

Interview of Karma Sorensen by H.B. Simonsen
Transcript reviewed and corrected by H.B. Simonsen
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Karma Sorensen_hbs.srt

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, I'd like to hear, what is your full name, please?
[SPEAKER_01]: My full name is Karma Overgaard Sorensen.
[SPEAKER_00]: And when and where were you born?
[SPEAKER_01]: I was born in Kimballton, Iowa, June 6, 1936.
[SPEAKER_01]: My parents are Niels and Najesta Overgaard.
[SPEAKER_00]: And what was their background?
[SPEAKER_01]: My mother and father were both born in Denmark.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.
[SPEAKER_01]: My father was born at Dyngby, close to Odder.
[SPEAKER_01]: And my mother was born in... I can't remember what the name of the town is.
[SPEAKER_01]: Doesn't matter.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, well, actually, my mother was born in Russia because her father was a Danish butter maker.
[SPEAKER_01]: And in the early 1900s, Denmark was making butter making equipment.
[SPEAKER_01]: And so they taught their young men how to run the equipment and then they sent them out into all parts of the country, the world.
[SPEAKER_01]: And my grandfather was sent to Siberia in Russia.
[SPEAKER_01]: And he was there for two or three years and then he came back to get his bride.
[SPEAKER_01]: my grandmother and they rode the train back to Russia and then my mother was born there a year later and when she was five years old my grandfather wanted her to be educated in Denmark so they moved back to Denmark and they lived in Copenhagen for about seven years and then when my mother was 12 they came to the United States
[SPEAKER_01]: And he was, he did run several creameries, butter making creameries in the state.
[SPEAKER_01]: In this area, yes.
[SPEAKER_00]: Okay, he came directly.
[SPEAKER_01]: He came directly to Hamlin, Iowa, which is about 10 miles east of Elk Horn.
[SPEAKER_01]: And so he was probably in five or six different creameries in this area.
[SPEAKER_01]: And my mother and father met in Kimballton and were married in nineteen... It doesn't matter, I can't remember.
[SPEAKER_00]: So you grew up in Kimballton.
[SPEAKER_00]: I did.
[SPEAKER_00]: How many kids were you?
[SPEAKER_01]: I was the second of seven children.
[SPEAKER_01]: And we went to school in Kimballton through eighth grade.
[SPEAKER_01]: And we would go to summer school in the summertime, which was folk school, where we learned Danish songs.
[SPEAKER_01]: And I don't remember learning Danish then, but...
[SPEAKER_01]: We did the gymnastics and the folk dancing and sang lots of Danish songs.
[SPEAKER_01]: That's what I remember.
[SPEAKER_00]: What age did you start?
[SPEAKER_01]: I suppose I started when I was six and went through probably, they probably ceased doing that when I was 13 or so.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't know the exact dates.

[SPEAKER_00]: Did you speak Danish at home, in your home?

[SPEAKER_01]: My parents thought it was important that we would learn Danish, so they spoke Danish to us before we learned English.

[SPEAKER_01]: So the four oldest of the seven learned Danish first.

[SPEAKER_01]: But, of course, when we went to school, we learned the English, and so by the time the youngest ones were...

[SPEAKER_01]: We were speaking English, so they didn't learn Danish like we did.

[SPEAKER_01]: But it's a language that you have to use a lot, and so I've lost most of my Danish.

[SPEAKER_01]: I can still understand it if it's spoken slowly.

[SPEAKER_00]: So when you went to school in the American school, how much English could you speak?

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't remember not speaking English.

[SPEAKER_01]: So I think I spoke English when I went to kindergarten.

[SPEAKER_01]: My older sister was two years older than I, so I think she remembers learning the English when she went to school, but I don't remember not knowing how to speak English.

[SPEAKER_00]: So, growing up in Kimballton, would that have been... Do you recall it as a community with much Danishness, Danish traditions?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: Should I turn it off?

[SPEAKER_00]: No, it's fine.

[SPEAKER_00]: That's no problem.

[SPEAKER_00]: Cut it off.

[SPEAKER_01]: Um...

[SPEAKER_01]: The traditions that I remember were a lot of things that my mother tried to teach the children.

[SPEAKER_01]: Mother was a teacher.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so during the summer, she would have different kinds of classes that would

[SPEAKER_01]: teach Danish traditions like the basket, the paper baskets, woven baskets, the heart baskets that we used at Christmas time.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we learned how to make pebernødder.

[SPEAKER_01]: And of course the gymnastics classes that we took and the folk dancing

[SPEAKER_01]: I guess that would be probably the main thing.

