

BACKGROUND My name is Amanda Nelson. [From 006 - 038 is garbled.]

...Tomesis? [her husband], a neighbor man who she knew from the old country, Sweden. They had one girl who lives in Seattle and a boy who died at birth. The daughter has two children; one works at Swedish Hospital and another lives in CA. [Discussion about granddaughter's trip to Europe.] Amanda has two great-grandchildren who are 12 and 14 years old.

Amanda remembers only her paternal grandmother. There were ten children in the family, and Amanda was the next to the youngest. One of the children died at birth. Her folks had a little farm; the kids had to go out and work as soon as possible. They had plenty of healthy food, and she was never sick in 95 years with anything worse than the flu.

SETTLING IN AND WORK Amanda was 20 when she emigrated to her sister's. 'If you ever wanted to come over, you should never go to your relatives'. Her sister lived on a farm near Portland, OR. They had about 25 cows and no milking machines. Amanda got up at 5 am and worked until 9, 10 pm for 10 dollars a month. When the brother-in-law took the cows to pasture, Amanda was in charge of carrying the milk pails to the milkhouse and separating the milk from the cream. The milk was put into a tank. 'I never got to go anyplace'. One day she met a man on her way to the milkhouse. Since she didn't understand English, he continued on to the house. Amanda's sister told her at dinner that he was a neighbor who thought Amanda's treatment was horrible, and they [the neighbors] would take her away if the situation didn't improve. After that, the brother-in-law carried the milk pails.

Amanda had only 50 cents in her pocket when she arrived. Her sister had sent her the money for the ticket, and she had to work for them over a year before paying off the debt. The following summer there was a huge cherry crop on the farm, and they held a picnic. She talked with other Swedish people, and one fellow—Mr. Johnson, a caretaker at the Portland Zoo—said he would find her another job. He later sent for her with instructions on how to travel the 14 miles from the farm to Portland. Amanda took the cream boat and then walked to their house, spending her first night there.

She had just had her 20th birthday, after emigrating in 1904 on Good Friday. She left Sweden because she had her sister here and because so many Swedes emigrated. 'I have never regretted that I left. No, golly, I should say not. I was home in the old country in 1920, and I never was so glad to come home again to America. ...I love it here'.

In Portland, she began housework with a Jewish family in Portland. 'They were the most wonderful people. Oh, boy. They were good to me. And I had 20 dollars a month then!'. The sister in Portland was next to the oldest and had been here for years. She married a boy from the neighborhood in Sweden and didn't have to change her name either. Another sister lived in Florida. When Amanda's husband died, Amanda visited this sister. But it was just more work because the 80 year old sister was laid up with a broken hip and leg.

From Florida, Amanda went to Denver, CO. [She tells a long story about an orphan girl that she had helped and in return, the girl befriended her.]

EMIGRATION A couple from Coeur d'Alene came home to Sweden. Another girl, 17, and Amanda, 20, decided to return to America with them. She had finished the 8th grade, and had been out working, tending cows and doing field work in Sweden. Women always worked out in the fields in Sweden in those days and no one thought about it. They lived in southern Sweden, close to Skaane. She'd been working down there with the sugar beets as a part of a crew. They carried their own food and cooked for themselves.

On the boat she was somewhat sick, but was also up and dancing. 'You know, when you're young, anything goes'. In America at one train stop, they got off to have a cup of coffee. It was only a 15 minute stop and the train started to leave without them. The others and Amanda ran after it. She was wearing bedroom slippers and couldn't run fast enough, so she kicked them off and managed to catch the train. Then somebody told them in Swedish about the 15 minute stops to take on and remove freight.

The boat was full of people. Amanda came second class with a bedroom and food. The third class didn't have much of anything and was a mixture of various people. The ticket cost about 100 dollars from Halmstad in Sweden to New York. When she visited in 1920, she had to enter through Norway because of a strike in Sweden. Going through customs, she 'hid' certain items by wearing a watch and ring and stuffing other things in the back of her bloomers. There was no problem with emigration customs in America, because they had such few things in a suitcase. Tells a story about a friend taking 9 liters of Swedish whiskey through customs.

She and her friend traveled by train with the couple until they reached Coeur d'Alene. Amanda was not afraid to travel alone. She had brought rye bread, cheese, and dried beef from home. She had only the 50 cents with and wasn't asked about money in New York.

'The hardest thing is you can't talk'. But people were wonderful and didn't make fun of her. She learned the language little by little. The most different thing between America and Sweden is the friendliness of Americans; you could make friends very quickly. Tells a story about herself and a girlfriend in Sweden and how they weren't allowed to sit in the kitchen of one family. Swedish were more class conscious at that time.

MEETING HUSBAND AND MARRIAGE Her husband stayed in Sweden until he was 35. He courted a cousin whom his father didn't like and he refused to give the son the farm as long as he went with this girl. So, he emigrated. He was a bachelor in Mt. Vernon and owned a 40 acre farm. After Amanda and he returned from Sweden in 1920, they built a new home on the farm. In 1937, they moved to town and built another new house. When she moved to the Home, she sold that house.

She had met her husband through her friend with whom she corresponded. This girl, his cousin, worked on his farm but planned on marrying Amanda's brother who lived in Spokane. She invited Amanda to visit her in Mt. Vernon which Amanda did. The farmer asked Amanda to stay and be the cook since his cousin was leaving. They had known each other in Sweden. They were married later at home and spent a couple of days in Seattle before returning to the farm.

