Interview of Asta Twedt and Solveig Gregory by H.B. Simonsen Transcript reviewed and corrected by H.B. Simonsen

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Input filename

Asta Twedt and Solveig Gregory_hbs.srt

[SPEAKER_00]: I'd like to hear what is your full name?

[SPEAKER_02]: My name is Asta Marie Peterson, and Twedt is my married name, which is

Norwegian. (mpk)

[SPEAKER_01]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: And your full name?

[SPEAKER_01]: And I'm Solveig Peterson Gregory, my married name, which isn't Danish at all.

[SPEAKER_00]: No.

[SPEAKER_00]: And where were you born?

[SPEAKER_00]: And what year?

[SPEAKER_02]: I was born in Ringsted in 1945, but grew up in Askov.

[SPEAKER_01]: And I was born in Ringsted in 1941 and grew up in Askov.

[SPEAKER_01]: Our parents didn't leave there until after we were both, no, after we were both married, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: And the names of your parents?

[SPEAKER_01]: Ardis and Harold Peterson.

[SPEAKER 01]: Our mother was Ardis Nielsen Peterson.

[SPEAKER_00]: And they were born where in this country or what?

[SPEAKER 01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Our dad was born in Cordova, Nebraska, and our mom was born in Upland, Nebraska.

[SPEAKER_01]: Her dad was in college there at the time.

[SPEAKER_00]: And what was his relation to Denmark?

[SPEAKER_02]: Well, our father's mother was born in Denmark, close to Silkeborg.

[SPEAKER_02]: And our

[SPEAKER_02]: And then the rest of our ancestors, it's our great-grandparents that were born in Denmark.

[SPEAKER_02]: And various places, on Møn, on Lolland, in Sjælland, and Sønderjylland.

[SPEAKER 02]: So various places around Denmark that they were from.

[SPEAKER_02]: And then it was when they came here, then they were married, went to various settlements and Danish settlements.

[SPEAKER_02]: in Cordova, and Nysted, and Tyler, and Askov.

[SPEAKER 00]: You mentioned Silkeborg.

[SPEAKER 00]: Are you aware of the specific place?

[SPEAKER_02]: No, I went to a folk high school in Herning, and I went to where I thought my grandmother was baptized, and I was so excited because she had told me about it.

[SPEAKER_02]: And I took pictures of the church and the baptismal font, and I came home, and she says, oh, no, that's not it.

[SPEAKER_02]: Oh, too bad.

[SPEAKER_02]: So it was some country church, but I don't know where.

[SPEAKER 02]: And she couldn't explain it to me anymore.

[SPEAKER_00]: In the area around Silkeborg.

[SPEAKER_01]: And one time I stayed in a bed and breakfast.

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[SPEAKER_01]: No, in an inn somewhere close to Silkeborg, and went for a long walk in the morning, and I just pretended that was where my grandma walked.

[SPEAKER_01]: But I couldn't find any, you know, her last name was Olsen, you know, you can't find cemeteries that have any kind of claim to that, that I would know would be her.

[SPEAKER_00]: But they came to this country as immigrants?

[SPEAKER 01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Around what year?

[SPEAKER 01]: Um...

[SPEAKER_02]: Well, our great-grandparents came mostly.

[SPEAKER_02]: Yes, and that would have been in the 1870s and 80s.

[SPEAKER_02]: And then our grandmother came in, well, that would have been the 1880s also.

[SPEAKER_02]: So a long ways back that we're Danish, but we can still speak "a lille smule".

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay, this will work.

[SPEAKER_00]: But we'll get back to that.

[SPEAKER_00]: And did they go to...

[SPEAKER_00]: settlements, Danish settlements, when they came into this country.

[SPEAKER_02]: Yes, our grandmother Olsen, the one that immigrated from Silkeborg, you can tell about where she came to.

[SPEAKER_02]: Well, she came to St.

[SPEAKER_02]: Paul.

