Nordic American Voices, an oral history initiative, was launched by the Nordic Heritage Museum in 2009 with the mission to collect, preserve, and share the life histories of Nordic immigrants and their descendants in the Pacific Northwest.

These recorded interviews will inform future publications as well as exhibitions in the Museum's current facility and in the new building planned for Market Street in Ballard. The stories will be featured in a range of projects, from educational websites to exhibitions, and will be available to historians and to other Nordic cultural organizations.

Transcript of interview for Richard Svensson

April 17, 2010
At Seattle, Washington
Interview conducted by Lynn Tengbom and Lisa Orville
Interview of Richard Svensson
April 17, 2010
Seattle, Washington
Interviewers: Lynn Tengbom and Lise Orville

Lise: [0:29] All right. This is an interview for the Nordic American Voices Oral History Project. Today is April the 17th, 2010. We are at the Swedish Cultural Center. The names of the interviewers today are Lynn Tengbom and Lise Orville. [0:56] Today we are interviewing Richard Svensson. Would you please state your name?


Richard: [1:11] OK. On April 9th, 1940, when the Germans invaded Denmark and Norway, I was working.

[1:42] OK, I'm going to start with the, reading my notes, yeah? On April 9th, 1940, when the Germans invaded Denmark and Norway, I was working in the tool room at Finnboda Yard. It's a shipyard in Stockholm. [2:07] The Swedish government immediately ordered all men mobilised. Which is the same as the general mobilization? It means that every man that had done the obligated military service, that everybody had to do at the time. When you were 19 years old, or 20, you get to do the obligatory service.

[2:42] OK, they have, they had to go to the predetermined units immediately. And they had to get there, whatever means they had. I mean, you know, nobody had cars, hardly, at that time, and so bicycles or buses or taxis, whatever, but you were on your own to just get there. It was total chaos. The guys were thrown a uniform whether it fit or not. So they exchanged between themselves, and so you can imagine what they looked like. There was a, all that [inaudible 03: [3:07] 22], sure a sorry looking army the first months. And there weren't even enough guns for everybody, but everybody was not a GIs, either.

[3:37] But, pretty soon the shipyard where I was working was, got pretty busy fixing up Navy ships. We worked two shifts, both day and night. And at one.. yeah, day and night.

[4:02] At one time, not at the shipyard, but at a Bergen Navy base in Horsfjärden, which is south of Stockholm was a big Navy base there. There was three destroyers, were tied together, side by side. And did I mention there was a big explosion there? Yeah.

[4:25] Well, anyway, they were tied together side by side. And there was a big explosion all of a sudden. And one of.. let's see, they think it happened on one of the outside destroyers, probably had come in. And anyway, that ship sank fairly soon and the other two caught on
fire. And the middle one sank from the damage from the first one. And the third one, a fire was, of course, more damage while they're still afloat.

[5:13] The one in the middle that was, sunk and also fire damage, came in to the shipyard where I was working. They had the, let's see, they had what they call a slip, where you bring up the ship in a cradle on a big railway. So this was a big one, I mean, it was hydraulic.

[5:47] It was in there, OK, it was in there for repair, and of course, it took several weeks to find all the dead sailors. And I think, it was even a month after they found, still found a guy that was drowned and damaged inside.

[6:10] And, so I got to see close up what happens in war, you know, the damage and injured guys and dead guys. Terrible stuff. All right, in the meantime...

**Lynn:** [6:33] May I just ask you, what year was this?

**Richard:** [6:37] This was, probably in 19..., it was early, see I worked there, let's see... It was fairly early, maybe '41 or '42. Something in there, that I don't recall exact year, but it was something like that, '41 or '42. [7:15] The Germans had... after they occupied Denmark and Norway, they mined the whole west coast of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, so nobody could get in and out. So, of course, we were cut off from the... anything from outside. Especially food was important because Sweden cannot grow enough food for themselves. You have to realize that Stockholm is on the same latitude as Anchorage, Alaska, see.

[8:00] So the growing season is very short. And of course most of the food supply is grown maybe from Stockholm, a little bit north of there and then basically south of there. And Skåne next to Denmark, that's what they call the Swedish grain supply. And or they say corn but basically in general.

[8:30] So a lot of food of course was imported from Denmark. But of course, the Germans owned Denmark now so they took care of all the food, you know. We couldn't get anything from Denmark. So pretty soon we had food rationing. And that included just about everything except for potatoes, beets, carrots and locally grown fruits. There was a, you know, limited amount and berries. And milk, I think, was still not rationed.

[9:11] But everything was on coupons. The government printed coupons and you only got so much per person per month or something like that. And actually meat was, after a couple of years, almost unheard of.

[9:33] I mean, we had enough meat during the war; we were a family of six. And they had my parents and four kids. And we could maybe, I don't know, if for every Sunday we had a piece of meat for all six. And the size of that meat was what I can go and have on a plate in a restaurant right now.

[9:59] So that, people really don't understand what it means when you don't have enough food. But I learned that the hard way and all the Swedes of course living there at the time. So food becomes of bigger value. I mean here, it looks like it has no value at all, you know. You're throwing away more than we were eating over there, so.
[10:26] But anyway, back to the war, here. My age group, I was born 1923, so before I was drafted to the Navy, which I was drafted to, we had to, we were drafted by the government, I think it was, yeah, at least. I think we were the first one. We were drafted to go out and service lumberjacks, to cut wood. The wood was used to heat the buildings, basically.

**Lise:**  [11:26] Was this while you were at the shipyard? No.

**Richard:**  [11:31] I was still at the shipyard, yeah.

**Lise:**  [11:34] Yeah.

**Richard:**  [11:35] Oh yeah. And, but that didn't mean anything, because, you know, when you were drafted by a government, like the power they have there, you just go. I mean, that's the same as, you know. It's the jail if you don't go. [11:55] But we had to, the way that it was set up, you had to earn a certain amount of money. So you had a choice, to either wait for the government to tell you where to go, or you could go out voluntary. And then you, which I did, because then I only have to earn 550 Kroner, regardless of the time or how much you were paid, you were paid by private companies to do this. And if you were drafted by the government, you have to earn at least, I think it was 700 or 750. So I figured, well, I go out voluntary. And get the lesser.

[12:45] And then I could pick where I wanted to go. So there was a friend of mine, same age, we went together up to Dalarna in Sweden. And there we were actually cutting wood that was going to, that was going to be smoked to make wood coal from it. And that was done in what they call coal meaner. Yeah, coal miller.

[13:33] They stacked the wood on an angle, and then there were special guys that kept the fire burning in the middle of it. I don't know exactly how it worked, but they kind of smoked it, probably got the moisture out of it till it got dry.

[13:54] And this coal was basically used by the blacksmiths to make tools. Because you don't want to destroy the steel in burning up the carbon in it. So this replaced the carbon in the steel, as the blacksmith was hammering on this thing. This I brought from the shipyard, in the tool room, because we had blacksmiths there that did our, some of our tools, it was all made by hand at the time.

[14:34] And anyway, and I remember well, too, because up there is nice birch wood, and we went early in the spring, or late winter to get better transportation, because we took the train up there. But then we had the skis along, yeah.

[15:01] So we could, because we were located up in what they call Fäbodvallar, where the, in summertime, the farmers send their cows up in the mountain. And they had small buildings there where usually a girl, or a woman, were milking the cows and making cheese and cream and stuff like that.

[15:30] So we stayed in one of these buildings, which, of course, was pretty rough in wintertime. Because going up there, the only heat we had was the wood we carried up there,
because we were, there was no wood up there, or forest. We probably walked a mile or more down to the forest, to cut the wood.

