

Interview of Axel Thomsen by H.B. Simonsen
Transcript reviewed and corrected by H.B. Simonsen
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Input filename

Axel Thomsen, Ringsted all_hbs.srt

[SPEAKER_00]: I'd like to start if you'll tell me your full name.

[SPEAKER_01]: Axel Thomsen.

[SPEAKER_00]: And where and when were you born?

[SPEAKER_01]: I was born in Ringsted.

[SPEAKER_01]: Iowa, on a farm in 1920.

[SPEAKER_01]: My father's name was Martin Thomsen.

[SPEAKER_01]: He was born in Denmark.

[SPEAKER_01]: and came to America in 1908.

[SPEAKER_01]: My mother, her name was Marie Petersen, maiden name, and she was born right here in Ringsted, and married my father in 1914.

[SPEAKER_00]: What was her background of your mother?

[SPEAKER_00]: Her parents, did they come from Denmark?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: My mother's father and mother both came from Denmark.

[SPEAKER_01]: One from Sjælland, and father from Sjælland, and mother from Sønderjylland, southern Denmark.

[SPEAKER_01]: And they...

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, they lived in Cedar Falls, Iowa when they were married, but then they pioneered out here in the Ringsted area and built up the farm, the first buildings and site and everything there.

[SPEAKER_01]: So it was a pioneer farm.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you were born on this farm?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: That we're at now?

[SPEAKER_00]: Right in this house.

[SPEAKER_00]: Right in this house?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, in the bedroom right in there.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: And you, of course, grew up.

[SPEAKER_00]: What was your schooling like?

[SPEAKER_00]: Where did you go to school?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, we had what we called country schools, eight grades, and then we went to a high school which was in the town of Ringsted.

[SPEAKER_01]: The country schools...

[SPEAKER_01]: were every four miles, four sections inclusive, so that the children could all walk to school, you know, within range.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we'd have one teacher, and he was, as far as I know in our area, was always a lady.

[SPEAKER_01]: We didn't have any men teachers in country school that I know of.

[SPEAKER_01]: We did when we'd get to high school.

[SPEAKER_01]: And when we had a good teacher and we had some excellent teachers with one or two years preparation, education,

[SPEAKER_01]: But they could teach well in singing and art and plays and things like that they taught us.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we had good school books.

[SPEAKER_01]: Our reading books in the higher grades were

[SPEAKER_01]: Besides learning to read, we got literature.

[SPEAKER_01]: The Iliad and the Odyssey in reading books written for our level.

[SPEAKER_01]: And King Arthur and stuff like that.

[SPEAKER_01]: We got literature with our reading.

[SPEAKER_01]: We learned to read.

[SPEAKER_01]: Ah, it was beautiful.

[SPEAKER_01]: And they don't use those books anymore.

[SPEAKER_01]: Probably not.

[SPEAKER_01]: I know they don't.

[SPEAKER_01]: No, they don't.

[SPEAKER_01]: And it's such a shame, but then that's progress, isn't it?

[SPEAKER_01]: Who knows?

[SPEAKER_00]: The schools you went to were, of course...

[SPEAKER_00]: Public schools, American public schools.

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you did not have any Danish in the school?

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, no, no, no.

[SPEAKER_00]: But did you have Danish schooling beside the public schools?

[SPEAKER_01]: In the church.

[SPEAKER_00]: In the church?

[SPEAKER_00]: How was that?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, that was, when I was young, it was Danish Sunday school.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then, I don't know when it happened, but...

[SPEAKER_01]: Sometime during my childhood, we had both Danish and English Sunday school, you know, by demand and desire, you know, the change of language.

[SPEAKER_01]: This is another question, a problem that we had that I grew up with was, you know, this is right after World War I.

[SPEAKER_01]: and all the patriotism and things that came out of that conflict, you know.

[SPEAKER_01]: We had a job.

[SPEAKER_01]: They wouldn't let anybody preach in German.

