Interview of Delores Jespersen by H.B. Simonsen Transcript reviewed and corrected by H.B. Simonsen Danish American Archive and Library – Digital Archive

Input filename

Delores Jespersen_hbs.srt

[SPEAKER_00]: So now it's working.

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

[SPEAKER_01]: Delores Jespersen, was Holmgaard, Holmgaard.

[SPEAKER_00]: And where were you born?

[SPEAKER_01]: In South Dakota, and between Watertown and Brookings, the eastern part, eastern central part of South Dakota.

[SPEAKER_01]: And I went to school, country school, through eight years there.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then I stayed home one year because we had three miles to the next town where I'd go to high school.

[SPEAKER_01]: But then I went to high school for four years.

[SPEAKER_01]: And it was so cold in the winter, we had to stay in town for three, four months.

[SPEAKER 01]: But we came home on weekends.

[SPEAKER_01]: Then I went to Grandview College for one year.

[SPEAKER_01]: I got married in 1941.

[SPEAKER_01]: We lived in Cordova, Nebraska, then Newell, Iowa.

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, one year we lived at Exeter at a congregational church while my husband went back to school to get his B.A.

[SPEAKER_01]: He had his five years of Grand View and seminary.

[SPEAKER_00]: May I return a little to your start in life?

[SPEAKER_00]: your parents, they were born in this country.

[SPEAKER 01]: Yeah, my mother and father went to a country school in South Dakota.

[SPEAKER_00]: What was the names of your parents?

[SPEAKER_01]: Sofie Steffensen and Arnold Holmgaard.

[SPEAKER_01]: My grandfather,

[SPEAKER_01]: Glen (? probably not correct name; hbs) Holmgaard, homesteaded in South Dakota, and he didn't find water on his place, so he moved a mile or two further north where he could find water and had his house moved down there.

[SPEAKER_01]: and he gave the land for the cemetery and on that cemetery my husband is buried, my parents are buried, my grandparents are buried, my great-grandparents and a great-great-grandmother who was the first person buried on the cemetery.

[SPEAKER_01]: They also built a sod church

[SPEAKER_01]: The local people built the sod church, and my other grandparents were married in that church.

[SPEAKER_00]: Can you explain what is a sod church?

[SPEAKER_01]: A sod church is they take the prairie grass growing, they slice it and make blocks.

[SPEAKER_00]: In Danish, when you say torv, in Danish you have that word torv.

[SPEAKER_00]: Tørv.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, exactly.

[SPEAKER_00]: Please go on.

[SPEAKER 01]: I think it's stacked and then

[SPEAKER_01]: I didn't see a picture of it, so I don't know what it looked like.

[SPEAKER_01]: But then they built another church a mile west of there.

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[SPEAKER_00]: They actually built this church?

[SPEAKER_01]: They built the sod church on the cemetery.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then when they built their big church,

[SPEAKER_01]: a mile west, I think that was, I should have that, I think seems like it was 1905, but I could find that out, but I don't remember.

[SPEAKER 01]: And that's where I was baptized and confirmed and married.

[SPEAKER_01]: No, not married, just baptized and confirmed.

[SPEAKER_01]: My parents were baptized and confirmed there, and married there, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: Your family background in Denmark, back from Denmark.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, my... Where did your family originally come from in Denmark?

[SPEAKER_01]: My grandparents came from, my grandfather came from Hurup.

[SPEAKER_01]: And my grandmother came from not very far from Thisted.

[SPEAKER_01]: They always said she was from Thisted, but it was a small country village near there.

[SPEAKER_01]: And her father was from, is there a Sennels..? (the place name is difficult to hear; hbs)

[SPEAKER_01]: I could look it up, but that was a little bit further north of Thisted.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then the other, my mother's parents came from

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, my grandfather Holmgaard came from Hurup, and then she came from this little village.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then my other grandparents, my mother's father and mother came from Snedsted and Nørhø (? the place name is difficult to hear; hbs)

[SPEAKER_00]: So they actually came from...

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: The same area around Thy.

[SPEAKER_01]: (Delores begins speaking the Danish dialect, "thybomål" or "thybo", that is spoken in Thy in Denmark. I have "translated" her words into standard Danish in the following; hbs) Så snakker vi allesammen thybo

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Jeg tror ikke der er nogle folk levende, der lever nu, der kan snakke thybo som jeg kan, fordi jeg er så gammel.

[SPEAKER_01]: Halvfjerds.

[SPEAKER_00]: Nej, du er 90.

[SPEAKER_00]: 90, yes.

