

FAMILY BACKGROUND Full name is Ellen Katarina Johnson. Maiden name is Erickson. Born in Dalarna, Sweden on September 20, 1900. Britta Janson Erickson and Lars Erickson were her parents. Father worked in a small boat building business and died when Ellen was five years old. She had one brother, Erik, two years younger. He stayed in Sweden and never wanted to come here.

Knew all her grandparents. Mother was a widow and wove fancy tablecloths and linens to make a living. They lived in a small two room house on her dad's place. The other grandparents lived within walking distance.

EMIGRATION Ellen emigrated in 1922 by herself. Why did she come? 'Well, that's a question. Why did I? I really couldn't say.' There were hard times in Sweden then; she noticed that older girlfriends had a hard time after marriage. She thought there should be something better than living in that small town of 3000. She was used to traveling and staying with an uncle in Stockholm. So, she could have moved to a large city. But she 'knew so many that went here. I wrote to them, and of course, they bragged'. She came with a lady who was visiting and wanted to bring her mother back. Before that happened the lady's mother was killed in an automobile accident. So, only the two came.

TRIP They took train down from her home and came on the Stavangerfjord out of Oslo. She remembers the beautiful Norwegian coastline as they continued to Bergen. Took 14 days to reach New York and five days to cross America to Tacoma. Ellen was going to relatives in Chicago, but the lady talked her into the climate of the Pacific Northwest. Ellen didn't have enough money, but the lady loaned her some and Ellen repaid her later.

SETTLING IN Ellen stayed with this married lady in a newly built home for about a week. Then she started a housework job, which she didn't like. But she had no language or job skills, so she worked four years for a Swedish woman married to a tugboat company owner who lived on the Tacoma's North end. The job helped Ellen with the language; the lady spoke English to her but explained the words in Swedish.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY Ellen also attended night school during those four years. 'I would have gone longer, but I got married'. She met her husband at the Swedish lodge and Swedish doings on K Street. They had three boys. The oldest is Bertil Johnson. [Discussion about another Bertil Johnson.] The second child was Kenneth who was five years younger. After Ellen was married, the family went up to Alaska. Her husband stayed in Latoosh ?, Alaska while she went back to Sweden for one year. Her oldest son was a year and a half when they left.

She didn't worry about her husband, because he stayed in a boarding house with good food and all. She returned to Alaska, but when she became pregnant again [with Kenneth] she came down to Tacoma. Then she had one more boy, Leonard.

Ellen had no problems in America. The countryside here was similar to Dalarna although the winters were colder and the summers shorter in Sweden. The environment made her feel at home. To get her final citizenship papers, she had to be here seven years but she moved around so much it was difficult to establish residence. She applied for and received her final papers in 1944; her husband had previously gotten his.

Kenneth lives in Tacoma and works in Puget Sound National Bank. She has seven grandchildren.

TRADITIONS Christmas in Sweden was special. She made spritz, fattigmann, *etc.* Her sister-in-law was good at making the Swedish meats; Ellen did the lutefisk and turkey.

Ellen was not active in church although the boys attended Sunday School. Her husband lived in Alaska for six years, and she was there nearly four-five years. She moved back here during the Depression and those years were the hard times. Her husband said, ‘ You can get a job if you’re willing to take any old thing that comes along’. There were no opportunities, so ‘he got fooled there’, and he was out of work for a long time. They had extra money from the AK job, but then the banks closed. Those were the worst years for them. They first lived on 12th Street and then in University Place. Husband worked in town for Puget Sound Plywood. He was one of eight to start that company; they borrowed the money—a big risk—but it worked out.

RETURN TRIPS Ellen kept in contact with her Swedish cousins by writing to Dalarna and Stockholm. Her first visit was in 1929-30, and the second was in 1961 when her mother was ill. She only stayed three months because her husband was alone and not well. She enjoyed the first trip because she still knew everybody. The second trip, 32 years after emigration, was different because she knew so few people. They knew her so well, because she had worked in a store before emigrating. ‘That way you’re known. And that way they knew me better than I knew them—even then, you know. That wasn’t so much fun. You were kind of disgusted with people. You knew you should know them, but they never introduced themselves. That’s Swedes for you’.

Ellen still remembers the language but needs to warm up before she takes off.

Her other two sons live away from Tacoma. They have visited them in Houston, Vancouver, Washington, and New York—wherever they lived. One son was a pilot—flew the small private jets—for an oil company, but is in administration now.