Amanda worked hard on that farm also—milking cows. 'There were a lot of things. But you know, you don't think of anything else. But it's your own and you feel all right and you're happy. I got the most wonderful man that's ever could be, and I got a daughter'.

There were nine kids in Sweden. One brother died at the Josephine Home [Stanwood]; one died in Mt. Vernon; one sister in Florida; and one sister in Portland. Five kids emigrated and the other four stayed in Sweden. All were over 80 when they died.

Amanda, her husband, and another couple and two children returned to Sweden in 1920 for a month. Her daughter was eight years old and could speak Swedish very well. Amanda believes the old people in Sweden have better benefits than in America, especially medical care. The kids in America used to send money home; the parents never owned a farm but rented a part of an estate. They made a living on the farm but had to pay rent also. Some of the kids moved to the city to work, but Amanda preferred to work on farms. One Swedish brother worked for the railroad.

SWEDISH TRADITIONS She continued with Swedish foods like sylta, risgryn, fruktsoppe and kaka?. 'You feel it's Christmas then. There were a lot of things that we tried to keep up with, but the older you get, the less [more] you get away from it'. She cried at the first Christmas, because she thought about the old country and the family. At Christmas time, her mother made a special roll for each child with their initial on top; that was the Christmas present. Amanda feels that she worked hard and maybe, it was better. People simply don't work so hard, but life isn't that good either. Her church, Salem Lutheran Church in Mt. Vernon, will have its 65th anniversary, and she is the oldest member. Amanda is a painter, and her last work of Jesus and Mary was given to the church. She loves painting, but never started until she moved to the Home. Here, at the age of 96, she bowls, paints, plays bingo, and decorates the dining tables.

She has sent a picture to a granddaughter but hasn't kept any herself. Some paintings, she has sold and others, given away. She has a very steady hand and has always done good handwork. In Sweden, she knit stockings and sweaters, and sewed clothing by hand. At 6 pm, they had dinner and were free to do handwork—crochet or knit for themselves. 'You couldn't sit down and do that when there were so many other things to be done on the farm'. It was not considered work because you couldn't make a living doing that.

CHURCH They worked so hard on the church; there was no electricity or hot water. Eighteen members had to put the top on. Some years later, they got a new schoolteacher. She came to a church dinner 'all dolled up'. She announced she was the head of the group and wanted to call a meeting to decide how to serve the dinner. The other 4-5 women told her they had done this job so many times, they didn't need a leader or a meeting.

Amanda was very active in the church; they had no money to hire people or buy goods, so they did all the work themselves. Among other things, she had to chop wood for the woodstove. In Sweden, they tried to attend church every Sunday; her father liked to go. But when they had to stay home, he read the Bible aloud. 'I never remember that my dad put a hand on any of us—never. But, he looked—. ...Mama was pulling hair...golly, with all them kids, you know'.

Amanda had instructions every morning at school—a short piece from the Bible. The church was quite distant. The pastor was a bachelor at the time, and had an uncle sea captain who lived with him. The year she attended confirmation class, she stayed at the parsonage and did the cooking for them. 'He was so wonderful' they were so nice to me'. The pastor gave her black fabric and hired a dressmaker to sew her confirmation dress; in addition she received her room and board.

REMINISCES Mother didn't like her leaving. The couple came to take her to the depot, and her mother stood on the lawn, cried, and told Amanda, 'Now, you are going to another world. ...But don't forget, never take anything from anybody that doesn't belong to you'. Her people were poor, but they were honest. Tells a story about honesty and the doctor visiting her in the Home. He'd stand at the door and inquire about her health, and then charge her 10 dollars for a medical call. She was never sick and finally got 'put out' paying him money just to say hello to her. She told him to stop coming to see her because she wouldn't pay him anymore.

She wrote home all the time when she first came, and she used to write to her husband's niece in Sweden. But, now there is no communication with Swedish cousins. She thinks the Swedish people have it just as nice as the Americans. Her father, 80 years old, was still living at a daughter's home in 1920. His birthday was May 12, the same as her husband's. He didn't want anything But they bought him a new suit which made him very happy and proud. He lived until he was 87 and got good use of that suit. Her sister was a widow living in town. The father received a small pension so he was no financial burden to the sister.

Amanda never considered living with her daughter, Evelyn. People live such different lives nowadays. She didn't want to interfere with their life style. Besides, she had enough money to pay her own way at the Home.

Amanda is not sure it's so great for women to work outside the home. There is no one at home for the kids. Her daughter wanted to work after the children went to school. Her husband wouldn't let her because he felt someone should be home when the kids came home from school, and she would be too tired if she worked outside. The granddaughter works at Swedish Hospital and likes it; she wants to work outside.

When Amanda first arrived, the language was difficult. She was glad to get away from the farm in order to learn English. After the Jewish family, she worked for another family at the seaside. Tells a story about going out on a date and arriving home later than 10 pm. Amanda thought that lady was mean. Following that job, she worked for another family until she left for New York state where the Florida sister lived. The NY family had just one boy and was a wonderful family. They were moving to Washington, D.C., and Amanda didn't want to go. She returned to WA when her brother was to be married.