

**FAMILY BACKGROUND** Full name is Hilda Maria Olsen. Her maiden name was also Olsen. She was born November 20, 1888 in northern Norway. Tromsø was the closest town. Her parents were Karoline Olsen and Ole Olsen. He was a fisherman and shoemaker. There were nine girls in the family, and Hilda was the youngest: Bergitte, Eline ?, Tina ?, Akseline, Charlotta, Amanda, Elvine?, ?, and Hilda. At Hilda's birth, her dad was waiting in the kitchen—for his boy. When told it was another girl, he just shook his head and went out. She was a year old when he died of blood poisoning. When he was fixing shoes, a needle had broken and the puncture wound became infected.

After he died, the family split up—'one here and one there'. Hilda's adopted dad was a brother to her grandmother. She doesn't know anything about her grandparents. The eight girls stayed in Norway and are all dead now. But a niece came to the US.

**EMIGRATION** Her adopted sister was in Tacoma and sent Hilda a ticket. 'I thought it was all honey, honey, and some more honey'. When she arrived, people tried to talk to her, but she was so ashamed she couldn't speak English that she walked away. She was 21 when she emigrated.

She didn't find it hard to leave Norway. Sailing from Tromsø, she traveled with a man and his daughter. All she remembers from the trip was dancing on the boat. The trip took two, three weeks. She was poor and didn't bring much along with her. They arrived in Canada and took the train to Seattle-Tacoma. The train stopped in Seattle, but the man was careful to have everyone stay on board. Her sister had waited at the Tacoma station, but finally went home when the train didn't show up on. So, when Hilda arrived, her sister wasn't there.

A guardian lady came and Hilda thought 'Be careful. Don't let anybody come and say something that isn't supposed to be said'. The lady inquired if she was Hilda. Hilda almost didn't respond but finally said yes. The lady then told her about the sister waiting and having to return home. This sister was pregnant. Both she and the baby died from tuberculosis soon after the birth around Christmas.

**SETTLING IN** By that time, Hilda had friends in Tacoma, and she also had a job in a laundry. She learned English little by little, but did not attend school because of the lack of money. The toughest part of being in America was not knowing the language. But because she was young and many of her friends spoke Norwegian, she basically was happy to be in America. However, she continued to be shy about speaking to people.

**FAMILY** Hilda met her husband in Norway on a street car. She met him again on a bus in Tacoma, and he said 'Are you here? Are you married?' John Olsen worked for his uncle in the strawberry business. After going together awhile, they were married on February 14 in Tacoma. They had a nice little wedding in a friend's home. They bought two lots and John built a little home.

Her husband was a carpenter also and worked at Wollochet Bay. They had two boys, Raymond and Irving. Both live in Tacoma, and are married with children. The older boy bought out .....? in Lakewood; he's a smart kid, Hilda thinks. The younger son is a machinist.

Hilda's husband died in about 1948. She attended church, but was not active. Tells a story about her grandson and Pt. Defiance.

Hilda was active in Daughters of Norway, Sons of Norway, and Nordlandslaget. She helped in the kitchen, cooking. At home she cooked different Norwegian foods like lefse and roemmegroet.

She returned to Norway in 1962 traveling with some friends. She didn't know anything there—all was so strange. Only one sister was living. It was strange to drive around Norway. When she was a child, they had to walk all over. Remembers losing a shoe and having to retrieve it because the family was so poor. Her old place was closed up. It was in some valley [dal] and there were lots of birch around. Everyone had moved into town.

LANGUAGE AND CUSTOMS The best hour in school was singing; she loved to sing. Her older boy talked good Norwegian, but married an Irish, so they speak English. The younger son married a Swede and they speak back and forth. Hilda spoke Norwegian at home, because she figured they'd learn English in school. Raymond could speak both equally well.

CHRISTMAS berlinerkranser, krumspritz? and other things. In Norway, they didn't do much except visit the neighbors. They had to walk one Norwegian mile [seven English miles] to church. They also skied. She remembers losing a ski and watching it slide into open water. It was fetched via a boat. In Norway, they didn't celebrate any other holidays because of work. All she heard was 'hurry up and eat and go out and work'. They couldn't sit still and think—always had to work. In her own home in America, life was easier. Raymond would always return home from school and say 'Mama, did you know...?!' Hilda never asked if she should know, but just listened to his latest discovery.

She wrote to Norwegian people when she first came, but then everyone stopped. They were all 'lazy' correspondents.

It was tough to come to America and not know the language. Emigration was easier for the generation after Hilda; they had people to come to. A lot of Norwegians lived in Tacoma: 'half of the telephone book was Olsens'. In Norway there were no doctors where she came from—only jordmors. If someone got sick, people just stayed in bed till they were better. After marriage, she didn't work out—stayed home and cared for the kids. Her own children were born at home with a jordmor's assistance.

Hilda says the Lord's Prayer in Norwegian.