

00:00 Today is October 2, 1994, and I am at the home of my cousin Esther Thune, who lives in the Toby Jones complex in the north end of Tacoma. I'm here to interview Esther in connection with the 100th anniversary, or rededication, of the Old Main building at Pacific Lutheran University which has come to be known as Harstad Hall.

Esther Thune is the oldest of 21 grandchildren of our founder, Reverend Bjug Harstad and his wife, Guro Harstad. Esther, being the first born grandchild, would be the elder statesperson for all of the other Harstads. I, being grandchild number 18, she definitely has seniority over me.

We'll be talking today about some of Esther's early recollections as they pertain to the early days at Pacific Lutheran University to the extent that she was connected with that school. Also in connection with her personal acquaintance with her grandfather and grandmother, Reverend Bjug and Mrs. Guro Harstad. I want to ask Esther first, what might be some of her earliest recollections of her grandfather and grandmother when she was a little child.

01:50 Well...there was a recollection of a white haired grandfather giving me a ride on his foot and saying old Scandinavian poems [Norwegian poem]

02:16 Translate please.

02:21 Yes. Ride ride a ranka... It's a little like, "Ride a rock horse to Banbury Cross. Ride ride ranka, my horse can bump you, my horse can send you and your doll over end." And when the end came up, he would kick me off his foot. I do remember some old grandfather, and I think that one was Bjug, although I had another grandfather with a white beard, playing that with me. But he seldom played because he was a very busy person. Even though he was 64 years old when I was born, he was still when I was a small child he was still the preacher, minister, at the Parkland church as well as two country churches that he went out to. And he often went on synod matters to the Middle West, which we called East.

03:36 That was one of your earliest recollections of Bjug. At least you did catch him for one fleeting moment to get a ride on his foot. That's interesting. Then, if Bjug was around, I suppose his wife, your grandmother, was also there. Do you have any recollections of your first contacts with her?

04:12 Oh, yes! A lot of recollections. I can remember when she used to churn butter. Of course, when she would milk the cows I would walk down to the barn with her. Also, her son sometimes milked the cows.

04:31 Esther, let's explain where these various locations are. You mentioned a barn and we mentioned Bjug and Guro's residence. The residence where they lived at is now at the address

of 1220 South A Street. When Esther mentioned the barn on that property, can you tell us where that was approximately?

05:02 Well it was down close to Pacific Avenue and that makes a street there.

05:05 124th I believe it is. So that would be in a spot, approximately, where a church, Parkland Lutheran Church and School, is now located. Interesting.

05:25 The chicken coop was over in the other, opposite corner of the property.

05:40 The chicken coop was up towards 121st, near A Street. Do you recall how one got up to the property from say, Pacific Lutheran University, How you got up to the Harstad's home?

06:00 Oh yes, there were, what you used to call the stone steps. They weren't really stone, they were cement steps. There was a stone rookery on the path on the way up there and we used to walk down to the store at Parkland by going that way. Through a small gate at the bottom of the property.

06:25 Back to Mrs. Harstad again. She seemed to be in charge of milking the cows. Is that accurate?

06:30 She really ran the farm.

06:32 She ran the whole farm. And her children, did they contribute?

06:38 Oh, they worked! Yes, they helped. My father talked about how hard he had to work as a child growing up.

06:49 I've heard over and over again, that if it hadn't been for Guro Harstad, the family would not have been able to do nearly as well as it did. With the frequent absences of Bjug, as you mentioned, to the Midwest, to various conferences, and of course, at one time, taking off to the gold fields of Alaska. This must have left everything in the hands of Guro.

07:18 Yes, She was a good manager. I remember one time, some poor unfortunate man had come to tell his story to Grandpa. Whatever happened he went away satisfied and one of my uncles said, "Oh, Pa would give his shirt off his back to somebody who told him a hardback story. And he always said the Lord will provide. But what the lord has provided him with mostly, was a good wife who could manage." She was a very good manager.

08:01 So we have a glimpse of the Reverend. and Mrs. Harstad, living on the hillside on the east side of Pacific Avenue. And, as we know, not very far away was the school which Reverend Harstad was instrumental in founding. Esther, can you tell us anything about your recollections about what is now Pacific Lutheran University and the buildings on the campus?

