

Sigfrid Eidsness Ohrt. Born in Eidsness, near Bergen, Norway. Born on September 26, 1891.

PARENTS Ivar Eidsness and Ragnhild Fjelde.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS Bertha, John, Reginald, Inger, Olaf, (Sigfrid), Bert, Hannah, and Edwin. These are the names they went by for most of their lives. Changed names when they came to America.

FAMILY LIFE IN NORWAY Lived in a rural community along the banks of the Eidsness Fjord. Father made his living in Bergen. Worked for a newspaper. Involved in a bank. A sergeant in the military. Wrote articles, witty things. Quite talented. Mother had a child every year. Took care of the cows. Came from a mountain family. Could make cheese. Did the farm work.

EIDSNESS Small community. Small farms with cows and sheep. Bergen was the nearest largest town. People made their own clothes. Used their own wool. Mother had a spinning wheel. Had a dressmaker come in to sew for the family. Had a shoemaker come in to make shoes.

CHILDHOOD Went to school. Sigfrid was quite the actor as a child. Brothers made a swing for her. Played in the boats. Fished. Would throw a small rock up. It'd land on the back of her hand. Threw the rock up again and caught it. Community celebrated May 17th, Norway's Constitution Day. Community would march 2 by 2. Person in front carried a big flag. The children had small flags. Would have a big bonfire on one evening in June.

SCHOOL Started at age seven. Went six days a week. First day of school, older sister Inger and her friend escorted Sigfrid to school. The schoolmaster, a young man, asked her to write a '4.' She did it upside down. He told her how to do it right. Used slate boards and slate pencils. School was in Vassel, near a lake. They used to skate on the lake. Girls weren't allowed to swim in the lake. They could only wade.

CHILDHOOD (See also I-284) Had a lot of freedom. Used to pick berries. Would pick small red berries called tyttebaer. Brought them in to Bergen and sold them at the market. Had relatives so they could stay overnight.

SCHOOL IN NORWAY (See also I-365) Had been in school for three years. In Norway, had to memorize the lessons. Sigfrid had to get up early to study. Had religious training in school. Had to study the catechism and Bible history. Had other studies too.

CHURCH Neighbors would gather. Had a boat big enough for the neighborhood. Four men would row across the fjord to the church. Sat in the church for long services. The children got restless. Mother would have to keep them quiet.

GRANDPARENTS Remembers her grandfather. A fine man. Lived with his second wife, who didn't take much interest in the grandchildren. The house Sigfrid lived in had two parts. Her family resided in the larger half. Grandfather lived in the other half. Grandfather and his wife had a room called the 'stue.' Had their bed and belongings in there. Had a storage room, which the grandchildren were not allowed to go in. They weren't allowed to visit his grandfather without permission. Sigfrid would follow her grandfather around on the farm. He'd take her in the boat with him when he went fishing. She has pleasant memories of him. His name was Johannes Eidsness. His wife had a great big apron. Whenever she was outside, she'd gather sticks for the fire and pack them into the house. People were very thrifty.

CHRISTMAS Mother seldom left home, she was so busy. She did go to the school Christmas program. They'd dance around the Christmas tree. Sang Christmas carols. Dancing, one ring of adults, a ring of teenagers coming the opposite direction, and on the outside, a ring of smaller children going in the same direction as the adults. Served refreshments. Had first chocolate there. Celebrated for two weeks. Met at neighbors' homes. Mother came with them.

IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA Father was involved in many programs in Bergen. He was talented and very generous with his time. So generous that he neglected his family. When Sigfrid was 9-10, he got himself into trouble. Couldn't fulfill his obligations. Slipped out of the country. Income wasn't sufficient to take care of his family. The grandfather had given his home to her father, the eldest son as was the custom. The house was about to be taken away from the family. Grandfather was very helpful. Helped mother pack things and dispose of things that were to be seized by the government. Mother had three brothers, young men who had recently come to America. They had acquired farms in South Dakota. They sent money to help her bring her family to America. They needed help on their farms, so John was 16 and Inger who was 13 were sent tickets before the rest of the family. Sigfrid thinks that they left Norway in the spring. Bertha who was 17 was regarded as an adult. She was very helpful, a second mother to the rest of the kids.

LEAVING NORWAY Mother hid things in the hayloft for other family members, rather than having things taken away. Hid a saddle in the hay. Brought her hand sewing machine and spinning wheel with her. Sigfrid had a special friend that she wanted to say goodbye to. While the rest of the family was carrying out things down to the boat landing, Sigfrid went to her friend's house. Grandfather came down to the boat. Was very sad. Knew he'd never see them again. Bert was his special pet. Tears rolled down his cheeks when he said, 'I know I shall never see any of you again.' They loaded their things into the neighborhood boat. A neighbor rowed them to the boat landing where the boat would come that would take them to Bergen. Spent the next night in Bergen. Next day took a boat across the North Sea to Liverpool, England. Rough ride. 14-year-old brother got away from the family while in Liverpool. They had to spend three days there. He got lost. They had to send the cops out to find him.