[SPEAKER 01]: 90 år gammel.

[SPEAKER 01]: Men det har noget at gøre med, at du kan tale dansk.

[SPEAKER_00]: Ja, vi boede på en farm.

[SPEAKER_01]: Mine bedsteforældre boede i deres hus, og vi boede i vores eget hus.

[SPEAKER_01]: Og de kunne ikke tale engelsk, så jeg lærte at tale dansk som thyboere gør.

[SPEAKER_01]: Men mine brødre, som var yngre end jeg var, de kunne forstå dansk, men de kunne ikke snakke dansk.

[SPEAKER_00]: Din søn, som var her for lidt siden, han fortalte, at du taler thybomål med en dialekt.

[SPEAKER_01]: En gammel dialekt.

[SPEAKER_00]: En gammel dialekt.

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[SPEAKER_01]: Den findes ikke i Danmark mere. Når jeg kom til Thisted, så siger de til mig. En mand på min alder sagde til mig, at jeg snakkede som hans bedsteforældre snakkede.

[SPEAKER_01]:Og hans barnebarn, han sagde, at han ikke kunne forstå mit sprog.

[SPEAKER_01]: Han ville gerne snakke engelsk.

[SPEAKER_00]: Men din søn snakkede om, at du snakkede med én dialekt, og din mand

[SPEAKER 01]: han talte med en anden dialekt.

[SPEAKER_01]: Hvor han kom fra, han kom fra Viborg i Syd Dakota.

[SPEAKER_01]: De var ikke thyboere, bortset fra hans familie, men de snakkede dansk som man skriver dansk.

[SPEAKER_01]: Vi har så mange ord, men vi har ingen ordbog

[SPEAKER_01]: til at lære ens ... ? (I'm not able to understand the next few words; hbs)

[SPEAKER_00]: Du er god til det.

[SPEAKER_00]: Det er flot, at du kan snakke den dialekt, som du lærte som barn.

[SPEAKER_01]: Jeg kan ikke læse dansk så godt.

[SPEAKER_01]: Jeg kan, men jeg kan ikke...(? the next words are difficult to understand; hbs), for det var ikke det samme.

[SPEAKER_00]: No?

[SPEAKER_01]: No.

[SPEAKER 01]: Jeg tror også, at jeg blander engelsk med dansk.

[SPEAKER_01]Jeg tror mange danskere gør det også.

[SPEAKER_00]: Det tror jeg faktisk også.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Jeg fortalte, at når jeg gik i skole, så sneg jeg over gården, men vi sagde fickle...

[SPEAKER 01]: Jeg tror det udtryk kom fra field, we would say across the field.

[SPEAKER_01]: So we snickered over fickle.

[SPEAKER_00]: Ja, det er nok en blanding.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Vi kan godt fortsætte lidt på dansk endnu, men så går vi tilbage til engelsk.

[SPEAKER_00]: Vi kan godt fortsætte lidt på dansk endnu.

[SPEAKER_00]: Kan du fortælle lidt om din skolegang, da du startede i skolen?

[SPEAKER 01]: Ja, vi var gik til, out in the country.

[SPEAKER_01]: Det var 8 år, vi gik der.

[SPEAKER_01]: Der var en og en halv mil fra mit hjem.

[SPEAKER_01]: Mm-hmm.

[SPEAKER_01]: Vi havde, det var en ny skole.

[SPEAKER 01]: Vi havde... (? the next sentences are is difficult to understand; hbs).

[SPEAKER_01]: They were chemical.

[SPEAKER_01]: (? this whole sentence is hard to understand; hbs)

[SPEAKER_00]: Men det var en engelsk skole.

[SPEAKER_00]: Ja.

[SPEAKER_01]: Det var public school.

[SPEAKER_01]: Om sommeren, to somre, kan jeg huske, havde vi dansk skole.

[SPEAKER 01]: Men den ene præst, han skrev alt dansk på blackboard.

[SPEAKER_01]: Tavlen.

[SPEAKER_01]: Tavlen, ja.

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[SPEAKER_01]: Men jeg vidste ikke hvad det var, jeg lærte ingenting.

[SPEAKER_01]: Han kunne ikke forstå os små børn.

[SPEAKER_00]: Mm....

[SPEAKER 00]:Men det var den danske menigheds skole?

[SPEAKER_01]: Ja.

[SPEAKER_01]: Det lå en tre uger om sommeren (? not sure about this; hbs)

[SPEAKER_00]: Hvad havde I mere end dansk sprog?

[SPEAKER 00]: Hvad havde I af fag i skolen?

