

Interviewee: Charles Sjolander (Hyphenated two sons' names; says it was a "cop out")

Interviewer: Sarah Hautzinger

[Intro and consent] *So, rumor has it Charles that there's an interesting last name story in your family can you tell us about it.* Well yeah, when my ex-wife and I got married (it was actually a little bit after Sean was born, my oldest son, he's now 24) and-- *But is she also his mother?* Yes. *Okay.* Yes and she didn't like my last name. I love my last name. *Which is?* It's Sjolander, S-J-O-L-- and I'm not even saying it right [goes through possible original pronunciations of last name] I mean, there's so much lost about how we don't even know whether we're Swedish or Norwegian honestly. A great great ancestor came from Sweden, married a Norwegian, and then they came to the United States, so there's kind of some grey area in there of where, you know, that last-- and that's just my dad's last name. *Okay.* So the patrilineal last name, but anyways that's my last name, my ex-wife's last name is Jaspers, which is J-A-S-P-E-R-S-E. *Oh.* And actually there's some--they think that it actually originally was Jasperse [ya-sper-say] because it's Dutch. *Oh.* And, you know, when you look back historically it's like it may have been, or it may have come through Dutch through French and then, you know, there's a lot of history there too. And then my mom's last name is Evanson which is, you know, one of those standard, you know, it was a created last name--*An Ellis Island kind of created?* Yeah, I mean, they'd say "What's your last name?" They didn't have last names, in the Scandinavian countries that was just a foreign idea. Sjolander in fact it means--in Norwegian means, well like it could be swamp dweller [laughs].

*But you say it's also a place name?* But it's a place name, it's like--I mean lander is-- *A place near a swamp.* You know, yeah, there was probably a settlement near a swamp and they'd say you know "What's your last name?" and "What I dunno. Oh, well I'm from you know", "Oh ok so --so you're from Sjol--Oh ok, so you're Sjolanders." So there's a lot of Scandinavian names that are just kind of created out of blue and nothing to do with the actual--But anyway, so, I really like my last name, I've always felt sorry for people who are like Smith. *Mhmm.* It's like, how boring is that, you know? And my ex-wife Chris, really didn't like my last name [laughs], and also I think honestly was hesitant to get married at all. *Hmm.* And so really liked having her last name, and actually we weren't married yet when Sean was born, and so we just decided we'll do a hyphenated last name. And we've always said it like "Oh yeah, we were just wimps. We couldn't [laughs] we couldn't make a decision, you know, we couldn't bite the bullet and like kinda do something we just wimped out and did a hyphenated last name." I mean Jasperse-Sjolander [laughs] that's--that's like, you know, that's cruel for a first-grader to have to, you know, write their name, and it's oh my god, you know? J-A-S, you know. And it never fits on government forms, school forms it never fits, it always you know, something gets hacked off.

*And was it around first-grade that you started speaking about, or telling the story of how you'd come to this decision more critically like that, as you watched a child contend with it?* We, um, no. We had always known that we were just kinda wimping out. *Mhmm.* Or that's--that's how we had felt, you know, it's like we're just, yeah let them deal with it sometime, and--and yeah, we both at least have always said "You can change your name later, you know, you decide come up with a new one, I don't care." I don't have any vested interest in you know, I think-- we're divorced, the divorce was final like 4 years ago, and I think that there is so much tension during a divorce and so much, you know, about what feels fair to you that I think if anything there's been times when he likes to use my name more you know that kinda really petty kind of stuff. *On both*

*sides?* Um, I don't know so much, I mean I can't speak for Chris, but I know for me. I know just every once in a while like, Liam would just have Liam Sjolander, like, um hmm, that's interesting. *Hmm* [inaudible] you know, and I know Liam often will sign school forms 'Liam J.S.' just because it's quick, it's fast other than ,you know rather than, signing that whole Jasperse-Sjolander thing, that's a long last name. *Mhmm*. You know it's like--and so then my oldest son just got married, um, oh gosh, what? A year ago? Yeah, something like that and his wife has a hyphenated last name, and so--*How many syllables all together?* Yeah really, how many--well let's see, I can't remember, she's told me but I can't remember what her last name was. But it was fairly straight forward; I mean it was not as horrific as Jasperse-Sjolander. *Mhmm*. You know that's got, Jas-perse, well that's only two, Sjo-lan-der--5. So that's only five-- *My kids have 6*. It could be worse [laughing] It could be worse, it could be like two Polish people you know, getting—or Russian [examples] it could be really bad compared to ours. But anyways with my son, he is my older son; he has actually kept the Jasperse-Sjolander. I think it might be because he has a sense of fairness. *Hmm*. Where he wanted to keep, you know, kind of keep the balance of--between Chris and I, you know? *Mhmm*. Jasperse-Sjolander, he was just gonna stick with that although it's interesting that during high school he and his friends, well they--his name is Sean and he actually had two friends who were Sean as well. And in high school, you know, often roll call will be by your last name--*Mhmm*. And so he and his friends used their last names because they had three Sean's. Within a small friend group they had three Sean's, so Sean, one of his best friends is Sean, uh [thinking] Risk, and so he was Risk but Sean often was Jasperse. *Mmm*. Just because, you know, on a school form often it's like Jasperse, hyphen S-J-O, maybe an 'L' and then that's it. You know, that's all that will show up on the--*Yeah*. So for roll call, I think, through high school, he was mainly Jasperse. So um, yeah it's pretty interesting. *And when you said that there's a little bit of, in I think Liam's case, if he was just using Sjolander, that sometimes you'd almost feel a little bit like, "Oh, he likes my name." How did, did you ever feel anything when, in Sean's case, he would be mostly like, using Jasperse as the only name?* Um, no, not really. I mean, I think if anything it might, it might concern my dad more than anyone else because he's done a lot of geneology work with our family and trying to figure out, you know, whether we're Norweigan or Swedish, and doing that kind of research. So I think, for him, it might actually matter, you know. And yeah, you know, it's funny thinking back him, what he's learned in doing a geneology is that even when people do just a strict you know, like, you know, patrilineal, you know, always having the, they're still, as soon as someone, I mean he has the frustration of as soon as someone gets married, they're lost. You suddenly have to be doing a lot of research on the female line in order to find out who someone is and where they went. You know, suddenly there's one picture of someone, and then you see them again and, you know, ten years have gone by, or twenty years have gone by and you're not sure whether it's them. You look at the back, and there's a different name, so you know, they got married or, you know, something.

