

Alli Otilia Carlson Benson. Born in Pargas, Finland, a town in southern Finland near the city of Aabo (Turku in Finnish). Aabo is oldest city in Finland. Mostly Swedish speaking people there. Finland had belonged to Sweden for about 600 years. Many Swedish people live along Finland's coast. Born June 1, 1908.

PARENTS: Mother-Akwallina Wilhelmina Hermansdotter (?). Father-Korell Johan Carlson (?). Father had a general store and bakery on the island they lived on. Many islands in the area. Did some fishing but not commercial fishing. Started a sawmill. Wanted to get a school started on the island. Parents got married about 1890. Father was in America in 1889. Fished on the Columbia River. Was in Seattle at the time of the fire. Started his store after he returned to Finland and got married. 30-40 families on the island. The name of this island is Mielisholm or Holmo. Tells more about her father starting a school on the island.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS: Seven. Only remembers 4 or 5 of them. One sister, Gunhild Lundgren, lives in Seattle. They came to America together. Father and 2 brothers came to America in 1913. They were to earn money to send for Gunhild, Alli, and their mother.

EMIGRATION TO AMERICA: Couldn't come as soon as planned because WWI broke out. Civil war in Finland shortly after WWI. Couldn't contact those in America. Mother died of cancer in 1918.

BROTHERS: Arthur Carlson and George Carlson. They fished with their father in Bristol Bay, Alaska. George quit fishing. Became a merchant seaman. Father fished until 1939, when he retired. They used to sail up to Alaska.

CHILDHOOD: Didn't live on a farm. Small community. Traveled by boat mostly. Horse and buggy in the winter. One mile to the church in Pargas. Difficult to get there in the winter. Beautiful trip in the summer. Used a mangle for ironing their clothes. Mail came 3 times a week to her father's store. People had to pick up their mail there.

Mother had 8 children. Needed help. A young woman, Sandra, lived with them. Alli's grandparents gave Sandra a nickel-plated tea set when she got married. She sent the tea set to Alli about 40 years ago.

SCHOOL: School father started was on the next island. Had to row across the sound. Took about 20 minutes. Didn't take long in the winter. Could walk across the ice at times. There was also a place where the current was so strong that it never froze. Could row in the winter if the ice didn't freeze solid. Didn't like the ice breakers.

GRANDPARENTS: Paternal-grandmother died before Alli was born. She took people out to passenger boats. She died in a boating accident. Maternal-grandmother had a farm on the island. Herman Carlson.

OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS: Mother's brother, Robert Hermanson, moved to Australia before Alli was born. Later settled in Africa. Mother's sister, Olga corresponded with him. She died in the 1930's. They lost contact with the uncle. Alli tried to contact him. Alli received a letter from a cousin in South Africa in 1982. She had sent him a picture of herself about 60 years earlier. Her uncle had married a French woman whose father had been in the army

and moved to Africa. Their home in South Africa had been declared a national museum. Alli's cousin, Robert Hermanson, had been asked to write a history about this house. He decided to incorporate his Finnish ancestry in the book. Wrote to the church in Pargas for information. Wanted to contact the Carlson family in America. Got their address through people in Pargas. He and his wife plan on visiting Alli in the summer of 1983. His son, Eric Hermanson, is a Baptist minister. Cousin is well educated.

CHRISTMAS: Alli and her sister were alone for a while. Mother and aunt had passed away. Rest of family in America. Neighbor boy would get them a Christmas tree. Decorated it with cookies they got from the man who baked for their father. Kept tree until January 13.

CHRISTMAS MORNING: Tradition with 3 neighbors. At 3:00am, one of the neighbors would prepare coffee for the other 2 neighbors. Have coffee again at about 10:00 am. Couldn't always go to Pargas for a Christmas service. Ice sometimes too weak. Held Christmas services at their home or at the neighbors. Did this on Sundays sometimes. At Christmas everybody had candles and glass curtains in their windows. Had rice pudding (Risgrynsgroet), lutfisk with cream sauce and allspice. Baked goods, coffee bread. Exchanged gifts with the neighbors. School Christmas program. Danced around the Christmas tree.

REASONS FOR FATHER'S EMIGRATION TO AMERICA: Hard times in Finland. He had been America before. Father had been a sailor in the 1890's. Poor working conditions. In 1913, father and oldest brother Arthur (born in 1897) came to America. Other brother came to America in 1916. They worked in the shipyards in Bremerton for a while. Moved to Seattle.

LEAVING FINLAND: Mother died of cancer in 1918. (See also I-204) Contacted father through a friend in Canada. Alli and Gunhild were alone between 1918-1920. Gunhild wanted to leave, Alli didn't. Alli was 12 at the time. Gunhild had to work hard in Finland. They owned their house but a local farmer owned the land. She had to work for the farmer. Alli wanted to stay with a neighbor until she was confirmed. Had to auction off their belongings. Had two big trunks of pictures and glass frames with them when they left. Had 3 suitcases.

