

Kathy Kaminen's interview  
with Helen Kaminen.



me = Hi. My name is Kathy Kaminen, I'm interviewing Helen Kaminen on making Finnish Cheese.

The date is January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1985. We are in Helen Kaminen's home on the Maailma road in the Green Creek location.

When were you born?

H.K. = ~~April~~ 16, 1914  
June

me = okay. Where did you grow-up?

H.K. = In the Ishpeming Area.

me = OKAY = I understand you were born over in Finland.

H.K. = Yes, I was born in Finland. I came here when I was 2 years old.

me = Was your family well off?

H.K. = No they were not.

me = What did your father do for an income?

H.K. = Ahh. He worked mostly on the farm and ahh every once in a while he would work in the mine just for some extra money.

for a few months





Kathy Ka  
with Helen Kaminen

#2

me = Could you tell me how much he earned in a day?

H.K. = Well (ahh) he only earned about a dollar a day, Money didn't come easy back then

me = Where did you go to school?

H.K. = I went to school at North Lake.

me = um - where did you graduate?

H.K. = I did not graduate. I just went 8 grades of school.

me = Well why did you only go 8 grades?

H.K. = At that time we didn't have the money to buy books or material to go to high school.

me = You mean you had to buy all your materials,

H.K. = Yes. You had to buy all your own materials at that time in order to go to school.

me = Did you do well in school?

H.K. = Yes! Oh yes! Yes I did.

me = What kind of grades did you get?

H.K. = At that time they marked the grades down in numbers.

me = Numbers?



Kathy Kaminens Interview #3  
with Helen Kaminen

HK = Instead of letters, like they do now. So (ahh) I would average between 80 and 100.

me = (cough) I understand that you make Finnish Cheese. Could you tell me a little bit about it. Like, Did your mother make Finnish Cheese?

HK = Yes. We made Finnish Cheese on the Farm. Because we had a lot of milk extra that we HAD to use up. And (ahh) for food for the family.

me = Who taught you to make it? -

HK = Well ahh, we used to watch mother make it and we sorta learned it on the side. She never really taught us to make it, but ahh by watching her, we'd learn to make it.

me = how old were you when you first started making it yourself?

HK. = Well I didn't start making it for myself until after I was married. But ahh we used to make it on "the farm" when I was 10, eleven years old.

me = Do you enjoy making it?

HK = Yes, when I have the opportunity.

me = When you make the "Fin Cheese" you have to have a lot of fresh milk. Where did you get it all from?



HK = well, after I was married when I made it I used to get it from the farm. But like now, fresh raw milk is hard to come by. So many times you end up making it out of homogenized milk. And it doesn't come quite as good out of homogenized milk as it does out of fresh milk. But you can make it with homogenized milk.

me = So you had cows then on the farm.

HK = Yes. (uhmm)

me = Do you have any sisters that make this cheese?

HK = All my sisters do. All the three of them. Yes, they all make "Fin Cheese"

me = Is it easy to make?

HK = It's not hard to make.

me = How often did you make it?

HK = Oh I didn't make it too often. Maybe 5, 6 times a year. Because you didn't have more milk than that.

me = Did you ever sell it?

HK = No, never sold any of it.

me = Could you give me a brief description on how ~~to~~ to make it and then later give me a copy of it?

HK = You have a copy of it already hey?



Kathy Kaminen's Interview #5  
with Helen Kaminen

me = yah

Use this

HK = well (ahh) when I made it I use three gallons of whole fresh milk. And you take a 12 qt. pail or larger even. And you put it in a big pan of hot water. That's the way you heat the milk. Sorta like a double boiler. And you heat it to about the consistancy of a baby's milk bottle. You kind of test it on your wrist if you don't have a thermometer which I never had. And then ahh you stir in for every gallon of milk one Penit <sup>SP.</sup> tablet. And you dissolve, for the ~~three~~ three gallons I had I used 3 tablets. And you dissolve that in a few tablespoons of warm water. And you ah, putting eggs in there is optional. Lots of people don't put eggs in their cheese but you can.

me = 'What does the egg do for the cheese?'

HK = I don't know that it does anything special but that's just an option that you can have. Sometimes I made it with the egg & sometimes without it.



Kathy Kaminens interview  
with Helen Kaminon

#6

me = is there any taste difference?

HK = There's no taste difference whatsoever. It might come a little bit squeakier WITHOUT the egg and the flour in it. And eh I beat-up the egg and a few tablespoons of flour and ah, stir the Renit and the egg and the flour - stir it well into the heated milk. Then you let it stand for an hour or an hour + one-half. Until you make sure its all set, when it comes away from the pan, or cuts ~~flat~~ clean. And then you stir that all up again and you re-heat it. Put it back into the pan of water & re-heat it again until its warm. And then you stir it up and you start pressing it down in the form of a cheese. And dump the whey off the cheese. and you keep on pressing until you get as much whey as you possibly can out of it. And then its formed into a round circle. Because you form it in the bottom of that pan. And (dah) it could be 2, 3 inches thick or more at that time. But when you put it on a pan. a pizza pan is good with the edges on it. about 12 or 14 inches in diameter. And you press it down on



Kathy Kaminens interview (47)  
with Helen Kaminek

HK = there & put it in a very hot oven, I would say about 425°. And deh so you can brown it quickly from on top. But you have to tilt the pan a little bit so the whey can pour off & put a pan under it to catch the whey. Preferably put water in the pan so the whey won't burn in the pan. And you brown it (cough) on top and then you take it out and turn the cheese and brown the other side, the same way. Then your cheese is ready.

me = Do you serve it hot or cold?

HK = We usually let it cool off. And then serve it. But ah sometimes when we cut it into pieces, we re-heat it in the oven ~~in~~ under the broiler and sprinkle some salt on it which is really good.

me = Was it a custom for most Finnish girls to make this cheese?

HK = Yays. Everybody made it. All the farmers that had cows. They all made cheese

me = Did the mold of cheese have a name?



Kathy Kaminens interview  
with Helen Kaminen

(#8)

HK = No No. We never called them anything.

me = Why have you + many others continued to make this cheese when you can easily buy it?

HK = You can't buy this kind of cheese. Of course you can because some farmers make it + sell it to stores, so I guess you can buy it. But it's delicious. Especially when it's made fresh. There's nothing like it.

me = Do you think this custom will last, or slowly fade out?

HK = Oh I sure hope it lasts.

me = Do you think it will?

HK = I think so.

me = Why?

HK = Well it is something unique. Some cheese no-  
body else makes. It's lasted this long. I've  
been in this country 68 years and it's still go-  
ing so.

me = Well thank-you ~~for~~ that's all the questions I have. And I really appreciate this. And it has been a real pleasure.

Well done!