

Interview of Harald Jensen by H.B. Simonsen
Transcript reviewed and corrected by H.B. Simonsen
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Input filename
Harald Jensen all_hbs.srt

[SPEAKER_01]: First ask you of your full name, please.
[SPEAKER_00]: Harald Christian Jensen.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: When we were in Denmark, when they saw that name, there was no problem.
[SPEAKER_01]: No.
[SPEAKER_00]: A good Danish name, right?
[SPEAKER_00]: Of course, of course.
[SPEAKER_01]: And when were you born?
[SPEAKER_00]: July 12th, 1917.
[SPEAKER_01]: And where was that?
[SPEAKER_00]: Where was I born?
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, where?
[SPEAKER_00]: I was born on a farm two miles north of Ringsted, Iowa.
[SPEAKER_00]: My mother was 82 when she died.
[SPEAKER_00]: She had four children, but she was never a patient in the hospital in all those years.
[SPEAKER_01]: Your dad came from Denmark, you said?
[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.
[SPEAKER_01]: And from what part of Denmark?
[SPEAKER_00]: I wish I could tell you the name of the town, but it's in the middle part of Jutland.
[SPEAKER_01]: That's as close as I can get.
[SPEAKER_01]: That's okay with me.
[SPEAKER_01]: But your mom was born in this country.
[SPEAKER_00]: My mother was born in Cedar Falls, Iowa.
[SPEAKER_00]: My grandmother immigrated to America too.
[SPEAKER_00]: somebody decided, both she and my grandfather, they needed to mate.
[SPEAKER_00]: So they helped that come to be.
[SPEAKER_01]: That worked out.
[SPEAKER_00]: And my grandfather was a janitor in the school in Waterloo.
[SPEAKER_00]: And that was a lot of hard work, climbing stairs, the two-story building, carrying the wood and coal up and the ashes down.
[SPEAKER_00]: And then he saw an ad that he could buy some land in Emmett County.
[SPEAKER_00]: And he wanted to go out here and farm.
[SPEAKER_01]: So he did.
[SPEAKER_00]: And he bought the land and told the school board that he wanted to move.
[SPEAKER_00]: And they didn't like to see him move because he'd been doing a good job.
[SPEAKER_00]: But he wanted to go.
[SPEAKER_00]: And when he left, they gave him a gold watch and chains.
[SPEAKER_00]: And oh my, he and my grandmother, they were so proud of that.
[SPEAKER_00]: But he come out here and built a little house for, and then he told my grandmother she could bring her two little girls up.
[SPEAKER_00]: My mother was about three and my aunt was just a baby.

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[SPEAKER_00]: And as close as they could get was Bancroft, Iowa.
[SPEAKER_00]: which now is 14 miles from my home.
[SPEAKER_00]: But at that time, of course, there wasn't roads.
[SPEAKER_00]: He got a man with a lumber wagon and he took them and they weaved around the
slew holes and got to the place they were supposed to go.
[SPEAKER_00]: And then Grandpa was on kind of a hill where they
[SPEAKER_00]: We used to call it because he planted a little bush of lilacs.
[SPEAKER_00]: But there come a man driving by, and he had a plow in his wagon.
[SPEAKER_00]: And he drove up and asked grandpa if he'd like to buy a plow.
[SPEAKER_00]: And grandpa sure would, but he didn't have any money.
[SPEAKER_00]: But they visited a while.
[SPEAKER_00]: And then the man drove away, and there stood Grandpa with the plow, and the
man drove away with Grandpa's gold watch.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh.
[SPEAKER_00]: And now came the hard part.
[SPEAKER_00]: He had to tell wife Karen about that.
[SPEAKER_00]: So he went and told her, and oh, she felt so bad.
[SPEAKER_00]: But Karen, he said,
[SPEAKER_00]: The land must be plowed, and I could not plow it with my watch.
[SPEAKER_00]: That's true.
[SPEAKER_00]: You can understand her feeling about it.
[SPEAKER_00]: She understood.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, you are right.
[SPEAKER_01]: So your dad came from Denmark to live in Ringsted, and he began farming and
met your mother.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, he met my mother and we always joked with them about they had to be
engaged for five years before they were married.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: Well, they had to have enough to start it.
[SPEAKER_00]: My mother taught school.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh yeah?
[SPEAKER_00]: She even taught school out in the Ransom.
[SPEAKER_00]: And most of the country schools, of course.
[SPEAKER_01]: How did she have an education to do that?
[SPEAKER_00]: Yes, they went to, I think they called it normal school in Cedar Falls.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: You and I. I know she went there.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: And, of course, she went to Grandview, too.
[SPEAKER_01]: She did?
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: For what kind of schooling was that?
[SPEAKER_00]: Well, I can't tell you.
[SPEAKER_01]: For a winter or something like that?
[SPEAKER_00]: No, I think she went all year.

