

Interview of Annette Andersen by H.B. Simonsen
Transcript reviewed and corrected by H.B. Simonsen
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[SPEAKER_01]: What is your full name?

[SPEAKER_00]: Annette Andersen, excuse me, Annette Overgaard Johnson Andersen.

[SPEAKER_01]: And when and where were you born?

[SPEAKER_00]: I was born in Kimballton, Iowa in 1934.

[SPEAKER_01]: Who were your parents?

[SPEAKER_00]: My father was Niels Overgaard from a little town called Dyngby close to Odder and Saksild.

[SPEAKER_00]: My mother's name is Najesta Lynge Overgaard, and she was born in Tera, Siberia, from Danish parents.

[SPEAKER_00]: And as my grandparents, I might like to say a little more later on.

[SPEAKER_01]: But just getting back to your father, do you know anything of the reason why he immigrated to the States?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes, and the first time he came, he came with his uncle because he wanted to join the Navy, but his mother didn't want that at age 16.

[SPEAKER_00]: And so he came to America for two years and then had to go back, and then he made the decision to come again and said goodbye to his mother.

[SPEAKER_00]: And he came to Kimballton.

[SPEAKER_01]: To do what?

[SPEAKER_01]: Do you know that?

[SPEAKER_00]: He did not know.

[SPEAKER_00]: I don't think any of them knew what they would be doing, but there was no work there.

[SPEAKER_00]: He lived on a farm.

[SPEAKER_00]: In Kimballton?

[SPEAKER_00]: No, he lived on a farm in Denmark.

[SPEAKER_00]: And at the age then of 16, he left the first time.

[SPEAKER_00]: The second time, he was 20.

[SPEAKER_00]: And he said goodbye to his mother and came over here to fulfill whatever dream they thought they had.

[SPEAKER_01]: How come he went to Kimballton?

[SPEAKER_00]: Because of the uncle.

[SPEAKER_00]: And this uncle, Thorvald Møller, sponsored many young people to come.

[SPEAKER_00]: So he didn't have to go through Ellis Island because he had a sponsor.

[SPEAKER_00]: Your mother.

[SPEAKER_00]: My mother's parents lived in Kattrup, which is kind of north and east of Skanderborg, isn't that right?

[SPEAKER_00]: And I think I'll just start here because that's really the story.

[SPEAKER_00]: My grandparents lived in Kattrup and went to school, I mean, after their parents,

[SPEAKER_00]: first trainings in school, to Samsø.

[SPEAKER_00]: And that's where they got their education, both of them, on the island of Samsø.

[SPEAKER_00]: And from this, the Danish government sent my grandfather to start up creameries in Russia.

[SPEAKER_00]: A very lawless time.

[SPEAKER_01]: So he went to Samsø to learn the trade of being a creamer.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Mm-hmm.

[SPEAKER_00]: And then he was sent there and was there almost two years by himself.

[SPEAKER_00]: But he had his sweetheart back in Denmark, my grandmother, and he built a home in Tara.

[SPEAKER_00]: I have pictures of it.

[SPEAKER_00]: And then he went back and got the permission from the king to marry.

[SPEAKER_00]: And at that time, it was to be posted so many days or so many weeks in the church.

[SPEAKER_00]: But he got a special permission because he needed to get back to his work.

[SPEAKER_00]: And they went then on their honeymoon on the only train up there to Terra.

[SPEAKER_00]: And then my mother was born a year later.

[SPEAKER_00]: and lived there for five years with her parents.

[SPEAKER_01]: What kind of place was that?

[SPEAKER_00]: The place where they lived?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, in Siberia.

[SPEAKER_00]: From what pictures I have seen, I have not done a lot of research on that, but

[SPEAKER_00]: I think it was just a very normal, pretty good sized town with a lot of traders and merchants and what have you.

[SPEAKER_00]: And he had to go to, he managed the creameries.

[SPEAKER_00]: So he would go out to the different ones by sled.