[SPEAKER 00]: Hvad lærte I i den danske ferieskole?

[SPEAKER_01]: De fortalte os bibelhistorie, og vi havde noget sang.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah?

[SPEAKER_01]: Ja, jeg kan ikke huske så meget.

[SPEAKER_01]: No.

[SPEAKER_00]: Men det var danske sange, i hvert fald.

[SPEAKER 00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER 01]: Yeah, det var dansk.

[SPEAKER_00]: Men da kunne du allerede dansk.

[SPEAKER_02]: When?

[SPEAKER_00]: Da du kom i den skole, da havde du lært dansk hjemmefra.

[SPEAKER_02]: What?

[SPEAKER_00]: You had, at that time, you...

[SPEAKER_00]: You knew Danish.

[SPEAKER_00]: You spoke Danish.

[SPEAKER 01]: Yeah, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Jeg kunne ikke forstå engelsk så godt, dengang jeg begyndte i skole.

[SPEAKER_01]: Men præsten, læreren, han snakkede jo ikke dansk som vi gjorde.

[SPEAKER_01]: Så det var ikke så nemt at lære.

[SPEAKER_00]: Så du startede ... Du måtte hurtigt lære engelsk, da du startede i den amerikanske skole.

[SPEAKER_00]: Så du var nødt til at kunne sproget.

[SPEAKER_01]: Ja, jeg kunne tale lidt engelsk, men ikke så meget.

[SPEAKER_00]: Hvordan klarede du det?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, det tog ikke lang tid at lære.

[SPEAKER_01]: Nej som barn...

[SPEAKER 01]: No.

[SPEAKER 01]: Min forældre gik til engelsk skole, så de kunne hjælpe.

[SPEAKER_00]: Men skolen fortsatte.

[SPEAKER_00]: Hvor længe gik du i skole der?

[SPEAKER_01]: Otte år.

[SPEAKER_00]: Otte år?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Så det var high school, som de siger.

[SPEAKER_01]: Nej, så gik jeg i high school i fire år.

[SPEAKER_00]: Ja?

[SPEAKER_01]: Ja.

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[SPEAKER_00]: Hvor var det henne?

[SPEAKER_01]: In Lake Norden.

[SPEAKER_01]: Vi boede mellem Badger and Lake Norden.

[SPEAKER_00]: There were many Danes in the area around Lake Norden, weren't there?

[SPEAKER_00]: Der var mange danskere?

[SPEAKER 00]: In the area around Lake Norden.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, kirken blev flyttet til Lake Norden.

[SPEAKER_01]: Jeg kan ikke huske, hvornår det var, men nu er de gået sammen med de finske og norske.

[SPEAKER_01]: If you'd rather speak English at some point, then just do it.

[SPEAKER_00]: But I think it's nice you're talking Danish.

[SPEAKER_00]: Du er god til det,. Hvad skete der efter high school?

[SPEAKER_00]: I went to Grandview College, and then I worked in Des Moines for some wealthy people for one year as a maid, and then I got married.

[SPEAKER 00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER 00]: Grandview, was that for one year?

[SPEAKER_00]: Ja. Jeg havde ikke penge nok til to år.

[SPEAKER_00]: It was just two years at that time.

[SPEAKER_00]: Two-year college, and then three years in the seminary when we were there.

[SPEAKER_01]: But then I worked a year when my husband, while my man friend was in seminary.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then when he graduated, we got married.

[SPEAKER 00]: And his name?

[SPEAKER_01]: Ronald Jespersen.

[SPEAKER_01]: And he was from Viborg, South Dakota.

[SPEAKER_00]: And his family background?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, Danish, just like mine.

[SPEAKER_01]: His father's family came from Bedsted, and his mother's family came from Mors.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah?

[SPEAKER_01]: Korp. (? I'm not sure about the place name. It could be Karby on the island of Mors; hbs)

[SPEAKER_01]: Mors?

[SPEAKER_00]: Mors?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER 00]: Oh, okav.

[SPEAKER_00]: That's probably a small... It started...

[SPEAKER_01]: It starts with K, a town on Mors Island.

[SPEAKER 00]: Yeah, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: And he graduated as a minister.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: He had three years in the seminary.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then two years at Grandview was all he could get.

[SPEAKER 01]: So when we moved to Cordova,

[SPEAKER_01]: He took a year and served at Congregational Church so he could go to school, and he got his B.A.

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[SPEAKER_00]: And then later, he got a... That would be a college or university up there?

[SPEAKER 00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, and Drake, you know, Dome College, Nebraska.