[SPEAKER_01]: And there were many older people at that time that spoke Danish, and they were good people.

[SPEAKER_00]: Both at home and in public life?

[SPEAKER_01]: Exactly, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: So, how was your school like?

[SPEAKER_00]: You went to school, elementary school?

[SPEAKER_01]: Elementary school in Kimballton.

[SPEAKER_01]: When I first started school there were 10 classes there.

[SPEAKER_01]: But then they eliminated the 10th and 11th grade and those kids went somewhere else.

[SPEAKER_01]: So then it was just kindergarten through eighth grade.

[SPEAKER_01]: And I was kind of unfortunate because there was hardly ever anybody else in my class.

[SPEAKER_01]: through school, maybe one or two people.

[SPEAKER_00]: At your age?

[SPEAKER_01]: At my age.

[SPEAKER_00]: Oh yeah?

[SPEAKER_01]: And so I made friends with the classes that were above me and below me, of course.

[SPEAKER_01]: But it was a good experience.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you went through high school?

[SPEAKER_01]: I went through high school in Elkhorn.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay, so you went here to high school.

[SPEAKER_01]: By that time, they were using the buses.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so we caught a bus and came to Elk Horn on the bus.

[SPEAKER_00]: And at some point of your youth, you met your husband?

[SPEAKER_01]: I did, in high school.

[SPEAKER_01]: When I was a senior in high school, we started dating.

[SPEAKER_01]: And he was two years older, so he'd been... He went to college for a year in Ames, Iowa.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then he volunteered for the draft when I was senior in high school.

[SPEAKER_00]: How old would you have been then?

[SPEAKER_01]: Then I was 17.

[SPEAKER_01]: And he spent two years in the Army.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then we were married when he got out of the Army.

[SPEAKER_01]: We lived a year in Harlan, Iowa.

[SPEAKER_01]: And then we lived a year...

[SPEAKER_01]: on a family farm that's south of Elk Horn and Mayo (? not sure about the name; hbs).

[SPEAKER_01]: And then we bought this house.

[SPEAKER_01]: And our oldest daughter was a year when we moved into the house.

[SPEAKER_00]: And what was your family background of your husband?

[SPEAKER_01]: My husband's parents were both born in Denmark.

[SPEAKER_00]: Mm-hmm.

[SPEAKER_01]: His father was a year old when he came and his mother was like 11 years old.

[SPEAKER_01]: So we're first generation Danes.

[SPEAKER_02]: Yes, you are.

[SPEAKER_01]: But, sad to say, we really didn't teach our children the Danish language.

[SPEAKER_01]: But we tried to carry on the traditions that we enjoyed, like for Christmas and we always have the

[SPEAKER_01]: traditional Christmas Eve service at our church, and that's the night we celebrate as a family.

[SPEAKER_00]: The 24th?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes, whereas your non-Danish neighbors would do it, have it, that's the main, it's Christmas Day.

[SPEAKER_01]: On Christmas morning, yes, Christmas Day, yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: You said sad to say you didn't teach your children Danish.

[SPEAKER_00]: Is that sad, you think?

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, I think it is.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's nice to know another language, and that is their heritage.

[SPEAKER_01]: But they have picked up a little bit of the Danish, a few words.

[SPEAKER_01]: In 1983, we made our first trip to Denmark to visit our cousins.

[SPEAKER_01]: Howard and I both have first cousins that live in Denmark.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so two of our daughters went along that time.

[SPEAKER_01]: Wow.

[SPEAKER_01]: They enjoyed it.

[SPEAKER_01]: They enjoyed meeting their cousins, second cousins, and picked up some words.

[SPEAKER_00]: And you said that you have these Christmas traditions that you keep on.

[SPEAKER_00]: Have you the impression that your children have kept those traditions in their homes now?

[SPEAKER_01]: Not really.

[SPEAKER_01]: Really?

[SPEAKER_01]: They have the Christmas Eve with us, and then they have their Christmas Day with the other side of the family.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so, in that respect they do, but not very much.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you don't think they will, at a later age, have Danish Christmas traditions?

[SPEAKER_00]: I don't think so, no.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's interesting, though, that my mother and I have both made kransekage for their weddings.

[SPEAKER_01]: And most of the kids have wanted that for their weddings, and now the grandchildren are asking for that too.

[SPEAKER_01]: So that's one tradition that they like.

[SPEAKER_01]: And the heart baskets and things like that.

[SPEAKER_00]: Your husband and you met and you got married.

[SPEAKER_00]: And where did you... You went to...