[SPEAKER_01]: And there were German communities right here, very close.

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, you...

[SPEAKER_01]: Glenn Henrickson that played music, his parents were German, down from the next town, and they were really affected by the language in their churches.

[SPEAKER_01]: But we were too, it was Danish, we couldn't have Danish.

[SPEAKER_01]: sermons and stuff.

[SPEAKER_01]: They tried to stop it.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't think they really did.

[SPEAKER_01]: But there was a conflict, which is what I want to bring out, that we lived with.

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[SPEAKER_00]: But that was only in Iowa, wasn't it?
[SPEAKER_00]: Iowa.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, I don't know.
[SPEAKER_01]: That's all we know about.
[SPEAKER_00]: It was all over, I'm sure.
[SPEAKER_00]: So it was the state law.
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, they made a state law.
[SPEAKER_01]: You couldn't have church services in a foreign language.
[SPEAKER_00]: And that went on for a couple of years?
[SPEAKER_00]: It didn't hold up very good.
[SPEAKER_00]: No.
[SPEAKER_01]: I'm glad to say.
[SPEAKER_01]: But it was, you know, this is patriotism.
[SPEAKER_01]: One of our biggest handicaps.
[SPEAKER_01]: Nationalism.
[SPEAKER_01]: Nationalism is a handicap.
[SPEAKER_01]: I mean, our own nation, we're the greatest.
[SPEAKER_00]: America first, we had that.
[SPEAKER_00]: You say that with an ironic... It is ironic, totally.
[SPEAKER_00]: You are ironic now.
[SPEAKER_01]: Of course.
[SPEAKER_00]: Okay, did you have a holiday school, summer school here in Ringsted?
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh yes, we learned Danish there.
[SPEAKER_00]: That was for some weeks during the summertime?
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, three weeks it was
[SPEAKER_01]: It might have been longer, but I know we had three weeks of it.
[SPEAKER_00]: Well, you had Danish singing, reading, all these kinds of things.
[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, yes.
[SPEAKER_01]: And folk dancing.
[SPEAKER_00]: And you were taught a bit of Danish or some Danish.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, quite a lot of it.
[SPEAKER_00]: Did you speak Danish in your home?
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, we did.
[SPEAKER_01]: I had one sister and we were the two siblings.
[SPEAKER_01]: And we always, it was always Danish at home.
[SPEAKER_01]: Everything.
[SPEAKER_00]: Also when you started school.
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, I learned, my mother was a teacher.
[SPEAKER_01]: She was one of the teachers that talked about early teachers.
[SPEAKER_01]: She only had, I think, only one year of education down in the teacher's college at Cedar Falls.
[SPEAKER_01]: And she taught me to read
[SPEAKER_01]: English before, not so much writing, but I could read English very well, and I started early, a little too early, but they had a reason to keep more children in the same class.
[SPEAKER_01]: It didn't work.

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[SPEAKER_01]: Best made plans didn't work.

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, it had an effect on me, but that's the way it goes.

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, yeah, so I learned, because I learned to read Danish at home, too.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: But did you speak Danish at home for, when you grew up, like when you were a teenager?

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, of course.

[SPEAKER_00]: So that was the language at home?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, it was.

[SPEAKER_01]: It certainly was.

[SPEAKER_01]: Hello...(someone's coming in the room), but I don't think he would.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: I learned, my mother taught me to read English before I started school.

[SPEAKER_01]: But I'm sure she taught me Danish, to read Danish first.

[SPEAKER_01]: But I don't know.

[SPEAKER_01]: I learned both.

[SPEAKER_00]: Excellent.

[SPEAKER_00]: Move back one step, like, sort of.

[SPEAKER_00]: You're quite close to the microphone.

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: Like that.

[SPEAKER_00]: That's fine.

[SPEAKER_00]: So, what about your own family?

[SPEAKER_00]: You got married?

[SPEAKER_01]: In 1953 I married Luanne.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: What background does she have?

