

# Esther Alfrida Lund Nilsen Oral History Interview, 1982

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Nilsen, Esther Alfrida Lund
<b>Title</b>	Esther Alfrida Lund Nilsen Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders 5 photographs 1 sound cassette
<b>Collection Number</b>	t133
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Esther Alfrida Lund Nilsen, a Norwegian immigrant.
<b>Repository</b>	<a href="#">Pacific Lutheran University, Archives and Special Collections</a> Archives and Special Collections Pacific Lutheran University 12180 Park Avenue South Tacoma, Washington 98447 Telephone: 253-535-7586 Fax: 253-535-7315 <a href="mailto:archives@plu.edu">archives@plu.edu</a>
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	The oral history collection is open to all users.
<b>Additional Reference Guides</b>	
<b>Languages</b>	English
<b>Sponsor</b>	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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## Biographical Note

Esther Nilsen was born on March 5, 1902 in Oslo, Norway to Edvard Lund and Anne Kolstad. She had three brothers: Thorleif, Arthur, and Kåre, but Kaare died when he was one year and nine months old. Esther's father worked in a store, where he sold eggs and fruit, and the family lived in a modest home, which Edvard built. Esther attended grade school and high school in Oslo, in which she learned German and English. After high school, she went to telegraph school, where she learned the Morse code. From there, she advanced to a radio station, and in 1939, asked for a leave of absence to visit her aunt, Anna Hageness, in Gig Harbor, Washington. Esther was unaware of how close the war was to starting, and after the Germans came to Norway in April 1940, Esther was not permitted to return home. After staying with her aunt for a while, Esther went to Seattle, where she found housekeeping jobs. Esther already knew English, but at these jobs she did learn the American way of housekeeping and how to cook. She particularly enjoyed the fact that she was called by her first name in America. In 1939, Esther met her husband, Arvid Nilsen, at a Norwegian party in Seattle. Arvid was a sailor, and they were married four months later in San Pedro, CA. Arvid was away at work often, and Esther

obtained a job at the Norwegian Consulate in California. Esther and Arvid have visited Norway in 1958, 1971, and 1981. In 1971, they had planned to live there permanently but missed the United States and returned after a year and a half. Upon this return, they settled in Tacoma, Washington. Esther is an avid churchgoer at the Assembly of God church in Gig Harbor, which her aunt and Pastor Gray built. She still speaks Norwegian and maintains some Norwegian customs, such as Norwegian cooking.

## Lineage

Full Name: Esther Alfrida Lund Nilsen. Maiden Name: Esther Alfrida Lund. Father: Edvard Martin Lund. Mother: Anne Kathrine Kolstad. Paternal Grandfather: Ingebrit Holand. Maternal Grandmother: Anne Johnsen. Brothers and Sisters: Thorleif Pedder Olaf Lund, Arthur Lund, Kåre Lund. Spouse: Arvid Jenloft Nilsen.

## Content Description

This interview was conducted with Esther Nilsen on January 20, 1982 in Gig Harbor, Washington. It contains information on family background, schooling, emigration, work, and marriage, return to Norway, church involvement, and Norwegian heritage. The interview also contains a Norwegian children's songbook, various newspaper clippings, a drawing of Oslo, copies of the N.A.L NYTT (May/June 1939), the Call Bulletin of San Francisco (April 10, 1940), and photographs of Esther as a child, Esther at the Daughters of Norway (1980), and Esther and her husband Arvid at the time of the interview. Also see Arvid Nilsen. The interview was conducted in English.

## Use of the Collection

### Restrictions on Use

There are no restrictions on use.

## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

The Oral History collection project was started during an experimental course on Scandinavian Women in the Pacific Northwest. Students in the course were encouraged to interview women and learn about their experiences as immigrants to the United States. The project was continued and expanded with support from the president's office and by grants from the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, from the Joel E. Ferris Foundation and the Norwegian Emigration Fund of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project was directed by Dr. Janet E. Rasmussen. The collection was transferred to the Archives and Special Collections Department.

### Acquisition Information

### Related Materials

To search and view Pacific Lutheran University's digitized images, visit our [Digital Assets Website](#)

## Processing Note

The interview was conducted by Inger Nygaard Carr using a cassette recorder. A research copy was also prepared from the original. To further preserve the content of the interview, it is now being transferred to compact disc. We deliberately did not transcribe the entire interview because we want the researchers to listen to the interviewee's own voice. The transcription index highlights important aspects of the interview and the tape counter numbers noted on the Partial Interview Transcription are meant as approximate finding guides and refer to the location of a subject on the cassette/CD. The recording quality is good

The collection was transcribed by Mary Sue Gee, Julie Peterson and Becky Husby.

## Bibliography

Rasmussen, Janet Elaine. *New Land New Lives: Scandinavian Immigrants to the Pacific Northwest* Tacoma, Washington University of Washington Press 1993

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

The partial interview transcription highlights important aspects of the interview. Numbers may be used as guides to important subjects. Two numbers separated by a slash indicate that the first number is for cassette and the second for CD.