[SPEAKER 02]: Yeah, so they didn't come to a Danish settlement, St.

[SPEAKER_02]: Paul, Minnesota.

[SPEAKER_00]: That's the city.

[SPEAKER_02]: The city, where he could find employment.

[SPEAKER_02]: And he actually worked...

[SPEAKER_02]: in the streetcars cleaning out the, you know, after the horses.

[SPEAKER_02]: So we have a wonderful story from that time, too.

[SPEAKER_02]: You know, the immigrant experience was not easy.

[SPEAKER_01]: Go ahead.

[SPEAKER_01]: They had been fairly well-to-do in Denmark.

[SPEAKER 01]: You know, I mean, very comfortable.

[SPEAKER_01]: And they came over here thinking that, you know, this was the good land.

[SPEAKER_01]: And they were very poor.

[SPEAKER_01]: They didn't know where their next meal was coming from.

[SPEAKER 01]: And

[SPEAKER_01]: So, yeah, our favorite story from our grandma being little was she can remember her mother holding her and her little brother on her lap and praying, give us this day our daily bread, in Danish, of course.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then she said, you know, that gave her the feeling that prayers are answered because neighbors did realize their plight and came with food for them anyway.

[SPEAKER_02]: But eventually she and her parents went to Cordova, Nebraska, a Danish settlement, and then that's where my grandfather, Peterson, was from.

[SPEAKER_02]: So the great-grandparents, they had come originally to West Denmark and then gone to Cordova.

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[SPEAKER_02]: Other parts of the family had come originally to, my grandmother on my mother's side had come to Nino, Wisconsin, but then had gone eventually to Tyler.

[SPEAKER_02]: Our great-grandfather on our mother's side, the father, he was one of the early pioneers of the Nysted community.

[SPEAKER_02]: He was called Kong Niels.

[SPEAKER_01]: And he taught at the Nysted Folk School.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you have a long family tradition of being integrated in these Danish communities around the Midwest.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's why we have our Danish names and our first language that we learned was Danish.

[SPEAKER_01]: But then we lost that pretty much.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: But you still have a little memory of it.

[SPEAKER_02]: Our parents actually, even being third generation Danes, were

[SPEAKER_02]: were fluent in both writing and reading and speaking Danish.

[SPEAKER_02]: Our father was a pastor.

[SPEAKER_02]: That's another reason we have this connection is that he was a pastor in the old Danish church.

[SPEAKER_02]: And we had connections all over, way up into Dalum, Canada.

[SPEAKER_02]: And all of our conventions and people that we'd get together with were

[SPEAKER_02]: of this Danish community.

[SPEAKER_02]: So that's a huge part of our upbringing, was that connection with these communities.

[SPEAKER_00]: What about your schooling?

[SPEAKER_00]: Where did you go to school?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, I think it's interesting.

[SPEAKER_01]: We just have to say that, because I always love to tell this, that all four of our grandparents attended Grand View in some way or another because they also had a

[SPEAKER_01]: Academy there and so they all went to Grandview and our parents both graduated or went to Grandview for college and

[SPEAKER_01]: Our brother, who now has died, and Asta and I all went to Grand View.

[SPEAKER_01]: And our dad went to the seminary at Grand View.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then we went, I mean, then I graduated from University of Northern Iowa.

[SPEAKER 02]: But before that, we went to Askov.

[SPEAKER_02]: We got all our 12 years of basic education in Askov at the school that was called H.C. Andersen School.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_02]: Yeah, that was what our name of our school was.

[SPEAKER_00]: How was the Danish language and culture in Askov in your school time?

[SPEAKER_00]: In our school time there was... For instance in the school.

[SPEAKER_02]: In the school there was nothing.

[SPEAKER_00]: It was a public school.

[SPEAKER_02]: Public school.

[SPEAKER_02]: No Danish classes.

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[SPEAKER_02]: At the time when my mother lived there, my mother lived there for a while when she was a girl.