[16:01] Then, we took a dry tree on the way, on the shoulder, carrying it uphill, up to this building and started cutting up this thing for a fire before we could even do anything. To cook food and to warm up. Of course, the water was in a well with ice on it. So we had to take one of the axes and chop up the ice and get a pail of water for drinking. So you can understand how much we were showering up there. Anyway, that was the kind of life we had.

[16:40] That was done in less than three months, I think; two and a half weeks. To start with I made maybe a couple dollars, well, in kroner. The first day I think I cut five of these. We had to stack the wood, three meters long and we stacked them like this. That's supposed to be one meter and 10 centimeters. For that we got 80 kroners for it; which is about, divided by five at the time, would be 15 cents or something like that.

**Lynn:** [17:29] Who paid you?

**Richard:** [17:30] Well this was a private man that bought the standing forest. The trees were marked by Wardens. Yeah, Wardens. There was only trees that was not good enough to make skis for. So we didn't have to cut very big trees. The biggest was maybe less than a foot in diameter. But it was birch, really tough wood. Growing slowly. That's how they made skis from this thing. But they also made good wooden coal for the blacksmiths. [18:26] So we needed sharp tools. But of course, I was a tool maker, so I knew how to keep a tool sharp. I had a file along with me. We had to buy our own tools, too - I mean, when went out as volunteers. If you were drafted to a camp, then of course the government had tools and whatever you needed.

[18:52] And then, of course, you had somebody in these big camps, somebody who were cooking the food, and had better quarter, and you didn't have to do like we did. It was already warm when you got there.

[19:08] I'd like to see the kids today doing this. I mean, those were things you just had to. There was no other choice. It was either that or freezing. So anyway, to... For our food - of course, we had backpacks and we had 20 kilometers down to Rättvik, in Dalarna, from where we were. So on the weekend, Saturday and Sunday, we skied down there with our backpacks and bought our food.

And then, of course, we're on skies, now with a full backpack, to go up hill all the way up to, what we call, the [inaudible 19: [19:47] 55]. And milk, of course, was not something that was not very practical to carry - heavy... you know, for a whole week. So we were buying dried milk, powdered milk, and mixed it with water. It didn't taste that good, but when you're hungry, it still tastes good. So that was the basic experience there before getting into the navy.

So then, in January of 1944, I got into the navy base in Stockholm and [inaudible 20: [20:36] 50]. There we had boot camp - everybody - for two months. We run over... Yeah, like boot camp here. Probably not as tough as the Marines have it here, but they had enough that some
guys that never... never physically did anything. And some of them couldn't make it either because they got sick or, had to send them home.

[21:26] Anyway, we were seven hundred I remember that came in at that time and seven out of the seven hundred were selected to the cannon shop to be... get the schooling and education as weapon mechanics. And of course in my case it was a perfect choice that they did. And, because I was already learning tool making in a tool room and I was also studying to become an engineer in the evenings.

[22:10] So, and the engineering in the evenings, that I paid myself because I and my friend, another friend, not the one who went to boot camp. We decided when we were sixteen that we wanted to do something more than just, you know, and so we start going to school in the evenings so we went to school four nights a week and then weekends of course we were studying for the tests and stuff like that.

[22:50] And that was basically a six year program. But of course I was interrupted by the services here, first up, cutting woods and the military service. And... But anyway, so I got into this, selected, yeah, selected to be a weapon mechanic. And of course we learned everything from handguns up to the big cannons, automatic machine guns, everything that was at the time.

[23:40] Of course this was also a better job on the ship because you didn't have to take the watches, four hours on, four off which of course I didn't know at the time. I mean we just did what we were told to do. Out of this seven there was only five of us that graduated, the other guys were basically machinists too and so they knew how to, you know they had mechanical background. Some of them were probably studying to be, we never discussed that but.

Anyway, yeah, then when we were done with the school, we were a big group of sailors from this whale boat, people that came off ships for one reason or another maybe they were sick, had to go home or whatever. We were a big group at the ships, at the Krippsholmen that was lined up every morning. It was probably a hundred of us or more. And selected to do certain work around. The basic was the work, to wait for a commandeering to get on the ship.

[25:06] And so we, all us weapon mechanics are there and the reason that we were selected to be mechanics was the weapon mechanics are usually people that was signed up for four years in the Navy, so they were professionals. And now they didn't have enough of these guys so they had to take from us, the general draft and educate us to get on the ships that needed.

[25:38] But apparently they didn't know in the office that we were walking around there, you know. And ships were waiting for mechanics. That I understood afterwards but, so one day, an officer comes, now they're going to, I understood that they took a couple of ships out of mothballs and was maybe not only these two but more ships. But anyway, see I'm falling out of order here, so, I know where I am, about there someplace.

Yeah, the, it was this man come, an officer and just counted up bodies, and said, "You are on the deck on this and this ship." The next number of bodies are in the machine room, or the lower deck, and [inaudible 26: [26:19] 43] machine, and stuff like that. And so on. And my
best friend that I met there, standing next to him, his hand come right between us, we end up on different ships.

**Lynn:** [27:00] Aw.

**Richard:** [27:04] Well, we should have been that, anyway, as mechanics, you know, because there's only one mechanic on each ship that knew how to service, not to do any work on the cannons. But service the weapons, knew how to take them apart and fix them, and understand what could be wrong with them, if something went wrong. [27:36] Usually the artillerists, they cleaned the guns and did the heavy work. We didn't have to do that. It was just kind of a little boss to tell you what to do. Which was kind of nice?

[27:52] Anyway, they, what they were supplying bodies for now was two old destroyers that were taking out the mothballs. And the name of them was Hugin and Vidar. So, I ended up in the machine on Vidar. And this, let's see, I said 80, but they couldn't be more than, there's no way we could be 80 people on that ship. Well, anyway, I think there were about 40 or so. Ordinary sailors. Then, of course, you had officers on top of that.

[28:52] And I end up in the machine and I am... yeah. Like I say, here, I could have gone to the office angry, everybody starts screaming, "I'm so and so, and I'm..." "Well," I said, "officer, I don't give a darn. You go to the office and get that cleared up."

[29:09] And I could have gone there, too, and said, "I don't have to shove the coal in this thing." But that's actually kind of fun to do that. So I just... I'm kind of little bit more adventurous than... So, I though I'll do that, and I knew I could get off there anytime, if this was the case.

[29:39] Anyway... Oh, yeah, Vidar was [commissioned in 1910], so you can imagine what this thing looked like. Well, maybe you can't. But anyway... And she had... Vidar is of course a man's name, but, for ships, you're always talking about "her" - "she".

[30:16] And she had... Yeah, before... You know, the airplane was invented, the wood and paper plane or fabric, just four years before, by the Wright Brothers. So there was no airplanes that was used in the war when that was built.

**Lynn:** [30:42] The First World War was....

**Richard:** [30:45] Yeah, it was built before the First World War, yeah, because that was from '14 to '18.

**Lise:** [30:52] What was the ship being commissioned for? What was its purpose?

**Richard:** [30:58] It was commissioned for defending the entrance to Stockholm. I was actually coming to that later on. I will just describe the ship little bit first, because it's kind of interesting. Vidar had two piston steam engines and four coal fired boilers, and at full steam, she actually made 30 knots, which was very fast. But, of course, they were built also to go... long and slim and narrow. [31:40] And when we went out there... I'm getting ahead of my... a little bit here. But we're supposed to... When we went out, we...
Part II

Richard: [0:21] OK. At full speed she made 30 knots, or could do, but, we were supposed to cruise at 12 knots, 10, 12. But our skipper, he liked speed, so we were usually moving around at 16 to 18 knots, which was a little more work in the, for shoveling coal on the fire, but, who cared? I mean [laughter]. [0:53] We had four, the ship had four torpedo launchers, two tanks with depth chargers, four 75 millimeter cannons, four machine guns, and two double barrel Bofors 40 millimeter automatic [anti-tank] guns, which was a very famous gun at the time and I think it still is. Well, now, of course they send the rockets, but this Bofors, they were bought all over the world. There was big business for them.