[SPEAKER_01]: Her father's family was Norwegian, totally Norwegian, and then her mother's was mixed Scotch-Irish and a little Dutch.

French?

[SPEAKER_01]: French, too.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: And you have two daughters?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, Jane and Laura.

[SPEAKER_00]: And you've been working with the farming all your life, haven't you?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Have you been doing anything else?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, I was in World War II.

[SPEAKER_01]: three years about, you know.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: How did that come about?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, I was drafted into the Army Air Force.

[SPEAKER_01]: It was in conjunction with the Army that time.
[SPEAKER_01]: We were Army Air Force.
[SPEAKER_01]: It was separate as it is now.
[SPEAKER_01]: And I spent about half, it wasn't quite three years total.
[SPEAKER_01]: Then the war was over.
[SPEAKER_01]: I spent about half of it in this country and then the rest in Italy.
[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.
[SPEAKER_00]: So when you got back from the war, what time would that have been?
[SPEAKER_01]: Back to this country.
[SPEAKER_01]: August of 1945.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: So before you were drafted, before you went to the war, what had you been doing work-wise?
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, just farming with my father.
[SPEAKER_01]: And then during that time I spent three, a quarter, three months
[SPEAKER_01]: in Grandview College in Des Moines, where I met a lot of these friends that I still have today, and got background, you know.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah?
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, it was a good three months.
[SPEAKER_01]: And I got more Danish.
[SPEAKER_01]: I took a class in Danish at that time, writing.
[SPEAKER_00]: But what was the purpose of your going to Des Moines, to Grandview College?
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, it was a folk school.
[SPEAKER_01]: This was our folk school.
[SPEAKER_00]: But they had a three-month course.
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, they called it Winter School.
[SPEAKER_00]: Okay, okay.
[SPEAKER_01]: It was designed for the immigrants to learn the English language and have the Danish background, too.
[SPEAKER_01]: You know, they feel comfortable with the Danish and still learn the English.
[SPEAKER_00]: So many Danes got that three-month course at Grandview.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, of course.
[SPEAKER_01]: My father did, too.
[SPEAKER_00]: But some spent more time at Grandview.
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, yes.
[SPEAKER_00]: Like, for two years.
[SPEAKER_01]: The ministers, you know.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: And quite a number of people that I spoke to at Tyler were there for maybe two years.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, yeah, more than, yeah, two years.
[SPEAKER_00]: Some more, but most of them, I think, were there for two years.
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, then they had, you see, under the ministry, the seminary for our synod, Danish Synod, was there.
[SPEAKER_01]: So it was quite an important institution.

[SPEAKER_00]: How did you enjoy the time at Grandview?
[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, heaven.
[SPEAKER_01]: Got off the farm, all that hard work, and then the experience.
[SPEAKER_01]: I was 20.
[SPEAKER_01]: What did you especially enjoy being there?
[SPEAKER_00]: Fellowship.
[SPEAKER_01]: Basically that was an all-around fellowship.
[SPEAKER_01]: And you know, to be accepted is a wonderful feeling no matter where you are.
[SPEAKER_01]: And you had that feeling which is so important.
[SPEAKER_00]: So that was kind of your experience, and then you said you...
[SPEAKER_00]: Well, that came up in 1941.
[SPEAKER_01]: I was in there in the school beginning of 1941.
[SPEAKER_01]: At Grandview?
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: And then of course we were involved in December 1941.
[SPEAKER_01]: And then in December 1942 is when I was inducted into the Army.
[SPEAKER_00]: But when you came back to this country after the war from Italy, did you go back to the farm here?
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: There's an interesting tale about that.
[SPEAKER_01]: As we left Italy, we were programmed to the Asiatic theater war in Japan.
[SPEAKER_01]: But while we were on ship, Japan surrendered, but we were on the ship coming back.
[SPEAKER_01]: The bombs were dropped, I don't know if that was, it was before we departed from Italy, but then the surrender was while we were on ship, so we knew we wouldn't need to go to Japan.
[SPEAKER_00]: And you were relieved?
[SPEAKER_01]: We had already, you know, spent time overseas and stuff like that.
[SPEAKER_01]: So they could send new guys over there, you know, for peace.
[SPEAKER_01]: So it was a wonderful feeling.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: Sure.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: So you got back to this country?
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, then I started help with the farming the rest of that year, harvest and things.
[SPEAKER_01]: And I started in partnership with my father in 1946, the beginning of the year.
[SPEAKER_01]: And then we were in partnership even after we were married for a while.
[SPEAKER_01]: And then finally became independent.
[SPEAKER_00]: So you went on farming until quite recently, actually.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, 2002 was the last year I farmed.
[SPEAKER_01]: So that would be the age of 82.
[SPEAKER_01]: 82, yeah, 82.
[SPEAKER_00]: high age for an active farmer.
[SPEAKER_01]: But actually, you know, equipment was much, we had cabs, you could be inside.
[SPEAKER_01]: It was pretty cold around here in the fall and in the spring, out in the open.