[SPEAKER_02]: Our grandfather was the superintendent of schools there.

[SPEAKER_02]: And they had Danish classes there at that time.

[SPEAKER_02]: The school was in English.

[SPEAKER 02]: And that was in the 20s.

[SPEAKER_00]: But not in your school time.

[SPEAKER_02]: But not in our school time.

[SPEAKER_02]: And even in the 20s, the school was in English, but there were Danish classes.

[SPEAKER_02]: Danish language classes.

[SPEAKER_00]: So did you have any Danish schooling?

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, we did a little bit because in the summer when we had what we called summer school, but it was like Bible, vacation Bible school.

[SPEAKER_01]: Anyway.

[SPEAKER 01]: Ferieskole.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we would have Danish classes then.

[SPEAKER_01]: So, you know, we brushed up.

[SPEAKER_01]: We knew a lot of that, but we brushed up on it at that time and sang Danish songs and things.

[SPEAKER_01]: But then we always sang

[SPEAKER_01]: you know, Danish translated songs.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, we grew up singing a lot in our church and our community and a lot of those.

[SPEAKER_01]: That, you know, I look back too, this is off the subject, but we would, our friends would get together, you know, first of all, our youth group always sang out of A World of Song and sang all those.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then we'd get together around our piano at our house and just sing away on a lot of those songs.

[SPEAKER_01]: So,

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, if you go up to Askov still, the people that are our age, you know, still know all those songs from the world of song.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you actually had this

[SPEAKER_00]: A bunch of songs all along your life.

[SPEAKER 02]: Absolutely, yeah.

[SPEAKER 02]: It's our first language is singing, I think.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_02]: Yeah, it's what we always did.

[SPEAKER_02]: It's still what I do.

[SPEAKER_02]: My husband tells me I know a song for every occasion and some that shouldn't be on any occasion.

[SPEAKER_02]: But it's because of how we grew up.

[SPEAKER_02]: Everything was singing.

[SPEAKER_02]: We just sang.

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[SPEAKER_02]: When I went to high school in Denmark, people were really surprised that they would sing the song in Danish and that I knew these songs in English.

[SPEAKER_02]: And I remember visiting a friend of mine in Aarhus, and we spent...

[SPEAKER_02]: hours singing with her mother and father.

[SPEAKER_02]: And her father was just, he was a wonderful, knew all these old Danish songs that I knew in English.

[SPEAKER_02]: And it was just one of the most delightful times I've ever had.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you went to Danish folk school?

[SPEAKER_02]: I did, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: I didn't, no.

[SPEAKER_02]: After my second year at Grandview College or University, it was only two years at that time, and after my second year I went to school there, just for a half year is all.

[SPEAKER_00]: And when you got out of school, what kind of a job did you engage in?

[SPEAKER_01]: We were both teachers.

[SPEAKER_01]: I taught high school English, and

[SPEAKER_01]: And I'm certified to teach both English and music.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so when I quit teaching full time, I substituted for many years and I taught music quite a bit.

[SPEAKER 01]: But now, all through my life I've taught piano.

[SPEAKER_01]: Now I don't teach in the public schools, but I still have a lot of piano students.

[SPEAKER_01]: And I'm a church organist too.

[SPEAKER_00]: Where was that?

[SPEAKER_00]: Where have you been living?

[SPEAKER 01]: Well, in the last 30 years, I guess, in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

[SPEAKER_01]: But we've lived other places for shorter times too.

[SPEAKER_01]: We lived in Chicago and we lived in Bloomington, Illinois.

[SPEAKER_01]: We lived in Germany for a little bit too when my husband was in the Army.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: You got married?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER 00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: When was that?

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, right when I graduated from college.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: And your husband, what is his name?

[SPEAKER 01]: He has an insurance agency.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: And his name?

[SPEAKER_01]: His name is Larry Gregory.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah?