[SPEAKER_00]: You went living somewhere else for a time.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, we lived in Harlan, Iowa for about a year.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, then you came back.

[SPEAKER_01]: Then we came back to Elk Horn.

[SPEAKER_00]: Then you bought this house.

[SPEAKER_00]: Right.

[SPEAKER_00]: What have you been doing for a living?

[SPEAKER_01]: My husband has been the manager of the telephone company here.

[SPEAKER_01]: He was the manager for about 42 years.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we're both retired now.

[SPEAKER_01]: I was a stay-at-home mother.

[SPEAKER_01]: Then when our youngest was, I think in sixth grade, I was fortunate enough to get a job with the postal service.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so I worked as a temporary clerk or when the postmaster was gone, then I was there.

[SPEAKER_01]: And so then in 1982,

[SPEAKER_01]: I was elected as postmaster.

[SPEAKER_01]: So I served the postal service for twenty years and then I retired.

[SPEAKER_01]: So I've been retired since 1996.

[SPEAKER_00]: Your husband grew up in Elk Horn.

[SPEAKER_00]: And at that point, at that time, there was two Danish congregations, one in Kimballton that was of the Grundtvigian tradition and one in Elk Horn of the Inner Mission tradition.

[SPEAKER_00]: Right.

[SPEAKER_00]: How would you describe... Can you describe a difference of upbringing or church tradition that you have been... that you have...

[SPEAKER_00]: that you know of comparing his tradition and your tradition?

[SPEAKER_01]: His mother was not so interested in the traditions and his father was a Baptist and so that always kind of was a little bit not

[SPEAKER_01]: They weren't at odds with each other on that, but they both respected each other's church, and so that really wasn't a big thing with them.

[SPEAKER_00]: So his dad would be a member of the Baptist church?

[SPEAKER_01]: Right.

[SPEAKER_00]: Here in Elk Horn?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: So his family was not really into this Inner Mission congregation at all?

[SPEAKER_01]: No, not really.

[SPEAKER_00]: No.

[SPEAKER_00]: No.

[SPEAKER_00]: Would you, have you known, experienced this difference of tradition between the two Danish congregations?

[SPEAKER_00]: Today?

[SPEAKER_00]: No, way back, maybe even today.

[SPEAKER_01]: When I was married?

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, when we were growing up, that wasn't discussed so much.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's more after I grew up and...

[SPEAKER_01]: people were starting to write about this thing that we started learning about.

[SPEAKER_01]: We didn't realize that this was going on when we were growing up.

[SPEAKER_01]: Okay?

[SPEAKER_01]: Do you understand what I'm saying?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, and I think that's interesting.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: And it's a lot of times, and nothing against people from Denmark, because they're looking to see why that happened and all.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we would rather just not even discuss it.

[SPEAKER_01]: Because it continues to be a rift if we keep bringing it up.

[SPEAKER_01]: Does that make sense to you?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, absolutely.

[SPEAKER_00]: I'm glad you tell me this.

[SPEAKER_01]: But I understand why people like to look into that because it's definitely something that happened.
[SPEAKER_00]: But not in your lifetime.
[SPEAKER_00]: No, no, no.
[SPEAKER_00]: Not in your childhood.
[SPEAKER_00]: No, no, no.
[SPEAKER_00]: You would never have noticed that there would be some boundaries.
[SPEAKER_01]: I think it happened during my childhood, but I wasn't involved with it.
[SPEAKER_01]: My mother was.
[SPEAKER_02]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: And she could speak very eloquently about the whole thing.
[SPEAKER_00]: She had experienced these things.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, exactly.
[SPEAKER_00]: Do you know to what extent the boundaries were put up?
[SPEAKER_01]: The thing with Kimballton and Elk Horn, there are several things that happened.
[SPEAKER_01]: The church was probably the first thing.
[SPEAKER_01]: They split off.
[SPEAKER_02]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: And then the next thing was that Kimballton, and you maybe know this already, that Kimballton wanted to create their own electricity, their electric plant.
[SPEAKER_01]: And they wanted Elk Horn to go in with them, but Elk Horn said no.
[SPEAKER_01]: Number two.
[SPEAKER_00]: But that had nothing to do with church.
[SPEAKER_01]: No, but it has to do with the two towns.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, yeah, sure.
[SPEAKER_01]: And then in the 50s,
[SPEAKER_01]: Elk Horn started building a high school.
[SPEAKER_01]: And of course, Kimballton's K through 8 was dwindling.
[SPEAKER_01]: And so that's when the consolidations of schools started.
[SPEAKER_01]: And there were a lot of people in Kimballton that didn't want their children to go to Elk Horn.
[SPEAKER_00]: How come?
[SPEAKER_01]: Because of this rift.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: So it was there, but you didn't notice...
[SPEAKER_00]: Maybe because your family was not so much involved.
[SPEAKER_01]: Well, the school rift, we noticed that.
[SPEAKER_01]: But not this church.
[SPEAKER_01]: I was never involved with all that.
[SPEAKER_01]: I haven't really studied it.
[SPEAKER_01]: To me, it doesn't matter to me.
[SPEAKER_01]: Good.
[SPEAKER_00]: Good.
[SPEAKER_00]: Your sister lives over in Kimballton.

