Mary Melcher: I'm Mary Melcher. I'm interviewing Augusta Falstrom. We're in Missoula, Montana, and it's August 8, 1977. Mrs. Falstrom, you're from Sweden, right?

Augusta Falstrom: Yes, I was 18 years old.

MM: When you came to America?

AF: When I first come to America, yes.

MM: What did your parents think about you coming here?

AF: Oh, I thought that it was all right, but I don't know. And then, of course, when I was sick and went home, four years sick, you know and the doctor thought I wasn't going to be alright and my mother didn't want me to go.

MM: That was after you had been to America and then gone back to Sweden?

AF: And then, of course, the fella I went with, you know, he says, "Aren't you want to come to America?" Again he says, "Out there in the West." And that was the doctor that told me was in that climate and in Massachusetts. So, I says, well I will when I feel strong enough so I can.

MM: You were writing letters to him? He was already in America?

AF: He was in America, ya. He was out there in Washington. And so he says, "If you do, I'll send you a ticket to come." And so I says, "Well, alright, I'll let you know." So then I begin to feel better, so I says, "I'll try it once more." And so then, you know, and of course I want, went over the ocean five times, you know, in the steamboat and so then I come out there to Missoula which I thought what of. I didn't like it at first at all. I thought it was just awful.

MM: Why didn't you like it?

AF: I don' know, but and so then, of course, I started hating Missoula here in 1901 when I came here and when I, and so then 1902 we got married.
MM: And how old were you when you married?

AF: What?

MM: How old were you when you got married?

AF: Uh, twenty-six. And, um, and he was an engineer for a sawmill there. In Lothrop, a place about two or three miles west of here. And then we went to the house first to live and then he built a house that we lived in for eleven years. And then they sold the sawmill and then we moved over across to Alberton, you know, just across the river. And then he got car work to fix cars and things that got, needed fixing.

MM: Were there many other people . . .

AF: And then we only lived there two years when he died. 1916 when he died.

MM: That's too bad.

AF: And then I went, rented out the house and then I went in my brother and he was here and he was married so I went and stayed with them for a while. And then I took a job and then I went to the University and worked there for ten years cooking and baking.

MM: Had you, when was it that you went back to Sweden? Did you go back in 1919?

AF: 1919, yes.

MM: Was that before you went to work at the University?

AF: Huh?

MM: Was that before you worked at the University?

AF: That was before the University. When I come back, 1921, I took a job at the hospital over, what you call, Northern Pacific, you know. And I worked there for about two years and then, I tried to see to get in there to University, you know, there. And I did. So I went and talked to the forelady and she said what I should wear and I stayed there ten years.

MM: What kind of work did you do?

AF: Baking.

MM: Baking.
AF: All kinds of baking.

MM: Did you do a different kind of baking than they knew here?

AF: Huh?

MM: Did you bake like they do in Sweden, or what kind of baking did you do?

AF: Like they do here and we do there too. They're about the same thing. You know cookies and cake.

MM: Did you like that job?

AF: Pies. Oh, yes, and then I took heart disease, so I had to leave the, there and go to the hospital and I was in the hospital for four months for my heart. And, oh, I was so sick. And then I got a rooming house and stayed, apartment rented. And then, then the lady that, over at University heard that I was sick, so she tried, she called. Oh, she says, "How I would love to have you back. Oh, you do so good and I would love to have you. And I know you can have anything you want if only I can get you back." Well, I said, "Thank you, that's very nice, but I don't know." She says, "You know we begin school right at the New Year, so you let me know and call me." So I did and I went and three weeks and I took a lapse of the heart. The doctor, he was so mad. He said, "I told you you couldn't work that hard." He says, "That's just gonna kill you. No more stress work," he says. Oh, he was mad. Well, then I didn't, I didn't go down anymore. I stayed in the apartment, so I didn't go work anymore, hard like that because he said that would kill me.

MM: Did you work at all?

AF: Huh?

MM: Did you do any work at all?

AF: No, no I didn't. Embroidery and crochet and such thing, you know, but otherwise, and then, of course, I bathed at home.

MM: Where were you living then?

AF: Down on, oh, what you call it, Fine Estate.