[1:36] The reason they were so good, too, was that the barrels did not, they still stayed straight even on heavy shooting. You know, they heated up, and if you don't have high quality tempered steel done the right way, they can bend, and now the bullets take off the wrong way. So they were the absolute finest guns at the time for antiaircraft.

[2:12] Anyway, so I ended up in this machine room which, basically, was shoveling coal to keep the boilers hot. I was lucky because there was older guys on my watch. We had four hours on and four off when we were out to sea. At port those are regular hours, eight hours, and then you were free; except for half of the crew had to be on four off and four watching and ready to take off if something happens. [cough]

[3:02] I was, as I mentioned, lucky because I remember there was a 40 year old guy that had been, what you call, elder fire man on commercial ships. He knew how to build a fire that was really hot. Because if you put too much coal in, then it got sick and then it didn't get so hot and produce so much steam. But if you could keep it thin and even and no holes, because they blew air in through the coal to get them really hot; then you cooled off and start for...

[3:50] He taught us the tricks, how to do this, and that meant less work when you do things. Same thing when you're chopping wood. Some people work their ass off without nothing happening; but they have sharp tools and let the tool work for you. You only use half the energy and that's what I knew how to do, because, anyway....

[4:27] So, normally we just, unless there was emergency, of course, at shore we only had one boiler going and one kind of on standby. The other two could be fired up very quickly. But at shore, of course, we needed to run, what you call, a donkey machine. A donkey machine is electric generator that was also run by steam to produce electricity for the lights, whatever, operation of the bridge, and...

[5:15] So, and I don't know much detail about this, but anyway, we belong to, now we're going out to sea, and we belong to the Stockholm [foreign language], I don't know how to translate that to English, more, I know in Air Force they have a squadron of planes.

Lise: [5:46] Could it be "fleet"?

Richard: [5:48] And could maybe be something similar word in, for the Navy.
Lise: [5:51] Could it be "fleet"?

Richard: [5:53] Fleet is basically, yeah, a small fleet, we can call it the small fleet of boats, a squadron or small fleet. I don't know how many was in it, but we belonged to part of it. And we, our station was up in a place called Grinda, which is on the map. It's about 50 miles, 50 English miles north of Stockholm. These are things I had to figure out last night for you. I knew what, look at the maps and re-figure the... [6:33] So we were basically stationed there, and patrolling the waters, which will be between Aland and Finland. And, of course, at the time we had the three mile territorial waters, three mile limit - three nautical miles. And, which I can tell you later on, when the Russians changed that without telling anybody. [laughter]

[7:09] Unbelievable. Anyway, so, yeah, basically patrolling there and, but at times we went all the way down to Gotland, which is down here. Do you want that on the...?

Lise: [7:35] Yes I do.

Richard: [7:36] We were stationed here, and we went down to Gotland. Because what happened was, see, Estonia and Lithuania, these Baltic states... oh yeah, there was even further, I see maybe it wasn't Latvia then. I thought it was Estonia. Well, there was both. Anyway, these countries were first occupied by Germany, the three Baltic countries as we called them. Then, the Russians took over. Then the Germans won again and drove the Russians out of there, in a bigger offensive. [8:41] And that's when the Germans went all the way to outside of Moscow, and got caught in the winter. And Hitler refused to let them retreat and come back and get warmer clothes, and wait for the winter to get over, because the guy was crazy.

[9:02] But anyway. So now with the Russians coming back, now the people there didn't want to stay there. Because they know how they will be treated because they'd already been there once.

[9:15] So they were fleeing over to Sweden, and they came in just anything that was afloat. A rowboat, something, rowing all the way. I mean the shortest distance here is 50 miles, to Latvia, and we picked up people all the way from Estonia.

[9:39] They were probably getting out to the islands here. And usually what happened was that probably the Swedish Air Force spotted these boats, and then we got orders to rescue them, pick them up. Because sometimes it was really blowing, I mean, storms.

[10:11] You had waves, gee, as high as high as a house or higher. Because it's not that deep here in places. Anyway, we went through some severe storms.

Lynn: [10:23] What happened to these people after you picked them up?

Richard: [10:26] Well, we took them into Gotland and they had a camp there where they interned them. They got food and clothing and help and then they got to the Swedish mainland to become Swedes if they wanted to. I mean, they were refugees, so that's what we did at the time. Many people don't know much about this over here.

Richard: [11:11] We must have salvaged or saved – rescued hundreds of them. I remember one time it was a really bad storm, and there was three people and a kid coming in a rowboat. Had rowed probably more than 50 miles in open sea and all they owned was a sheet that they had put their belongings in and tied together. It was in the bottom of the boat. And it was raining and blowing, and they tried to keep afloat by whatever they used to bail out the water with. So this was - I was on deck at the time - and so, when the waves were so, so their little rowboat was level with our deck, then the first thing they did one of the men threw this little kid over. And, one of our sailors, you know...

Lise: [12:54] Did they all make it?

Richard: [12:56] Yeah. Anyway, one of our sailors caught the kid. And, of course, they got the other elders on board, too. [13:13] And their belongings, I don't know if we even bothered with. That I don't remember. But, at least they come on board and got dried up and dry clothes and whatever, food. And then, we tried to tow this poor boat, but that didn't work at all. I mean, as soon as we started up, we just pulled it a little, it all broke apart, you know.

[13:45] So, that didn't work. And, it wasn't worth anything anyway. It was a wooden old boat. It was surprising they made it as far as they did with it.

[13:56] So, that was - another time, basically, yeah, another time was kind of a sad story, too, because it was a bigger boat with sails and about 100 people. Maybe they had an engine in it. They must have had an engine in it. But anyway, there was almost 100 people on this thing.

[14:21] There were a lot of injured people because one guy had gone crazy or something and took the pipe or something and started swinging around and hitting people. So, our crew quarter, which is the, is not a doctor but more a military nurse, he had a lot of work to help these people with bandage and whatever they could do.

[14:54] And, that boat, of course, we towed into Gotland. It was close, probably, 80, 90, maybe 100 people in it. So it was a bigger thing.

[15:06] Anyway, let's see, let's move along. Yeah, and that's what I wrote here. I mean, you've got to be very desperate when you're doing these things, coming in a rowboat with your family. There was two men, and a woman, and this little kid. I don't know what the relationship the, probably the kid belonged to, maybe, two of them were married and the other one was a brother or relative. They were probably relatives.

[15:42] And anyway, back up to Ålands Hav, where we were, I mean, these stories was several, but these was the most remarkable ones, I think.

[15:58] Up in Ålands Hav, we were patrolling there, and once in a while, several times, we got a report that there's some fallen or unidentified submarines out there. And we got the position, and we had to go if they didn't, you know, if we didn't know who they were, we were supposed to sink them, or attack them. Because they were in on Swedish waters.
[16:40] And our depth chargers were not like they have in the US Navy, they shoot them out like this. We had big barrels on aft deck that we just rolled off the stern. And that was another dangerous operation, because they were not activated when we, normally, when, we only activate them when we needed them.