[SPEAKER_00]: I went for a winter term.
[SPEAKER_00]: That's all I went there.
[SPEAKER_01]: You did for a winter term?
[SPEAKER_01]: Like Axel did?
[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.
[SPEAKER_00]: I think we went the last two years.
[SPEAKER_00]: It was maybe a vacation.
[SPEAKER_00]: But we learned a lot.
[SPEAKER_01]: You came to, you got to belong to the Danish congregation here in Ringsted.
[SPEAKER_00]: Right.
[SPEAKER_01]: Your family.
[SPEAKER_00]: My family did.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: They... And you told me that... My grandparents, they were part of those that stayed with the Synod, you know.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: So of course we always...
[SPEAKER_00]: said we were the Happy Danes and they were the Sad Danes.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: That's a saying.
[SPEAKER_01]: That's kind of a... What would you say is actually, is there some truth to that?
[SPEAKER_01]: That name that you've had, the Happy Danes.
[SPEAKER_01]: How would you describe the difference maybe?
[SPEAKER_00]: Well, of course, the young people, they mixed.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, sure.
[SPEAKER_00]: Sure.
[SPEAKER_00]: Well of course, when my folks talked it was the Inner Mission group.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: What did you say it means?
[SPEAKER_01]: Indre Mission.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: So I don't know of course.
[SPEAKER_00]: They said we were the happy Danes and they were the holy Danes.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: But I don't know.
[SPEAKER_00]: It doesn't make that much difference.
[SPEAKER_01]: No.
[SPEAKER_01]: But just to catch up, you grew up with Danish parents, parents with Danish backgrounds, so you spoke Danish in the home.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.
[SPEAKER_01]: And when you got to school, when you were supposed to go to school, did you speak Danish or English most?
[SPEAKER_00]: No, we had to speak, we were required to speak English.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, but until we went to school, your daily language would be Danish.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: Back home, in the home.

[SPEAKER_01]: Correct, correct.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Of course, you met with other of your same age, and they would speak... That's correct.

[SPEAKER_01]: So you had to speak English.

[SPEAKER_00]: So we spoke English, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, so you could speak both languages.

[SPEAKER_00]: And when I was a young man, or young lad,

[SPEAKER_00]: We did a lot of Danish folk dancing.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we even went out to different places to do the folk dancing.

[SPEAKER_00]: Two times we went to, I think it was a sports festival in Ames, and did the folk dancing.

[SPEAKER_00]: I know the last year we were picked as one of the groups

[SPEAKER_00]: that performed in the evening.

[SPEAKER_00]: And they had put up a little, what was it, you could almost see a boxing ring out on the football field.

[SPEAKER_00]: And the people sat in the bleachers with the lights hanging on.

[SPEAKER_00]: We did a couple of the good old Danish folk dances there.

[SPEAKER_00]: And that was quite a thrill, for me anyway, with the spotlight shining down on me.

[SPEAKER_01]: What about Danish singing?

[SPEAKER_01]: Singing Danish songs.

[SPEAKER_01]: You've been acquainted with that?

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Glen Henriksen, when he was here, he wanted me to sing a Danish song.

[SPEAKER_01]: So you did?

[SPEAKER_00]: Sure.

[SPEAKER_01]: Which one was that?

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, you know, that's sometimes a little hard to pick the right one.

[SPEAKER_00]: But at Christmas time, I would sing Dejlig er den himmel blå.

[SPEAKER_00]: I can sing it in English, too.

[SPEAKER_00]: I sang that at a

[SPEAKER_00]: nursing home there when I was in Haywarden.

[SPEAKER_00]: Some of them enjoyed it.

[SPEAKER_00]: Some of them didn't know a thing.

[SPEAKER_01]: You also have, you said, you told me you have Danish traditions around Christmas.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Like what?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, we sing Det kimer nu til julefest,

[SPEAKER_00]: Is that in the home?

[SPEAKER_01]: In my home.

[SPEAKER_01]: That used to be in your home?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: And then, oh, we have, dansk rødkål,

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: We don't have the goose, though.

[SPEAKER_01]: You don't have what?

[SPEAKER_00]: The goose.

[SPEAKER_01]: No.

[SPEAKER_00]: My mother sometimes said, oh, that was a lot of work.

[SPEAKER_01]: So you have had these Danish traditions with the singing, the folk dancing, like Axel and I guess Norman would be acquainted with.