MM: Uh, yes!

AF: And, in an apartment there. And, uh, so then I begin to get sick again. I begin to feel it. I feel so awful and I fell right on the floor and they, I lived on the second floor, and the one that lived
under the second, she heard me falling, so she come running up and then they called the doctor and they wouldn't take me off the floor until they find out if I had broken a leg or something. He examined and then he lift me up in the bed. And now, he says, "I will tell you, no more upstairs and no more for you to live alone. That is one thing," he says. Well, "And I mean it. You go down the stairs and fall down and break your neck and kill you off." Well, so I says, "Yes, I won't."

So, then I moved into one of those rest homes, you know. They were only, they were more like a home. I wish I stayed there but after the big industry and all those small ones lost their home, you know, and they couldn't keep up because they expect them to improve it with so many things. Well, then I thought, well, and I wouldn't, so I stayed there for so long as I could and now I've been here now for four years and so.

Then, before I went there, the doctor had an operation on my gall bladder. It had been opened once before, but it had begun like drying up. And the doctor told me, the surgeon, if I don't have an operation soon and put an artificial in there, I'll die because I couldn't live without it. Oh, well, he says, "You have to give us your consent that you let us do it." I says, "All right, go to it." I did. So, and that's fifteen years ago. Then, then, you know, it begin to hurt so I'm afraid that it, but he says it should be good for twenty years. Well, and so, I hope to be gone before that time.

MM: You come from a large family, don't you?

AF: Huh?

MM: You had a lot of brothers and sisters, didn't you? Four boys and three girls?

AF: Huh?

MM: How many children were in your family, your family . . . you had a lot of brothers and sisters?

AF: I had four brothers and three, two sisters, three as Mom said.

MM: And you were the oldest?

AF: Seven. Huh?

MM: And you were the oldest?

AF: No.

MM: Oh, I thought you were.

Augusta Falstrom Interview, OH 049-013, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
AF: That was, I had a brother that was a sailor and was also on the ship it went in the mast to take up some sail and slipped, it was on Christmas Eve and the slip and fell down on the deck and died. Was killed, you know. And Then I had a brother here that was married.

MM: Did he come before you came?

AF: Oh, no. He come after I had, was married. He stayed with me. Then I had sister home with my mother and father. The other had died. I had a sister that died when she was eleven years old from some kind of—

MM: What kind of chores did you do in your house when you were a child?

AF: Huh?

MM: Did you do certain jobs in your house when you were growing up?

AF: I helped my mother to clean and do things like that and help her to bake and things like that.

MM: Did your brothers have chores too?

AF: Huh?

MM: Did your brothers have chores? Jobs?

AF: Ya, he was here and he worked in a saw mill. And he died, oh, about eight years ago.

MM: When you first came to America, you had a hard time learning to speak English?

AF: Oh, golly. I couldn't say more than yes and no. When they asked me anything, I just shake my head and didn't know what it was. And I know the lady asked me to wash windows and I shake my head, I didn't know wash windows. And she said it two or three times, I shake my head, I didn't know. And then she took a rag and went on the window like that and then I know what she meant. That meant to wash window.

MM: And you were working in her home?

AF: In the home, ya.

MM: How did you find her?

AF: There was awful hard work. There were four in the family, three girls and a boy and there
was so much, I had to do everything. They had a thirteen room house and I had to clean and I had to wash and I had everything and two little girls that went to school, you know. They had leaves on the dresses and things, oh, my. It was so hot I drop on the floor once. I couldn't stand the heat.

MM: That was in Massachusetts?

AF: That was in Massachusetts, ya.

MM: When you first came to America?

AF: Ya.

MM: When you were 18?

AF: Ya. And then one morning, I went up and set bread and I was gonna make biscuits for breakfast and lightening, awful hard lightening storms there, and it got so dark, so I thought I had to go turn on the lights, so I can see. And when I took hold of the, the lightning struck and burnt out all the lights in the house and hit me and I fell on the floor. I could have been killed, you know. But, and so the lady, she come running down and see me laying on the floor, oh, she says, "Are you hurt?" "Yes," I says, "My arm." It was funny, you know, all the lightening that got through. And so she, she says, "I know, this was terrible." Oh, there were lightning storms so terrible back there. That was one thing I don't like there. That told me that that climate was not for me. That I couldn't take it. Either you have to go home to your home country, or out west. Well, then that's where I went. See, he was out west, see. So, here it has been, but I have been sick many, many times.