[17:16] And on the end of the barrel, was just like a big oil barrel, you know, the 200 gallon, little bit bigger than, and of course, they were loaded with tortulu they called it, it's stronger than dynamite. Tortulu is a concentrated type of dynamite, because it's a really, you know, but in order to set this off, you, need a smaller charge, and these are the things that we screwed in from the end.

[17:49] But in order to do that, there was only two of us doing this. The rest of the crew was up front. Because if we had an accident and blew ourselves up, which could easily happen. Because we had a big device, as big as a plate, with treads on it, that was about this tall.

[18:16] And this was a charge to set off the big charge, and that was just like on a handgun, a hammer that was spring-loaded. And they were activated by the water pressure, and we could set that to different depths of water. But the thing was that you only did this out to sea, where we were rolling around.

[18:54] So usually the officers in charge are laying on top, laying on their stomachs, trying to carefully put this thing in and do the threads. And my job was to hang onto his belt so he doesn't fall off, or keep him steady there so he didn't. Because if you hit one of these little spring-loaded hammers, that would be the end of us, and half of the boat would be blown up.

[19:30] And sometimes I had to do this, too, when he was ashore or not available for some reason. There was usually only two of us there doing this.

**Lise:** [19:42] How did you know how deep the submarine was?

**Richard:** [19:46] Well, I don't know. That was just an estimate. Because they work on...we set each one was at a different depth. So if one was too far away, the other one would...

**Lynn:** [20:05] Were these Russian submarines?

**Richard:** [20:06] We don't know, we never knew. But it's an interesting story. I just read in the Swedish paper, I read it on the Internet a couple of times a week. And, just a couple of months ago, they found in Ålands Hav, a Russian submarine that's been sunk at that time. And, of course, I don't know if we did it, or if some of the other destroyers did it, but they found this Russian submarine in about the area where we were patrolling. [20:52] So, there is a possibility we could have done this. But usually, when we had to drop the depth charges in, we had to, we stayed, usually, 36 hours, I think it was. Minimum of 36 hours. Waiting for the sub to either come up or, if it was damaged, usually some oil come up. So we had to just hang around there and wait for oil slicks. Or a sub to come up. But we never, never saw anything. I mean, we just, did our job, and moved along.

[21:46] And so, but that's kind of interesting, that just in that area.

**Lynn:** [21:53] Yes. Wow.
Richard: [21:54] And it was just, I think it was the last, I think it was about two months ago, they found this there.

Lynn: [22:05] Do they intend to bring it up?

Richard: [22:06] I don't know. They only, the only thing the paper said was that they found this submarine. Yeah, oh yeah, they probably, take it off, but at least go down and inspect it you know. You know, they don't take up all the warships that's gone down, they just check them out, the divers check them out. I mean, if it's, it's just a pile of junk anyway, unless there is something valuable, but the, you know, this is 50 years ago, so, or more. So, it's nothing of value in there, but that was kind of interesting.

[22:51] Oh, yeah, another thing that happened. When the Russians, no, when the Germans lost the war over in Russia, through the winter, and, basically, through the winter, and when springtime came, well, maybe earlier than that. Try to remember. This has been... this was probably in the fall.

[23:37] Well, anyway, they, you know, they talked Finland into joining them, the winter war. Because Finland lost a big part of their land to the Russians when they attacked them in the year before the second World War, 1939. Because the Russians wanted part of the Finnish Gulf and bases out there and stuff like that.

[24:08] So anyway, now, the Germans were running to Finland, and they sent big ships up to get the soldiers home. Troop transports, and Hell cruisers.

[24:30] Hell cruisers, at the time, Sweden made, too, because they didn't have enough naval ships for everything. So what they did, they took, in fact, we had some in at the wharf, where I was working. They used passenger, not passenger ships, but freighters. And they put a big cannon on some of them, usually a big cannon up on foredeck. So, the shipyard, we built a big lavitage, what they call it, to put the cannon on. You know, reinforced the deck and build up the steel platform, kind of, to put the big cannons on. And Germans had done the same thing. And at one, and of course, one day they didn't want to go down here, so they want to come over to Sweden, and get in the Swedish waters, and hopefully, get back to Germany, that way, avoiding the Russian Navy.

[25:35] So now we had a problem with these guys, keep them out of the Swedish waters. [cough] Well, one time, one of their ships came very close in. And, of course, when they were in, and then we had to stop them. And they happened to come in - I don't know exactly where we were, because they didn't tell us everything, we just sometimes went into a port, to get coal, or food, or whatever.

[26:09] But anyway, we went to, it could have been down here. But anyway, we had this big German ship for anchor from us, I don't know, two to 300 meters or something like that. And we were actually tied up at shore, what we called stern, tied in. Our skipper liked to do that, because he was nice to us. And also, he wanted to go to shore himself, [laughter] and not have to, go in one of our lifeboats.
[26:53] So, we usually tied up at the stern. And, but, and then he gave us 50 percent off, but he said, "You guys don't go any further than you can hear the whistle. And then you get aboard, and so we can leave right away," because we were supposed to be anchored out and then just 20, 25 percent allowed to go ashore in lifeboats, you know, row in. And then, you know, it's a big hassle, back and forth.

[27:29] And, so, and of course, he had no problem with that. But anyway, there must have been, I don't know if this was Sunday, but anyway, we have this German ship anchored. You're all right?


Richard: [27:51] And so we kept an eye on them. But, then the next day, we had entertainers. Like they do here, Bob Hope used to bring entertainers to the troops.


Richard: [28:07] So we had the entertainers coming on board for entertainment. And of course the officer in charge of the food, he bought a lot better food, that we had never seen! [laughter] Because these people came on board. So they thought we were eating like this every day. [28:30] But, anyway. So they were playing and singing, and all of a sudden this German ship sneaked up their anchor. They thought we were not paying attention. They sneaked up their anchor, and started moving.

[28:51] But, of course, we had guys watching them. So the first thing that happened was that the artillerist, I don't know who it was, it was a guy or an officer. He fired one of the 75 millimeter guns right in front of the bow. And you know the racket when a gun like that goes off.

[29:18] Because there was no shields around or anything, it's just sitting there. And of course the entertainers, I don't know if they did something in their pants or not. But, it was all of a sudden...

[laughter]

[29:35] And, of course, they just kept going. So these guns were not automatic. So when shells get thrown off automatically, then you have to get a new one and put it in. And of course we were not ready for war.

[29:59] We had a limited number of shells on there. But, anyway, it had to be put in by hand. So when he started reloading, then an officer on the bridge got hold of one of the machine guns, and started sweeping the foredeck on this German ship.

[30:20] So the Germans were jumping and running and throwing themselves... But, anyway, now the anchor came down of course, almost as big a noise as the gun. A big chain came up.

[audio cuts off] [30:37]

Transcription by CastingWords
Interview of Richard Svensson
November 13, 2010
Seattle, Washington
Interviewers: Brandon Benson, Lise Orville

Richard Svensson: [0:04] I am Richard Svensson, and I'm continuing this interview. Is that OK?

Brandon Benson: [0:10] Yes, it is. It's the second part of the interview with Richard Svensson, for the Nordic Heritage Museum's Nordic American Voices Project. It is the 13th of November, 2010, and we are at the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle's Ballard Neighborhood. [0:25] My name is Brandon Benson and I will be assisting Lisa Orville with this interview.

Lisa Orville: [0:32] Hello, my name is Lisa Orville.

Brandon: [0:37] So, Richard, in your last interview, you ended up pretty much, after the war, second World War.