[SPEAKER_00]: She belongs to this congregation they have over there.

[SPEAKER_01]: Right.

[SPEAKER_00]: And you belong to this Lutheran congregation here.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: Have you noticed any differences in church life in general between these two congregations?

[SPEAKER_01]: No, not really.

[SPEAKER_00]: Because now they belong to the same ELCA.

[SPEAKER_01]: Actually, our church doesn't belong to the ELCA anymore.

[SPEAKER_01]: We have split off from the ELCA.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we're Lutheran churches in Mission for Christ, which is an offshoot.

[SPEAKER_00]: Recently?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, within the last 10 years, maybe.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: Do you know the reason why you've been...

[SPEAKER_01]: Well, there's a couple things that have entered into it.

[SPEAKER_01]: The hierarchy of the ELCA is getting more powerful all the time, the bishops and also the fact that they have decided that gays can be ministers, gay people.

[SPEAKER_02]: Mm-hmm, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: And there are a lot of people that don't go along with that.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, a gay person as a person is fine, but there's a lot of people that don't think they should be at the head of the church.

[SPEAKER_01]: So that's part of it.

[SPEAKER_00]: But that's just from last year.

[SPEAKER_00]: It was a vote in the church.

[SPEAKER_01]: Right, but it's been coming on for several years.

[SPEAKER_00]: So the split between the time that...

[SPEAKER_00]: Your congregation left the ELCA, it would be several years ago.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, I'm not sure.

[SPEAKER_01]: I think it's maybe seven.

[SPEAKER_01]: I think it's seven or eight years ago that we did.

[SPEAKER_00]: So you belong to a new upcoming church.

[SPEAKER_01]: What's the name of that?

[SPEAKER_01]: Lutheran Churches in Mission for Christ, LCMC.

[SPEAKER_01]: And it's also, we don't really call it a synod because we don't have hierarchy in that church.

[SPEAKER_01]: If we need a new pastor, we don't need to go to the bishop and he doesn't send us candidates.

[SPEAKER_01]: We can go out and get whoever we want to.

[SPEAKER_00]: So that's the way it works.

[SPEAKER_00]: That's the way ours works.

[SPEAKER_00]: You don't have a bishop at all.

[SPEAKER_00]: No, we don't.

[SPEAKER_00]: Or even maybe have a...

[SPEAKER_00]: an office that takes care of certain things.

[SPEAKER_01]: No.

[SPEAKER_00]: Like a, well, what about a paper, a magazine?

[SPEAKER_00]: You don't have a sort of magazine for your group of congregations.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay, so it's very independent.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's very independent.

[SPEAKER_01]: And that's the way they want it.

[SPEAKER_01]: Keep it that way.

[SPEAKER_00]: That's the way they want it here in Elk Horn?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.

[SPEAKER_01]: And there are lots of churches that have done this.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, I read in the paper there was some 400.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, there's a lot of churches.

[SPEAKER_01]: Churches that have been... And they're, like in the ELCA there's a district, you know, like Kimballton would belong to a certain district.

[SPEAKER_01]: We don't belong to a district.

[SPEAKER_00]: We're just... So you are actually fully independent.

[SPEAKER_00]: but you have this affiliation with other churches and our missions we can have whatever mission we want to we're not obligated to a certain mission that the ELCA has decided that you support so but can you run any mission activities on your own because that might be one of the difficulties that being one

[SPEAKER_01]: Right.

[SPEAKER_01]: We have hooked up with a missionary that is, we've just started to support, we started to support a missionary in Vietnam.

[SPEAKER_01]: And we just chose to support him.

[SPEAKER_00]: By knowledge of him and what he was doing.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah, exactly.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: So that works?

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: That works fine.

[SPEAKER_01]: Works fine.

[SPEAKER_01]: You walk in the door, it's all the same.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's all the same now as it was 15 years ago, you know.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: What about the membership of the congregation?