[SPEAKER_01]: And you had to do it to get things done.
[SPEAKER_01]: So after I didn't have any livestock, you know, and that helped so much.
[SPEAKER_01]: And then being in, inside, out of the weather made it so much easier.
[SPEAKER_01]: Warmer and everything.
[SPEAKER_01]: I had a lot of good experience from using horses entirely for the farming to the tractors.
[SPEAKER_00]: Ferguson.
[SPEAKER_01]: Complete way to the
[SPEAKER_01]: pretty good sized combines even when I was still farming.
[SPEAKER_01]: Although it's really increased since that time.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: You live close to a small town called Ringsted and it's been a Danish community for a good many years.
[SPEAKER_00]: What kind of Danish community life would you mention?
[SPEAKER_00]: There was of course a Danish congregation.
[SPEAKER_00]: There used to be a Danish congregation.
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, yes.
[SPEAKER_01]: We still have Danish days, you know, in Ringsted.
[SPEAKER_01]: You do?
[SPEAKER_01]: In the summer.
[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.
[SPEAKER_00]: But what kind of... Within the church, there was, of course, the service on Sunday.
[SPEAKER_00]: But would there be other...
[SPEAKER_01]: gatherings, things going on, activities within the church that you could... Well, we had young people's societies which were active, involved with the church all the time.
[SPEAKER_00]: You have been part of that, I'm sure.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: What kind of things were going on?
[SPEAKER_01]: Well we didn't do much other than we had a certain amount of business, you know.
[SPEAKER_01]: We met I think once a month, I think so.
[SPEAKER_01]: If you talk to Harold he might remember better.
[SPEAKER_00]: But what kind of, you were together doing something like singing, I suppose, and maybe folk dancing.
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, singing in the choir.
[SPEAKER_01]: Of course, we folk danced through the Young People's Society.
[SPEAKER_01]: You did?
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, yes.
[SPEAKER_01]: In fact.
[SPEAKER_00]: Quite a lot, or was that just once in a while?
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, yes.
[SPEAKER_01]: There were some years there that we traveled.
[SPEAKER_01]: We were in demand in different areas in the community.
[SPEAKER_01]: We were down in Des Moines once.
[SPEAKER_01]: dance down there for whatever, I don't know.

[SPEAKER_00]: Did you have sort of old costumes?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: You were wearing the women long dresses and the men... Blue.

[SPEAKER_01]: We still have some pictures from the time we were in Des Moines.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't know where they are.

[SPEAKER_00]: I didn't... So that belonged to your community life, that you Danes had folk dancing?

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: What about other activities in this group we're talking about?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well mainly school.

[SPEAKER_01]: When we were in high school we had a lot of activities through that.

[SPEAKER_01]: Even in these country schools we'd have a Thanksgiving play and a Christmas play.