[SPEAKER_01]: And he grew up around Cedar Falls and among Danes in a Danish

[SPEAKER_01]: community too although he's not Danish but you know it was he was very he very easily assimilated into these customs because

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[SPEAKER_01]: He and all his friends danced around the Christmas tree and ate aebleskiver and things like that.

[SPEAKER_01]: And said tak for mad and things like that.

[SPEAKER_00]: So he was very familiar with that.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so our kids, as well as their kids, they learned all those Danish customs too.

[SPEAKER 01]: So that's fun.

[SPEAKER_00]: So that was not a mixing of cultures very much.

[SPEAKER 00]: No, no.

[SPEAKER_00]: What about you?

[SPEAKER_02]: Well, I was married in 1966, and...

[SPEAKER_02]: I married my sweetheart from Grandview, who was a Norwegian.

[SPEAKER_02]: And the first time I went to church with him in his home church, I looked around and thought, oh my, is this Lutheran?

[SPEAKER_02]: Because it was such a much more pietistic background than what I had grown up in.

[SPEAKER_02]: But Arlen fell in love with the more Grundtvigian tradition at Grandview and also at the church Lutheran Memorial.

[SPEAKER_02]: in Des Moines because he found there the grace that he felt was kind of missing in his growing up years.

[SPEAKER 02]: And so that was a really important thing to him.

[SPEAKER_02]: And we've lived, we lived in California and we lived in

[SPEAKER_02]: Rochester, Minnesota, and Cedar Falls for a year with her.

[SPEAKER_02]: But now for many years we've lived in Ankeny, Iowa, right north of Des Moines.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you lived in many different communities, both of you actually.

[SPEAKER_02]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: With Danish

[SPEAKER_00]: neighbors and also with all kinds of other neighbors.

[SPEAKER_02]: Well, actually, she's been more in a Danish environment since she's been married than I have been.

[SPEAKER 01]: Because Cedar Falls has a lot of Danes.

[SPEAKER_02]: So our Danish heritage or culture things have been more in our home that we have kept on to rather than in our community.

[SPEAKER_02]: We like to say that we got one of our sons-in-law because we fed him medisterpoelse and aebleskiver and soedsuppe.

[SPEAKER 02]: And so we say that's how we got him.

[SPEAKER_02]: And maybe our daughter had a little to do with it too.

[SPEAKER 02]: So even our sons-in-law and their children enjoy that food.

[SPEAKER 02]: culture too.

[SPEAKER_02]: And our grandchildren know a lot of these translated songs.

[SPEAKER_02]: Our little granddaughter, who's six, I don't think she can go to bed without singing Den Lille Ole.

[SPEAKER_02]: Isn't that interesting?

[SPEAKER_02]: So that's many generations back, but it's still there.

[SPEAKER_00]: It's a natural daily life thing for you, actually.

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[SPEAKER_02]: It is, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: Coming to

[SPEAKER_00]: Danebod folk meeting.

[SPEAKER_00]: How long have you been attending this meeting?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, our parents moved here to retire in 1978 or something like that, probably.

[SPEAKER 01]: Or 77 maybe, can't remember.

[SPEAKER_01]: But anyway, right away my dad was asked to be

[SPEAKER_01]: the director of, you know, like Ricky's job now.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so he did that, and then when he died, my mother took over.

[SPEAKER_01]: But because they were doing that, you know, then we got interested in coming.

[SPEAKER_01]: Her mother was the director of this meeting for 20 years.

[SPEAKER_01]: She was very active in this community.

[SPEAKER_01]: We've both been coming since, you know, probably the early 80s anyway.

[SPEAKER_02]: And I not as often as you because your work schedule is more flexible than mine is.

[SPEAKER_02]: So sometimes I'd come and sometimes not, depending on whether I could get off work.

[SPEAKER_00]: But you haven't been living in Tyler.

[SPEAKER 02]: No, we've never lived in Tyler.

[SPEAKER_02]: But we did have our great-grandparents, which we never knew.