TRIP ACROSS THE ATLANTIC Went on the Cunard Line. Traveled steerage. People from many countries on the boat. Wore different kinds of clothes. Smelled on the boat. They were curious about the different languages they heard. Tried to get close enough to listen but mother got mad. Mother got seasick. They came to America in 1901, probably in the spring.

ARRIVAL Landed in Boston, Massachusetts. Exciting when they first saw land. Went through the immigration building. They had a young woman from home traveling with them. She couldn't come in as part of their family. Immigration officers asked who had supplied her ticket. She told them an unmarried man in South Dakota. They asked if she intended to marry him. She said no. She intended to pay him back. She was quite indignant. Mother had to have a place to go. They were very particular. Had to have someone who would be responsible for you.

TRAIN TRIP They were put on the train to South Dakota. Stopped in Chicago. A strange man approached them with a big grin on his face. He was bearded. They didn't recognize him. He seemed glad to see them. Mother recognized him as her husband. He'd disguised himself with his beard. He was in trouble with the law in Norway. He was very lonely. Wanted a couple of the children. Mother didn't like the idea. He ended up getting a couple of the boys, Olaf, 11 and Reginald, 14. They stayed with him for a couple of years.

SETTLING IN SOUTH DAKOTA Mother kept house for a bachelor brother. He had a farm with cows and equipment. He became involved in a well-drilling business that proved to be more profitable than farming. With the help of the children, mother was able to take care of most of the farm work. They lived very comfortably. They were supported by their father and mother's brothers. Father was writing for a Norwegian newspaper in Chicago. The family was never together again as a family after coming to America. Most of the children were in their teens by then.

NORTH DAKOTA About four years later, Sigfrid's father came out west. Land was opening up in North Dakota and somehow he was involved in locating settlers who wanted land. The younger boys (Olaf and Reginald) were too young to take land in the states but in Canada because they needed more people, males were encouraged to come and take homesteads. When the two boys were 17 and 18 they were allowed to take land provided that their parents were close enough to help. Father took up a homestead on North Dakota's northern border and the boys took up homesteads on the southern border of Saskatchewan, Canada. Each one got 160 acres. They lived in a shack. An 18-year-old cousin was in on this. The three boys built a shack on the corner joining the three pieces of property. They had to find work in towns. Began to work their land. Made it eventually. Got titles to their land. People would help each other with their farms. People worked on both sides of the border until immigration stations sprang up everywhere. Her brother did some work in Ambrose, N.D. The boys worked on big farms eastern North Dakota when help was needed with the threshing. Earned enough money to get started with. Most got by by exchanging labor. Father built mother a house. She had cows. There was water in the slough. She milked cows, made butter and cheese. Sigfrid was farmed out. The couldn't afford to have her at home. Got work in Portal, North Dakota. Had one year of school left. Worked for her board there. In the fall, when she was 15, she was sent to live in her brother's shack. They had their first calf. Needed someone to take of it while they were helping with the threshing. Sigfrid was supposed to stay with a young woman on a neighboring farm who'd just got married. Her husband was helping with the threshing too. He came home early because the work was too hard for him. Sigfrid didn't want to stay at their place so she moved into the shack.

SCHOOL IN NORTH DAKOTA After spending four years on the farm, Sigfrid's mother spent a couple of years cooking for miners. Family members were working in the mines. This was near the North Dakota and South Dakota border. Sigfrid was sent to Portal, North Dakota near the border to work and go to school. Passed the seventh grade. Father built mother a house in Ambrose, North Dakota. Took one of the first trains that went to Ambrose. A new school was being built there. Sigfrid stayed with a family and earned room and board while going to school. Completed her eighth grade education there. Was 15 then.

LEARNING ENGLISH Community in North Dakota was Scandinavian, but school was taught in English. There were two American families in the area. The teacher wouldn't allow the Norwegian children to speak Norwegian. Sigfrid started in the first grade. Was in the sixth grade after four years. Didn't have any problems learning English.

CHURCH Was confirmed at a Lutheran church when 14. Was confirmed in Norwegian. Her mother had done a good job of raising her. Sigfrid feels that she had always been self-disciplined.

