

Magnhild Johnsen. Born Magnhild Torsvik in Kristiansand, Vest-Agder, Norway on April 26, 1908. Torsvik was the family farm and a centuries old name (from Tor, the god). She only knew one other family up north in Andenes that had the same name.

PARENTS Her father was Adolf Andreas Torsvik (this is not in agreement with the family background sheet), and her mother was Hanne Kristine Tønseth who was born in Arendal, Norway. Her father was the manager of the biggest lumberyard in Kristiansand, which had its headquarters in Setesdalen. Her mother was a teacher, grades 1-7. She was one of the first female professors in Norway, graduating from the University of Oslo. To be a professor she would have had to live in Oslo. But since she was married and living in Kristiansand, she became a teacher. Three of her friends, Anna Setle (?), Anna Vogt, and Anna Wexelson (?), also received university degrees, and they did continue with their careers. Her mother worked throughout her life; the paternal grandfather lived with them and was the 'nursemaid' - and 'you couldn't get a better one'.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS There were four children: Hjertdis, Harald, Bergljót, and Magnhild. Hjertdis (Sjertvik) worked in a telegraph office. Her brother Harald was a lawyer in Å

lesund; he was executed by the Germans during the war. His wife Elsie and two sons, Arne and Harald, are living. Arne is a doctor in Bergen, and Harald works for the government in Oslo.

Bergljót is the black mark in the family. She was a teacher married to Ove Sæther, a lieutenant in the military before the war who became one of Quisling's right-hand men. He was jailed for 14 years after the war before being released. Both are still living and in Oslo. The whole family has cut Bergljót off. Magnhild thinks she feels bad about her, but not Ove - 'he's just as much a Nazi now as ever'.

Magnhild was the fourth child. All the children were active in the underground during the war except Bergljót.

BERGLJÓT She had met Ove at a teachers' seminary in Oslo. They were married and thoroughly believed in Hitler and Quisling. Magnhild doesn't know why, just that they did. When her brother Harald was sentenced to death, they did try to intercede by having him imprisoned in Germany; that would have given him a chance at life.

HARALD Å

lesund is a fishing town. Harald owned shares in two boats which he placed at the disposal of the underground right away. He helped many people flee to England. Harald himself had a chance to leave; but he knew that two others who would be caught and executed were innocent, so he stayed. He was caught and executed in 1941; the family is very proud of his action, but very sad. His wife Elsie also worked in the underground. She lives in Å

lesund and is very well-known and liked. Elsie was born in the US of Norwegian parents, but the family returned to Norway (around Bergen) when she was 15-16 years old.

GRANDPARENTS Her paternal grandfather was her 'nursemaid': Georg Andersen Torsvik. His wife was Margrete Dorothea. Both came from southern Norway; grandfather was born in Torsvik. He bought a farm called Osenden and was a farmer until Margrete died (before Magnhild was born). Then he moved in with the Torsvik

family.

The maternal grandparents were Hanne Gumbertha and Gerhard TÅ_nseth (Tynsett in the old days). Gerhard was born in RÅ_ros; he died in 1937. Hanne was born in Arendal. He was the head of the telegraph system in southern Norway, and she was a 'grand lady' - had 12 children.

HOME Father had a farm outside of, but close to Torsvik; he was the manager of the 'feltspat' (feldspar) mine. Mother was teaching. When Magnhild was four, the war broke out and the family moved into Kristiansand. Her mom continued to teach and her father became the manager of the lumberyard. Magnhild remembers both the farm and town homes as she's returned to visit so many times. The farm was a beautiful place surrounded by neighbors who were also cousins.

SCHOOL IN KRISTIANSAND She attended school, graduated from high school, and attended one year of college.

HOME They had kept part of the old farm for a summer home, and rented a cold monstrous house in Kristiansand. The children had upstairs bedrooms and in the morning during the winter they'd awake to frozen water in the wash basins. The summers were beautiful, especially the long evenings.

SCHOOL The grade school was very close. Her mother continued to teach because she wasn't too strong, and teaching was easier on her than housework. When her mother died (about 1920), they got a housekeeper until her older sister HjÅ_rdis finished telegraph school and took over. Magnhild took over the house and attended college simultaneously, taking general courses in gymnasium. Her special interest was languages.

CHURCH Lutheran Protestant - always. Religion was and is very important in her home. The cathedral (Domkirken) in Kristiansand was at one time the second tallest building in Europe; but the steeple was shot off by the Germans during the invasion.

CHRISTMAS IN NORWAY Christmas preparation was lengthy. On the farm cattle and pigs were butchered to make rullepÅ_lse, etc., and a lady came in to make lefse. In town cookie baking began four to six weeks before, and all the gifts were handmade. (Her first purchased gift in 1914-15 was a doll that could 'sleep'; she was so proud of that doll.) The oil lamps were cleaned (electricity came in 1914), and the wood was chopped and ready for the woodstove.

