

ELSIE KRISTINA KARLSON ODMARK In Sweden her name was Elsa Karlson. Born June 1, 1904 in Toreboda, Vaestergotland, Sweden. Toreboda is located on the Goeta Kanal between Stockholm and Goteborg (Gothenburg). This was a small farming community.

PARENTS Mother, Hilda Larsson. Father, Per August Karlson. He was a farmer. Elsie's parents started farming after they were married.

They were poor. Her father went to work on the railroad. That's the last she remembers of him before he left Sweden in 1911.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS John August, Ellen, Anna, Freda, Gustav, Bertil, Nels, Swen, Knute, Elsa, Lars, and Erik.

GRANDPARENTS Doesn't remember them on either side.

BACKGROUND OF NAME KARLSON Doesn't know.

They were very poor when Elsie's father left for America. Five of Elsie's brothers and sisters were already in America. Oldest brother saved money to send father to America. Her brothers all settled in St. Edward, Nebraska. Later they moved to a place 12 miles west of Omaha, Nebraska.

In Sweden, they were very poor. Elsie went out to work for her room and board when 8 years old. Cleaned up house, making beds, feeding chickens, and going to school. Family rented a two room house. Big living room with open fireplace. Big kitchen with two beds in it. Elsie and her two little brothers were the only kids home. Mother got sick. Elsie went with her to a health resort in Landsbro (?), Sweden. This was a well-to-do community. The children made fun of Elsie because she washed the clothes. A kind woman said she'd wash the clothes so the kids wouldn't make fun of her.

Elsie's oldest brother had promised to come home after five years. He came in the fall after they'd come back from Landsbro. When he left for America again, he took another brother with him.

Older sister, two older brothers, herself, and two younger brothers were left in Sweden. Two older brothers were working for farmers and going to school. They worked only for room and board, just as Elsie did. Her father would send his check home every month.

Her mother died when Elsie was 10 years old. Her sister, who was 18 years old, came home and took care of them. Once the check missed the boat. All they had was a little sugar. Her mother had a well-to-do brother who had a

farm. Elsie's sister was too proud to accept help that was offered. Two of his hired help came down. Said they'd ask Uncle John if they could bring some food to them until the check came. Sister wouldn't accept that. The hired help suggested they just take some food from him then. She accepted that. Elsie loves America because she's never been hungry here.

TRIP TO AMERICA First boat they were to come on sank. Brother got chickenpox. That's why they couldn't go. Plan was for the whole family to come. Mother died. As youngsters, they thought they'd have plenty of money and no poverty in America. Wouldn't have to work as hard.

Many got seasick on the trip. Elsie didn't. Sailed from Oslo on the ship, 'United States.' Took train from Algaas to Oslo, Norway. On the boat they played the song, 'Amerikabåten lägger ut' (The America boat is leaving). Her brother fought with a group of Finns on the way.

They traveled third class. People were very nice to them. Remembers seeing the Statue of Liberty. Examined at Ellis Island. Thought they could go right away. Had to have three signers. Sent telegrams to two sisters in Omaha, and their father who was running a farm outside of Omaha. Elsie and the others had the required \$25, the train tickets to Nebraska, and were healthy, but they were underage. Mr. O'Keith (owner of the farm her dad rented), Mr. Swanson (president of Nebraska Clothing Co.), and a lawyer in Omaha (that one of her sister worked for) were the signers.

There were people who didn't make it through Ellis Island. If they were dirty or unhealthy they were sent back. There were mostly Swedes, Finns, and Norwegians on the boat. Ellis Island seemed like a prison, but the officials weren't mean.

TRAIN TRIP FROM NEW YORK TO OMAHA, NEBRASKA Six of them traveling speaking Swedish. Sat where four seats faced each other. Two youngest would sit on the oldest sister. Tells a story about the train conductor. Food much different than Swedish food. Thought the scenery was beautiful.