WORK Worked away from home since she was 15. When the two brothers who'd stayed with her father in Chicago had completed their obligations on their land in Saskatchewan they sold it. They were in their early 20s. Started a business in a community of homesteaders. They opened a coalmine. Opened a store and a boarding house. Sigfrid had been away from home, gone to business school, and worked a couple of years. When she was 20, she went to business school, and worked a couple of years. When she was 20, she went to visit her brothers. They needed her help. She ran their store for them. Reginald, who liked the outdoors, bought a fancy team of horses. He wanted to sell insurance or farm equipment. Turned the store over to Sigfrid. There was a 19-year-old girl hired to do the cooking. Baked bread and took care of the three meals every day. Sigfrid would close the store sometimes and help her. They were all young people there. This was in Saskatchewan. Sigfrid wanted to move into town after a year as store manager. They were 25 miles from town. Had met several salesmen who'd come out to take orders. A man from a wholesale fruit company got her a job bookkeeping in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

BUSINESS COLLEGE Family she was living with in Ambrose, North Dakota while attending school (8th grade) moved to Aberdeen, Washington. They had a little girl, Joy, who was a handful. The mother was nervous. Took Sigfrid with them because she could handle the little girl. Sigrid felt free in Aberdeen. She was away from her parents and could do whatever she wanted. Had the family there as her protectors. She went downtown looking for work. Found a coffee shop that needed a waitress. Went in and ordered a waffle and coffee. As she was paying for her food, she asked the young man if she could see the manager. He was the manager. Said she was interested in the waitress job. She got the job and started the next day at 7am. Worked until 730pm. Earned \$8 a week. Got one afternoon off. Stayed there for almost a year. Had saved \$100. The family who'd brought her had moved to Portland. Had to find her own place. Lived in three places while going to business school. A Jewish man in town who was a leader in the community, was a customer at the coffee shop where Sigfrid had been working. Was impressed with her performance. Needed a bookkeeper. Sigfrid had a friend who worked in his store. He'd seen Sigfrid in the store. Told her friend that the next time she was in the store he would like to talk to her. He offered Sigfrid the job. She never had difficulties getting a job. Worked for him for two years. Had vacation with pay coming. Went back to see her parents. Hadn't been home for four years. It was at this point that she started working in her brother's store in Saskatchewan. (See II-242)

MEETING SPOUSE Met her husband in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. She was 22 years old then. Got married one year later. They lived in Moose Jaw for several years but Sigfrid wanted to raise her children on the West Coast. Her two oldest children were born in Moose Jaw. Husband had never been on the coast.

MOVE TO THE WEST COAST Had an inheritance from his grandmother. Moved to the coast in 1919. Married in 1916. Two boys by 1919. Didn't know where they wanted to settle. Sold what they had and left. Checked out California. Decided they like Medford, Oregon. Husband opened a welding shop. They lived there until 1927. Then moved to Rogue River, Oregon. Bought an abandoned farm.

DEPRESSION Husband wanted to start a fish hatchery. He built a little house for his family. They had three by then. Had a rough time but made it.

CHILDREN One of the boys turned out to be a writer. They lived in Rogue River from when he was seven until he was 17. He treasured the free and easy life there. When he'd grown up and had children, he would tell them stories about those days. The kids were so impressed with his stories that they'd ask him to repeat them. He thought that if his kids were so impressed then maybe other people would like to hear them, so he wrote a book, 'The Rogue I Remember.' His name is Wallace Ohrt. The book is an historical account of the area. Sigfrid has two other boys

and a daughter who was born while the boys were in their teens.

Moved back to Medford when the boys were in high school. She wanted the boys to get better opportunities. Husband didn't want them running around the streets of Medford. Sigfrid wouldn't stay in Rogue River any longer after one incident. When her daughter was 2 years old, she wandered off to the river by herself. Sigfrid couldn't find her and had nobody to help her. The little girl came back eventually but the incident could have been tragic. Moved in 1936.

WWII Moved to Bremerton, Washington while war work was going on. The boys joined the Air Force. Husband worked in the ammunitions depot. Bought a rundown hotel, which Sigfrid operated. Daughter was about seven then. They did pretty well there. Moved to Tacoma about five years later.

AFTER WWII Lived in Tacoma 22 years. Husband died in 1963. Lived in Lynwood nine years, Seattle two years, and in Bellingham since 1974.

CHILDREN (See also II-626) Daniel, the eldest; Wallace, Robert, and Mary Ann.

GRANDCHILDREN AND GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN Dan has two twin boys, Gary and Larry and a daughter named Carol. Wally has a daughter named Lori and a son named Steve. Bob has a daughter name Kathleen and a son named Robert. Mary Ann has two sons, Chris and Morgan. Sigfrid has nine great-grandchildren.

NORWEGIAN LANGUAGE None of her kids speak it. She hasn't kept in touch with anyone in Norway. Isn't proud of this, but it happened that way. Her mother never learned to speak English. Sigfrid wasn't home after she was 15. Didn't keep up with it. Family was scattered after they came to America in 1901. Husband was of German descent.

TRIPS BACK TO NORWAY Went back in 1971. Visited her home. A very exciting trip. Met a man she had played with as a child. He had stayed in the same place through the years. A cousin that lived in the area told him of Sigfrid's plans to come to Norway. They had flags flying for them when they came. This man had a stroke a few days before they arrived. They were able to meet him anyway. He remembered Sigfrid and her family. Sigfrid was with her sister on this trip.

SPEAKS NORWEGIAN Recognized the Norwegian table prayer when her cousin, Dagmar said it in Norway in 1971. Recites 'Ride Ride Ranke.' Her grandfather used to hold her on his knee and say this.