[SPEAKER_01]: So it was a kind of...

[SPEAKER_01]: Developing a new country.

[SPEAKER_01]: It was not go west like in America.

[SPEAKER_01]: It was go east.

[SPEAKER_01]: But the same idea.

[SPEAKER_01]: The same things.

[SPEAKER_00]: But he was sent by the government.

[SPEAKER_00]: The Danish government.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: So that's who he was really working for.

[SPEAKER_01]: About what time?

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay, he first went in 1898.

[SPEAKER_00]: And then, no, yes, no, he was there even longer than that, because my mother was born in five, and they were married, my grandparents were married in 1904, so he was there a number of years by himself.

[SPEAKER_00]: And then she was born, and they had a very good life.

[SPEAKER_00]: They had nursemaid, they had people who helped in the creamery, and...

[SPEAKER_00]: Their house looked lovely from pictures I have.

[SPEAKER_00]: The one thing that my grandfather liked to say was, I went out to all these remote areas and one is a picture of him being photographed on his sled.

[SPEAKER_00]: And he says, the photograph looks good

[SPEAKER_00]: But the photographer was not out in the forest where I ran into the wolves.
[SPEAKER_00]: That was just a little sideline from my grandfather.
[SPEAKER_00]: So then of course they, my mother was five when they decided she needed a Danish education.
[SPEAKER_00]: And so they went back.
[SPEAKER_00]: And he tried to farm, my grandfather tried to farm while my mother went to school
[SPEAKER_00]: And then his brother had immigrated to, in fact, he immigrated, I think, to the Ringsted area.
[SPEAKER_00]: And then, of course, the writing back and forth.
[SPEAKER_00]: My grandfather then decided to take his family, which at that time included four children.
[SPEAKER_00]: And...
[SPEAKER_00]: He came first because one of the children had broken his leg badly and couldn't travel.
[SPEAKER_00]: So then he went and established a place where now the rest of the family could come.
[SPEAKER_00]: And that was called West Hamlin Creamery, close to Kimballton.
[SPEAKER_00]: So he came to his uncle and then moved back to Kimballton.
[SPEAKER_01]: Okay.
[SPEAKER_00]: And that's where everything gelled between my mother and father.
[SPEAKER_01]: Your schooling?
[SPEAKER_00]: My schooling, only high school.
[SPEAKER_00]: Grade school and high school.
[SPEAKER_00]: Where was that?
[SPEAKER_00]: In the Elkhorn-Kimballton area.
[SPEAKER_00]: I married right out of school and started a family as a lot of people did in those days.
[SPEAKER_00]: And we farmed.
[SPEAKER_00]: And we raised four children on the farm.
[SPEAKER_00]: The youngest was 11 when my husband died of cancer.
[SPEAKER_00]: And then I stayed on the farm for five years.
[SPEAKER_00]: And my son took over, and he's still on that place, still farming.
[SPEAKER_00]: And then I remarried.
[SPEAKER_00]: And that's where my Andersen comes in.
[SPEAKER_01]: Your first husband, what was his name?
[SPEAKER_00]: Johnson.
[SPEAKER_00]: And he was all Danish.
[SPEAKER_00]: My children are all Danish, but not my grandchildren.
[SPEAKER_01]: You mean all Danish?
[SPEAKER_01]: I mean, your first husband, he was born in Denmark.
[SPEAKER_00]: No, no, no, no.
[SPEAKER_00]: My first husband was born in Elkhorn.
[SPEAKER_01]: Okay.
[SPEAKER_00]: So we went to school together and married and raised our family on the farm.

[SPEAKER_00]: Then I met another gentleman, and he worked for the Danish Brotherhood here in America.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we decided to marry.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I was with him in Omaha because that's where his work was.

[SPEAKER_00]: And then when he retired in Omaha,

[SPEAKER_00]: he had promised that he'd take me back to my community. Kimballton.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes, and he was content there.