[SPEAKER 02]: They died before we were born, but they lived in Tyler.

[SPEAKER_02]: So our roots in Tyler, we have roots in Tyler too, even though we didn't have, we never lived here.

[SPEAKER_00]: You obviously enjoy being at this folk meeting.

[SPEAKER_02]: Yeah, we love it.

[SPEAKER_00]: What do you like best about it?

[SPEAKER_02]: Just getting together with the people.

[SPEAKER_02]: And, you know, for me, I'm not living in a Danish community.

[SPEAKER_02]: I live in a more...

[SPEAKER_02]: Yeah, conservative.

[SPEAKER 02]: Maybe it's an upwardly mobile kind of community.

[SPEAKER_02]: And here, it's very plain and ordinary and very down-to-earth.

[SPEAKER_02]: And people with my values.

[SPEAKER_02]: And so it's just a wonderful environment to come to.

[SPEAKER_00]: Could you elaborate a little on the share your values?

[SPEAKER 00]: Sure.

[SPEAKER_02]: I think there's been a lot of talk this week about happiness.

[SPEAKER_02]: I love the Danish translated song that happiness never depends on success, one in the struggle for glory or pleasure.

[SPEAKER_02]: You know, those kinds of values of getting away from the, you know, we do things because we can earn a living that way, rather than, you know, our dad was fond of saying, oh, now I can't even remember the thing about, oh, anyway, the value of life being different from the values of society, but, you know, the values of the...

[SPEAKER_02]: life of living a rich life rather than becoming rich.

[SPEAKER_02]: I guess that's kind of what he would talk about.

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[SPEAKER_02]: Good expression.

[SPEAKER_02]: And I think that's kind of what we find here is the importance of

[SPEAKER_02]: of a rich life that's different from what society thinks of as being a rich life, of accumulating.

[SPEAKER_02]: Instead we accumulate friends or we accumulate how we can be of service to other people and those kinds of values.

[SPEAKER_00]: So it's not, you can say, to be in a Danish

[SPEAKER 00]: environment.

[SPEAKER_00]: It's something more of a heritage environment.

[SPEAKER_00]: It's more something of the present day.

[SPEAKER_01]: And a way of life, I think.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, I think so.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, I'll just add to that, because nobody, you know, when you explain this to somebody else who doesn't have a clue as to what this is about, they don't understand, you know.

[SPEAKER_01]: But, you know, and they'll think, well, it's a church thing.

[SPEAKER 01]: Well,

[SPEAKER_01]: It is because this is part of our faith, the way we live out our faith, but it's not cloistered in a church or in a particular religion or anything like that.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's how we understand our way to live out our Christianity in that we need to educate ourselves in a wide variety of ways and then

[SPEAKER_01]: and then live out those that's why i love all the variety of lectures you know you might not like you might not agree with them all but then that's okay too and but that's what i also like about it but i also like the singing just because all these Grundtvigian songs for one thing really are what are

[SPEAKER_01]: my life was about, you know.

[SPEAKER_02]: And that's how our parents raised us, too.

[SPEAKER_02]: You know, when we were growing up, you know, when people think that we are pastor's children, then they think that probably we are more, you know, pietistic or whatever than anyone else.

[SPEAKER_02]: But we were growing up, you know, infused with the idea that our whole life was our

[SPEAKER_02]: our faith.

[SPEAKER_02]: We don't separate.

[SPEAKER_02]: That's why we can sing the Danish hiking song right next to Gracious and Mighty God, in that we don't separate what is our spiritual life and what is our social life.

[SPEAKER 02]: So in a way, that's very countercultural, especially today.

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, you would say it's countercultural?

[SPEAKER_02]: Yeah, I think it is.

[SPEAKER_00]: In what way?

[SPEAKER_02]: In that the whole idea of...

[SPEAKER_02]: spirituality today, it ends up, it causes more divisions than it causes unity, it seems like.