Richard: [0:47] That is right. And, now I have to figure out what we did after that. Anyway, let me see here. What do you, stop. [1:05] Coming back to normal, so to speak, if you can figure anything is normal after a five, four or five year war in Europe. Well, of course, including the war that the Russians did against the Finns, before the second World War started in '39. But that didn't affect us that much, but, and so, afterwards of course, the problem was, there was no raw materials. Sweden itself, of course, has no coal or oil.

[1:47] And as I mentioned before, I was out in the woods, chopping wood, before I was drafted. And of course, that situation didn't change much, just because the war was over. Because the mines were still there and the food shortage lasted. Of course, I understand there was ration here in US, too, but there was nothing compared to, because I'm looking at the plate at the restaurant today with a piece of meat on it, and that piece of meat would be one month's ration for a whole family of six people. Just had one piece.

[2:28] So, we think people that didn't live in this kind of conditions can't imagine what it is. Because, basically, if it wouldn't be for potatoes, we don't know if we'd be alive.

[2:41] But anyway, that's another thing, but anyway, we're getting back to work, and I, at the time, worked for a small company where we designed and built machine tools on order, from, because Sweden has, they had a couple of factories.

[3:09] One was Montel, they were building lathes and mills and stuff like that, and the other one was Chippings' mechanical that had started, Chippings'. And they made mills and lathes and stuff like that, but their capacity was not big enough to supply everybody that needed machinery.
[3:37] So, I was at that time working when I was drafted for a company, small company, where we, the owner went out when there was a fire or something, or some old machinery is sitting around, he bought up this stuff. Had a couple of guys cleaning them up, and then we rebuilt them totally. So, that was kind of interesting work, too.

[4:09] And sometimes we also rebuilt and renovated machinery for companies like, I especially remember a Post Office, all their machinery they have. Of course, a shop where they work on the cars, and they need machinery, and so we had all that to do.

[4:36] But also, one thing I remember was kind of interesting. Of these people that we rescued from Estonia, for example, they didn't come with their hands out for a handout. They came to work, just like the immigrants did to this country, came here to work.

[4:58] And among other things, we had a guy come in, and he wanted us to build an automatic machine to make buttons out of wood. Buttons to, you know, put in your sweaters and clothes or whatever. And it was an interesting project, so we developed this thing, and after a while, it worked fine, and so he took this, or we delivered it.

[5:28] Interesting thing is, I'm coming to a big store in Stockholm called, I think it was Enco. Yeah, there was a famous store, like similar to Macy's here or something like that. And here I see a chart of six wooden buttons on a piece of, attached to a piece of paper, and it says, "Estonian handwork." [laughter] And the price of this.

[6:03] Of course, we're spitting out, with this automatic machine, I think we managed to get about a couple of seconds on each button. So you can imagine, it was 100 buttons in a minute or something like that.

[6:18] And the price of the, I mean, this is just interesting to see, what you buy in a store, when you know the background so well. Of course, he had to pay 5,000 krona for this machine, or over 5,000. So even if he charged, you know, seven krona for this button, he still had to pay off this machine. But it was interesting to see your own product, kind of, in the big store, later on, like this.

[6:49] And so, kind of, we had things like this going on. Anyway, later on, I think it was 1946 when the atomic bomb went off, wasn't it? Yeah. If I can recall. And there was big words about this.

[7:14] Later on, following year, I'm getting a call from a friend of mine that I went to engineering school with, and he said, I said, "Where are you?"

[7:26] And he said, "I'm at the Institute of Technology. And we need a guy like you."

[7:33] So I said, "What are you doing there?"

[7:35] "Well, they just started up the, they just got a lot of money to do nuclear research."

[7:42] I said, "I don't know anything about nuclear research."
[7:46] And he said, "Nobody does. That's why we are starting from ground zero, here." Except for some theoretical things that we know now, you know, after.

[7:57] Anyway, so he said, "The problem is that there are a lot of chemists and physicists here, and they need a man to design mechanical devices for the research."

[8:12] So I said, "That sounds kind of interesting." So, I go up and talk to them about this. So I talk to the professor, and a few other scientists, and I had to, so I decided, well this looks more future than what I'm doing. Because this is a brand new field.

[8:32] And so I said, "OK." I had to take a cut in wages because they didn't have that much money. So when I got home and told my wife, she got really tee'd off. [laughter] Because I took a cut. I said, "Yeah, but you have to look at the future. Where I am, there's not going to be much more." Well sure, I can go higher and own a company or something. But, here there is no limit to... Well, anyways. So, I started anyway.

[9:04] And we were really doing a little bit of everything. One thing we were doing was measuring methods to absorption of alpha, beta, and gamma rays through materials. So there was of course, a lot of lab personnel doing this, and I supplied the mechanical devices to do this.

[9:36] Another thing we were doing was also isotope separation because you want to refine the uranium from 238 till 235 in order to get some action out of it. So there were some other interesting things, too, where I had to build chambers because you transfer the uranium into uranium hexafluoride, which is a very poisonous gas.

[10:12] So I had to have many double things, to not breathe in the stuff. And of course we also have the counters on the stuff for the radiation, which was at that time very high compared to now. But, apparently I didn't take any damage from it, because we didn't have that strong of materials.

[10:41] But, what we did was also worked with the Karolinska Institute which was a famous research hospital in Sweden probably, maybe. Many people heard of it probably. And there, I don't remember which we were using now. There were so many things we were working on.

[11:12] But, anyway, we were able to mix it in a liquid that the doctors pumped into the blood, and could trace the flow of the blood in a person's body, and use the simple Geiger-Muller counters that we had at the time. I actually made the first ones, the tubes, with the directions from the scientists; of course.

[11:42] And thinking back now, the weak signal you're getting from this... We had about 20 amplifiers hooked up in series to amplify this thing enough to be readable. Today, I mean, you can have it in your pocket, you can. [laughter] But, that's just another thing for the chip, and it was in that.

[12:08] So, but anyway, we're able to do this. And, another thing we were working with was some famous scientists, like, Johannes Alfven. He was a brother of Hugh Alfven, the
composer of the Swedish Rhapsody. And he was, also nuclear researcher from, in Uppsala, and he had a cyclotron there.

[12:44] So I got to meet this man, and you could not think you were looking at the nuclear scientist, here comes a guy on a bicycle with blue jeans. Well, we didn't have jeans, we had similar clothes made out of. Because he was working in the lab, and you could think he was shoveling something in the, behind the horses or something like that. I think, that's the way he was dressed. This is, yeah, yeah, this is me, you know, so.

[13:19] I mean, it's just interesting. You picture these people to look a little different. But, of course, at work, that's the way it was. I mean, we didn't have any cars. I mean, and we didn't even have gasoline. So even these guys came on a bicycle. Today it's a sport to do it, but that's a different story. They want to look different.

[13:46] So, anyway, and of course, there we could use different types of material, and bombard them in the cyclotron, and make them radioactive for the short time. Like, minutes or hours or whatever, depending on what material we were using. And that was helpful for the, especially for a hospital. Because you could just make attack, it may be for five minutes, till you measured it, and then it was harmless after that.

[14:18] So, these are the kinds of things we were working with. And another thing that was interesting, too, of course, our word, the word spread. I mean, we wrote articles about what we were doing, and it was soaked up by industry. And one interesting thing was, the Sandvik that makes cold-rolled steel, that's very famous all over the world. Any razor in any country, except China, I don't know, but in all the European countries at least. Any razor blade.

[15:03] There can be any name, anything you want on them, but the basic steel was cold-rolled in Sandvik, and they sold it all over, and they made their own blades and put their own names on them. And another thing, too. All the Italian good reeds in accordions come from Sandvik, and they're heat treated.