[SPEAKER_00]: And then he came down with cancer and was gone.

[SPEAKER_00]: And so, to end it all is the fact that my mother was quite accomplished in many things, art, and was a school teacher, and many things.

[SPEAKER_00]: And she lived in her home until she was 95.

[SPEAKER_00]: This home then, when she went to the old people's home, because she couldn't take care of herself any longer, I was able to buy in her home, the family home.

[SPEAKER_00]: So I'm content now.

[SPEAKER_01]: I understand.

[SPEAKER_01]: There's a lot of balance in that story.

[SPEAKER_01]: Now you are at the Danish, the Danebod Folk Meeting.

[SPEAKER_01]: How come you're here?

[SPEAKER_00]: I love my Danish heritage.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we try to uphold as much of our Danish heritage as we can in the two villages, Elkhorn and Kimballton.

[SPEAKER_00]: I did not speak English until I went to school.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you can speak a little Danish?

[SPEAKER_00]: (Annette speaks Danish): Yes, I speak... I think I can probably... I like it when some of my family members call from Denmark, and they can't speak English.

[SPEAKER_00]: Then this thing goes, and I can probably do it.

[SPEAKER_00]: (Annette speaks English again): I'm not a teacher.

[SPEAKER_00]: No, I'm not a teacher, but I'm just kind of helping them read a little bit.

[SPEAKER_00]: Why am I here?

[SPEAKER_00]: I had heard of Danebod many years, through the years, because of the folk school.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I love the aspect of the folk school.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we tried to do that in Kimballton in the early church years by having summer camp where we did gymnastics, folk dancing, studied, and had Danish.

[SPEAKER_00]: And so that's been carried on.

[SPEAKER_00]: I guess I have retained that.

[SPEAKER_00]: Mm-hmm.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I am from a family of seven.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I'm really the only one that has really wanted to retain the real Danishness.

[SPEAKER_00]: And, of course, we were from the Grundtvig church, or the Grundtvig era.

[SPEAKER_01]: Because when you say you retain the Danishness...

[SPEAKER_01]: And Danish and Grundtvigian.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's not the same.

[SPEAKER_00]: No, it isn't.

[SPEAKER_00]: But the love of music, just the whole aspect of the church being the center of it, but not the whole thing.

[SPEAKER_00]: We did many things outside of the church which pertained to the same thing we were trying to do in the church.

[SPEAKER_00]: And of course we were known as the Happy Danes and the Elkhorn people were known as the Holy Danes.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I have the whole history and I just think it's fascinating, the schism and the whole thing.

[SPEAKER_00]: We still, in my family, we still dance around the Christmas tree at Christmas time.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we do, we try to do as many of our, as the Danish authentic foods as possible.

[SPEAKER_01]: Like what?

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, we have to have our æbleskiver.

[SPEAKER_00]: I have two grandkids that come from Peoria, and they beg for my æbleskiver.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I make kransekage for weddings.

[SPEAKER_00]: I have helped a lot with smørrebrød.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I love to have a party with smørrebrød.

[SPEAKER_00]: The real smørrebrød.

[SPEAKER_01]: The real smørrebrød.

[SPEAKER_00]: Not just a piece of bread with something on.

[SPEAKER_01]: A lot of it.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Different stuff.

[SPEAKER_00]: Nicely arranged and nice and pretty.

[SPEAKER_01]: I am teaching folk dancing today.

[SPEAKER_00]: I have been folk dancing since I was a little girl.

[SPEAKER_00]: My parents taught it for many years in Kimballton, and then I took over from them.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I've been teaching since, oh, way back in the 80s.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we still have a large group.

[SPEAKER_00]: We have some 10 adult couples, plus many children, 40, 50.