[SPEAKER_00]: Has that been steady or declining or growing?

[SPEAKER_01]: It's declining, just like all churches, they're declining.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't know why the younger people don't want to go to church.

[SPEAKER_01]: But it's all that I've talked with my daughters that belong to other churches.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's the same for them.

[SPEAKER_01]: I've talked to a friend that belongs to a big church in Atlantic.

[SPEAKER_01]: Same for them.

[SPEAKER_01]: I don't know.

[SPEAKER_01]: It's all around us.

[SPEAKER_01]: And, of course, the population is declining in the rural areas.
[SPEAKER_01]: Not as many farms as there used to be.
[SPEAKER_01]: That's true.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, so it will be that tendency.
[SPEAKER_01]: It will, yeah.
[SPEAKER_01]: It's a struggle.
[SPEAKER_00]: Well, it's interesting to hear about your congregation and the way you've chosen to be very independent.
[SPEAKER_00]: So you think that will be a solution for many years to come?
[SPEAKER_01]: I think so.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah?
[SPEAKER_00]: We're happy with it.
[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah, you're happy with it, and your fellow members are.
[SPEAKER_01]: Oh, yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: So... Your sister, (Annette Andersen; hbs), whom I met in Tyler, she goes to the Tyler folk meeting.
[SPEAKER_01]: Yes.
[SPEAKER_00]: And you never had... No, I've never... You've never been there.
[SPEAKER_00]: Did you never have the...
[SPEAKER_01]: idea of going there? No not really. Why not?, if I may ask. um I just don't get into all that Danish stuff like she does, I mean, I'm just not as maybe I'm not as intellectual as she is and maybe I just
[SPEAKER_01]: I'm happy with what I'm doing.
[SPEAKER_01]: And my husband isn't interested in it.
[SPEAKER_01]: And it's just been within the last 10 years that she's gone, probably.
[SPEAKER_01]: So my husband's coming in the door.
[SPEAKER_00]: Oh, yeah.
[SPEAKER_00]: How do you do?
[SPEAKER_00]: Good morning.
[SPEAKER_00]: Good morning.
[SPEAKER_01]: Howard, this is Henrik.
[SPEAKER_00]: How are you?
[SPEAKER_01]: Howard.
[SPEAKER_01]: I'm fine.
[SPEAKER_00]: How are you?
[SPEAKER_00]: Good.
[SPEAKER_00]: That's good.
[SPEAKER_00]: We're just sitting and having a talk about, well, life stories, you can say.
[SPEAKER_00]: That's interesting.
[SPEAKER_00]: But I think we are getting towards the end of what I had to... Yeah, and as far as the traditions in our church, the Danish traditions, maybe really the only...
[SPEAKER_01]: Danish tradition that we carry on is the Christmas Eve service.
[SPEAKER_01]: And we don't really have anybody that speaks Danish in our church anymore.
[SPEAKER_01]: You know, that generation is gone.

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[SPEAKER_01]: They used to have a service in Danish once a year, but they don't do that anymore because, of course, our pastor now doesn't speak any Danish.

[SPEAKER_00]: And it would be few who could understand it.

[SPEAKER_00]: Exactly, yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: But you have that Christmas Eve service?

[SPEAKER_00]: Yes, we do.

[SPEAKER_00]: At what time of the day?

[SPEAKER_01]: It would be 4 o'clock on Christmas Eve.

[SPEAKER_01]: We have two services that day.

[SPEAKER_00]: So that would be different from...

[SPEAKER_00]: Lutheran churches in the area, apart from Kimballton.

[SPEAKER_00]: I guess they would have... They have the same thing, yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]: A lot of the Lutheran churches around here would probably do that, like in Audubon and Exira and Atlantic.

[SPEAKER_01]: I'm not sure about Atlantic, Harlan and Jacksonville.

[SPEAKER_01]: You know, there's quite a few smaller churches within a 20-mile radius, and they would probably...

[SPEAKER_01]: As far as I know, they all kind of do that.

[SPEAKER_00]: That could have been a common tradition also from Norway and Sweden.

[SPEAKER_01]: Yes, yes.

[SPEAKER_00]: And the Germans would probably go at night, midnight.

[SPEAKER_01]: Right.

[SPEAKER_00]: Yeah?

Yeah.

[SPEAKER_00]: I think that's about it.

[SPEAKER_00]: Okay.

[SPEAKER_00]: That was good.

[SPEAKER_00]: Good.

[SPEAKER_00]: So, I'll just stop here.