[SPEAKER_01]: This was acting and theater.

[SPEAKER_01]: taking part, wonderful education.

[SPEAKER_00]: But that was the youth association among the Danes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Did the grown-ups, when you were younger, your parents and their group, what kind of thing did they have going on?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, they had the Danish Brotherhood.

[SPEAKER_01]: You heard of that?

[SPEAKER_01]: But my parents didn't belong to that.

[SPEAKER_01]: But it was active, very active here in my youth.

[SPEAKER_01]: And they had dances and parties.

[SPEAKER_01]: There wasn't any drinking then because we had prohibition.

[SPEAKER_01]: So there wasn't, not even beer.

[SPEAKER_01]: But they had fun, they danced.

[SPEAKER_01]: They danced well.

[SPEAKER_01]: It was an important activity.

[SPEAKER_00]: This group that you belong to have been called the Happy Danes, right?

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, that's kind of a designation, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: What kind of... Well, you have told me about the things that sort of was in that community.

[SPEAKER_00]: was the group that belonged to the Danish church, the so-called Grundtvigian church, was that sort of a fixed group, or did you have a lot of things to do with the others?

[SPEAKER_01]: Actually, Henrik, we intermarried.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Indiscriminately, is a beautiful part of it.

[SPEAKER_01]: They married, both sexes intermarried, you know, from both.

[SPEAKER_01]: You couldn't stop it.

[SPEAKER_00]: No.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's a beautiful story.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then they would usually join the ladies' church, whichever one.

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, so sort of, that was sort of the way you did it.

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh yeah, that was a way to mix, blend.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, yeah, sure, sure.

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[SPEAKER_01]: All natural, purely organic.

[SPEAKER_00]: Purely, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's a fun story, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: They couldn't keep us separate.

[SPEAKER_01]: And the young people from the other church would come out to our young people sometimes to dance.

[SPEAKER_00]: But were there some of your parents or the other people, the other youngsters' parents that would try to keep you within the group that you should...

[SPEAKER_00]: They might say, for instance, you should find a girl within this group.

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, of course.

[SPEAKER_01]: They wanted that, but they did what they wanted.

[SPEAKER_01]: They fell in love.

[SPEAKER_01]: You can't beat love.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, that's all.

[SPEAKER_01]: But these youngsters that would come up to our...

[SPEAKER_01]: folk dancing a little bit.

[SPEAKER_01]: Not a lot, but there was a desire.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, they envied us a little.

[SPEAKER_01]: And they were more straight-laced, but they were not any different.

[SPEAKER_01]: We were the same.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we knew it, you know.

[SPEAKER_01]: But their parents, you know, kind of had some influence on them and did it in us too.

[SPEAKER_00]: But you belong to the Danish church and the tradition that has come in one way or the other from Denmark from what the old Grundtvig in Denmark influenced high school movement and so on and that came through the states and you've been part of the Tyler

[SPEAKER_00]: folk meeting this year.

[SPEAKER_00]: Have you been there for a long time, for many times?

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh yes, yes, going back to the early 80s at least.

[SPEAKER_01]: We didn't always go up for the whole four day, but we'd be part of it.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then of course we were in Tyler for young people's gatherings.

[SPEAKER_01]: Seeing that young people's meetings would, annual meeting would be in Tyler once if I would have been there.

[SPEAKER_01]: down in Des Moines and meet together down there.

[SPEAKER_01]: And the young people, they had an organized society in the church, in the business and everything.

[SPEAKER_01]: The ministers were involved and we got together in different towns to do that.

[SPEAKER_01]: One thing I want to tell you about, when the church divided,

[SPEAKER_01]: Way back, way back in the 1890s.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, 1896 or turn of the century.

[SPEAKER_01]: The people made up their minds, you know, the once group wanted a church in town and once decided they would build there in town.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, that was an easy decision.