08:34 Not too much. I just took it for granted. By the time I was old enough to remember, Grandpa had ended his — about 1917 — he had ended his relationship with Pacific Lutheran University and his preaching with churches. Working out at Yelm, for instance.

One of the interesting things that I recollect about Grandma, she would drive the horse, Fanny, an old horse, and the carriage. I was a little girl, but she showed me how to buggy down a hill. Right

on that 121st Street hill there. She showed me how you put the brake on so you wouldn't run over the horse.

09:28 So she also used, what was it, a carriage of some sort? hitched up behind the horse. Did she have someone hitch it up to the horse or did she do that?

09:40 Oh I think she did it all herself.

09:41 She was very capable of doing that sort of thing.

09:42 She was very efficient.

09:43 And was that their primary mode of transportation then? Or did they walk?

09:47 Walking! Walking was even more important.

09:51 On what occasion would they hitch up the carriage? Do you recall?

09:58 Well, I suppose when she went down to get groceries. I think we went down to visit someone. I used to ride with her in the carriage a little bit.

10:10 Was there somewhat of a business community in Parkland at that time?

10:13 Oh yes! There was a store, two stores I think. The post office was in the store farthest on the left... Leman's store, I think it used to be.

10:29 You said as long as you can remember the building was on the campus and that you kind of, your words, "took it for granted". Do you ever recall going over to the campus?

10:45 Yes, I remember going over when I was little. I think my father and his brothers liked to go to the games at the old gymnasium that was down there. I suppose it was basketball, but I remember going to some affairs there at the old gymnasium.

11:07 You mentioned your father, can you tell us a little bit about him? About him, and where he was in the family of Bjug and guru.

11:14 Well he was the oldest living one. They lost their first three.

11:21 Back in North Dakota.

11:22 The first ones are buried back there. Then Marie was his older sister died when he was about 19.

11:35 When your father was about nineteen years old. I understand Marie was about 21, or thereabouts, when she died. So your father was Theodore, the oldest of the surviving brothers and sisters. Would you tell us a little bit about his life and his work?

12:02 He was a lumberman. He started in very young. Working, and later owning, a lumber mill out at Celtic Junction first. And then he joined his cousins in Yelm in a lumber mill there, from 1918 until about 1926. Then they sold the lumber mill in Yelm and he and two of his cousins bought a lumber

mill in Broomfield, about a mile from South Prairie. Broomfield was a lumber camp. And they had bought woods up above there on the hill.

12:52 So your father was a businessman in the Tacoma area, generally in Western Washington.

Before, we spoke of Esther's father. She recalled going down to the Pacific Lutheran University campus, at least once. Maybe with your father, and some uncles perhaps, and attending some sports event. You think maybe it was a basketball game in the gymnasium?

13:30 Sometimes they had programs there too, where people performed.

13:34 Have any recollections of any such programs?

13:38 Well later on my uncle Adolph used to. He sang in some operetta. I don't know if that was at Pacific Lutheran University or at Lincoln High School.

13:55 Back when you were a child, you mentioned you visited Parkland area even though you had gone to live with your parents at the various sites of your father's lumber mills. You mention you came to Parkland and spent some time at the home of your grandparents.

14:16 Yes, when my brother and I were small children, we loved to go down to our grandparents house when they were having hay. My younger uncles drove a wagon around and picked up the hay. We thought that was great fun. Then we'd pitch it into the barn because my grandmother ran a regular little farm. She had a few cows, and a few chickens and the horse Fanny, who was the carriage horse. But was also used for plowing the fields and the garden.

14:57 Very interesting. To me especially, because I and my family live on that very premises that you are speaking about.

15:05 The orchard was there. There is still quite a bit of the orchard left.

15:10 Amazingly, there are still quite a few of the apple trees there from 100 years ago or more, planted by a Ward T. Smith, which are still producing abundantly and which we are enjoying to this very day.

15:28 I remember that. I remember lying out under the apple tree while your dad read, 'Enoch Garden,' which was a high school assignment. He read it aloud to me.

15:37 So you remember a fair amount of time, in your early years, coming to Parkland visiting with your relatives.

