

Dagny Bergitte Unsgaard Nygaard Oral History Interview, 1978

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Nygaard, Dagny Bergitte Unsgaard
Title	Dagny Bergitte Unsgaard Nygaard Oral History Interview
Dates	1978 (inclusive) 1978 1978
Quantity	3 file folders 4 photographs 1 sound cassette 2 compact discs
Collection Number	t008
Summary	An oral history interview with Dagny Bergitte Unsgaard Nygaard, a Norwegian immigrant.
Repository	Pacific Lutheran University, Archives and Special Collections Archives and Special Collections Pacific Lutheran University 12180 Park Avenue South Tacoma, Washington 98447 Telephone: 253-535-7586 Fax: 253-535-7315 archives@plu.edu
Access Restrictions	The oral history collection is open to all users.
Additional Reference Guides	
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Biographical Note

Dagny Bergitte Nygaard was born on August 31, 1899 in Tydal, Norway. Her parents were David Unsgaard and Berit Stuedal, and there were seven children in the family: Ingrid, Kair, Johannes, Inga, Peder, Dagny, and Ivar. Dagny's father had attended carpentry school and specialized in furniture-making, and her mother was trained as a midwife. Dagny married Lars Nygaard and had two children-Inger, born in Tydal, Norway, and Thelma, born in Grygla, MN. Lars was also a carpenter and immigrated to America in 1928 to find employment. He stayed at Ole and Ellen Aune's farm in Minnesota during the winter and spent the summers doing carpentry in Montana in order to earn enough money for Dagny and Inger to emigrate as well. Dagny and Inger emigrated in September 1930, and the family spent the first winter with the Aunes. The following spring they moved to Grygla, MN and sharecropped a farm. Lars also owned cows and sold the milk and cream. Learning the language was the hardest thing for Dagny to adjust to, but she especially learned after Inger began school. In Grygla, she also joined her church's Ladies Aid and was elected secretary, which helped her

improve even more. On March 1, 1942, Lars went to the West Coast to find work in the shipyards, and Dagny and the girls joined him on the first of April. They moved to a small farm outside of Freeborn, WA, and Inger and Thelma attended school in Everett. While in America, Dagny continued to cook Norwegian food including risengrynsgrøt, lutefisk, lefse, and flatbread. She also churned her own butter while living on the farm.

Lineage

Full Name: Dagny Bergitte Nygaard. Maiden Name: Dagny Bergitte Unsgaard. Father: David Unsgaard. Mother: Berit Stueda. Paternal Grandfather: Esten Jonsen Unsgaard. Paternal Grandmother: Ingrid Evavold. Maternal Grandfather: Peder Stuedal. Maternal Grandmother: Kari Graae. Brothers and Sisters: Ingrid Unsgaard, Kari Unsgaard, Johannes Unsgaard, Inga Unsgaard, Peder Rangvold Unsgaard, Ivar Johan Unsgaard. Spouse: Lars Nygaard. Children: Inger Nygaard Carr, Thelma Nygaard Schwarz.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Dagny Nygaard on April 27, 1978 in Stanwood, Washington. It contains information on family background, emigration, marriage and family life, and Norwegian heritage. The interview also includes a picture Dagny's home in Tydal, Norway, a picture of Dagny leaving Norway, a picture of Dagny in 1982, a picture of Dagny and her husband Lars in 1982, and Dagny's life memoirs. Also see Lars Nygaard.

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

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	
8, side 1	004: BACKGROUND Born on August 31, 1899, married Lars Nygaard, two children--Inger Nygaard Carr and Thelma Constance Nygaard Schwarz. [004-017 is in Norwegian.] Husband is a carpenter trained in Norway. He came to America in 1928 because carpenter jobs were scarce in Norway. In northern Minnesota, the family sharecropped a farm, worked hard, built a house and got chickens. In sharecropping, the owner furnishes the land and seed and receives 50 per cent of the crop, but Lars owned the cows and sold milk and cream.
8, side 1	067: EMIGRATION There wasn't much work to be had in Norway so Lars went to America [in 1928] two years before Dagny and Inger. During the winter, he stayed at Ellen and Ole Aune's MN farm. The Aune's had a niece in MT married to a contractor. Lars worked two summers in Montana for him doing carpentry and earning enough money to send for Dagny and Inger. Dagny lived with her father who had leased a home to a young couple, but kept rooms for himself and Dagny. In the summer of 1929, they packed everything and went to Oslo. However, they were refused visas "because you [Inger] were too fat!" and because of an enlarged, red birthmark on Inger's hand. Dagny felt the reasons were silly, but they returned to Tydal. Embarrassed because she had been refused a visa, Dagny readily accepted an invitation to live with her sister's family