Container(s)	Description
Cassette	
133, side 1	004: Esther Alfrida Nilsen. The immigration officer canceled out her middle name. Maiden name was Lund. Born in Oslo, Norway on March 5, 1902.
133, side 1	011: PARENTS Edvard Martin Lund and Anne Kathrine Kolstad. They were deep Christian people. Had a big garden, berry bushes, apple and pear trees, and chickens. They lived outside of Oslo.
133, side 1	023: Father worked in a store, sold eggs and fruit. Parents were from Vega, Helgeland, north of Trondheim. Father used to fish in Northern Norway. Mother had lost many people at sea so she did not want to live in a fishing community.
133, side 1	042: BROTHERS Thorleif worked for an insurance company. Arthur worked in the Postal department. Kåre died when he was 1 year 9 months old. Her two brothers stayed in Oslo.
133, side 1	053: GRANDPARENTS

Container(s)	Description
	Maternal grandmother had a little coffee shop in Vega. Her name was Anna Johnson. Maternal grandfather passed away early. Paternal grandfather was Ingebrit Holand. Esther's father took a different name than his father.
133, side 1	086: CHILDHOOD HOME Father built it. Very ordinary home.
133, side 1	094: SCHOOL Went to grade school and high school in Oslo. She walked 40 minutes to school then took a streetcar. Three years of high school. Learned German six days a week and English five days a week. Had Norwegian every day.
133, side 1	110: Today they have taken lots of the Norwegian out of the schools. People do not go to church as often.
133, side 1	120: Talks about a niece who took medical exams in Norway. Her name was Lila Christenson (?). She went to school with Esther.
133, side 1	141: They have taken religion out of the schools. Esther was taught religion when she was in school.
133, side 1	153: CHRISTMAS Started three weeks before with cleaning and baking. The day before they trimmed the tree with homemade decorations.
133, side 1	163: CHRISTMAS EVE Went to church at 4pm. You could hear all the church bells ring. Went home and ate pork roast, rice pudding, dessert, and coffee for the adults. Children had mjød, julekake with fruit in it.
133, side 1	186: CHRISTMAS DAY Quiet family day. Second Christmas Day went out visiting. Kids started julebakk, have a mask, costume, and went around asking for goodies.
133, side 1	194: Father had a horse and sleigh. They all went sleighing. Went to church early Christmas day, sang beautiful hymns.
133, side 1	205: At Sunday school they had juletreffest. Had coffee, julekake, candy and went around the tree. Called it 21 Days of Christmas.
133, side 1	218:

Container(s)	Description
	After high school, Esther went to telegraph school for seven months. Learned Morse code.
133, side 1	228: She advanced up to a radio station. In 1939, she asked for a leave of absence to go to the U.S. to visit relatives. She wanted to see her mother's sister in Gig Harbor, Mrs. Hageness.
133, side 1	240: Was not aware of how close the war was. Esther received leave of absence. Her father could not understand why she wanted to go. In April 1940, the Germans came into Norway. Esther left Norway in June 1939. She could not get back to Norway after the war started.
133, side 1	255: TRIP OVER Beautiful. Came on the Stavangerfjord, second-class. She went with a girlfriend of hers, Anna Hendrickson, who had experienced a bad marriage in Norway. She came to stay with relatives in Kent.
133, side 1	268: Esther spoke English when she came so she did not have many problems.
133, side 1	275: Trip took over nine days. Landed in New York. Went to stay with friends in Ottawa, Canada, Osmund Holand. He was from the same district in Norway.
133, side 1	289: Saw Indians that surprised her. They were short and fat. They traveled across Canada to Vancouver, B.C.
133, side 1	294: Met her cousin from Gig Harbor, Olai Hageness. Esther went to his parent's house. She was stuck there, could not go back to Norway.
133, side 1	305: Went to Seattle and started to work in houses. Worked for the Blethen's. He was part owner of the Seattle Times.
133, side 1	314: Was a maid in homes. Learned the American way of cooking and housekeeping.
133, side 1	317: FIRST PLACE OF WORK Woman had a terrible temper. She was a schoolteacher. The man was a quiet businessman. Daughter played the piano well. Esther ironed shirts and

Container(s)	Description
	cleaned. Couldn't cook because she had never cooked in Norway. Stayed here for about three months at \$30 a month. Made \$50 at the Blethen's.
133, side 1	340: Mentions above lady who was a very good cook. She taught Esther how to cook pudding. Esther made a mistake and the woman's temper came out. Esther did not want to be treated like that anymore. She gave Esther a good recommendation.
133, side 1	358: SECOND PLACE OF WORK She worked for a shipping company. The wife was a help to Esther. Did not stay here long because they accused her of having men in her room.
133, side 1	376: THIRD JOB Stayed eight days. They called her 'maid' and she did not like this.
133, side 1	381: Stayed with the Blethen's for eight years. They were nice people. Arvid and Esther moved to San Pedro, California for his job. He was a fisherman. They were married in the Seaman's Church in San Pedro in 1943.
133, side 1	390: Esther learned to cook at the last place she worked in Seattle.
133, side 1	400: Most exciting thing about America at first was that she was called by her first name. This made her feel like she was included in the group. She stayed with her family in Gig Harbor for six months before she went to work in Seattle for various families.
133, side 1	418: TRIP BACK TO NORWAY IN 1958 Stayed for nine months. She worked at her old job. Arvid worked for a firm in Oslo.
133, side 1	435: MOST DIFFICULT THING IN AMERICA Had to have a student's passport so she could get money for studying English. She was writing up papers to stay in the U.S. She had problems because she was not supposed to work. Her student passport disappeared. Her cousin went to straighten things out.
133, side 1	460: She got her first papers in 1940. She could now work with these papers.
133, side 1	471: MEETING HER HUSBAND