[SPEAKER_02]: Or the, you know, when you talk about religion with people, that's a very divisive thing.

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[SPEAKER_02]: Whereas the way we were growing up, it was a way to be inclusive and a way to be including people of all faiths and all beliefs and all people.

[SPEAKER_02]: And today it seems like that's really the opposite.

[SPEAKER_02]: So, and that's, that we feel is our, it was our Danish upbringing and our Grundtvigian

[SPEAKER_01]: thinking yeah I you probably figured out in america as probably other countries too but there's so much fundamentalism you know where where you know this is the right way and there's no other way you know and and so

[SPEAKER_00]: absolutes yeah I agree very much with what you say about this mixture of things in the church you have devotion right after lecture and it's all you can have a laughter almost in all of it through all of it which I think is quite unique because I don't think it's even very much the case in

[SPEAKER_00]: very many places in Denmark.

[SPEAKER_00]: No, no, no.

[SPEAKER_02]: Well, I think the 11th commandment in Denmark is the same as it is here, thou shalt not laugh.

[SPEAKER_02]: So, yeah, and that's very good.

[SPEAKER_00]: It's very good.

[SPEAKER_00]: I would like to go on.

[SPEAKER_00]: Thank you.

[SPEAKER_00]: Would you add anything to what...

[SPEAKER_00]: whatever we have been talking about.

[SPEAKER_02]: No, I just think, you know, about how thankful we are.

[SPEAKER_02]: I mean, it's just for our ancestors and our parents.

[SPEAKER_02]: Now I get emotional when I think about that.

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, I was also going to say, because you want to mention Askov, I am so thankful to have grown up in a small

[SPEAKER_01]: community like that where you know there was a lot of cohesiveness even though everybody was different but you know everybody cared about each other and it was a great little place to grow up we had lots of grandparents yeah yeah yeah it's a it's a very good and secure yeah yeah way of being brought up and that of course makes you

[SPEAKER_00]: feel that way.

[SPEAKER_00]: It gives you a lot on your way.

[SPEAKER_01]: And the town is way, I mean, it's way different now, but I still love to go there, and I still feel that, you know?

[SPEAKER 01]: People still come up and you just feel like they're still your family.

[SPEAKER_00]: But now it's...

[SPEAKER_00]: At Danebod Folk Meeting, to be specific about that, it's the older generation here, mainly.

[SPEAKER_00]: They're also younger.

[SPEAKER_00]: How do you expect it will evolve in the coming years?

[SPEAKER_02]: I think that's really hard to tell, whether it'll evolve or whether it'll quit.

[SPEAKER_02]: But when my mother started doing this, when they first asked her to do it in 1980 after my father died,

[SPEAKER_02]: They said, oh, but don't worry about it.

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[SPEAKER_02]: It's going to die out pretty soon.

[SPEAKER_02]: So you won't have to do this for very long.

[SPEAKER_02]: And of course, it got bigger and bigger and more important.

[SPEAKER_02]: Both our daughters and our sons-in-law and their children have attended this a number of times.

[SPEAKER_02]: But of course, they're working.

[SPEAKER_02]: That's hard.

[SPEAKER 02]: It's difficult to do.

[SPEAKER_02]: But it's hard to know.

[SPEAKER_02]: I guess we just have to wait and see.

[SPEAKER_02]: I think it has staying power and value for all generations.

[SPEAKER_02]: And I think that we're short-changing it if we say that it's not going to last because we were proved wrong 20 years ago.

[SPEAKER_00]: And there's new things added to the tradition, you could say, with the summer camps.

[SPEAKER 02]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Because that's... Our one daughter and son-in-law and family went to that.

[SPEAKER_00]: The younger generation that are able to attend that...

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, that might mix and give new... New life to this, yes.

[SPEAKER_02]: I think that's a very possible possibility.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, thanks very much.

[SPEAKER_00]: Thank you.

[SPEAKER_02]: It's been fun to have you here.