[SPEAKER_01]: So he got his B.A.

[SPEAKER_01]: plus his three years seminary, and then he did take some more work again.

[SPEAKER_01]: I think he got a master's.

[SPEAKER_00]: So that was the first congregation that you served, the Cordova?

[SPEAKER 01]: And then we moved to Newell, Iowa, near Storm Lake, and we were there for

[SPEAKER_01]: Six and a half years, I believe.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then from there we moved to Dannevang, Texas.

[SPEAKER_01]: We were there a little over four years.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then we moved to Cedar Falls where we were for 12 years in Iowa.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then we moved to Eldridge near Davenport in Iowa.

[SPEAKER_01]: That was our first experience in not being in a Danish community.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then after my husband retired in 1981, we stayed there until 1994 and then moved to Des Moines.

[SPEAKER_00]: That was after the merger between the Danish church and the other churches that you got into this non-Danish community.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, it was after the merger.

[SPEAKER_00]: Because of the merger, you would have to go to mixed ministers and congregations.

[SPEAKER_00]: Right.

[SPEAKER_00]: The many places you've been living,

[SPEAKER_00]: What kind of traditions would you have had from, you say these are Danish traditions.

[SPEAKER_00]: I think about things like dancing and singing.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, well I guess I never distinguished because we always

[SPEAKER_01]: could dance, and we always did a lot of singing, and we always played cards, and we could have a drink, but we didn't do it.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, we just didn't do it much.

[SPEAKER_01]: Because we could have it, I guess.

[SPEAKER_01]: And that was the way I grew up, and that's sort of the way it was, I think, in Cordova and Newell.

[SPEAKER_01]: They were real Danish.

[SPEAKER 01]: Cedar Falls, but Eldridge was German background, and that was different.

[SPEAKER_00]: Thinking back, would you say there were some ways of looking at the world that you would say you got with you in your tradition?

[SPEAKER_01]: I think we were tolerant of others.

[SPEAKER_01]: I believe we were flexible.

[SPEAKER_01]: I thought it was interesting when I went to Solvang for their Farstrup Mortensen conference that there was a debate or lectures on homosexuality and I feel like there was only one person who did not accept it.

[SPEAKER 01]: The rest of us were tolerant, I believe.

[SPEAKER_01]: I think we just accept them.

[SPEAKER_01]: We do not condemn them or judge them.

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[SPEAKER_01]: They're like we are.

[SPEAKER_01]: And I think that, to me, that's part of our background, that we should respect all people.

[SPEAKER 02]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: Would you connect that outlook, that sort of tolerant outlook, with some specific heritage or tradition within the church?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER 01]: Well, I don't know.

[SPEAKER_01]: I never knew any better, I guess, but it was just part of us.

[SPEAKER_01]: We were not, I don't think we felt we should judge anyone else.

[SPEAKER_01]: And I believe we should allow people to do what they feel is right.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't know.

[SPEAKER_00]: Of course, this tradition of yours in the Danish church, the Happy Danes, is some tradition that comes way back from Denmark, from NFS Grundtvig.

[SPEAKER_00]: Were you ever aware of this person back in Denmark who had written a lot of things and sermons?

[SPEAKER_01]: My grandmother was.

[SPEAKER_00]: And hymns, of course.

[SPEAKER_00]: You knew his hymns.

[SPEAKER_00]: You would sing them in Danish, but apart from that you probably

[SPEAKER_00]: Would you know, would you sort of be aware of his name and what he was doing?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, only once.

[SPEAKER_01]: I remember my grandmother saying about somebody that she was Indre Mission, and I didn't know what that was.

[SPEAKER_01]: I couldn't tell the difference.

[SPEAKER_01]: I didn't know.

[SPEAKER_01]: I was just growing up.

[SPEAKER_01]: I didn't care, of course.

[SPEAKER_01]: But like Christmas Eve, we always, I think, did Danish traditions, having the Christmas tree brought in all lit up with candles, of course.

[SPEAKER 01]: And my grandmother would always read something out of Dannevirke.

[SPEAKER_01]: before we had to sit and wait, you know, before we would open gifts.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then we would always walk around the tree, of course, and sing.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we did that at the church, too.

[SPEAKER_01]: We had a big Christmas tree and walked around the church, and it was lit with candles, and the men had mops with

[SPEAKER_01]: water, pails of water to put out any fire that might start.

[SPEAKER 01]: And of course we always had them coffee with lots of sweets.

[SPEAKER_00]: Now, a few weeks ago you went up to Tyler.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: To take part in the Tyler Folk Meeting.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: How come you went there?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, my husband's mother went to school there in the wintertime for at least one session.

