

Margit Johnsen. Maiden name was Carlsen. Born on June 5, 1901 in a small town, four Norwegian miles north of Bodø, Norway. A Norwegian mile is equal to seven English miles. Used to go by boat everywhere. Home place is Aasjord, this is still a community.

PARENTS Ludvik Carlsen and Bergitte Danielsen. Father was a farmer. Did fishing in the wintertime and farmed in the summer.

Father was fishing from January to late April. He was gone all this time. This was in the Lofoten Islands. Mother stayed home with the children.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS Seven children. Elbjørg, Kaare, Haakon, Leif, Einar, and Thorstein. Three brother left Norway.

GRANDPARENTS Does not remember seeing them and never heard about them. Mother was from a village farther south. Dad was from the area Margit was born.

Mother came to Aasjord as a tailor and then met her husband. Did men's tailoring.

Does not know anything about her name Carlsen. Tells where her mother's maiden name comes from. Husband changed his name from Johansen to Johnsen when he came to America. He was from Bodø.

CHILDHOOD HOME Lived close to the ocean. Mountains behind them. Sunsets were beautiful. Storms on the ocean were common. One brother lives in the home place. Always at the ocean fishing and swimming. Had their own boat and fished for food.

FISH Salted or dried it. Split and filleted it. Buried in it salt. Had a cellar underground to store their food. This past year (1982) the potatoes froze, first time this had happened. The fjord froze over this year too.

Storms on the fjord caused the fishermen to stay on shore some days. Many lost their lives. Always worried that their father may not return.

Hardship for the woman to raise families, they were used to it. They lived happily, never complained.

Children got wood from the woods, split it, and brought it in. They carried the water. Got the feed for the cows nine months out of the year.

Children started working when they were 6-7 years old. Grew potatoes and hay. Planted carrots and rutabagas in the summer. Diet was mostly fish and potatoes.

CHRISTMAS A fun time for everybody. Celebrated for a long time. Started Christmas Eve. First day of Christmas you could not visit anyone, had to stay home. Christmas Day was a family day. Father read the Bible at home.

CHURCH Was one Norwegian mile from home. Every third week had church. Minister had two other places. One fellow with a big motorboat gathered up all the people in the community and took them to church.

CHRISTMAS Second day of Christmas was visiting day. Went around to everybody in the community. It was custom that you could not leave the home without getting something to eat. You were through all your work by noon on Christmas Eve. Dressed in the best clothes that they had.

DECORATED HOUSE FOR CHRISTMAS Had a tree decorated with baskets made of paper woven together. Had candles on the tree.

EASTER Easter was an important holiday. Celebrated Thursday and Friday before Easter. Had first and second Easter days.

CHRISTMAS FOOD Did not have meat very often because slaughter was in the fall. Had a little meat at Christmas. Baked cookies, lefse. No lutefisk at her home.

CLIMATE IN NORTHERN NORWAY Had kerosene lamps when it was dark. Sun starts shining again in late January. By June there is all light. People are not that affected by the change in night and day. Did a lot of spinning, weaving, and knitting. Were self-sufficient.

Skied most of the time because of the snow. Went to school by skis. Had school for three weeks at a time and then were home for three weeks. Teacher had many places to teach. This all the teaching she had. Went until she was confirmed, age 15.

Went out to work on neighboring farms since she was 13 years old. Stayed with a neighbor and worked until she was 18.

Went to Bodø to work. Gives an account of her uncle who went to America. They passed through Bodø on a visit, her uncle gave her invitation to go to America. She had been working in Bodø for six years before she decided to go to America. She had worked in the canneries.

In 1924 she wrote to her uncle in America. She did not like it anymore in Norway. She could not see a future in Norway. There were many immigrants going.

Waited for a year before she left. Came in July 1925. Margit knew many people who were leaving Norway.

Did not know anything about America before she came. Uncle sent a ticket.

Left from home on a boat to Trondheim then took a train to Oslo. She did not think much about leaving. She traveled alone.

Took the Bergensfjord. Was sick the first day. Shared a room with two others. Food was okay. All Norwegian immigrants on the boat.

Seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time. It was early Saturday morning.

ELLIS ISLAND Went by ferry from Ellis Island to the main land. It was dirty. Talks about the differences between the Norwegian immigrants and the Italian immigrants. Tells about an experience she had where she was quite scared. First time she saw black people.

Took ten days to cross the Atlantic. All immigrants went through Ellis Island. No examination. Had to have a head tax of \$25.