15:48 Yes, I used to visit there at least a week every summer. And my parents would drive down, after we had an old Model T Ford, which we drove often on Sundays to Parkland to go to the church service.

16:08 So cars are here now. Did Bjug have a car?

16:10 Oh no, oh no no. He was always curious about everything new, and interested in everything new. He wanted to learn how to drive my father's car. So one day my father took him out on A Street and

they decided to drive a little. But he got excited and he steered towards the ditch and he said, "Whoa!" He called out to the steering wheel! My father had to step on the brake and stop before they went into the ditch. Somehow after that my father never had time to teach him again.

16:54 Or was a little reluctant to, for personal safety reasons. That's a good story. I wonder if Bjug ever tried to drive a car after that incident?

17:07 I don't think so. A horse was enough for him.

17:10 Esther, I think we'll take a little break at this point.

We're back after a delightful little interlude in which Esther played a couple of Bach numbers on her harpsichord. And made us a nice cup of coffee. Now we are ready to talk a little bit more about Grandma and Grandpa Harstad. Esther mentioned that when she lived in Yelm she had a recollection of Reverend Bjug coming out to Yelm. Can you tell us about that?

17:48 Yes. There was a little country church, like a little brown Church in the Vale, about a mile out of Yelm. I think it was an old one-room school. Grandpa used to come out and hold church services for a few people, Lutherans, out there in the country, in Yelm. He'd see the Martins, the Lindstroms, the Iversons, and us. And I'm sure there were a lot of others.

He'd come out on the train on Saturdays. On Saturday we had a bible study and the beginnings of before we had Catechism. The children would have a meeting and I always thought it was great fun. Because we'd meet at the different houses and after we finished our lessons the hostess would always have some refreshments. Then we'd play outside. Then he'd have a short Sunday school lesson before church on Sunday morning. I attended that. He talked with patience to us children, which was nice.

19:18 I remember a comment that you made, that you may be a little reluctant to mention. That you were one of Bjug Harstad's best confirmands. That's what I heard.

19:32 Oh, where did you hear that? Oh I was not! I didn't think I was anyway.

19:40 I heard you studied very diligently and were a favorite student.

19:48 Oh, I didn't know that. I know I was very impressed and I did study. But I wasn't good at memorizing the exact words like you were supposed to.

20:04 Esther, you have a marvelous memory, even remembering some of the families out in Yelm. So you had him come out to your home, in Yelm, and he would preach on Sunday morning, presumably. Or did he go back?

20:24 Yes.

20:25 Then returned to Parkland by train again. Is that how he traveled?

20:27 Yes, that's how he traveled.

20:30 I don't think we still have a train route going out that way, or do we?

20:34 I don't know.

20:35 You mentioned something about Bjug's personal preference to rest in the afternoon. Can you tell us about that?

20:48 Oh yes. Both Grandma and Grandpa took a nap after lunch, in the afternoon. Setting a good example for all of us.

But afterwards, we always had what they called cupytee. One time, I asked why I never saw tea. Grandma would always have sweets for the people with the sweet tooth, and coffee, and milk for the children. When I asked why they didn't have tea, Grandpa said 'tee' was Norwegian for time. Cupytee was coffee time.

21:38 Of course! You mentioned that he had a certain interest in a dirigible, or a balloon, that was moored at the Air Force Base.

21:48 Oh yes! The Shenandoah dirigible, in 1924, came to Tacoma. Grandpa was so interested in it and he spoke to my father about it. So my father decided to take us out to the airport. I suppose it was out where McChord field is now. I'm not sure, it must have been there. And so we all went out to see the dirigible. Grandpa later wanted to have a ride on an airplane, during the late 1920s. So my father took him out there one day. We didn't go, the rest of us. And I never did find out whether he actually took an airplane ride or not.

22:50 While we were on "break" you mentioned some of Bjug's activities after he retired. You mentioned that he did some hobby kinds of things. Do you want to comment on that?

23:09 Yes, he did something unusual because he had never been a hand worker. He made some garden furniture out of some old, dead apple tree limbs. I guess they were from the apple trees. And for years we used them outdoors. A chair and a loveseat and I suppose there was a table.