Nobody met them at the station. Finally, a beautiful woman came up and spoke Swedish to them. Offered to help. She got a policeman who was Swedish. He arranged for a taxi to take them to McCarter's Store. There was a Swedish girl working there. Mr. McCarter gave them each a banana. Didn't like it.

Brother came with a lumber wagon and two horses to pick them up. Whole family was together that evening. Very exciting. Interested in the furniture and the oven in her father's house. Next day looked at the chickens, pigs, and horses.

They came in May 1915. Didn't bring anything special with them. She has only one picture of her mother and father.

REASON FOR SETTLING IN NEBRASKA Mother had a cousin living there. She was married to the man who

her mother wanted to marry. She couldn't because he was just a hired hand on her father's place. This young man went to St. Edward, Nebraska and married Elsie's mother's cousin. Mother's sister and oldest brother went there too. Many Swedes there.

Started school the next fall. School outside of Omaha, Nebraska, across from McCarter's Store. Teacher, Miss McDermouth, very helpful. Father spoke Swedish at home. He was a farmer. His children always spoke Swedish to him.

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES DIDN'T TROUBLE HER Having only an eighth grade education did. She got over her 'inferiority complex' when she was 26 and went to Sweden. She found that many with twelve years of education were no better than she was. She had good manners because she'd worked for many wealthy people in Omaha.

14 YEARS OLD Graduated. Stayed home and kept house. Two oldest sisters had stayed home the first few years. It was the third sister's turn but she wouldn't stay home. Elsie had got a scholarship to business school but had to give it up.

AMERICA THE LAND OF PLENTY Opinion hasn't changed. Could still be great if people weren't so greedy.

Tells story about one of their first suppers in Nebraska. Sister called them to come in for supper. They thought she meant soup. Saw the dinner table. Bread and butter, milk, chicken, vegetables, potatoes. Next best thing to heaven.

Rented a farm near Boys Town, Nebraska. Four miles from where they were before on Lincoln Highway. Many Germans in the area. Germans treated the Swedes and Father Flanagan's boys rudely. This was during WWI. Authorities came to make sure the Germans weren't speaking German in school. Boy's Town was across the road from Elsie's family. Elsie's little brother loved Father Flanagan. He played with the boys there. Flanagan started out with six boys. Elsie's father helped them learn to farm. Gave them potatoes and pork. Elsie's brother went to visit Father Flanagan each year until Flanagan died. He was a very nice kind man. Elsie's father is recognized in the history of Boy's Town because of the help he gave them.

CHURCH LIFE Confirmed in Benson, Nebraska. Her family was not active in the church. Elsie had promised her mother that she would get confirmed in America. Father felt church was too far away. Brother, three years older, confirmed too. Father didn't come. One sister came. Took horse twelve miles every Saturday for one year. Confirmed in Swedish.

Good experiences with some Germans. Mrs. Standard, a neighbor, had no children. Taught Elsie many things. Taught her to make bread. Only had bad experiences with German children.

MOVE TO CHICAGO Oldest sister moved to Michigan. Married. Had a little boy. Elsie's father sold out. Moved to Michigan. Following year, Elsie and an older sister (10 years older) moved to the north side of Chicago, amongst

the Swedes. Elsie did housework. Had done that in Omaha for one year. Cooked there. Most people she worked for were nice. Duties: get up in the morning, do housework, and cook. The judge she worked for in Omaha treated her like another member of the family.

Worked in laundry in Chicago for a while. Didn't like it. Went back to housework. Always cooked American food. Didn't have Swedish food until she went to Michigan. Learned from an old Swedish lady.

MARRIAGE Went to Muskegon, Michigan when she was 21 because her oldest sister who lived there had a baby boy on her birthday. Elsie had to get her tonsils out while there so she stayed longer than planned. In December of that year, her sister's husband died of TB. Her sister didn't have much so Elsie stayed to help out. Her father and little brothers were living in Michigan. Her brothers in Nebraska moved to Muskegon. Sister in Chicago came a few months later. Sister had a small farm in the boy's name. Rented a house in town.