Container(s)	Description
	<p>in Kjyrksetuaia on the West Coast of Norway south of Trondheim. A nurse also boarded there and she wrote to a doctor about Inger's condition and the refused visas. They also thought the reasons were ridiculous. And in the spring they moved back to an uncle's house in Tydal and then reapplied for visas in September 1930.</p>
8, side 1	<p>182: Lars' oldest brother had worked in the mines in Butte, MT and advised Lars not to do that. This brother returned home and took over the homeplace. Dagny felt that it wasn't too hard to have her husband leave; it's simply what had to be. Dagny's father felt bad when she left, but they saw one another again.</p>
8, side 1	<p>216: Dagny is writing her memoirs and in it, she quotes Iver Aasen, a Norwegian writer: "Stor arv det er for mannen av godtfolk vera foedd" [it's a large inheritance for man to be born of good people]. Both her mom and dad were outstanding people. Mother was a midwife in the Tydal area having trained two and a half years at an Oslo clinic. At a birth, she delivered the baby, stayed a couple of days with the mother and the newborn, and visited again within the first week. She made the mothers stay in bed one week. Jordmors were paid by the distance and the case, but not everyone had money. After socialized medicine came in, she received adequate payment for her services. Because there was no doctor available, she had monthly office hours and helped with general medical problems. For instance she helped Lars' mother who died of cancer of the uterus at the age of 49. Dagny's dad had gone to carpentry school and specialized in making furniture. There weren't many jobs in the mountain valley where they lived, but there was a tourist resort. He made all the carved furniture for that. They also had a small farm and took in some overnight visitors. Her father wrote and published some poems. He went blind at 88 and died at 90. After grammar school Dagny had attended a nine month course to learn a trade. Following that year, she worked in a store for two years. Her mother died while she was working at this store, and she quit and returned to care for the family and home.</p>
8, side 1	<p>346: Dagny's ancestors were all farmers and active in civic life. Her mother had five brothers: one took over the homeplace and the others managed to get an education and good jobs [engineer, Oslo raadhus, etc]. There was a total of seven children in Dagny's family, and they all wanted more education. However, they lived too far from a large city and didn't have the opportunity. One sister had a year of teacher's training and taught. Her brother, Ivar, became a representative to the parliament with only the basic country education. He was very active in local government as a young man. All were farmfolk but interested in civic affairs. The oldest uncle, Ole Stugegaard? was especially active.</p>
8, side 1	425: TRIP