23:36 Gosh Esther, now that you mention that, I just hope they are not the items of furniture I used for kindling when we moved to that house.

23:47 They were old and wearing out as I remember.

23:49 Now I've got a guilty conscience. At some point I'm going to ask you about one of your later visits with Bjug. Bjug died in 1933, I believe it was. Followed, not too long afterwards by Mrs. Harstad, who had a stroke, I believe, prior to her death and was somewhat handicapped as a result of that stroke.

23:58 Yes, that was shortly after their 50th anniversary, she had her stroke. Oh, I should've told you about their 50th wedding anniversary.

24:33 Let's hear about that. I see pictures of it and am curious. Are there any stories?

24:43 We had a dinner, Lydia and Louise prepared a dinner for us, down at Parkland.

24:49 Lydia and Louise being the two daughters of Bjug's family?

24:55 Yes. After we had finished eating, Grandpa went into the study and he came out carrying a heart-shaped box of chocolates and gave it to Grandma. That made such an impression on me. That was so touching. I never forgot.

25:17 Neat. I had never heard that little story before. You mentioned that one of your last visits with Bjug was particularly poignant in your memory?

25:35 Yes, I had heard that he was not doing well at all, physically. So I took the streetcar out to Parkland from Tacoma to visit him and see how he was. As I visited him, I think his kidneys were failing and he was very low, he said to me, "Well, it looks as though I'm going to —" I thought, "Oh dear, he's going to say die!" He brightened up a little and said, "Get better." I wondered if he said that just to cheer me up. He didn't get better, he died within a week or two.

26:24 Did he speak to you in English?

26:26 Yes, he did. I was thinking about that the other day. He seemed to realize, I guess, that my parents didn't, weren't, interested in teaching us Norwegian. But I did pick up a lot because sometimes when we went to church, it was in Norwegian. Three Sundays out of the month down at Parkland, and the fourth Sunday... Many times we didn't get there on English Sunday. so I heard quite a bit of Norwegian, picked up a few words.

Grandpa always had prayers before every meal and at coffee time too I think. He was just obeying a biblical order, "Pray at all times." Sometimes, I suppose it embarrassed the family.

Oh, yes, when they had their 50th anniversary, my brother had wanted to go to a lumber camp and lumber mill. We took a trip. The family wanted to see the woods and lumber mill and so we had mounted a bunch of benches on a flat car. The family sat up on the benches and rode up into the woods and came back. Grandpa was along and after, at the end of the day, we all went to the lumber cookhouse where the lumberjacks ate.

We sat at these long tables that were covered in oil cloth and heavy crockery. Just before we sat down to eat, Grandpa stood up and said, "We will pray before we eat!" and launched into one of his before meal prayers. The lumberjacks were shocked, I think, surprised. But he always prayed before and after meals. Oh and another thing, when he was obeying one of these orders in the Bible, "Visit your friends who are ill and those who are in prison." One time he was riding with us to see Theander —

29:13 His son?

29:14 Yes. We were driving through Walla Walla and he wanted to stop and go into the penitentiary. So we stopped and let him go into the penitentiary. And I think some of the family in the car were embarrassed to be parked out in front of the penitentiary. They couldn't understand why he wanted to go in there. But he did. I never did find out if he prayed with the prisoners or what he actually did in there. But he went in to visit prisoners I guess. Which is interesting.

He retired at about the age 80.

30:11 Retired from the act of ministry altogether?

30:13 Yes.

30:16 It's been my understanding that grandfather Bjug was somewhat brought back in beyond the point where he felt he could best serve in the ministry. Brought back in, I say, because there were some problems within the local church, and for lack of another person, I believe, Bjug was often brought back into situations against his better judgment.

Esther, some of the things you mentioned, his propensity for obeying the scriptural injunctions to pray without ceasing and not be intimidated by earthly things, gives us a little bit of a picture of this man's spirit and how he operated.

I said that I would not ask you to tell the story, but I am going to tell a little story and ask if you will verify. It's been said that perhaps during the prohibition period or perhaps after, that Bjug was not opposed to smoking tobacco. Either a pipe or cigar... or cigarettes, do you think?

