

Aleta Rintamaki's interview with  
Helen Huotari - Dec. 27, 1984

me: where were you born?

H.H.: Humbolt, Michigan, right in this house

me: when?

H.H.: March 20, 1907

me: What was your father's occupation?

H.H.: farmer

me: were you poor?

H.H.: yes. He was just a farmer so.

me: O.K. do you remember what your X-mases were like?

H.H.: well, very slim.

me: like what did you get?

H.H.: well, maybe one little thing like a doll or something.  
candy maybe, but once a year.

me: um, how long did you go to school?

H.H.: 8 grades. Went <sup>an</sup> to a camp, they called it a  
camp, they called it a camp school up here on Fish Lake Road.  
I can't recall if I went kindergarten, but first grade there,  
& I think 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> in this other school house in Humbolt.

me: do you remember what the name was?

H.H.: I think it was call no. 2 district, It might have  
been District 2. I don't remember. They just called it  
a camp school on Fish Lake Road.

me: Oh, O.K.



H.H.: And then um, I come back again to  
the camp school for 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, grades and I finished  
8 in District 2.

me: Oh, o.k.

H.H.: I just went 8 grades

me: Do you ~~remember~~ <sup>remember</sup> any of your teachers?

H.H.: I remember um, Agnes Marrow was I think my  
first grade teacher and then um, Gladys Arrenson was  
my ... let's see ... 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher + 3<sup>rd</sup> were Mrs.

Ruth Peterson + then Lempi Anderson. Ruth Peterson  
taught the lower grades, up to 4<sup>th</sup> grade + then  
Mrs. Anderson taught 6<sup>th</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> + 8<sup>th</sup>.

me: Um, how did you get to ~~school~~ school, did you  
walk or ...

H.H.: We walked

me: Oh.

H.H.: Took ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> lunches

me: Did they serve lunch at the school?

H.H.: No, not at that time (laughs) + we tramped  
knee high in snow (giggles)

me: When you were in your teens did you just help  
out at home or did you have a job elsewhere  
like did you help out at the neighbors?

H.H.: No, we work anywhere just at home well  
sometimes I did some babysitting you know, if  
some families went somewhere. When I was a little  
older. Stay there a few days. But not



not really jobs

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ME: you mean like not go there every day

H.H.: no, uh, uh

ME: what did you do for entertainment? like skiing?

H.H.: skiing and skating + summertime, swimming

but we didn't have bathing suits (giggles or laughs)

ME: what did you wear? your dresses? (laughing also)

H.H.: Then we walked to Fish Lake there

ME: ~~oh~~ ya,

H.H.: Sometimes took lunch along + had a good time (& laughs)

ME: what would you do if it were rainy out?

H.H.: on rainy day?

ME: yah.

H.H.: Ya mean to pass time

ME: yah, like what did you do?

H.H.: well, we played games like, we had some games you know

ME: Oh, I suppose, make your mother nervous (jokingly)

H.H.: We had to some housework chores too so wash days we had to scrub. we had to get up in the morning + wash by washboard, before we went to school.

ME: Did you ever go out of Michigan when you were young?

H.H.: no nuh-uh.



only as far as I shipmenting that's all

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me: + that was very rare?

H.H.: Well, to go dentist + that wasn't very often

me: Who was your dentist? Do you remember?

H.H.: Dr. Jarvis, Dr. Sivula in later years

me: Like when you got older?

H.H.: mm hm

me: How old were you when you got married?

H.H.: 22 November 9<sup>th</sup> of 1929 (shares a laugh with me at her exactness)

me: What was your husband's occupation? Like, what did do for a living?

H.H.: Well, he was a, he worked in the mine also worked with X-MAS trees

me: Like he sold them? Grew 'em + sold 'em?

H.H.: mm hm + he worked on WPA Depression time in 20+30

me: Were you poor or were you pretty good off?

H.H.: Not too well, um-huh work was very scarce His health wasn't too good either

me: I suppose what was a normal day like when you had most of your kids? Were they pretty good?

H.H.: They were good kids ya, they did pretty well, they did very good in school always



me: Did you have to get up really early 5

H.H: Well the buses come around & get up by

6:30 - 7. you know

me: Then after they went to school did you just do your housework

H.H: House work, ya

me: Who delivered most of your babies?

H.H: Dr. van I was never in the hospital for my babies. All were delivered at home. Yorraine & Ruth were born in Shpeming. We lived up Shpeming on Greenwood Street & that's where they were born.

me: Oh! How long did you live there?

H.H: Hmm. Let's see we were married, moved to Sh. my husband worked at Greenwood mine so, we ah. we moved in June to Shpeming. He worked at the Greenwood mine when that was new. & then, Oh I don't remember what year it was we moved. we lived in Daggett for a little while first when we were married we lived in ~~Wakegan~~ Wakegan. June of 1930 we moved to Shpeming.

me: I thought you had always lived here.

H.H: Well, most of the time we lived here in this house now since '64 No, I talk that back '40 when my mother died we moved here. She was born in Champion.

me: Where was my mom born?