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[SPEAKER_01]: And so we've always known about Tyler.

[SPEAKER_01]: And when we had conventions, one would be at Tyler, one would be somewhere else in the Danish community.

[SPEAKER_01]: So we were always aware of our Danish heritage.

[SPEAKER_01]: and different communities.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you've been going there for a good many years.

[SPEAKER_00]: I've been at Tyler.

[SPEAKER_01]: I started in 1985, and I've been there for those 25 years except for one year when my husband was not well.

[SPEAKER_01]: But then in 1950,

[SPEAKER_01]: We went there for what was called recreational lab, where we learned to do some crafts to teach in our congregations.

[SPEAKER_01]: And that was a week.

[SPEAKER_01]: And at that time, Tyler, the folk school, did you live at the folk school?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, yes I did.

[SPEAKER 01]: The bathroom, the sinks were metal, just tin.

[SPEAKER_01]: And there was cistern water.

[SPEAKER_01]: We could not drink it.

[SPEAKER 01]: They had one faucet with well water that we could drink.

[SPEAKER_01]: The rest were soft water that ran off the roof and into a big cistern.

[SPEAKER 01]: It's changed.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, it's fine now.

[SPEAKER_00]: What do you like most at Tyler, the activity?

[SPEAKER 00]: I'm thinking about the Tyler Folk Meeting.

[SPEAKER_00]: What do you cherish the most?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, the friendship, the meeting the people, and then the singing next, I think.

[SPEAKER_01]: I have trouble hearing, so I missed some of the lectures.

[SPEAKER_01]: I couldn't hear everything, but what I could hear was good.

[SPEAKER_00]: And you also took part in the language, Danish language lessons.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: I told her she wasn't a good teacher because I didn't learn very much, but she was.

[SPEAKER_00]: You probably should have been on a higher level.

[SPEAKER_00]: Would you consider... I go to something a little on the new path.

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

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, yes, I would.

[SPEAKER 01]: I'm proud of that.

[SPEAKER_00]: So if someone asks you, what are you, you'll say I'm... Danish-American?

[SPEAKER_00]: That's the expression you would use.

[SPEAKER_01]: I could, I might.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: I have some friends in Denmark, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: And once in a while, one of them will call me on the phone and, oh, I have trouble speaking Danish.

[SPEAKER_01]: The words don't come.

[SPEAKER_01]: I never speak Danish around here.

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

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, I would.

[SPEAKER 01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: And I think my kids are too, you know.

[SPEAKER_00]: What kind of values do you put in to connect with the label?

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't know.

[SPEAKER_01]: They're flexible and tolerant, I think, and I feel that's a tradition, a Grundtvigian tradition.

[SPEAKER_01]: I guess maybe I don't know what Grundtvigianism is.

[SPEAKER_01]: I'm just part of it, I suppose.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, it's unconscious, maybe.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: You say you have passed it on to your kids.

[SPEAKER_01]: My son Dan that you met, he didn't go to church for a long time.

[SPEAKER 01]: Then his daughter was confirmed, and he got interested in the choir.

[SPEAKER_01]: He sang in the choir.

[SPEAKER_01]: And now he has...

[SPEAKER_01]: He's on the church council.

[SPEAKER_00]: Is that at Luther Memorial?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: My daughter Donna was very active.

[SPEAKER_01]: She and her husband sang in the choir, did bells in another church, not Danish.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then he died and she's kind of fallen away for now anyway.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you see some of your values and traditions... Yes, yes, I do.

[SPEAKER_01]: ...continue by... I mean, we think the same.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, that's good.

[SPEAKER_01]: and I'm going to be 90 on December 12th, and my kids are having a birthday party for me.

[SPEAKER_01]: My daughter and husband from Tucson are coming, and we're going to have it at Lutheran Memorial Church in the afternoon.

[SPEAKER_01]: Sounds good.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, I think we sort of come through what I have.

[SPEAKER_01]: I've really enjoyed you.

[SPEAKER_01]: I feel close to you, like I've known you longer than I have.

[SPEAKER 00]: Well, I think that goes both ways.

[SPEAKER_00]: It's very easy to be around and have a good talk.

[SPEAKER_00]: And you serve, I should mention right now, you serve this Danish, Danish, Danish frokost.

[SPEAKER_00]: med hjemmebagt rugbrød, hjemmebagt frikadelle og æg og tomater og æggesalat.

[SPEAKER_00]: I have a picture of that now.

[SPEAKER_00]: So, I think I will...