[SPEAKER_01]: And they let us have this church out here, which didn't have any, there's no conflict there that I know I've ever heard of anything.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, it was just, and then the people, the congregation decided where they wanted to belong.

[SPEAKER_01]: They would have never divided if it hadn't been for the clergy.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then you went with the minister that you liked, their faith.

[SPEAKER_01]: And a lot of our influence was we could play cards, we could dance.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't know, what else do you need?

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, this had a lot to say with the common person.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, where they wanted to belong.

[SPEAKER_01]: It wasn't so religious, was it?

[SPEAKER_01]: So human though, human again.

[SPEAKER_01]: And this is the part I think that we got from Grundtvig.

[SPEAKER_01]: Inadvertently, you know, because it pleased us to do these things and we didn't think they were that sinful.

[SPEAKER_01]: And it all depends on how bad you want to be, you know.

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we had alcoholic drinks, made beer and wine and all that stuff.

[SPEAKER_01]: We were more open that way.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's an interesting thing to have been involved in through my lifetime.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's a real study in sociology, social living.

[SPEAKER_00]: What would you point out in this tradition that you especially have been fond of, in the Grundtvigian tradition?

[SPEAKER_01]: Just life.

[SPEAKER_01]: Enjoying life.

[SPEAKER_00]: How would you describe it, this Grundtvigian concept, like you did before at the table?

[SPEAKER_01]: How did you describe a happy life?

[SPEAKER_01]: What makes you happy?

[SPEAKER_01]: success, wealth, of course.

[SPEAKER_01]: But that was not, not in my mind at least, the main concern.

[SPEAKER_01]: I wanted to get wealth and be rich and be successful, but it was in a little different frame of mind.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, when you're

[SPEAKER_01]: motivated to be successful or just want to make it.

[SPEAKER_01]: There's a little difference.

[SPEAKER_01]: I'm thinking my own feelings about it.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't know everybody else's exactly how they felt.

[SPEAKER_00]: You mentioned this concept of Grundtvig, human first.

[SPEAKER_00]: and then Christian.

[SPEAKER_00]: Could you elaborate a little on that?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, yeah, it was just the feeling that to be holy you had to be human before you could be holy.

[SPEAKER_01]: Not just Christian, you know what I mean?

[SPEAKER_01]: you could be closer to God.

[SPEAKER_01]: And this is what Jesus is always saying, I and the Father are one.

[SPEAKER_01]: He didn't say they were equal or anything, we are one.

[SPEAKER_01]: And if you can be one with your God, Creator, whatever, Allah, I don't care who it is, it's still our Creator.

[SPEAKER_01]: then you've got a pretty good start on having a good life.

[SPEAKER_01]: A happy life, you know, not totally successful.

[SPEAKER_01]: I mean, there's a difference in success and value of success.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's not all wealth, but it has to be there.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, that.

[SPEAKER_01]: And this...

[SPEAKER_01]: I think Grundtvig gave us that, you know, I don't think he was really... Well, the folk school, of course, is right there in that folk school thing, that he was very instrumental in.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then the idea of, you know, they lost all the territory to Germany.

[SPEAKER_01]: Terrible loss of territory, wasn't it?

[SPEAKER_01]: About a third of the country, I don't know,

[SPEAKER_01]: make you totally unhappy.

[SPEAKER_01]: And they were.

[SPEAKER_01]: They didn't like Germans, and yet we got along.

[SPEAKER_01]: We could still get along.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's just the way it should be.

[SPEAKER_01]: I can go on.

[SPEAKER_01]: There's a lot of little stories.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, well.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, I think you got around it because you mentioned when we sat at the other table earlier, how did you sort of get to know about Grundtvig and Grundtvig's ideas?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, it was prevalent in my childhood.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know what I mean?

[SPEAKER_01]: Prevalent.

[SPEAKER_01]: It was all around.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's in the atmosphere of mentality, you know.

[SPEAKER_01]: It was part of your thinking was revolved around that center.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's also religious, you know, which Grundtvig was very religious, wasn't he?