CHRISTMAS EVE At 4 pm there was a children's program at the church. Afterwards all the bells of Norway would chime for an hour - was especially beautiful if it snowed. They went home to supper which was boiled codfish in their part of town; others had roast pork or lutefisk. The codfish was served with potatoes, melted butter - never with white sauce,- and risengrynsgrøet with an almond in it. Whoever got the almond received a marzipan pig. (Magnhild shows the interviewer an old-timer marzipan pig she'd received.) After dinner they did the dishes, and everything was put in order. Then her father rang a special bell in the parlor, and the children stormed in to see the Christmas tree. They danced and sang at least 10 Christmas songs before presents were opened.

CHRISTMAS DAY This is a family day. After attending an early church service at 6 am, the family came over to visit Grandfather who was the oldest member of the family. On the second day, partying and 'julebuk' began. The party festivals continued for the 20 days of Christmas, ending with a children's party on January 12 to take down the tree. On Christmas Day they ate leftover, cold risengrynsgrÅt mixed with cream and sugar - resembled 'riskrem'.

'Julebuk' was a Christmas tradition: masked and costumed people (usually children) go around from door to door and are treated with goodies. They dressed up as elves and dwarfs - rather like an American Halloween.

(The microphone falls and the conversation is lost.)

Speaking of the 17th of May and midsummer's eve. Even during the war the kids celebrated May 17.

EMIGRATION After college Magnhild kept house for her father. Then she desired to attend Stabekk husmorskole in Oslo to become a home economics teacher. In order to qualify she needed a year's employment in housework, but couldn't see doing housework in Norway for anybody. 'You (housegirls) were not anything if you were working for wages' in Norway; so she decided to emigrate and work one year in America.

Her father wasn't too happy, but agreed, as she was going to Brooklyn where his oldest brother, Bernhard Torsvik, lived. She sailed from Kristiansand aboard the 'Stavangerfjord' on March 7, 1929. With her she carried the obligatory \$50 and a few clothes. She was seasick the whole time - from the first night out until three days after arriving in Brooklyn.

Her old boyfriend introduced her to Olaf Johnsen, a fellow passenger, on the dock at Kristiansand. Olaf brought her water while she was seasick and in bed. When the weather cleared around Newfoundland, he coaxed her up on deck, but she just hung over the rail. The trip unfortunately lasted 10 days, not the expected seven. This was due to rough weather and a delayed landing; it was a holiday (St. Pat's Day) and they weren't allowed to land.

She saw the Statue of Liberty in between throwing up. They landed directly in Brooklyn around 3rd St. (no Ellis Island). She was met by her uncle and his 20 year old daughter, Margret, and they took a taxi home to Woodhaven, Long Island. Relatives came to visit her, but she was still sick, and couldn't visit or eat. Her uncle's house was very warm and comfortable, and she was happy to be there.

WORK In two weeks she began her first job as a house girl for a very nice Jewish family. She was still weak, fainted, and had to be taken back home. Ten days later she returned to work, but the job didn't last long because the Jewish family moved to Israel.

Olaf was working in Scarsdale. He emigrated in 1923, and had been visiting in Norway in 1929 when he and Magnhild met and crossed the ocean. He found her a job at the same home where he was a caretaker/chauffeur. The owners, the Youngs, were wealthy Americans who had a business school in Brooklyn. They employed at least five

people in their Scarsdale home: Magnhild (the cook), Olaf, a nursemaid, a governess, and a laundress. She stayed at the job until after she was married and pregnant with the first child.

Magnhild had no problems with the language when working because English was part of the curriculum in high school, and languages were interesting to her. She was paid \$50 a month in the beginning, and had a beautiful room with a private bath; she felt she was in seventh heaven. The laundress from White Plains did not live in, but the other employees did, and all had similar accommodations. Both the laundress and the nursemaid were from an Irish background.

Her salary was increased immediately to \$60, then \$70, and by the end - \$90. She cooked both American and Norwegian foods, learning American ways and recipes via a cookbook and from the older Mrs. Young. Though raised in a proper home, there were new things to learn about in America: finger bowls, formal service, electrical refrigerators, *etc.* The older Mrs. Young planned the meals, bought the food, and taught Magnhild.

Olaf worked for both parties (the younger couple and the older mother) and in both homes (Scarsdale and Brooklyn). But he stayed with the 'old lady' in Brooklyn mostly.

MARRIAGE After meeting Olaf on the ocean crossing, she decided not to return to Norway, but to get married. Their wedding ceremony was rather unusual and unexpected. Friends from White Plains were to be witnesses. When Olaf and Magnhild went to obtain the license, the judge wanted to marry them directly because he had an impending golf game. So, they were married right then and there at the courthouse with a state patrol man and the judge's secretary, Miss Brown, as witnesses. For 'music', there was an Italian family crying their hearts out for a jailed son. 'It was quite really something. We laughed afterwards, but—.'

FAMILY LIFE They stayed a week at Olaf's sisters home in Lakewood, NJ. Then returned to work and had a whole section of the house for rooms. After four-six weeks (October 1929), Magnhild was pregnant and too sick to work. The family went broke in 1929, but Olaf continued to work until the spring while she lived in Lakewood. Her first baby, Christine, was born. Christine married Frank Rea, has two children, and lives in Yelm, Washington.