H.H: Yorraine & Ruth were born in Shpeming & your mom, Ronnie, Floyd were born in the schoolhouse



where we used to go school <sup>mickolas</sup>  
had remodelled to a home like you know,  
they lived in on one side ( ) on the other <sup>side</sup>  
was born in Champion + Beacon Michigan  
Jan + Kenny were born in this house

ME: Where did you do your grocery shopping?

H.H.: Champion.

ME: What store?

H.H.: Mostly Ryans. or pick up a few things here + there.

ME: What was the price of a lb of meat?

H.H.: Hamburgers, about 9¢ a lb.

ME: a dozen eggs?

H.H.: about 9¢

ME: How about vegetables?

H.H.: I don't remember the vegetables or they were cheap too. milk was about 8¢ a quart

But wages were to. You worked on WPA 24 1/2 a day  
~~you~~ maybe <sup>worked</sup> 2 days when times were really poor

+ then if it rained they didn't work at all that week. But then there was some welfare too, you know

ME: What were ration stamps?

H.H.: Oh! Ya, we had. oh. oh meat, I can't recall how much we got but bigger families would get stamps to get your meat



me: Just meat + anything else? Like mmm 7

H.H: mostly meat I think. sugar + flour on gas, too  
ya, but gas was ah. but mostly for important  
things but that was limited too.

me: are they like food stamps today?

H.H: Similar to that... mmmhm.

me: Did you sew your childrens clothes or did you buy them?

H.H: No, mother made alot but I didn't do any sewing. I  
was never talented at that. But we didn't have a closet  
full of clothes (laughs)

me: like kids now-a-days!

H.H: yes! very much different. We didn't have  
sleighs your mom + them used to ride in cardboard  
boxes (shares a laugh with me) they used to skate

me: at the dam?

H.H: Not when we were kids, it wasn't there yet.

me: How about my mom + them? where did they skate?

H.H: At the dam.

me: Did you have a car when you had kids?

H.H: Yes, Plymouth. They used to run + didn't run (laughs)

me: what was christmas like when you were  
unmarried?

H.H: Ohh, Christmas was quite nice.



when I was married. Well, we couldn't afford that much though, but then our family gave some

me: what was a traditional Christmas?

H.H: we didn't go out that much. out to eat...

me: How did you wash your clothes? ~~scrub~~ scrubboard?

H.H: scrubboard, washboard, bail them, all day job. But <sup>then</sup> we did get the Maytags, gasoline ones, sometimes they didn't work. We washed in the summer kitchen, it was cold, so, once got it going, you had to make sure you get your washing done, before it stopped, if it ever stopped it would never start. You had to crank it to get it going. But later years we washed in the shed, because it was too cold for the motor, we had lots of fun with it (laughs)

me: so the new washers are very convenient

H.H: Oh yes, very convenient! Especially now I have this Hoover

me: Did you have a bathtub or a sauna?

H.H: sauna.

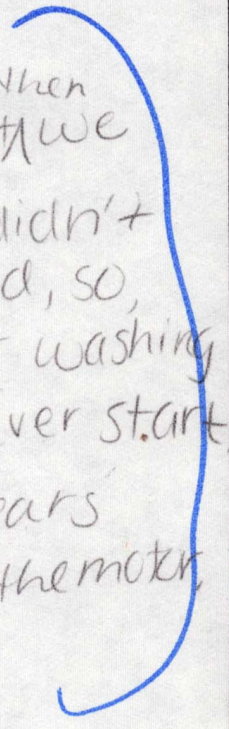
me: Did you have any Finnish customs? Did you do things a special way or whatever?

H.H: Just whatever, not really any customs.

me: where was your church located?

H.H: Years before when we were kids, we went to different homes, sometimes they might have had church at the school-house, but mostly at homes.

new material





~~me~~ <sup>often?</sup> me: Did you visit your friends ~~often?~~ ~~often?~~ ~~often?~~ (9)

H.H: Well, sometimes, depending on the weather not to often, with all the work. Grandma Finni, my grandma Finni ~~we~~ used to live next door & this was my mother's house. We moved in when my mother died in 1940.

~~me~~ me: When did your husband die?

H.H: 1948, Sept. 30 at age of 41

me: What was it like raising 8 kids by yourself?

H.H: Well, it was hard & we had to go on ~~and~~, mother was left with 10 of us, my dad died at age 49

me: Were you poor?

H.H: Yes, my dad died all summer so... my husband wasn't well either

me: What was a normal day when your husband died?

H.H: You had to take more responsibilities

me: How many kids were old enough to help you with your chores?

H.H: Well, there was... Ronnie was fourteen so... Lorraine was through school... so... most of them could do things at home.

me: Did any of your kids have any diseases other than "everyday" ones?

H.H: Well, they had the measles & your mom had scarletina, she was 6 mo. old. My husband had it too, Kenny had, ah, the measles & he got a palsy, he still has a... sorta twitch.

me: How about the other ones?