Also, he liked a glass of brew now and then. So at one point his daughters, who were probably the caretakers of the home, as grandfather and grandmother were in their upper ages, noticed that there was some discoloration on the ceiling in the kitchen. Upon further investigation they found that there was some brewing going on on the second floor.

And Bjug was implicated as far as Lydia and Louise found that he was making a batch of homebrew and that it either popped a cork or flowed over the top of the crock that he was brewing it in. He evidently received a stern admonition from his daughters not to brew anymore in the family home. I thought it was interesting, but maybe it was a little bit risqué to tell in this interview.

Esther, we've kept you going for quite a while here. Do you feel like we can talk more or do you want to soon wrap it up? I like, especially like, hearing some of these vignettes that you come up with after a little bit of thought.

33:32 Oh, I remember one now. I was often there when interesting things happened.

33:36 Just happened to be there?

33:39 Yes, just happened to be there. Nils Hong was a friend of his that often came up to see him, Another old friend of his was A.J. Hall. They were friends of my family I know.

33:50 A.J. Hall?

33:58 Hall, yes. His wife, Julia was a Satra. And it was old man Satra who was a friend of my grandfathers . But there was another thing I was thinking of.

34:12 I recall that there was an elderly widow who lived in their home. With Bjug and Guro, up until the time that they died. And she was the widow of one of the early faculty members at Pacific Lutheran. And his name was...

34:27 Tobias Larson.

34:34 Yes. He was a pastor from back in the midwest who had a good reputation as a good manager and a sound fiscal planner. Bjug asked him to come out and give some help at the early stages of the school. He died in 1915 or 1916, or right around that time. His wife outlived him by some 30 years. Living most of that time with grandmother and grandfather. We called her grandma Larson. She lived in the front room that used to be the parlor in the old house before, which reminds me of the fact that in the 1920's the old house burned down.

35:28 Grandma was down at the barn and saw that the top of the house was on fire. It probably came from the chimney or something. Louise was on night duty and she was sleeping up in the bedroom on the second floor. Grandma rushed home and woke Louise up. Louise escaped in her bathrobe. She didn't have a bit of clothes with her when she escaped from the house before it burned.

When the firemen finally got there from Tacoma, they wouldn't let anyone go upstairs. They removed all the furniture from downstairs, the neighbors came and helped. But the firemen were afraid that the floor would give way. They didn't realize how strong the old house was. They wouldn't let anyone go upstairs.

Grandpa's study was upstairs where he had his collection of bibles, valuable bibles. Some of them were in Hebrew and Greek, and German and Norwegian. He was in Tacoma so he wasn't there to save his precious books. When he came home later on that day and looked down on the ground and saw the remains of his precious books, he said, "I felt like an old friend had died."

37:11 Interesting. I understand that some of those bibles in his rare bible collection were extremely valuable in the monetary way. One of the bibles dated back to the Gutenberg Press days.

37:30 Yes, wasn't that interesting?

37:31 Interesting too, that at that time Bjug had no insurance. He felt that the Lord would somehow insure them. And interestingly enough, there was a tremendous outpouring of help from the good Christians and friends in the Parkland community.

37:55 And in the Middle West, too. Old friends sent money I believe. And they rebuilt the house on the old foundation, but not as fancy and not as beautiful a house. A very simple house they rebuilt. But it was very soon, they rebuilt very soon. I remember Grandma and Grandpa stayed at some friend's house. I was about seven years old I think, when the place burnt down. But what I felt bad about was the toys that had been in the attic. The dolls!

38:41 Well, he was certainly an interesting person in many ways, and as we've said, his wife deserves the credit for managing so much of the family's affairs.

Let's just talk a little about the family of Bjug and Guro. Your father, Theodor, whom we all call Ted, being the eldest of the surviving brothers. You told us about his life and career. The next person, the next oldest would've been...

39:15 George.

39:16 George, who was an educator by trade. He was a school administrator and was the father of four children, the oldest being Arthur. Arthur, who died at age 16, was going to Luther College.

39:42 Yes. He died of appendicitis. He had just started college.