[SPEAKER_01]: Totally.

[SPEAKER_01]: But the fact that he was human,

[SPEAKER_01]: You read about, I always like biographies.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't care who it's about.

[SPEAKER_01]: You always find out that they were pretty human, if you get the real facts.

[SPEAKER_01]: People in history, look at conquerors in history.

[SPEAKER_01]: The Roman Empire was a fascinating thing, wasn't it?

[SPEAKER_01]: It lasted a long time.

[SPEAKER_01]: And yet, and they persecuted the Christians.

[SPEAKER_01]: I feel, you know, they feared them.

[SPEAKER_01]: They feared Jesus.

[SPEAKER_01]: Not so much the Romans, because they were powerful, but the Jewish people, the control

[SPEAKER_01]: party of the Jews feared Jesus.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's why they crucified him, of course.

[SPEAKER_01]: Got him out of the way.

[SPEAKER_01]: He was still doing that.

[SPEAKER_01]: All these dictators, Hitler and Stalin, I was there.

[SPEAKER_01]: I remember when Hitler eliminated his political enemies in the 30s.

[SPEAKER_01]: And he said, and I heard this, I don't know if I read it, maybe, but heard it.

[SPEAKER_01]: I didn't understand him speaking, but he said, I had to be ruthless.

[SPEAKER_01]: Why?

[SPEAKER_01]: We know why.

[SPEAKER_01]: But he was, and so was Stalin, even more ruthless.

[SPEAKER_01]: I'm not necessarily, no comparison, but they had to be ruthless to have power.

[SPEAKER_01]: It seemed very interesting.

[SPEAKER_00]: One thing you said, the point you made about being human, and you said something, if you are successful in your life, then there's another thing about that is good, that is needed.

[SPEAKER_00]: That's humility.

[SPEAKER_01]: The humility?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Of course, that's basic to your own well-being.

[SPEAKER_00]: Could you just tell me one more time?

[SPEAKER_01]: It's all very simple.

[SPEAKER_01]: This is what's so nice about it, but we don't like simplicity.

[SPEAKER_00]: Let's hear it.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so we want to be exalted.

[SPEAKER_01]: And you know what Jesus said about that?

[SPEAKER_01]: He who is exalted shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.

[SPEAKER_01]: And that's what you have to, if you really want to be happy.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's too simple.

[SPEAKER_00]: Then you have to be humble.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: To be really happy.

[SPEAKER_01]: How else do you want to be happy?

[SPEAKER_00]: One more thing.

[SPEAKER_00]: The group that you have been, you have belonged to all your life, you can say that.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: the environment that you have been along with.

[SPEAKER_00]: You are, many of you politically, politically Democrats.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, I'd like to say, of course I am.

[SPEAKER_01]: I have leaned that way ever since when we were in financial distress in the thirties, when we got the new deal with Roosevelt was elected.

[SPEAKER_01]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_01]: And with that background, you know, I'm totally

[SPEAKER_01]: but parties are not what's really important.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's for power, to get into office and do something good.

[SPEAKER_01]: But they all had platforms, Democrats and Republicans, and I observed them all my life, and they never followed their platforms.

[SPEAKER_01]: But to a certain extent they did,

[SPEAKER_01]: and they were consistent.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, never, the Democrats are not always good and right, but they were closer.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's why, and there's some scoundrels

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, many, especially, you know, in the South, we think of them as being wrong, wrong-headed, you know, doing bad things.

[SPEAKER_01]: There were a lot of Democrats there, you know, after, well, ever since the Civil War, they were anti-Republicans, basically.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, that's what they were.

[SPEAKER_01]: Now they're the best Republicans.

[SPEAKER_01]: The same conservative people are the best Republicans.

[SPEAKER_01]: They're the strongest element in the Republican Party, in my mind.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's kind of interesting too, you know.

[SPEAKER_01]: You are what you are.