[15:31] They grind it down. They're cold-rolled at first, and heat treated, tapered a little bit, so they can just cut it out. And of course when they're cutting out an accordion reed...a cheap reed is just stamped out and fit into the base. So now the edges are rugged and so forth, so they can't be that tight, like they need to be.

A medium-good reed will be basically stamped out, but oversized so they can file off the stress in the edges of it, and then fitted in. The most expensive reeds are hand-sawed out from the sheet, so there's no stress at all. And that's the highest quality reed. And these sets of reeds run $3,000 or $4,000 more than a medium we call [indecipherable 16: [16:02] 42] of money that's partially handmade.

[16:44] That is what they're doing. Now, in order to roll...and these steel sheets that we're talking about, there's an enormous pressure for one thing to cold-roll it like this. But also the tolerances are very small. So what Sandvik had to do to keep the tolerance, they had to stop the whole machinery and take micrometers out and measure to like one-thousandths of an inch, or something, plus/minus 1,000.
Because that's what they guarantee. That's why they sell it, too, because it's high quality steel. It comes from the middle of Sweden, not the cheaper that comes from the northern part. Because it's a cleaner from the beginning ore.

And this if of course very costly to stop everything and do this. So they came with a question: if there was a possibility that we could come up with some idea where they could measure this without absorption methods?

And I said, "Sure, we had already done a lot of basic research in this. So I designed a model for them, designed and made the model to prove that this could be done. And so, we had a... I don't remember what [properties] we used. We probably used... I think we used the alpha rays there, because they are very short. And the Beta is two decimeters, 200 millimeters... 200 millimeters-300 millimeters.

But alpha is just a matter of centimeters, but they are concentrated. So there's a lot of them to be absorbed with precision. You can get good results out of that. So I made a little model for them. And they got all excited about that, so then they could have somebody else do and of course, they saved enormous money on this.

But, of course, this was done... I don't know if the government got any, they might have had some... Maybe the business people agreed on some compensation to the government for this. Another thing I learned was very useful after: the bearings in this rollers only lasted a very short time, a matter of hours, because of the enormous pressure.

Some chemist came with an addition to the oil, and it's called molybdenum disulfide. And chemically, I don't know exactly, but that's what it is. And you mix in the oil and the bearings could last a whole day almost, because this chemical could... it didn't break down the oil and destroy the metal. It got baked into the metal and it could take this enormous pressure.

And that I had personal use of later on. When I came here, they... I don't remember now what they called it? Well, anyway, you could buy it in little bottles here. So I mixed it in my oil in my car and, of course, my car engine lasted a lot longer. [laughs] But they don't want you to know about this, of course. [laughs] But anyway, also, the gear boxes.

But these were the kind of things we were doing there. And I'm trying to remember what else. Oh, yeah, then the isotope separation. We were actually doing it with... there's several ways you can do it. You can bend it off [indecipherable 21:25], or in the cyclotron, or stuff like that.

But my basic institution was, when I started, was called theoretical chemistry. Later on, because physics and chemistry blends together [indecipherable 21:45], so it was called, physico- [indecipherable 21:50] after that. Then, of course, my division was [indecipherable 21:58]. You call it nuclear here, but the [indecipherable 21:59] is, you call it nuclear here, but.

Is actually the stone in the fruit. What they call [indecipherable 22:12] in an apple or something.
[22:09] So, anyway, yeah back to the...so we had one specialist chemical doctor from... he'd gone to Uppsala and worked for us. So, he came up with these filters, where very fine holes you can't see, they were just the size of molecules to go through, or isotopes, rather. So, to get this through, you need a good as vacuum as possible to suck the gas through.

[22:57] That's why they made it into gas first, and then sucked the gas through this filters. So, I had to come up with... because, you could buy pumps that were too expensive. We just didn't have the money. So, we decided to make our own pumps. And I could hire another guy, because I set up a shop for doing all this, and I could expand a little bit.

You have to prove all these things. Of course, I wanted more machinery and stuff like that. [laughs] And this was a good chance to get them. So, I could get the [indecipherable 23:25] 38 in mill, for example, with high class stuff. So, we were working on this quite a bit, but they didn't get very far, seemed to.

[23:51] And then a couple of the guys went to France to see what they were doing. Because France was actually very, despite bad cars and good wine, they also in research, they are further ahead than most people want to think, or know. And they had already spent a lot of money on this way by gas and filters. And so they came back and said let's scrap the whole thing, because when they couldn't do it that way. So all the work we did ... But that's the way it is in these sorts.

[24:36] And that's why many companies, when they come up with a product, they might have spent millions of dollars, and need some of that back when they finally, but that's something that you find out when you work in basic stuff like this. Let's see. But then we got into, we already talked about, let's stop for a minute. The professor in Sweden, now probably the rest of Europe too, a professor there is not like here.

[25:20] When I came to physics here, everybody was a professor. In an institution, in an institute of technology or higher learning, there's only one professor and he's the head of the department. All the others are assistants. They're called first, second, or third assistant, which in this country would be professors. But anyway, my professor's name was Ulla Lamm, and he was famous for the light, the, let's see, how do I translate, anyway, how the different light changes color and breaks.


Richard: [26:19] Spectrum is what I'm trying to say, yeah. And also, he was studying how it transfers in liquids. And so he needed a cuvette they're called. He needed a piece where he could send the light in and have an absolute 90 degree break. We got special, special glass that we got from a company in Sweden that made lenses for cameras and that kind of stuff, high precision stuff. So we could get them to grind down glass plates for us within, you know, thousandths of a millimeter, something like that, which is two and a half times less than thousandths of an inch. [27:24] And I also made, to put this glass on, I made a chunk of metal in a metal to glue them up. But that also had to have been absolute 90 degree. And this is another challenge to do that because you need high precision instruments to be able to make this. And of course it was off he would see it right away because of the way the light. So this was the kind of challenges.
And here, now I've got the chance to go to see the Johansson factory that made the precision [indecipherable 28: [28:01] 23], the English name for them, gauge blocks. And these are used, [indecipherable 28:32] Johansson, was the one that made it possible for Ford to build cars on the line and get parts made on other places. Because if you don't have a basic way of knowing that this is one millimeter, within a thousandths of an inch, how do you do that, you know.

[28:49] He came up with a way of doing it by using the spectrum of light of the different light colors, like the violet and blue and on that. And came up with a way of making, and you can put this, you can take one millimeter thick gauge blocks and put 100 of them together and they will be within one thousandth of a millimeter, even when you add up all this stuff. And they're so tight, so when you have to slide them in from the side because you get air and then they stick together because there's no room for air between there. That's how precise these things are.

[29:32] And this method he came up with, Ford heard about this. So he talked, so he and Johansson got together. And he made gauge blocks for Ford, so these could be used to make transmission parts and all kinds of car parts in another place. And they fit together when they assemble them. These are things that I guess are not well known, but of course I knew it because I grew up with it.

[30:03] So I was able to come to this factory and see how they were doing this thing, so I learned about that. And that's how I could come up with this precision instrument for my professor to do this.

[30:17] So there's a lot of things that maybe people in general, I understand, don't know, but I was experienced because I happened to get into this type of field which has been very useful over the years. That is one project I had.

[30:49] Another was... now we're getting into more sophisticated electronics stuff, but one thing too that was useful, the combination of mechanics and chemistry, was that there was a company that start... see, the diodes and transistors start getting developed from electrical engineering before the chip.

[31:30] And there was one company was making these things, and they needed to... they had I think it was a diode they were making, they had a very tiny wire that was sitting in a device. I don't even remember seeing the diode what they look like, they were of course a little bigger at that time. But you had a tiny wire. I think the wire was about, at that time, were fairly big, 20 thousandths of a millimeter, which will be... in inches a lower gauge. Well, anyway it was very tiny.