39:47 Then there was Isabelle Watness and Norman Bjug, a son who became a minister. Isabelle, was married to Luther Watness who served in the ministry for many years. And another brother is Adolph, who we call Duff who has had a career as a musician in the military service. He is now a retired attorney living in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

I believe he went back to school and got an LLD degree.

Then we have the next daughter who was let's see, after George came... was it Louise? Louise was a registered nurse and she remained single all of her life. Then the next brother would've been Ander, or was it Oliver?

Oliver was a teacher and was also involved in the lumber business at various times. He had two children, Hazel and Paul. The next child would have been Oscar Theander, who had an athletic career in which he played baseball for the Cleveland Indians, among other teams; became a dentist and practiced in Milton-Freewater Oregon for many, many years. Then the next would've been Ingvold.

41:42 Theander had three children, Dorothy, Helen and William, Billy as we called him.

41:49 The two daughters live in Oregon. Dorothy lives east of ...

41:57 Corvallis.

42:03 Yes, I believe it is. And Helen lives east of Portland. Bill died several years ago. He had a career as a dentist. Ingvold was the other brother who remained single. He was an engineer, a mining engineer? A civil engineer?

42:28 Yes. He died in South America, in Chile.

42:34 Then came Lydia, who remained single. She was a registered nurse in Tacoma for most of her career. And my father, Adolph, was the youngest in the family. He had ten children. I think we will not go down the list of the ten. But we did not mention Esther's brother who was a civil engineer and a city planner. how would you term his ...?

43:09 Well, sanitary engineer, too. Because he planned fire departments and things of that type.

- 43:20 His name was Howard and he was an outstanding person in his field, having achieved great success, having offices in several parts of North American and South America.**
- 43:36 Yes, Texas.
- 43:38 When we do this there is always the risk of leaving somebody out. Isn't there? But we really won't go down the list of my siblings at this time. We'll leave that for another time.**
- Esther, are there any other little things that you want to include in this interview for the Archives at Pacific Lutheran University? Or if there are any other things, maybe we could stop now and take a moment to assess whether there is something else you want to say. I'll pause.**
- At this point Esther, I'd invite you to talk about any other comments you'd like to make as we wrap up this interview. If you want to give a potpourri of information that you've thought of now that we've taken a break.**
- 44:55 Yes, after Grandpa finally retired from preaching at age 80, I mentioned that he made furniture for the garden which is unusual, but he spent a lot of his time in the study, studying and writing. He walked to the post office every day for the mail, which was really a very, you might say, it was hard exercise for a man over 80. One of the books he worked on was the family history. He wrote back to Norway and got his genealogy and assembled all these papers. When they were ready, organized and ready to write, he tried to get one of his sons to write it, but none of his sons was interested in writing it in English so he went ahead...
- 46:14 Yes, the family history, which he titled, 'A Brief History of Valle, Saetersdal, Norway and of Some Families From There.' And we believe there is a copy of that book in the Archives at Pacific Lutheran University.**
- 46:32 Although his family displayed little interest in his work while he was preparing it in the 1920's, now about 70 years later, his children, his grandchildren, his great grandchildren, and even his great-great grandchildren are very interested in it. And the other "father collateral relatives" are very interested in it too because he tells about his brothers, who were their great great grandparents, too. And they are all finding it a mine of information. One of his mottos from the Bible was, "Always and for everything give thanks." That was in Ephesians 5:20, but it's in very many other references to that. So he was always thankful.
- 51:14 Well, Esther, I think you and I are very thankful for the heritage and having the grandparents that we did and for the many legacies they left behind, not least of which is a wonderful school in the South End of Tacoma, Pacific Lutheran University. And I, as interviewer and grandson of Bjug Harstad, want to thank the University for giving us this opportunity and for maybe keeping this information in the archives.**
- 51:53 I remember another thing that happened that was very interesting. While I was visiting there. A girl came up from Pacific Lutheran. It was a Dahl, Irene Dahl. I believe she was the editor of the

yearbook that year. She brought this copy up, which I have now. A copy of the yearbook which had a big picture of Grandpa in the front of it and it was dedicated to him. Have you heard of that?

52:26 No I haven't.

52:27 Maybe I can find it.

52:32 Esther, thank you very much. I really appreciate this interview.