[SPEAKER_01]: That all comes from...

[SPEAKER_01]: These things sort of comes from a tradition brought over from Denmark.

[SPEAKER_00]: Correct.

[SPEAKER_01]: And that is the tradition that had been along with the church life, isn't that so?

[SPEAKER_00]: Correct, correct.

[SPEAKER_00]: And that goes to back... We had a hall there next to the church.

[SPEAKER_00]: But they had gymnastics there.

[SPEAKER_00]: They had, what did you use, ribber?

[SPEAKER_01]: Ribber, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: So gymnastics does also belong to this tradition of... That was mostly a little before my time though, most of that.

[SPEAKER_01]: So you've not been so much into that yourself?

[SPEAKER_00]: No, not so much.

[SPEAKER_00]: Sure we had it in summer school, Dane school, but just not anything real.

[SPEAKER_01]: A thing like lectures that belongs to the tradition as well, and they have it down at Tyler, at the Tyler meeting.

[SPEAKER_01]: Would you have had a thing like lectures here in Ringsted in the older days?

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, just occasionally if someone would come in.

[SPEAKER_00]: I remember one time they had a lecture in the church in the afternoon.

[SPEAKER_00]: So us young boys, you know, we were playing someplace else.

[SPEAKER_00]: And one of our sons was talking about it was time if we shouldn't go to hear the lecture.

[SPEAKER_00]: And one fellow says, they say it doesn't hurt you any.

[SPEAKER_00]: And there was one little guy there

[SPEAKER_00]: He was kind of tight with his money anyway.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, you know, sometimes when we have to offer, that's when it hurts me.

[SPEAKER_00]: But I couldn't say things like that.

[SPEAKER_00]: He was a nice fella.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: This tradition that we're talking about, that you've sort of been living your whole life,

[SPEAKER_01]: you've been having it as a living tradition, right?

[SPEAKER_01]: Correct.

[SPEAKER_01]: It comes from Denmark and what you call the Grundtvigian tradition, the Grundtvigian ideas.

[SPEAKER_01]: What does that mean to you?

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, I've been trying to

[SPEAKER_00]: read more about Grundtvig, but I think a lot about it and would like to know more.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, he said, wasn't one of his sayings, human first and then Christian?

[SPEAKER_00]: And I said that one time at a Sunday school when I was in Haywarden there.

[SPEAKER_00]: One lady says, that I really like to hear.

[SPEAKER_00]: Well, wasn't the folk school, didn't they want to learn to live a good life with one another?

[SPEAKER_00]: And I think that's so important too.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I say,

[SPEAKER_00]: I like to say the best way to evangelize is by the way you live your life.

[SPEAKER_00]: Because that tells people that you can live a good, clean life and get along well in this world.

[SPEAKER_00]: Of course, I'm a long ways from being perfect.

[SPEAKER_01]: So that has meant a lot to you in your life.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes, yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: But when you've been meeting with the Norwegians or other people of this community, wouldn't they agree with you about human first and Christian then?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, that's true.

[SPEAKER_00]: We folk danced one year for the after Christmas party of the Sons of Norway in Esterville.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I guess we did all right at the folk dancing, but afterwards one of the fellows come over to me and he says, I have a question I want to ask you.

[SPEAKER_00]: Somebody told me that Danes have more fun than Norwegians.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I want to know if that's true.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I thought, absolutely it's true and I know because I'm married a Norwegian and I have a lot more fun than she does.

[SPEAKER_00]: I don't know if that's true or not but we were married for 48 years and I still miss her a lot.

[SPEAKER_00]: She always says, Harald, you've got to let me go first because I don't want to have anything to do with all the things you've got money invested in.

[SPEAKER_01]: Would you consider yourself a Dane?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I can say I'm proud of it.

[SPEAKER_00]: Is there anything wrong with that?

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't think so.

[SPEAKER_01]: I guess not.

[SPEAKER_00]: I'm proud of my ancestors.

[SPEAKER_00]: They had a hard time.

[SPEAKER_01]: So would you consider yourself a Grundtvigian?

[SPEAKER_01]: Would you consider yourself being a Grundtvigian?

[SPEAKER_00]: Well yes, I think I would.