Mentions seeing the skyscraper in New York and the Statue of Liberty. Did not know the meaning behind the Statue at that time.

TRAIN TRIP Got on the Southern Pacific. People helped her get on the right train.

TRAIN TRIP Miserable time because it was so hot in July. Went through the southern states, changed trains in Chicago. Her and a friend were the only ones from the ship to get on this southern line. Someone helped them get on the right train. Margit had two suitcases with her.

Her friend warned her not to go with anyone. A girl approached her and found her something to read. She brought her four magazines. Her friend had read about white slavery, so she was scared. They were so dirty when they reached Tacoma.

LANDED IN TACOMA Uncle was there to meet her. Took five days from New York to Tacoma. Sat up the whole trip.

Had language difficulties on the train. They did not understand about money. Her friend had a package from Ellis Island full of everything: crackers, bread, and summer sausage. Bought sandwiches on the train. Met up with people in Portland, who they knew from the boat. Her friend's name was Osbjornson. They met in Oslo. He was from Bodø.

Uncle had a boarding house. He used to have a hotel on 17th. Then they had a rooming house on 11th and J. Her uncle's name was Timmermo.

Started working in Sumner and worked in a cannery with fruit. Her aunt helped get this job. She took the bus out everyday.

HOUSEWORK Stayed with one family for seven months, the Hansen's. They were Danish. Roland Hansen had an insurance company. Margit could speak Danish. She never liked housework, liked the outdoors better.

Heard of someone who went to Alaska. Went to Seattle for work in Alaska and worked with the herring company. Mostly Norwegians up there. Margit got picked to work in the kitchen, better pay. She did the gibbing of the herring. Took the guts out and salted it.

Had monthly wages in the kitchen, cooked for the men. They made herring meal, oil and salted herring. She did the dished when they were all through. Spoke Norwegian in the camp. Her best friend married the head cook. Margit worked two summers in Alaska. Worked for Nalley's for a while.

LEARNING ENGLISH Did not learn much at first because she worked where Norwegian and Danish was spoken. When she first got a radio this helped her to learn the language. Learned from her own child.

Margit has always felt at home in this country. She was on her own early in Norway.

EARLY TACOMA Did not like the way they handled the horses here. She worked hard when she came to America.

DAYS OF HOUSEWORK Made breakfast, cleaning, made beds, took a whole day to iron. All the kids went to Annie Wright Seminary. They had uniforms that had to be ironed and starched. Fixed lunch for the girls. Cooked dinner and washed clothes.

Woman in the house did not do much where she was. She sat upstairs.

Had half of Thursday and half of Sunday off. Usually never got off until the middle of the afternoon.

WAGES Started out with \$40 a month plus room and board. Got a raise to \$45 a month. She quit to go to Alaska.

MEETING HUSBAND He was a friend of her uncle's. Einok Johnsen, he came to America in 1911 from Norway. He had stayed at her uncle's hotel, the St. Francis Hotel. They were married in 1927. They went to the courthouse.

Bought a home after they were married a week. On 38th and F Street. Tore down the house in 1965 for a road.

Husband was a fisherman and a longshoreman. He went to the Bering Sea in Alaska during the summer. He was gone a lot.

Did not work after she was married except for a friend once and a while.

CHILDREN Earl Johnsen died in 1958.

SCANDINAVIAN COMMUNITY Daughters of Norway, became a member when she first came. Have done so many things. Used to take baked goods to the wounded soldiers at Madigan. A service club. Now helps with Scandinavian Days. Tacoma is the biggest Daughters group on the West Coast.

Used to do demonstrating of making Norwegian foods. Once she made fish pudding.

ROLE OF THE DAUGHTERS Meant an awful lot to her. She has met many friends. Has grown in size lately.

Husband was a member of the Sons of Norway but he was gone a lot so he did not take part in much. He passed away in 1954.

CHURCH Belongs to Bethlehem Lutheran.

TRIPS BACK TO NORWAY In 1948, 23 years after she left. Lots of fun. Boat was crowded because everybody was going home after the war. Saw her parents in 1948. Hard to speak Norwegian when she first went back. Last trip was in 1978.

Her brother has visited her in Tacoma. She still keeps in contact with relatives there.

NORWEGIAN HERITAGE 'Means everything to you.' Proud of her language.

Being a Norwegian means a lot to her. A good feeling you have. She also feels American.

SPEAKS A LITTLE NORWEGIAN Table prayer, always says this before meals. Go to top Maintained by archives@plu.edu © 2002-2003 Pacific Lutheran University