H.H: Ronnie had tonsil surgery & I can't remember of anybody really having any. They all had the measles



ME: Did you take care of them or did Dr. Van? (10)

H.H.: Dr. Van took care of Kenny, but then Dr. Noroski, we had to take him to Ishpeming

ME: How many of your children finished high school?

H.H.: They all finished high school.

ME: How many went to college?

H.H.: 2 Wendel + Kenny

ME: What did they go into?

H.H.: Mechanical, engineering

ME: After your kids grew up, did you travel much?

H.H.: Well, after the kids got bigger, I went to Wakegan + Minneapolis, Then in '64 I spent 3 weeks in Minneapolis

ME: Where do all your kids live now?

H.H.: Jordaine is in Houghton, Ruth in South Zions, Rennie in Iron Mountain, Lloyd is in Ypsilanti, Michigan, Wendel lives in Kokato, Minnesota, Kenny is in Mendota, Washington, Jan is in Plymouth, Minnesota, + your man is in Ishpeming.

~~scribbles~~ (11)



"Touch-up" interview with Helen Huotari  
by Aleta Rintamaki on January 27, 1985

①

me: where were your kids born?

H.H.: Lorraine was born in Humbolt, no, she was born in Ish, on Greenwood Street.

me: Okay.

H.H.: Ruth was also born in Ishpeming, Greenwood Location  
Ronald + your mom + ah Lloyd + ... in the schoolhouse + Jean +  
Kenny were born in Humbolt where I live now, Old farm house  
+ where Ronnie + your mom were in the schoolhouse + that's why  
they were so smart. (laughs with me)

me: What was a normal day like when you had most of your  
kids?

H.H.: Well, very busy washing clothes was the hardest we washed  
in the shed + had a maytag that was operated by gasoline + oil,  
+ the shed was very, very cold so we had a hard time. The neighbor  
washed there also so, we had to crank them + crank them + when  
they finally started we had to, to get our washing done as fast  
as we possibly get through because if they stopped they would  
never start that day again (laughs)

me: could you tell me about some old-time remedies?

H.H.: During the big flu epidemic that was in 1918-1919  
we had real foggy weather mild, so we had old-time wood stoves  
+ ah, they brought tar cans + ~~holes~~ <sup>punch</sup> holes on top so they wouldn't  
explode + they'd be put in a pan of water on the back of the  
wood stove on the hottest part + the vapors were suppose to help  
the flu + we were given vaccinations at the school + ah, but  
after all, we all got sick. the vaccination didn't do any



much good. It ah, our arms swole up. Anyway, @  
when when I went to my doctor ~~to~~ to get another  
flu shot, they said to get another flu shot so, they asked  
me when I had my last flu shot & I said in 1919 & they  
kinda laughed at me the nurse said 1919? & I said yes, that's  
when I had it.

me: Was there any other old-time remedies besides the tar  
pot?

H.H: If you had sore throat you would have... the big seller  
at that time was a pain killer... then they would have you  
a lump of sugar with, ah... hmmm... I can't recall the stuff  
they put on it. It was suppose to help some, but. Very seldom  
we went to doctors only for dentist or something. We didn't  
run to doctors very much at that time.

me: Were there any others?

H.H: Well, they used to drink hot lemonade or they put Vicks  
on your chest or on your nose.

me: Was that for a cold?

H.H: mm hm.

me: How about for fever? What did they do?

H.H: Oh, for fever they used to put wet, keep wetting your fore  
head with wet towels or something like that.

me: Did they have anything else?

H.H: I can't recall if they had aspirin or any thing else.  
But most of the time they would give you wet, cold rag to  
put on your forehead. It seemed to <sup>help</sup> some.

me: Any funny experiences at school?

H.H: The spring-time farmers bought pigs to have meat in  
the fall then. There was a family that lived right by the school.



4 in the spring they had maybe one or two little pigs & it was nice weather so they somehow or ~~other~~ other they got loose or... I don't if they run loose or. One pig came in the schoolhouse & the porch there & they came in teacher got so scared she jumped on the desk. (laughs)

me: can you remember any other funny incidents from school?

H.H.: Oh, the boys use to ah, they used to open windows in the spring & go from one window, you know come in from one window & go from the other window. Sometimes they'd fool around & go under the desks. One of the boys, I think he was a grade ahead of me, the teacher would scold him because he was so pokey with getting his lessons done. He would always tell the teacher "I'm slow but sure." (Laughs)

me: where did they have bathrooms?

H.H.: Outdoor jns. which were very pleasant when it was 30 below 0 (laughs)

me: How did they keep the schoolhouse warm?

H.H.: Hard coal, coal stove, coal stove with <sup>little</sup> windows, then you would have to... But they were hard to get going, once you got them going then they'd... it was really nice.

me: what were the desks like?

H.H.: Regular school desks, A row. They was only 1-2 in a class. so, about 2 rows (pause for a few secs.)

H.H.: When we went shopping we didn't have to much <sup>money</sup> ~~more~~ so, went x-mas eve to Champion called Ryans (General merchandise & we went there the nite before Christmas & got each a little thing. we didn't hang up stockings, but they were satisfied.