[SPEAKER_00]: Maybe you could say I'm just a lukewarm Christian.
[SPEAKER_00]: That isn't good enough, is it?
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, that depends what you put into the words.
[SPEAKER_01]: I think I get what you mean.
[SPEAKER_00]: Well, I was brought up to be a good Christian.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: So you...
[SPEAKER_01]: cherish these traditions that that you that you've been living with in the in the Danish church and the Grundtvigian tradition?
[SPEAKER_00]: Yes, I do.
[SPEAKER_00]: But there aren't many Danes left around the area anymore.
[SPEAKER_01]: No, no, I'm aware of that.
[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, I sang
[SPEAKER_00]: At Danish days, when we had Danish days.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: Summer.
[SPEAKER_01]: Recently.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.
[SPEAKER_01]: This year.
[SPEAKER_00]: I sang, uh, uh, Altid frejdig.
[SPEAKER_00]: Come in!
[SPEAKER_00]: Altid frejdig.
[SPEAKER_02]: Oh, you've got company.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: But, uh... Come in.
[SPEAKER_00]: Something?
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, we're... You can speak Danish some.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yes, I can.
[SPEAKER_00]: Nobody to speak it to.
[SPEAKER_01]: No.
[SPEAKER_01]: Du taler lidt dansk.
[SPEAKER_00]: Ja, jeg taler lidt dansk.
[SPEAKER_01]: Ja.
[SPEAKER_01]: Og du kan også danske sange.
[SPEAKER_00]: Ja.
[SPEAKER_00]: I'm happy to sing a Danish song whenever somebody wants it.
[SPEAKER_00]: And for my birthday, we sang several Danish songs.
[SPEAKER_00]: And there's a lady friend of mine, she enjoys that so much.
[SPEAKER_00]: She said,
[SPEAKER_00]: Will you mind singing?
[SPEAKER_00]: We sang part of Mor jeg er træt, nu vil jeg sove, one of H.C. Andersen's.
[SPEAKER_01]: Kan du synge en sang for mig?
[SPEAKER_00]: Ja, hva skal jeg synge?
[SPEAKER_01]: Det må du bestemme.
[SPEAKER_00]: Der er et yndigt land?

[SPEAKER_01]: Maybe not.

[SPEAKER_01]: Maybe some of your tradition that you would be singing in your, at meetings or at your home.

[SPEAKER_01]: I thought about one of the, Grundtvig's hymns.

[SPEAKER_01]: Would you remember some, one or two?

[SPEAKER_01]: Or maybe a Christmas hymn of his?

[SPEAKER_00]: I could sure sing them.

[SPEAKER_00]: I don't know all the words.

[SPEAKER_00]: No, just one.

[SPEAKER_00]: Maybe just one verse.

[SPEAKER_00]: You have to know.

[SPEAKER_00]: Dejlig er den himmel blå,

[SPEAKER_00]: Lyst det er at se derpå,

[SPEAKER_00]: Hvor de gyldne stjerner blinke,

[SPEAKER_00]: Hvor de flyve, hvor de vinke,

[SPEAKER_00]: Os fra jorden op til dig,

[SPEAKER_00]: Os fra jorden op til dig.

Good.

[SPEAKER_00]: Thank you.

[SPEAKER_01]: (The following is spoken in Danish): I can hear that you are good at your Danish songs.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: And you told me before, at Christmas time, then you dance around the Christmas tree.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: You have a song that you are going to sing for the last time.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Nu har vi jul igen.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Do you know Danish?

[SPEAKER_00]: They know it, right?

[SPEAKER_01]: That's for sure.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's for sure.

[SPEAKER_01]: There are many Danes who sing.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: Christmas Eve.

[SPEAKER_01]: Maybe like the last one.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, Christmas Eve.

[SPEAKER_01]: Or Christmas Day.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, that's one of the things you sing about for the last time, I think.

[SPEAKER_01]: I'm sure.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, this is the day I'm here for.

[SPEAKER_01]: Is there more that you would add to what we've been talking about?

[SPEAKER_01]: ideas about man, human first, then Christian.

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[SPEAKER_00]: I would like to study more about Grundtvig, because I think he was a wonderful, great Christian man.

[SPEAKER_00]: And he had a lot of influence on many of us, including myself.

[SPEAKER_01]: That's been a value of your life.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Of course, you know, in this country, we're taught we have to work to feed our family.

[SPEAKER_00]: And we have to pay our bills.

[SPEAKER_00]: And now in these times, I say, if you've got a good job,

[SPEAKER_00]: do a good job and keep it, because it's not easy to find another one.

[SPEAKER_00]: And I hesitate to see how some of these children, even my own grandchildren, they have to go to college, an expensive college far away from home.

[SPEAKER_00]: Maybe that isn't all bad, but there's a lot of good colleges close by.

[SPEAKER_01]: So they end up living far away, most often, wouldn't they?

[SPEAKER_00]: Right, right.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, I think that's...