*So much more is lost in just the great grandparents generation. At least 15 of those 16 stories are lost.* Right, right, exactly. So, that's part of why I've never worried about, you know, because it's like, yeah you could, I mean, if you really wanted to make it easy for generations that follow you to figure things out, you would actually always have a hyphenated last name. *And just keep adding and adding and adding, like Spanish nobles.* Right, right, right yeah! Spanish nobles, exactly. And yeah, if that was how you do it, you know, most people would need it written down or a computer record or something because it gets to, once you're past, I mean we even trip over the hyphenated last name and that's only two names. *No, it's very complex. Do you think if you*

*had it to do all over again, if you were able to dial the clock back, how old is Sean now? He's 24? Something like that. So if you could dial the clock back 24 years, what would you do? Would you do it the same? Would you do something different?* [pause, laughter] What I would change has nothing to do with the name. I think it was a mistake to get married, I really do. [laughter] And yet, you know, we already had Sean, we were already committed to him. So, yeah, no, I wouldn't. Well, and... *So you would still name both Sean and Lean Jasperse-Sjolander?* Yeah, and well, and I, any time it comes up, or any time there's a question, I have always always, every single time, said You know, you are free to change it. You are free to pick a new name, you are free to...absolutely. Don't feel like you're in the middle of a name struggle. You know? Boy, whatever you want to do is absolutely fine with me.

*And so Sean and his wife are both Jasperse-Sjolander. Have they talked about what they'll do with kids?* [laughter] No, they um, they just had a daughter. She was born in August, um. *You're a grandpa!* Yeah, I'm a grandpa now. I don't feel like it. Yeah, I'm a grandpa. So she's still pretty young, so I don't think they have, you know, thought about what they'll do [laughter]. *Your granddaughter is Jasperse Sjolander?* Yes. Yes. I don't know her middle name. I've got it written down some place. But Illyana...I'm trying to, yeah, no, I can't remember. I'm not good with names anyways. And then yeah, Jasperse Sjolander. I think at this point it's almost embarrassing because it's like, you know, we just didn't make a decision. We just passed it on and now for them to, you know, pass it on to another generation, I don't know. It seems kind of like child cruelty, you give them this long, this long, you know Jasperse just has the extra E on the end, it's not too bad. But Sjolander with the J, you know, is not an easy...I mean I've always liked having a name that people stumble over. It doesn't bother me at all. And yet, and yet I know that there are lots of people who, you know, would just as soon be Smith or Brown or you know, Cooper. One of those really common or tailored, one of those really really common names that no one trips over. I think a lot of people do feel that uncomfortableness. Whereas I, when someone calls my name and it's Charles and that long pause, I'm like yeah, that's me. And we talk about, you know, oh it's Swedish or Norweigen, they love those extra Js. Throw in the J! What the heck, you know? And yet actually, Sjolander, compared to some Swedish names is pretty straightforward. There's just the J! It's not something...where you have to piece together all of the things.

*I lied when I said this was the last question. No no, that's fine. Do you think that this would be different for your sons if it weren't for the divorce? 'Cause something you said earlier suggested in way, like in Sean's case, that it becomes a sort of a fairness or loyalty issue.* [pause] I think that probably for Sean, I think that probably would have been true whether we had gotten divorced or not. He's, well, [laughter] part of the funny thing with the divorce was when Sean went away to college, it suddenly became very apparent that he was the center of the family. *Ah.* That he was like the glue that held the family together. It had nothing to do with [laughter] you know. And you know, Chris moved out, oh what was it, a year, six months, a year later? And then we started the divorce proceedings and went from there. So, so, yeah. He was just, he's like the person who yeah, I don't know any other way to explain it. It was just like he was the center. And I think that has shifted a little bit, you know, now Liam is off in college and so, you know, there's less, there's less that we would need to be glued together, you know, it's like, well, and Sean is married and has his own child and so, you know, it's almost like the family just naturally now would be spreading out anyways.

*So maybe that's partially how we would understand Liam just using Sjolander more. Well, I*

think that Liam, well, Liam and my dad went on, what was it, like a two or three week jaunt this last summer to a bunch of national parks and Liam hiked a bunch, and um, so they have spent um, they have spent a lot of time together and I think in some ways Liam might have even an easier time being with my dad than even I did. Because, my dad and I are fine, but he takes up a lot of space. And so for he and I it's like, I have to always figure out ways to have enough space when he's around [laughter]. And I think Liam, you know, not having the long history together maybe gets an easier relationship with my dad just because he can, you know, "Oh yeah, crazy Grandpa Peter." You know, 'cause my dad, he's pretty loopy. I mean in a good way. *In a great way, he's so much fun, he's come and danced with us. Okay, I promised it'd be a short one, I think we went well over five minutes, it's been a twenty minute interview, and I really appreciate it, thanks so much.*