Container(s)	Description
	Met Arvid Nilsen in 1939 at a Norwegian party in Seattle. She knew she liked him from the first. They were married in February 1943. She was working at the Blethen's.
133, side 1	496: WEDDING Married in San Pedro, California. Arvid was sailing between Panama and San Pedro. Norwegian colony in San Pedro made the wedding plans. Pastor Stenson was the manager of the wedding. Captain of the ship walked her up the aisle. The men all had their sea uniforms on.
133, side 1	527: Did not have much money when they married. Esther worked for the Norwegian Consulate in California. Did typing. She worked for them for a few years.
133, side 1	586: Arvid was working on Norwegian fishing vessels as an engineer in San Pedro during the war. Had about six ships a day come into the harbors. Esther met many seamen working at the Norwegian Consulate.
133, side 1	629: Esther had contact with a girlfriend in Norway. She received a letter from her with black edges representing sorrow. Her friend was put in a concentration camp.
133, side 1	636: Got a Red Cross letter from her family in Norway, which said "Esther, I am so happy you are in the U.S."
133, side 2	SIDE II:
133, side 2	010: TRIPS BACK TO NORWAY Esther worked for a Telegraph Co. Arvid worked for an engineering firm in Oslo. He went to Scotland, Germany, and other places to work on Norwegian ships. Esther and Arvid were often separated.
133, side 2	020: Came back to the U.S. after nine months. They loved Norway but missed the U.S. Norway was more formal and the U.S. is more relaxed.
133, side 2	029: TRIP TO NORWAY IN SUMMER OF 1981 They missed their church in Tacoma. They have learned much about their Lord at their church.
133, side 2	040:

Container(s)	Description
	In 1958 they came back to San Pedro. In 1960 they moved to Northern California because Arvid worked very hard in San Pedro and need a change.
133, side 2	050: In 1971 they left the U.S. to live in Norway. Arvid had many relatives in Norway. They lived there for one and a half years in Stakken, two hours from Oslo. Arvid worked as an engineer.
133, side 2	060: They moved back to the U.S. in 1973. Esther's cousin offered them some property in Gig Harbor. They decided to buy property elsewhere.
133, side 2	070: They sold their house, furniture, car, etc when left Norway. They built here in Tacoma.
133, side 2	082: Esther goes to the Assembly of God church in Gig Harbor. Esther's Aunt Anna Hageness and Pastor Gray built the church.
133, side 2	100: Esther could not go back to Norway and live, not the way it is now. Believes Russia may be a danger for Norway.
133, side 2	108: Condition of young people has changed. Has occurred all over Europe. This is what the war did. During the war, people were always together helping each other.
133, side 2	126: Talks about God coming soon. Feels Satan is involved in many things of the world today. Esther is not baptized in the Holy Sprit.
133, side 2	140: BROUGHT THINGS OVER FROM NORWAY Paintings and a lamp.
133, side 2	158: MAINTAINS NORWEGIAN CUSTOMS Still speaks Norwegian. Does Norwegian cooking. Christmas Eve they have lutefisk and meatballs.
133, side 2	173: Esther's family is really Norwegian. They have family reunions with the Hageness'. They are from Stavanger.
133, side 2	180:



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Speaks in Norwegian. She reads a poem.

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## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Christmas  
Education--Norway  
Education--Norway  
Emigration and immigration  
Family--Norway  
Marriage service  
Norway -- Social conditions - 1945  
Norwegian-Americans--Ethnic identity  
Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs  
Return migration -- United States  
Return migration -- Norway  
World War, 1939-1945

### Personal Names :

Holand, Ingebrit  
Johnsen, Anne  
Nilsen, Arvid  
Hageness, Anna  
Hageness, Olai  
Kolstad, Anne  
Lund, Edvard  
Nilsen, Esther--Interviews  
(creator)

### Corporate Names :

Assemblies of God (Gig Harbor, Wash.)  
Stavangerfjord (Steamship)

### Family Names :

Hageness family  
Holand family  
Johnsen family  
Kolstad family  
Lund family  
Nelson family  
Nilsen family

### Geographical Names :

Gig Harbor (Wash.)  
Oslo (Norway)  
San Pedro (Calif.)  
Seattle (Wash.)  
Tacoma (Wash.)

### Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Domestics

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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