TRIP TO AMERICA: Left November 12, 1920. Took a boat from Holmo to Aabo (Turku). Took a boat to Stockholm, Sweden. Sister got seasick. Captain and sailors liked Alli. Captain invited Alli to his quarters for coffee and bread. Took 12 hours to get to Stockholm. Took train from Stockholm to Gothenburg (Goeteborg). Had to wait an extra day in Gothenburg. Ship was the 'Stockholm.' Sister was seasick during the entire trip. They brought her fruit soup to eat. It was too sweet for her but Alli liked it. Rats on the ship as big as cats. Traveled 3rd class.

ARRIVAL: Took all bedding from the passengers as they arrived in New York Harbor. The Swedish-American Line used the same docks as the Italians. The 'Stockholm' had to wait for a couple of days because there 2 or 3 ships ahead of them. Poor washing facilities in those days. Passengers were given dirty pillows and blankets to use. They were fed eggs 3 times a day. Tired of eggs by the time they got off. Saw first black man on Ellis Island. He had gold teeth. They had to stay a couple of days on Ellis Island. Slept in a room with 35 Catholics. Very nice people. Glad to leave Ellis Island. Had a lot of things to carry - 3 suitcases, 4-5 lunch boxes, plus some blankets which belonged to a lady on her way to Pearson, Washington. This lady was sick.

TRAIN TRIP: Got on evening train in New York. Train collided with another train at 3:00 am. Many people got hurt. Alli and her sister didn't get hurt. They had to get off the train. It was cold. They were supposed to go to

Chicago but ended up going to St. Louis. Sat up all the way to Seattle, Washington. Dirty trains. Alli got lice. Father and brothers took turns coming the train station to meet the girls. They didn't know about all the delays. Arrived on December 9, 1920. They hadn't eaten any of the lunches. Bought candy and apples on the train. Her brother threw away the lunch boxes. This surprised Alli. You couldn't throw things away in Finland.

FIRST IMPRESSION OF SEATTLE: Happy to see her family. Had to start school after New Years. Didn't want to go to school. Teacher asked her on her first day if she'd like to go out for recess or stay in. She chose to stay in the classroom. All of the other children looked in the window at her. On 2nd or 3rd day of school, met some girls who understood Swedish because their parents were Swedish. Had to walk home through Seattle Pacific College. A girl about her age would throw rocks at her everyday. The girl thought she was German. Found out she was Swedish and they became good friends. Finished grammar school after 4 years. 2 years of high school. Graduated from Business College.

Father was a real gentleman. He fished during the summer so he wasn't home then. Brother and wife lived with them. Gunhild didn't live with them. She worked as a housekeeper. Brother died in 1928. He and his wife had known each other in Finland. Got married in the U.S.

HARD TIMES IN FINLAND: Civil war in 1918-1919. Conservatives against the Bolsheviks. Food was scarce. They grew their own potatoes. She and her sister fished everyday.

HARD TIMES IN FINLAND: Fishing - Alli rowed and her sister would put out the 3 nets. Alli didn't like to work so hard. Pulled in the nets in the evening. Soldiers came by once and asked if they had any weapons. They had guns for hunting in the building where father's bakery had been. Guns hadn't been touched since their father left. Soldiers believed them. Didn't look at the guns. Measured the potato bin. Decided Alli and Gunhild had too many potatoes. Took what they needed. Left enough for the two girls. Everything was rationed. Sugar came in big cones. She and her sister would break the cone into cubes.

MEETING SPOUSE: Met him at a Scandinavian dance.

DIFFICULTIES IN A NEW COUNTRY: Language and meeting other children.

MOTHER'S DEATH: Describes preparing for the funeral. There were no funeral directors then. Mother's cousin helped out. Took her to Pargas to be buried. Ground was frozen solid. Her mother was buried next to a Bolshevik who had died.

SWEDISH ORGANIZATIONS: Didn't know anybody from Finland so they became active in Swedish organizations. Father wasn't very active in these organizations.

CONFIRMATION: 1923 in the Swedish-Finnish church (Lutheran) in Seattle. 12 confirmed. Alli was the only one confirmed in Swedish.

CITIZENSHIP: Became an American citizen through her father. Witnesses for a Swedish boy who took his papers out in 1941. The judge told her she couldn't be a witness. She was an American citizen but she needed her derivative citizenship papers. Needed to get proof from Finland that she was the daughters of her parents. Difficult to get in touch with people in Finland during this time. Her brother who was 11 years older could remember when she was born. Got some papers that had gone through the courts in Finland that declared that Alli and Gunhild were the minor children of their parents.

BUSINESS COLLEGE: Attended business college after high school. Worked for a family while attending college in order to pay for room and board. Worked in this man's office after graduating. Hew was a very prominent architect in Seattle.

WORK: The architect she worked for was J. Lister Holmes. William J. Bane was the other architect in the office. She worked for them for 4 years.