MM: Why didn't you want to stay in Sweden?

AF: Huh?

MM: Why did you decide to come back to America? You wanted to marry that young man?

AF: Ya. Oh, yes.

MM: Were there other Swedes in Missoula when you came here?

AF: Huh?

MM: Were there other people from Sweden in Missoula when you came here?

AF: Yes, I lived with a Swedish family.
MM: In Missoula.

AF: Jacobson was the name.

MM: Were there many Swedish families?

AF: Ya, and then I met one that had to go to the same school as me in Sweden and she was here, so I went with her and she was gonna have a baby, so I went there instead and took care of her and the baby when it came.

MM: What kind of school had you gone to in Sweden?

AF: It was through the high school grade. But I didn’t get to go to high school, but I was reading, but I didn’t.

MM: Did you get together with the other Swedish people much?

AF: Oh, yes.

MM: What did you do?

AF: We was together quite a bit because, you know, I could talk to them and they talked to me.

MM: In Swedish?

AF: Yes. In Swedish. But that lady that I worked for thought I learned awful fast. She says, "My, you only been here three months and you know everything I ask you now." Well, I says, "I try to learn." Then the two little girls went to school, they had their little books and they come out. They'd ask, "Read for us, read." "Oh, I can't," I says. Then put the book and I ask what so and so words were and, you know, and then I got to find out. I ask everything in the house, what they call it, and so on and so forth. You know, so there was a pretty, I worked. Then I talked to people and got some things there, you know, that I begin to learn. So, she says, "Now, you can put a sentence together." "Oh, no," I says, "Not yet." "Oh, yes," she says, "If you can't do it right, I'll learn you, I'll tell you how." I says, "I guess I'll have to wait longer yet."

MM: Did you vote here?

AF: Huh?

MM: Did you ever start voting here in America?

AF: Oh, I vote, yes. All the time. Since my husband was, he voted, you know. Then after I married him, well, I voted too every time there was voting.

Augusta Falstrom Interview, OH 049-013, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MM: Were you involved, or did you hear much about the women's suffrage campaign when women got the vote?

AF: Yes.

MM: So, did you and your husband discuss politics much?

AF: Huh?

MM: Did you discuss politics with your husband?

AF: Can you repeat?

MM: Did you discuss politics with your husband?

AF: Yes, and then my brother come here to America, you know and he stayed with us, so I had, so we were three.

MM: Were you involved in any clubs in Missoula? Were you involved in any clubs in Missoula?

AF: No, uh, yes. At the Rebecca's Lodge. I belong there many year, I was head of 1926.

MM: What did the club do?

AF: Well, they done everything and, you know, they had meeting and they try to go see the sick and help them if they could, you know. If anyone was sick and they would sit up at night with them, you know, sometimes like that. So they was a good lodge because they took care of those that got sick, you know. Help some.

MM: What was Missoula like when you first came here?

AF: Oh, I'll tell you there was so little. You know over Blue Mountain and Victoria Hotel, up on Higgins Avenue. There was the livery stable. You could go and rent a horse and buggy and go out and ride. There was not automobiles or nothing like that then. That wasn't before 1905 and there was five people that bought them. Doctor and something. Otherwise they had horses and buggy, all of them. And there were, on the sidewalk, there was no cement or anything. It was boardwalk and they were done so poorly and so you would step and hit your head. Oh, oh, my. And mud. I know I was in town one and it rained and mud and I had a pair of rubbers and my rubbers stuck in the mud and I had to stop and pull them out of the mud. Oh, it was different. There was awful things and there wasn't very many. I think there were 8,000 in the whole, and now they're over 55.
MM: Do you remember any Chinese families?

AF: Huh?

MM: Do you remember seeing any Chinese families around?

