is going to have a leg amputated so he goes to visit him. The Red Baron requests that Toivo drop his leg into Germany. Toivo again grants the Red Baron's wish.

Toivo hears that the Red Baron is about to have his other arm amputated so he goes to visit him. The Red Baron again requests that Toivo drop the amputated arm into Germany. Toivo refuses this time and when the Red Baron asks him why he says, "cause I think you're trying to escape."

This joke was told by Arnie Johnson...

"There were two guys out snowmobiling and one of them fell through the ice. The guy who didn't fall through looks through the hole in the ice. He sees his friend down in the freezing water trying to start his machine and yells, "Choke it, choke it!"

Arnie also told this next joke...

"Savo and his friend were working full days. Everyday the boss would come into work, leave at 11:00 a.m. and be gone all day, without fail. Savo says to his friend, "Why don't we leave after the boss leaves? He's gone all day and he won't know the difference." At first Savo's friend was a little reluctant but Savo eventually talked him into it. Once they decide to leave neither one can decide what to do. Finally Savo says, "let's both go home and wash up and then go out to a tavern." One guy goes home and finds the boss in bed with his wife. They met up later on and Savo asked, "what happened, what took so long?" Savo's friend replied, "I almost got caught."

After the jokes we were sitting around the table and I asked Arnie about his family history again. Somehow the topic came around to the pioneer days. I think these stories are accounts that Arnie heard from his grandfather.

"They (?) were in Montana and they went in to a bar to get a drink. None of them could hardly speak English. There was a cowboy in there starting trouble with the bartender. The cowboy was a dude and he was carrying two side-

arms. The cowboy got mad at the bartender and shot the numbers right off of the clock. The bartender grabbed a double barrel shotgun and went chasing after the cowboy. The Finns went outside to see what was going to happen but all you could see was a cloud of smoke."

As I look at it now, most of these stories involved three Finns.

"There were three Finns in a Montana bar. They had some money and some locals were about to steal it from them. One of the Finns pulled a knife out and ran towards the door cutting every man that tried to grab him. The three Finns all ran in a different direction, so that their pursuers wouldn't know who to follow. The guy who told Arnie the story said that years later he saw one of the guys that he cut up. He cut into his face on the cheek. Apparently, when the guy first got cut he could put his tongue through his cheek."

Another story Arnie Johnson told me involved three Finns in a lumber camp. "These guys were the only Finns in the lumber camp. As is often the case they were picked on because they were a minority. One of the Finns finally grew tired of one particular wise guy that did most of the antagonizing. The Finn told his father that he was going to get even with this guy. The wise guy made a snide remark one day. The Finn took a barrel ax and threw it at his head. The ax missed the wise guy and stuck in a tree behind him. Many men turned to observe the incident. All they saw was that ax (ocillating) in the tree." (I chose to use a word such as ocillating because Arnie described this part with his body movements more than words).

We began to talk about the towns such as Hurley and Cumberland that used to cater to the lumberjacks with booze and women. Arnie told me that Iron River was such a place. This discussion led to talk of moonshine and drunken rowdiness. Arnie said that some folks in Oulu had stills. He told this story of his grandfather..."My grandfather stood in front of an oncoming train when he was drunk waving a knife in the air and yelling,"don't blow that whistle at me. Come closer and I'll kill you." Fortunately my grandfather's brother

grabbed him by the shirttails and pulled him off of the track."

They told me of the train that used to come through Oulu to bring logs back to Iron River. Arnie also spent time talking about how hard they had to work in the woods cutting timber to make money.

Richard and Arnie then proceeded to tell me of their travels to California, British Columbia and other places. We talked of vacationing and traveling. We talk@d about the splendors of the world such as huge redwood trees, glaciers and caverns.

After talking for a long while Richard decided that it was time to leave. He brought Arnie and I out to the truck and showed us a gas heating device he rigged up on his engine. Arnie showed me his log splitter after Richard left and then we went back into the house.

Arnie decided that it was time for me to play my fiddle and for Ailie to play her accordian. I got my fiddle out and Arnie got Ailie's Chordovox out of the case. Ailie was reluctant to play at first. I played them a fiddle tune and I guess she felt obliged to play a tune for me. We played "Redwing" together and Ailie backed me up on "Turkey in the Straw". She played the "Beer Barrel Polka." We played "Tennessee Waltz" and some other tunes that I merely improvised on. They told me the "Finnish Settlement in the Woods" polka is a popular tune among Finns.

Ailie played a schottische and told me that I should learn a schottische. She played accordian and danced a little at the same time. I explained that I was familiar with a different type of schottische step and she told me that this was the Finnish version. Arnie sang whenever he knew the words and he danced around on some songs. Ailie told him that he wasn't dancing but merely jumping around. He agreed with her but he was having fun jumping around.

Arnie again mentioned that the old dances were good because you could "belly-up" with your partner. That is, you could dance belly to belly.

We played ourselves out and decided that we would have to get together

again some other time. Ailie apologized for having to listen to the basketball game. I bought Arnie's album. They gave me some milk and cake and I gave them some posters to post pertaining to the Finnish Culture Night at Northland College.

I drove home half asleep. I left their place at about midnight.

Some things remembered;

Arnie told me that you can sing better if you're chewing snooze (snuff). While Richard was there we talked about the price of chewing (snuff) tobacco. Arnie showed me a clay container that it used to come in.

Ailie told me that I should learn some old popular songs for my band. She also told me that they didn't play for much money back when they played alot. She indicated that they started playing for the money. They played mostly weddings, funerals and dances.