[SPEAKER_01]: You bear witness to what you are, whether you know it or not.

[SPEAKER_00]: A few more questions.

[SPEAKER_00]: Would you consider yourself being a Dane?

[SPEAKER_01]: Of course.

[SPEAKER_01]: What else?

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, no.

[SPEAKER_01]: No, I'm pure American, just whatever you want to call yourself, you know.

[SPEAKER_01]: We're all human there again.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you are American and a Dane.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, I got dual citizenship.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't have a card for Denmark, but I'm there.

[SPEAKER_01]: I'm with them.

[SPEAKER_01]: I'm sure.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, you call yourself a Grundtvigian.

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, yeah, it's all right.

[SPEAKER_01]: You are what you are.

[SPEAKER_01]: Why do you have to have somebody else's label?

[SPEAKER_02]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: If you're a Democrat and you're politically involved, if I was running for office and wanted to do good in the government or whatever or get rich, then I would certainly be obviously and live the Democratic spirit right or wrong.

[SPEAKER_01]: You have to feel that way.

[SPEAKER_01]: There are a lot of good conservatives

[SPEAKER_01]: that are on the wrong party, in my mind.

[SPEAKER_01]: People I admire, have admired.

[SPEAKER_01]: Like whom?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well... Oh, there was a senator from Nebraska, his name was Morris, M-O-R-R-I-S, Morris.

[SPEAKER_01]: I forget his first name.

[SPEAKER_01]: He was a Republican.

[SPEAKER_01]: The Midwest was pretty Republican, all of Midwest.

[SPEAKER_01]: and he finally became an independent.

[SPEAKER_01]: After he was well enough established in the political world, in the country, then he could afford to be an independent and he could have something to say in both parties, which is ideal, I think.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's what we need right now.

[SPEAKER_01]: Both parties are thinking only about their own little play yard and their own well-being, success, power.

[SPEAKER_01]: So a lot of people in government will say we should have in this country the parliamentary style of government.

[SPEAKER_01]: which has a lot of advantages.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we have a lot of disadvantages, but we have a few, maybe.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, the fact that there are two powerful forces that have to work together to get something done.

[SPEAKER_01]: And I've seen that happen.

[SPEAKER_01]: After World War II, we had the Marshall Plan.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know what that was?

[SPEAKER_01]: It was bipartisan.

[SPEAKER_01]: It didn't look all that great at the time, so nobody wanted to claim credit necessarily.

[SPEAKER_01]: See what I mean?

[SPEAKER_01]: If there had been real credit to it, oh yeah, we started there.

[SPEAKER_01]: Nobody's saying that because they didn't.

[SPEAKER_01]: The same way with the GI Bill for the soldiers after the war, we could all go to college free if all we had to do was want to.

[SPEAKER_01]: And that was bipartisan.

[SPEAKER_01]: And these were good things, beneficial for everybody.

[SPEAKER_00]: They need quite a bit of that today, don't they?

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, we need a lot of it, but then everything goes in cycles.

[SPEAKER_00]: It'll get better.

[SPEAKER_00]: You're not so worried about the political path that the United States is on?

[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, I am very worried about it.

[SPEAKER_00]: In what way?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, they're going in the wrong direction quite rapidly

[SPEAKER_01]: All I can do though, you know, everybody wants to fix everything, and they really want to make it perfect, don't they?

[SPEAKER_01]: You're never going to do that.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's the first thing you have to recognize when you fix something, that it's not going to be perfect.

[SPEAKER_01]: Socially, you know, politically, government-wise, it's never going to be perfect.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, we've been... That's just about enough, isn't it?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, we've got a lot of... Is there a point or two that you would like to... No, there's nothing.

Interview of Axel Thomsen by H.B. Simonsen
Transcript reviewed and corrected by H.B. Simonsen
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[SPEAKER_01]: I've said enough.

[SPEAKER_01]: My poor wife has to suffer through these things so many times.