MARRIAGE: April, 1930 married Gust Benson. Met him through a friend who knew him in Spokane, WA. He came from Vaermland, Sweden. He worked in a boiler shop first, then worked as a jobber. Bought his own milk truck. Sold it in 1931 so he could go to Sweden and visit his parents.

TRIP TO SWEDEN: Stayed in Sweden for 5 months. Alli became ill on their 2nd day in Sweden. Had an appendectomy. Was in the hospital for 8 days. Made a trip to Finland. Their neighbors were like family. One of the neighbors had bought their old home. Sweden and Finland hadn't changed much at that time. Is much different now.

WEDDING: Had a small wedding at her sister's home. Pastor Swanson married them. Sister-in-law made a chicken dinner. Rented an apartment on Capital Hill. Didn't go on a honeymoon. Gust had his milk route then. Sold it in 1931.

THE DEPRESSION: Hadn't hit the West Coast in 1931. They were surprised to see so many people standing in 'soup lines' when they got to New York.

TRIP TO SWEDEN: Went to Sweden on the Gripsholm. 2 or 3 Swedish boys had to work on the boat in order to go back to Sweden. They had been deported. A friend of Gust's went back to Sweden with them. He had gotten sick. Had been in the U.S. for 3 years. Was in an institution for the insane the whole time. Had no money so he was deported finally. Had to be watched day and night on the boat. Gust had to loan him clothes. Gust was in full charge of the man once they got Gothenburg (Goeteborg). Took the train to Vaermland. Got a taxi to deliver the man to his parents. He got better once he was home. He visited Alli while she was in the hospital. (See also II-394)

WORK AFTER MARRIAGE: There wasn't really much work during that time. Did a lot of volunteer work during WWII. Worked at the rationing board. People told her she should get a regular job. Gust didn't really want her to work. She could type and most volunteers couldn't. Went back to business college (See also I-1047 and II-336) to brush up on her shorthand. Started working for the government in about 1942. Worked for them for about 4 years. Worked in the office of price stabilization. Many advantages and benefits when working for the government. She

worked in an office up in the Smith Tower. Got another job for the Federal Housing. Worked with a man whose name was Saari. Couldn't get along with him. She started this job with a Japanese girl. Saari made the Japanese girl take a lot of tests. Alli didn't have to because she was Finnish (Saari was also Finnish). Alli didn't think this was fair. Stayed for about 2 months. Got a job in the office of Clifford Benson (now the Swedish consulate), who had just completed law school. Worked for him from 1948 to 1965. Still helps him at times.

COMPANY FROM SWEDEN: Quit working because they were expecting company from Sweden. They had sent for Gust's younger brother and wife.

HUSBAND'S WORK: Worked for a dairy, delivering milk. Worked for Paramount Dairies until he retired at age 63. Alli and Gust celebrated their golden anniversary in 1980 and Gust passed away in 1981. They had a wonderful life together. Didn't have any children.

CHURCH: Hasn't been very active, but does attend Redeemer Lutheran church at times. She walks to church. Doesn't drive anymore. Too much traffic.

SCANDINAVIAN ORGANIZATIONS: They were very active in the Independent Order of Vikings. Belonged to the Swedish Club. Belonged to Vaermlands Gillet. Gust was a charter member.

TRIPS TO SWEDEN AND FINLAND: (See also II-394 and II-466) Have been back 4 or 5 times. Had more difficulties with the language the last time. They speak mostly Finnish in Finland now. Many speak English but are shy about speaking it. Tells about an experience in Helsingfors (Helsinki). They would ask questions in English but the answers came in Finnish. Finally went to a place that sold Swedish newspapers. Got directions in Swedish. Helsinki is a beautiful, clean city. Took train to Aabo. Friends met them there. Took 20 minutes to get from Aabo (Turku) to Pargas on the bus. It used to take an hour when only boat services were provided. Beautiful highways and bridges now. The boat ride was more beautiful. They speak mostly Finnish in Pargas now. Finland used to have 3 languages - Finnish, Swedish, and Russian. Now only Finnish and Swedish. Street signs are in both languages. In towns with a Swedish majority, the names come in Swedish first, then in Finnish. It's just the opposite in a town with a Finnish majority. Finnish services are held in the church every Sunday now. Expensive with 2 services in 2 languages every Sunday.

COMPANY FROM FINLAND: Two girls from Alli's home area came to visit about 4 years ago. One of the girls worked in a bank in Finland for over 35 years. She spoke Finnish very well. Spoke several languages. The other girl, about 35 years old, didn't speak any Finnish. Must be difficult to get around in Finland without knowing the language.

FAMILY IN AMERICA: Her sister is still living. She doesn't have any children. A brother died 10 years ago. His two daughters live in California and Arizona. They come and visits now and then. She talks about her nieces.

SWEDISH LANGUAGE: Hasn't forgotten it, but they haven't really spoken it much. The only Swedish foods she fixes are meatballs and pancakes. Lutefisk at Christmas. Says a prayer in Swedish.