Elsie started working in the office of Brunswick Records. Elsie's sisters worked in their factory and made twice as much money. Soon the whole family was working in the factory. Elsie's sister had two boys, the six-month-old Roy Bylund and a two year old.

Sister came home from a dance. Mentioned that a handsome Swede was there. Elsie loves Swedish dances, schottis, hambo, waltz, *etc.* Went to the next dance at the Vikings and met the handsome Swede, Adolph Odmark. He had come to the U.S. in 1925. Married in 1928.

Adolph got a letter from his mother in Sweden. He'd promised to go back to Sweden in two years. She wrote that oldest son promised the same thing. Broke promise when he got married. Elsie told him he was going to go back to Sweden to visit his mother. They saved money. Didn't have quite enough for Elsie to go. Elsie's sister gave them what they needed.

FIRST TRIP TO SWEDEN Met his mother. She was very nice. They stayed for four months. He was from Ornskoldsvik in Angermanland. Whole family was nice. Wanted to stay there. Took the boat to Gothenburg (Goteborg). Took train to Angermanland. Didn't know about midnight sun. They saw a beautiful waterfall at 11:00pm. Tells about first breakfast food. Didn't know how to eat Swedish food. Many relatives and friends came to visit. Went to dances over there. Adolph's mother didn't approve. Elsie convinced her it was all right. Elsie left before her husband did. His mother was sick. Elsie went south to visit her relatives.

BECOMING A U.S. CITIZEN Father didn't take out the papers that would make them citizens while they were in Nebraska. Adolph took out his first papers as soon as he came to the U.S. Elsie took out hers after she met Adolph. They were rejected because they went back to Sweden too soon. Took out first papers again after they came back. War broke out. At the factory, they asked Elsie if she was a citizen. She wasn't. Her husband was just about ready to become citizen and then she could take out her second papers. She feared she'd get laid off. They checked her records at the courthouse. Let her work if she promised to take out citizen papers as soon as Adolph became a citizen.

Became a citizen when 40 years old.

SWEDISH ORGANIZATIONS The Vikings. They had all kinds of Swedish activities, dinners and dances. Brother's wife knew some of the Swedish boys who attended the dances. Took her there and introduced her. Brother and sister-in-law left her there and went to a show. Elsie danced nearly every dance. Had fun.

Before Elsie got married, she went out with kids to American dances as well.

CHILDREN Marianne, Raymond, Richard, and Donald. Gave her kids American names that Swedes could pronounce. Raised her kids in Muskegon. All graduated from high school. All baptized and confirmed at the Swedish church in Muskegon (Samuel Lutheran).

CATERING SERVICE Company Elsie worked for moved to Arkansas. Left employees without a pension. Elise told them that they wouldn't make it. They had a thousand people wishing them bad luck. They went broke. This was the Norge Corporation that made Norge refrigerators.

Elsie didn't need to work anymore. Her kids were grown up. She'd have a babysitter come to the house and watch the kids.

A restaurant in town (Docks?) called. Wanted her to wait on tables. They called again to help in the kitchen. Husband suggested she go into catering. Inherited \$200 dollars from a brother who passed away in Alaska. Went into a partnership with Marsha Smith. Started this when she was 60 years old. Did most of the cooking in her home. Catered the fish fry at the Elk's park. Did all the frying at the park. Deep-fried the fish. Had 90 people at first fish fry that summer. 400 at the last fish fry in August.

Cooked whatever the people wanted. Cooked Swedish food for the Vikings. Did charity work for the church and for the city's 'All Nations Celebration' at the YMCA. Cooked Swedish food.

Joined the Vikings when 46 years old.

Made good money catering. Had five girls working for her. They enjoyed it.

Husband worked for Bennet Pump for 35 years. Worked in the factory. Her son-in-law works there too.

Vikings have insurance. Similar to Vasa or Sons of Norway. Elise and her husband came to Seattle for a Viking convention once.