Olaf found employment including a job with Providence Loan Society in NY, and they had a number of apartments in Lakewood, Bronx, and Brooklyn. Their second child, Aina Sylvia, was born in Brooklyn. She is now married (husband works for Weyerhaeuser), has five children, and has a ceramics shop in Raymond, Washington.

The father-in-law in Kristiansand, Norway was alone; they decided to move home and care for him in 1938 - right before the war.

World War II: family life. They lived in Kristiansand for nine and a half years from 1938 to 1948; Olaf was employed as an electrician. Their third child, Harald, was born there. Harald is an electrician at the Trojan nuclear plant in Oregon. Tells background of Harald's education, training, and work experiences. He married a Polynesian girl from the Marshall Islands; they and their two daughters live in Longview, Washington.

World War II in Norway. Olaf injured himself at work and was 'out of commission' for over a year. Her brother Harald was one of the leaders in the Underground. Magnhild and a lawyer-friend of Harald were assigned the job of transcribing and translating English broadcasts (Churchill, etc.); she and Olaf had a hidden radio in their basement. These underground papers were packed into the school rucksack of the oldest daughter who delivered them to her teacher. Magnhild reflects on how she used her child and what would have happened if she was caught, but philosophically admits that at the time, 'you did what you could do' and didn't think about the consequences.

The Russian prisoners of war. On the outskirts of Kristiansand was a POW camp containing 18,000 Russian soldiers. Magnhild says, 'I never saw people treated as bad as that.' The winter of 1943 was one of the coldest, and the prisoners lived in barracks and had newspapers for shoes. The Norwegian people didn't have much, but the Russian prisoners had even less. Magnhild, like many Norwegians, tried to slip a half loaf of bread to some prisoners working on a ditch. A German guard caught her in the act and told her 'to pick it up and don't do it again'. The prisoners suffered terribly.

When peace broke out, there was a celebration party in a park outside of town with the Russians as guests: they were pampered. Most Norwegians had hoarded a little something during the war. Magnhild had some white flour which she received when pregnant with Harald. With it she made and brought a white cake to the party. Magnhild doesn't understand how a cultured people like the Germans could treat people - prisoners and Jews - like that.

She has good memories from the war and terrible ones - like her brother Harald who was killed in 1941. He was squealed on by a boy (schoolmate) from her hometown. Seven of her relatives were executed in the war by Germans including her brother, two second cousins, and an uncle. Another cousin's execution was set for May 9, 1945 but peace came in time to save him. This family suffered a lot. The Nazis couldn't make him talk; he was a 'telegrafist' - sending cables to England. To make him talk, a German woman guard beat his pregnant wife right in front of him until she lost the baby. 'The German women guards were worse than anyone else; you wouldn't think that people could treat people like that.' She doesn't call them people and hated the Germans for a long time. Now she feels more sorry for them as they have to live with themselves.

When the Johnsen's returned to America in 1948, they tried to look up their old American-German friends, Fred and Freida. But Fred refused to see them because of guilt. Magnhild tried to convince him otherwise, because they too were victims of the war. The Nazis had imprisoned Fred's 82-year-old mother in an attempt to 'draft' him as a soldier. He had rebuffed this coercion, but still felt guilty.

RETURN TO AMERICA Their decision to return to America was made by the entire family. The father-in-law had died during the war. The two girls were 15 and 17, Americans, and greatly saddened by the war. Many of the family's Jewish friends were gone: 1400 Jews from Norway went to Nazi camps and only 14 returned. Magnhild herself could have continued living in Norway, but the girls really wanted to live in America. They traveled to Lakewood, New Jersey. Olaf's friend offered him a job as an electrician in Hoquiam, Washington. They moved across the country in a truck in the fall of 1948. They had a grand time. Her 'son is the only kid that stood up all across America'.

They lived in Hoquiam three years, and then transferred to Eureka, CA. When grandchildren came, they moved back to WA to be close to family. Olaf worked as an electrician at Simpson (lumber company) in Shelton until he retired.

RETURN TRIPS TO NORWAY In 1970 after Olaf's retirement they traveled all over Norway. Magnhild returned again in 1976 with her daughter. Norway is not a 'poor country' anymore. It has a very high standard of living and has grown tremendously; Kristiansand had 15,000 people when she was growing up, and now it's 75,000.

NORWEGIAN HERITAGE Christmas continues to be a big day for the family. The grandchildren enjoy skiing. Christine is fluent in Norwegian; Anna and Harald understand Norwegian but Anna prefers not to speak it.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES Magnhild has always been active in the church - in Norway and America, held offices in Eureka and Aberdeen. She has a life membership in Sons of Norway and was an officer in that also. She still attends meetings in the Olympia lodge.

CITIZENSHIP She received her citizenship in Eureka, CA in 1954. Had first papers in New York, but lost them as they were out of the country over five years. They started over, were put on a preferred list, and received papers quickly.

Snakker litt norsk. Magnhild recites a table grace which in Harald's home is given in three languages: English, Norwegian, and 'Marshallese'.