Container(s)	Description
	<p>The trip over was fine: nice people, good food, clean boat. Dagny was seasick only one day. They traveled on the Stavangerfjord with Norwegian people who were returning to their American homes. Dagny carried no money on her but received 50 dollars from the customs people [part of the travel arrangement]. In America, they went straight from the boat to the train. The train trip took a long time, but she continued to be aided by Norwegian-speaking travelers. On the train, she had her first piece of pie--blueberry.</p>
8, side 1	<p>474: Gust and Berit Saxvold drove to the depot in a Model T with curtains on the side. As Lars was still working in MT, they picked up Dagny and Inger. Dagny thought America was dirty compared to Norway. At the Saxvold farm, many Norwegian friends came to visit her.</p>
8, side 1	<p>507: SETTLING IN When Lars returned from MT, they stayed with Ole and Ellen Aune the first winter. Lars did chores and Dagny helped in the house. It was here that Inger fell and hurt her back which gave Dagny a real scare--thought she was dead at first. The language was all Norwegian. The hardest thing to adjust to was the language when they moved from Gatzke to Grygla. Other hardships included the Depression and the small houses in America compared to their Norwegian home. Here there were three-four beds in the same room.</p>
8, side 1	<p>550: FAMILY LIFE IN AMERICA Dagny learned the language little by little, especially after Inger started school. Then, they obtained a radio, and Dagny continued to read. After moving to Grygla, she joined the Ladies Aid in church and became secretary. She had to write and read the minutes, so that really helped her with the language. Thelma was born at Grygla and Inger began school there. They had a nice, but small, house. After a couple of years, they added on, and Dagny got her first washing machine. The land was good and produced fine crops. But one fall was so wet, they couldn't get into the fields to harvest the crops. The family had to find another situation.</p>
8, side 1	<p>591: The landlord, Erik Erikson, was good to them. He wanted to help find another farm to rent and continually upgraded the methods of farming. In the beginning they farmed with teams of mules and horses, but then got a tractor. Lars got carpentry work, and between that and Dagny milking about 10 cows, they survived. Later they bought a house and moved into Grygla for one and a half years. But because the carpentry work in MN was too seasonable to support the family, they moved to another farm. This house was old and small; the girls slept on a sofa in the living room. They didn't have much furniture, but did manage to acquire an old sewing machine of which Dagny made good use. There was no problem with food during the Depression because of living on the farm.</p>
8, side 1	<p>648: Dagny Bergitte Unsgaard Nygaard Oral History Interview, 1978 http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv60194</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>During the war years, she didn't hear anything from Norway unless letters were smuggled into and sent from Sweden. She had a first cousin, Marik?, married to a klokker; both were very anti-Nazi. He and some other fellows went to the mountains anticipating the invasion, but were caught. One boy was shot, and the others were taken to an interment camp. All of her relatives stayed true to Norway. Since they all had farms, food was not a problem if the Nazi's didn't take it.</p>
8, side 1	<p>704: Dagny and Lars lived on the MN farm during WWII, and she worked off and on. In 1942, Lars went to Great Falls, MT to work on an airfield; Dagny kept up the home and milked the cows. The farm was close to town so that Inger could walk to school. Lars came back when Inger finished the eighth grade. They had earned enough money to send Inger to a Crookston boarding school, Agricultural College. The AC was for farm families and the school year was a six-month session. The bus rides to the public school would have been too long.</p>
8, side 1	<p>740: MOVE TO WEST COAST Henning, Lars' brother, took over the farm chores, and Lars went West on March 1, 1942, to find work at the shipyards. When Inger finished school on the first of April, the family packed up and moved . Dagny left the washer and sewing machine behind but took all the home-canned goods. Traveling by rail, they joined Lars in Everett where he had found work.</p>
8, side 2	<p>027: He was a layout man, the rest did the nailing. The pay was mediocre, but he worked long hours and managed to support the family. Inger began high school in Everett, and Thelma went into the third grade.</p>
8, side 2	<p>060: Dagny liked the West Coast and the mountains--it reminded her of Norway; she hadn't seen a mountain since she left. However, she found the weather colder here. At the end of the summer, Lars returned to MN to sell the remaining furniture and the cows. He shipped the washer and the sewing machine back to Everett. The family moved to a small farm with five cows outside Freeborn.</p>
8, side 2	<p>116: NORWEGIAN TRADITIONS Lars went to Alaska for three summers and left Dagny with the home and farm again. Before returning to Norway in 1952, they sold all the cows except one. Inger finished school and began work in Bellingham. She met and married Bill Carr, and eventually they had a family of seven children. Thelma started college at Pacific Lutheran and met Roy Schwarz. She taught school in Tacoma until he graduated. She continued to teach in Seattle and put him through medical school at the U. of WA. They still like Norwegian food, and Dagny cooks risengrynsgrøet, lutefisk, lefse, and flatbread. On the farm she always churned her own butter. In Norway, cards and gifts were not important at Christmas; they concentrated on the food. The Christmas holiday lasted two</p>

Container(s)	Description
	weeks and consisted mostly of visiting and eating. Christmas Eve was spent at home, and began when the church bells rang at 5 pm. Church was held on Christmas Day.
8, side 2	252: EDUCATION "You get more in Norway in a shorter time, I'll tell you that". The people are great readers and many have a gift for writing poems on any occasion. She feels the training in school encouraged both habits. The same teacher was present for all Dagny's eight years in the two-room schoolhouse. There was an assistant for the lower grades. All the seven children received straight A's, even though Peder had an accident and lost partial sight in one eye. The children were taught how to read at home before starting school. When Peder was taught at the age of six, Dagny sat across the table and learned to read upside down.
8, side 2	330: In Norway there was a ladies group, a woman's organization similar to the Red Cross, and a mission group. The people did not have offerings in church, because the ministers and religion were supported by the state. But, money would be raised to support missions. In school, the children had to learn a new psalm every week. Most learning took place by rote. Education was always important to the Unsgaard family.
8, side 2	390: Socialized medicine is good in Norway. Of course, one pays for it through taxes, but medical care is readily available and good. It was better for her mother, because she was then paid regularly.
8, side 2	463: Dagny continues to write Norwegian letters to two sisters-in-law. She speaks a few words of Norwegian.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Emigration and immigration
 Family--Norway
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs
 Ocean travel
 Railroad travel

Personal Names :

Nygaard, Dagny--Interviews
 (creator)
 Aune, Ellen
 Aune, Ole

Carr, Inger Nygaard
Nygaard, Lars
Schwarz, Thelma Nygaard
Unsgaard, Ingrid
Unsgaard, Ivar Johan
Unsgaard, Kari
Unsgaard, Peder Rangvold
Berit, Stuedal
Unsgaard, David
Unsgaard, Inga
Unsgaard, Johannes

Corporate Names :

Stavangerfjord (Steamship)

Family Names :

Nygaard family
Unsgaard family

Geographical Names :

Freeborn (Wash.)
Grygla (Minn.)
Montana
Tydal (Norway)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Midwives

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
2004