[32:20] And they needed that to have a tip on it. You couldn't have got it off and put it in. It wouldn't work. They needed a tip on this thing. So they asked if I could do that. I said well, you know you couldn't mechanically do it. It was almost impossible. Well, there may be some kind of grinding machine, but it would be very expensive.

So I talked to a chemist about this and she said yeah, we can probably use some kind of an acid where we can dip it in and it will take off the rough edges like this and just leave it like
this. So I said OK. So we tried that and that worked. But now they're going to fabricate this, so you can't sit there because [indecipherable 33: [32:43] 17] about this long. [laughter] So well, maybe a little bit. Maybe five-sixteenths, three-eighths of an inch because they had to solder something to it.

So what I did, I made a little device, where they could put this wire in, take the roll of wire and put... and they had an acid in the little hole, and I made kind of a little tab out of... an arm that came down that they put the wire in this thing, and made a timing on it so it just stayed in the acid so long, and then it come up. And then it could just cut off that piece of wire to [indecipherable 34: [33:29] 15] and now we had them.

So these are the kind of things. Those are private companies so that I got paid for [laughter]. Besides, because I talked to my professor, I said you know this private company wants to, you know... well, sure he said but you have to pay so much for using our shop because it was all legal to do it, I didn't use the government like some people do here. Well, maybe over there too but I just [indecipherable 34: [34:14] 45]...

[34:45] So there's a lot of interesting things going on.

Lisa: [34:48] How did you start thinking about the United States?

Richard: [34:51] Well, when I got married there was kind of a shotgun wedding. She got pregnant and the right thing to do was to marry the girl despite all these things about Sweden free love, and when I came over, "Oh well, it's Sweden ah they're free love" and stuff like that. I said, "What are you talking about?" [35:17] Well there had been an article in the See Magazine. What is the See? They're a photography... In winter time, people don't see the sun for six, seven months. And when it gets warm in summertime, some families go out and they want to shed their clothes.

[35:35] So they look for a secluded area on the beach, and drop their clothes and go swimming, and here was some photographer from this magazine lying in the bushes taking pictures of these people, and then, "This is how the Swedes are." And just totally twisted the whole idea. Another fun story, that way, too.

But anyway, so anyway, in my case, now, so, after awhile we kind of grew apart in that 10 years, so. So after that I decided, well, I'm going to make a five year plan, I'm going to save up, I'm going to work on this, because I had all kinds of projects from private companies, and I could use the facilities, by paying in so much for every hour, you know, to the lab, to the lab [indecipherable 36: [36:04] 36] who our lab cashier, we have the fund. [indecipherable 36:46]

[36:47] So I made a five year plan to come over here, and make enough money. And so that's what I did, and I planned, too, I told my kids, that if you want, I'm, in five years, I'm going to US, and if you want to, if you graduate, and want to come over, I'll help you. And so that's what I did.

[37:18] And so I went on a ship, because it was too expensive to fly, half my savings would have gone to airplane ticket to just settle here. So what I did, I went on a ship.
Well, first I took a year leave of absence from my work, because I actually had, what you call civil service work. So, if I had stayed there, I was supposed to get 80 percent additional pension besides all the fault control. So, it was a good deal, you know, to be.

And, so anyway, I came over and I had the relatives in New York. First I, of course, I had to have somebody sign for me, to, because you can't just come over here, legally, without having somebody sponsor you. And you have to prove that you are, can take care of yourself, but besides so that be sponsored.

And then you have to have health records from, that you're healthy, that you're never been in jail, or any criminal things, and that you never belonged to the Communist Party. These are things that were required. And also that you could speak English. So what I did after this, several things I did.

First, saving up money. Another thing was to learn about the U.S. And at the U.S. embassy in Stockholm, they had lectures all winter long about the U.S., different subjects. And they had specialists from here that were speaking about the economy, about geography, about various things that you learn about.

And I think I learned more about than people that lived here. So, you know what you're doing. And then, another thing, which just happened, so that after I was divorced, I was always looking for the scientists that came in especially from the U.S. To get friendly with them, so I had contacts when I came over.

So I met several people who came over, different. But among other things, we had a guy from Australia that came to study for the professor I was working for. And he had...See, the American embassy, they have a club for not only American research workers and foreigners, but also other foreigners like from Australia or England.

And they met at the American Embassy. Once a month they had a party, stuff like that. And this guy from Australia had told me, "There is a girl from England I think you should meet," and she was the secretary for English naval [indecipherable 40: [40:31] 54] . A girl about 25, good looking girl.

So he introduced and, yeah, we got together. So it was a good chance to learn English, because she could not speak any Swedish. Because the way that England was working, their embassy, at least at that time, they sent out reps just for a maximum of two years, because they didn't want them to take up the customs of other countries.

They were supposed to be English, 100 percent England. So I had to speak English to her. Of course I took both German and English classes after because in my engineering school, I specialized in engineering, so there were no languages there. And I had to learn German because of all the new research that was coming from there. They were actually going ahead [laughs] quite a bit. We got more information from there than we did from here.

Of course, we learned about the acrylics and some of the... Of course, in the nuclear research, they had to come up with some materials, which was Teflon, that was brand new at
the time. And we couldn't... We didn't even know how to make it. So when I got the piece of Teflon, that was like was like worth gold, you know, to...

[42:26] But anyway, so that's how I practiced my English quite a bit, because that was required to come in here. So when I came to the American embassy. They said, "You have the choice", because I was born here, in Chicago. But my parents went back to Sweden when I was seven years old. So I grew up there. So they wanted to know how I lost my Swedish citizenship.

[43:02] And I did that because my father came over, and when he stayed, there was a different agreement between Sweden and U.S. at the time. So when my father came over, he stayed in Sweden for two years without renewing his American citizenship. So now he automatically becomes Swede, and all his kids under 21 years of age it was the same thing. So they wanted to know how I lost it. So that's what I learned, too.

[43:33] So I had through the Justice Department and stuff like that. So that's how I find that out. And, of course, when it comes to health, first I have to come up paper with my own doctor. And that was not enough, because I could have bribed him, of course. So first you come with that and then the embassy sends you to a doctor of their choice, and he checked me out, so I didn't have any VD or whatever. So you're completely healthy.

[44:07] And same thing when it comes to criminal. I have to have, you know, that I had never been in jail. But then, FBI checks you out, too. I tell you, to come in legally to this country, people don't understand how much the immigrants had to go through, at least at that time. It was 1961 when I came over.

Lisa: [44:31] Did they test your English? Did you have to take a test?

Richard: [44:37] No, I don't remember that. Maybe they did. Maybe I had to fill in... I filled in several pages of paper, that I swore that I had not had these things, you know, going on, and never belonged to Communist party, and all this health and other problems. [45:05] Well, maybe they checked me at the embassy. I don't remember that now, but they probably did, spoke English to me, I could answer them.

[45:14] So now I had a choice if I wanted to come over here and get my citizenship back, she said, "I could do it right now", but then I would lose my Swedish citizenship. So of course, I still had my job there, and I didn't know what was going to happen here, because I planned to stay here for a year and see what work I could get, and things like that.

[45:48] So I thought well, I better keep my, because I still had my position at the Institute of Technology at a fairly good pay too because I was a specialist, and there was only three guys in Sweden that had this kind of position, first-class instrument maker or something like that, I don't know how it would translate.