Their sons led them to Tacoma to live. They were both in Vietnam. The oldest one was an officer. Came to Fort Lewis for the first time. Liked it. Came back from Vietnam very unhappy about the war. Only a political hassle. Middle boy's wife was having her last baby. Elsie came out in January to help. This was 12 years ago. Thought it was beautiful. They sold their house in Mukegon, Michigan and drove west. Elsie did the driving. She was 66 then. Visited their daughter in Oklahoma and Elsie's brother in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Were very happy to come to Tacoma, Washington. They retired just before they moved west.

1046 Made a lot of money from her catering. They took a trip to Sweden. Charter flight. Didn't like the drinking that went on on the way home. Tells about her first drink in Sweden when and her husband went to visit his mother when they were first married.

THIRD TRIP TO SWEDEN Her youngest brother wanted to go to Sweden. His Swedish wasn't that great. His wife is of German background. They wanted Elsie and Adolph to go too. They flew to Copenhagen, Denmark. Went to Malmo, Sweden and rented a car. This was 1974.

Drove up through Gothenburg (Goteborg). Drove to Toreboda. Found her cousin there. Stayed there a while.

Drove to northern Sweden. Visited her husband's relatives. Stayed at their summer cottage. Drove down through Norway, back to Malmo, Sweden, and home again.

Husband had been tired over there. After they came home, they found he had cancer. Brother had a heart attack. Good thing they went in '74.

SWEDEN TODAY Disapproved of their free sex, drugs, and the school system. Problems that the U.S. has too. Kids don't have to work hard. Too free. Sweden is beautiful. Take care of their old people. No poverty. Doesn't approve of Swedish military policies.

TACOMA Lonely at first. Left all her Swedish friends in Michigan. Moved into an apartment. Didn't like it. Found a small house. One Swedish neighbor. Many nice neighbors. Found out oldest brother died. Sons home from Vietnam, without work. Boys went fishing a lot.

Saw in a newspaper that Arvid Lindgren, who lived up the road, was 85 and belonged to the Vasa. She hadn't joined in Michigan because she didn't have time. Went to Mr. Lindgren's house. Asked how she could join. He told her to call Elsie Person. She joined by herself. Husband wouldn't go with her. Was a hostess for one their luncheons. Ruth Nelson helped her. Got acquainted with people that way.

Started going to the Christmas morning services in Swedish. This was Bethel Lutheran Church on 54th and I. Belongs to that church.

Belongs to Bethel Lutheran Church, Vasa, and the Vasa Friendship Club. Helps at Scandinavian Days every year. Makes coffee all five days. Has worked there every year since her husband died. National Vasa convention to be held in Tacoma in 1982. Making silk flowers for the convention. Thelma Johnson is in charge of arrangements.

Loves the Scandinavian community in Tacoma. This group has been good to her. Haven't forgotten her since her husband died. She'd like to go visit her daughter in Michigan but she wouldn't live there.

GRANDCHILDREN 9-2 in Castle Rock, Wash.

SWEDISH TRADITION Christmas, have potato sausage. Family doesn't like lutfisk. Has lutfisk dinner for friends. Christmas Eve fixes dinner for the family. Meatballs, sylta (made with veal), cheese, hardtack, thin bread. Her daughter always used to play the piano and they'd sing Swedish Christmas songs.

Children don't speak Swedish. She was disgusted with the German kids when she went to school. Didn't want her children to be like that.

Her children are interested in Sweden. Her oldest son took Elsie and Adolph out to Pacific Lutheran University once for some kind of Swedish activity in Olson Auditorium. Tells about when they brought in the Norwegian and Swedish flags.

Says a prayer in Swedish.

Elsie came to the U.S. when quite young. Remembered a lot of things. Her father always bought a newspaper called 'Svenska Amerikaneren' (Swedish-American). It had stories and interesting articles in it. Elsie has read that from the time she came over here. It was printed in Chicago. Two youngest brothers don't speak much Swedish. The one who went to Sweden started to pick it up while there. He liked Sweden.

SWEDISH HOSPITAL Very proud to be Swedish. Swedes are hard working. Most of them very good people. Wouldn't choose to be anything else. Still, she loves America. This is her home.