[SPEAKER_01]: When you were a young girl,

[SPEAKER_01]: in your young days a thing like folk dancing, would that divide people in your community like some would dance some wouldn't? No not in our community no. I mean what about Elkhorn? Because they were their own entity at that time and we were our churches were not you know. So that's why, you could not go to Elkhorn and folk dance? I don't think they had folk dancing no

[SPEAKER_00]: In fact, for many years they didn't dance in Elkhorn.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we did, we had public dances in Kimballton.

[SPEAKER_00]: But they liked to come down.

[SPEAKER_00]: Have you been to Elk Horn, Kimballton?

[SPEAKER_01]: I have, yeah, but many years ago.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_01]: But you could also have a beer or a glass of wine.

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: All the way, also, you remember back to your younger youth.

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: My parents, yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: That was accepted all the way.

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

[SPEAKER_01]: Would you say there are things in your daily life that separates you or makes you a little different from your neighbors, your friends in the Elkhorn area still?

[SPEAKER_00]: No.

[SPEAKER_00]: That is the one thing we have tried to put to rest.

[SPEAKER_00]: And the people who like to bring it up the most is reporters, especially from Denmark.

[SPEAKER_00]: And that's fine, I understand what they're after, but we put it to rest right away.

[SPEAKER_00]: No, we have no, we work together.

[SPEAKER_00]: We work together with their celebrations.

[SPEAKER_00]: We folk dance together.

[SPEAKER_00]: I have many of them from Elkhorn now folk dancing.

[SPEAKER_00]: And of course our museum really draws us together.

[SPEAKER_00]: And our school is all in Elkhorn now.

[SPEAKER_00]: No, there is none.

[SPEAKER_01]: ...

[SPEAKER_01]: Belonging to this group and the whole thing about the Danish heritage you've been telling me about, is that something looking to the past, all of it?

[SPEAKER_01]: Or does it also have aspects of the present time and the future?

[SPEAKER_00]: I think so because I think we want to pass it on to our children and our grandchildren, but we're not having the best luck with that because naturally our children are very busy.

[SPEAKER_00]: They integrate into other, their wives are different nationalities and

[SPEAKER_00]: Most of my children are very proud of their heritage, and they try.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I think, I hope, when they get a little older, they'll be able to join something like this.

[SPEAKER_00]: I have a daughter that would like to come.

[SPEAKER_00]: But we are not making them, no.

[SPEAKER_00]: It is only if they want to and what they feel is important to them.

[SPEAKER_01]: So do you think this Danebod Folk Meeting will have a future in, let's say, 20 years, 30 years, 40 years?

[SPEAKER_00]: Not part of that.

[SPEAKER_00]: I think it will.

[SPEAKER_00]: I really do, because there are some young people here, and if they feel the need and can keep coming and still attract people,

[SPEAKER_01]: So it will.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, we don't know.

[SPEAKER_01]: No, we don't know.

[SPEAKER_00]: But to think it has gone on as long as it has is, I think, remarkable.

[SPEAKER_00]: It's the same concept.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

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[SPEAKER_00]: They don't try to.

[SPEAKER_00]: No, that's true.

[SPEAKER_01]: Very good.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we are so thrilled with the lectures.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I try to tell my friends back home what I'm doing.

[SPEAKER_00]: They look at me kind of like, what, you what?

[SPEAKER_00]: And I say, yeah, but it is only for my good that I come.

[SPEAKER_00]: It's not to go home and talk about it or anything, because you can't, it's your own, you retain what you want from it.

[SPEAKER_01]: How do you explain to them what you are here for, what you're doing here?

[SPEAKER_00]: I just plain tell them that we get to sing our lovely songs that we sang since we were little kids.

[SPEAKER_00]: We'd still folk dance.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we'd hear some of the most modern lectures, world events.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we'd put those two things together.

[SPEAKER_01]: Some of your friends back home will understand that this sounds quite interesting.

[SPEAKER_00]: I think they think it's interesting, but I don't know if they think they could do it.

[SPEAKER_00]: I may.

[SPEAKER_00]: I keep on.

[SPEAKER_01]: Very good.