AF: Oh, yes and Cheyenne. What you call Indians. There were sitting on the sidewalk and on the stairs on Higgins Avenue when you were coming to a store, they were sitting and then they had they're teepee out here on the south side. Oh, ya, there was plenty Indians.

MM: Did they scare you?

AF: Oh, they scared me. They come in and beg everything, you know. And sometime they were pretty mean if you don't leave them.

MM: What were the Chinese people doing here?

AF: Huh?

MM: What were the Chinese people doing here?

AF: They'd wash and things like that and some was cooks in a restaurant.

MM: What kind of jobs were women doing who were working?

AF: Huh?

MM: What kind of jobs were women doing who were working then?

AF: Well, took care of for them self and there are more now, you know, they don't do much of that. Then there were more industries so they took care of their own things more. They never had any babies like they're used to have now. They took care of them them self. They had the babies, well, then when they went out they took the baby in the buggy and off they went. So, there was so much different that way. [long pause] Yes, there was lots of difference, and you never, like you do nowadays, never saw a lady go into a saloon. Never. That was a shame if they did and now, my goodness.

[End of Side A]
AF: —if they see a woman go in a saloon. Oh my goodness, that was a disgrace entirely. Now they are in there all the time. [laughs]

MM: What do you think of that? Do you think you think that women shouldn't go in saloons?

AF: You say saloons?

MM: Yes.

AF: Well, I didn't think it was so nice.

MM: Do you think it’s okay now?

AF: What?

MM: What do you think of it now?

AF: Oh well, I don't think very much of those that do. Because I don't think there's a place for a woman with her kids to take the kids with them and set them on the bar there and drink. I don't like that. I don't think that's very nice, and that happened so much.

MM: Did you used to go to dances with your husband here in Missoula

AF: No. No, he was hurt in the leg so he couldn’t dance. I danced when they had dances, but he wasn't able to dance. Oh, he could maybe go around once or so, but his leg was too bad. He had a (unintelligible) hip, so he couldn't.

MM: But you would still go to the dances?

AF: What?

MM: Would you still go to the dances?

AF: Oh yes, I did, but now I can't do nothing. [laughs] I’m too old. When you get a 101 and...on the second. I’m 3 month going on the second.

MM: Well you’re old, yes.

AF: So that is all (unintelligible). I can’t walk except I have that wheelchair and that walker there.
MM: You used to like to dance though?

AF: I did when I was young, yes. They had in the saw mill there, they had the union hall and there sometimes on Saturdays had a dance. Oh, they had a good time then a dancing.

MM: And that was in about 1901?

AF: That was 1901 and 1902 or ’03.

MM: Is that what you did for fun mainly is dancing? What other things did you do for fun? Do you remember?

AF: Oh, nothing at all. You would go off and visit a neighbor.

MM: Did you have a lot of nice neighbors?

AF: Oh yes. Some of them were pretty nice.

MM: What did you think when women started wearing their dresses so short—shorter?

AF: Oh, I thought that was just awful.

MM: Did you ever bob your hair?

AF: Well, I did yes. Bobbed it, oh, quite a few years ago. I never had before. They had those...oh, what’s it called? Heated it and put it in and curl your hair with? Now, of course, they have those rollers they put in and have this there. I used to...They have one down here right by the office put in here, and she’s here on Tuesday and Friday and fixed hair for those that want to. So I used to go to her and have my hair shampooed and trimmed. I do it myself quite a bit too, because I got to those rollers that I can curl them up.

MM: Did you ever learn how to swim?

AF: What?

MM: Did you learn how to swim?

AF: Nope, and I was born by the seashore, as close as (unintelligible), and never learned to swim. When we were small, we went down in the water, and I pretty near drowned once. I fell and got under the water, and if a girl hadn’t come and seen me I would have drowned. It was terrible.
Then sometime, we took...there was a fisherman’s boat they had to go out fishing. We took the boat and went out, and a storm come up. My mother she had called on some men down there to go and try to get us in, so we wouldn’t get lost because we were way out in the water. Oh, we had all kinds of crazy things when we were small.

MM: Okay, we’ll stop there. Thank you!

[Break in audio]

MM: Mrs. Falstrom, would it be okay if we use this information if we don’t use your name?

AF: Yes.

[End of Interview]