[46:17] So there was the guy who said, "You throwaway that, and burn your bridges", so I decided to come in on a green card, and that was the requirements at that time. So I got on a green card and yeah, anyway, I come over here and then what I planned to do was to see the
country so for my savings I come to my relatives in New York and stayed with them for almost, let's see, three, four weeks.

So I bought a used car. I got a single, I got a Ford with the [indecipherable 47: [46:57] 06] in it and stick shift. The most simple car you can get so I could fix, and luckily enough I got one that didn't have that many miles on that, and very decent in good shape.

So anyway, so that's what I did, and then I crisscrossed the country. From over here I visited other places and my relatives, and I went to go to Chicago and see what I went to school for the two years from [indecipherable 47: [47:21] 45] from five to seven. Can we stop this?

[47:49] OK before I left with my car, I, of course, was in New York for a little while with my relatives, who was my mother's sister. And she was married to a Swedish man that, they met in Sweden, and he was a carpenter. And had built many houses for millionaires. So, they were doing all right.

And something that was interesting for me that I didn't know at the time, but I know now. It was midsummer time, and we went to a midsummer party, and there was an accordion player that's famous, which I didn't know, because I hadn't heard of him. And that was, well, I don't remember his name now, but it doesn't matter. But anyway, it was interesting, too, because I thought he was pretty good, and he was. [laughter] And he's been visiting Seattle since, and [indecipherable 49: [48:22] 07] go back to Sweden, of course. Swedish man.

[49:04] Anyway, and my plan was to see as much as possible. So, I drove, from there I went, yeah, I guess, yeah. Because on the ship, I met a guy that was working for IBM, and they had sent them to some. IBM probably had some place up in Poughkeepsie at the time. [laughter] And so I went up there just to see him, because it's a holiday in New York.

[49:46] And then I continued over to Chicago, and saw my cousin there, and, where my mother's other sister had been married to a Swedish man that was installing air conditioning and air ducts, in big places, churches and factories and stuff like that. So, it was also interesting to meet and talk to them.

[50:20] And then, I know I went south. Oh yeah. I, they, I saw my cousin. And my uncle, his wife, my mother's sister, had died, and he was married to another lady from Omaha. So they were there, so I drove over there, and got to see the stockyards and the stuff. And finally, you know, so I got to see stuff that I probably wouldn't have gotten to see otherwise.

**Brandon:** [50:59] Were you under 30 at this time? How old were you, about?

**Richard:** [51:03] Well, now I am 37.

**Brandon:** [51:05] 37?

**Richard:** [51:05] Mm-hm. Because I spent 14 years at the... the atomic bomb went off '46. I started at the [indecipherable 51:26] Royal Institute of Technology in '47, and this is 1961, so there was 14 years in that research. [51:33] And then I had met a scientist from Denver, and so I had an address for him. He was still in Sweden, but he gave me the address to his friends
in Denver. So I got over there to meet these people, and then I told them what I was doing. And they said, "Well, up in Boulder, there is a research facility going on."

[52:12] And there also...I don't know if that was Denver itself. It was in Boulder. But a professor had just got money to do atmospheric research, and he needed a guy like me. But he had just got this. I talked to him, it sounded really interesting.

[52:38] But he could not do anything at the moment because he just got the money and he just got an institution, but he couldn't hire anybody yet. But he said, "You are certainly welcome to come back in half a year or something," or a month or whatever. No, it was less than that. "Probably a few months," he said.

[53:03] I'd really like to, you know, be a part of that. So, I talked to him. And then I went up to Boulder because there's a lot of chemistry research going on up there, especially in the mining business and stuff like that. And so I talked to them, and they wanted to hire me right away. [laughs]

[53:30] I said, "Well..." I was just looking at possibilities along the road, because I knew I wouldn't stay in New York. I was sure of that. Because I went into New York for a couple of days, because they lived on Long Island.

[53:48] I said, "This is not the place I want to be." [laughs] But when I saw the Rocky Mountains, I knew, "This is it" because, you know, skiing and all that.

[53:59] And I also went up... One of the guys, he had a boat, a skiff, up on the lake up there. I don't remember now what lake it was. And he said... but he didn't hardly know much about sailing. I knew a little bit. I didn't have a boat, but our friends had boats, and we'd sailed as kid with the open fishing boats in southern Sweden, where my grandfather was a fisherman after he... as a young man, he was sailing on the square riggers around the world, so I learned a lot from him.

[54:39] And then, of course, they had smaller rowboats that they sailed. But the real fishing boats, they were nine meters, about 30 feet long with a engine, does a chugh, chugh, you know. The smoke rings came out when they went out - they left. [laughs]

[55:02] So we sailed... but anyway, so I come there... so I knew a little bit about sailing and the dangers and how to do it. And this guy didn't... So he said, "Empty your pockets and everything and leave them in the car." I said, "Why?" "Well," he said, "you know, when you're sailing in between, all of a sudden a wind can come through the mountains and we tip over."

[55:24] I said, "Why do you tip over for?" "Well, that's the way it is." "No," I said, "you don't have to tip over." But anyway, I left my wallet and things, because I didn't know they had a flap kind of skiff, flap boats. And sure enough, the way he was sailing, we will we in the water more time than we on the boat.

[55:46] So I told him, "When the wind comes, you let the sail go or you have to open it," you know, stuff like that. So he was surprised that we could go across the lake without [laughs]
swimming. So anyway... so it was kind of fun. But anyway, when I came up to... Yeah, they want to hire me. And then, when we said... I said, "I want to go out to the west coast first." And one guy said, "You go out to the west coast, you're not coming back." That's exactly what he said.

[56:25] Well, I said, "I want to know if I have the job if I come back?" "Yeah, you will, but you're not coming back." And he was a bit... Of course, I went south from there. But in Denver, and I talked to the guy, he sort of said, "You going south? You better get the gun with you." I said, "Why?" "Well," he said, "you never know what you're running into." And sure enough, good thing I had, because, I never need to use it, but I had to show it a couple of times for the guys.

[57:03] We're looking at 1961. And the dumb thing I did, I took a small road, because I wanted to see the real country, which was a silly thing to do. Because, at one time, I caught up with a car and I'm not a racist or anything, but when I told people, "You shouldn't say that." "Say what?" They look like Mexicans, for they were dark-skinned. That's what the people were.

[57:38] But anyway, they went in a car and they didn't let me pass. They blocked me. I thought, "This doesn't look..." I had my rifle. I had bought a 22 automatic rifle in a store. Of course, you could buy that at that time. They suggested that rather than a handgun.

[58:03] Because, I was stopping in the National Parks, the ranger said, "You have a rifle?" "Yeah, for my defense." I said. What happened was, I was supposed to take that. He said, "Just hide it," because I'm going out the other end. So, they were pretty flexible about that.

[58:31] Anyway, these guys didn't let me go by. But, of course, I've been into a little bit of motorcycle racing, not myself, but I'm a mechanic for a guy. So, I figured I got to get by these guys. Anyway, I saw on the side of the road, a little bit wider spot where the tractor probably went in to the fields.

[59:06] So, I timed it there. So, I stayed on the right side of the road, and they were right there. Then, when I timed it... because I knew that my car was faster than theirs, because there were four guys in it, and it was an older car than what I had. At the moment, when they drove over there, I turned this way, put it in second gear and just floored it.

[59:33] And I went by them, and they just missed my rear-end. But that was the closest, I think, I'd been to disappear from, whatever.

Lisa: [59:46] What state were you in?

Richard: [59:49] I think it was Arizona. I'm not sure. That was south of Colorado, but a little more west. Or New Mexico, just I don't remember exactly. [audio ends]

Transcription by CastingWords