

FAMILY BACKGROUND Martha Nilsen was born Marte Johanne Dagsvik on December 15, 1894 in Kvalnes, TjÅ¶tta (prestegjeld), Helgeland in the middle of Norway. (TjÅ¶tta is about 35 km west of Mosjoen, and Helgeland is the southern part of Nordland county.)

PARENTS Father was Sverdrup Dagsvik from Dagsvik, Leirfjord, Nordland (about 20 km northwest of Mosjoen). Mother was Rebecca Ericksen from a Helgeland prestegjeld. Martha's father taught school in and around Kvalnes. They lived on a farm, had 5-6 cows, horses, sheep, pigs, and raised a few row crops and hay.

WORK ON A FARM Martha raked hay during the hay season and fed and milked cows in the barn, traditionally women's work.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS She came from a large family - at least 13 children: Edvin, Nilsine, Signe, Einar, Lucie, Agny, Line, Marte, Sverre, Georg, Aslaug, Johan, and Anne. Anne had a twin who came dead-born. Aslaug died at three years old from appendicitis. Einar, Agny, Marte, and Sverre emigrated from Norway.

Mr. Dagsvik was a schoolteacher who traveled from place to place staying 12 weeks each site. Mother had charge of home, farm, and family when he was away.

GRANDPARENTS Martha remembers only her maternal grandmother, Marte Ericksen, and her paternal grandfather, Nikolai.

CHILDHOOD HOME Their home was two stories; one room was the Kvalnes school place. The local 'church' was not Lutheran but a building maybe owned by the state: a prayer house or 'bedehus'. The preachers were not Lutheran, but they could preach there anyway just for a Sunday or so. She was confirmed at a distant Lutheran church by attending classes and staying away from home for five weeks to do so. Class consisted of Bible reading and memory work. After confirmation she did housework in a town.

CHRISTMAS On Christmas Eve they had lutefisk, meatballs, potatoes, groensaker, and dessert of Christmas cookies: fattigmann, berlinerkranser, also lefse, flatbroed, and risengryngroet. Under the tree, there were packages produced by hand. On Christmas day they had 'bedehus' and a dinner with meats (steaks). There was a tree at the bedehus. Christmas lasted 13 days; sometimes the tree was sitting all winter because the family didn't use that room.

SPOUSE Nils Nilsen had been in America many years. She knew his family in Kvalnes where they'd moved while he was in America. She met him when he returned to Norway for a visit. He returned to America and Martha came afterwards; 'she had to have time to think'.

EMIGRATION Martha had to have papers signed at the prestegjeld. Her mother felt bad; Martha said, 'It was a regular funeral!' Her mother cried and cried because so many of them (children) had come to this country. Agny

and Martha came together in 1921. She thinks they took both the train and boat from home to Oslo, and the 'Oslofjord' (a Norwegian boat) from Oslo to New York.

WORK IN NORWAY She worked in a cafe in Mosjoen about 1911. (There is a black/white photo of Martha taken in a Mosjoen studio.) Mosjoen is close to where she came from.

CONFIRMATION Martha was 14 (1908) when confirmed. Had to stay five weeks at people's house. There were 96 in the class from all around the district; this was the head church where they were confirmed.

MOSJOEN She worked in the cafe. The lady of the cafe put Martha in the window so the men could see her and come in for coffee!

Worked for the Svedin (?) family for seven years. It was a nice family and Mr. Svedin was high in 'tolles faktor' (customs). She did cooking, cleaning, and what was necessary: 'Mrs. didn't work very much there.'

OSLO She did housework for the Skoyins (?) family - nice people. (This was after she was in Trondheim?)

TRONDHEIM Worked for a German family that she didn't like; they were not kind. (There is a black/white photo of Martha taken at a Trondheim studio when she was 19 years old in 1913.)

TRIP OVER She remembers there was a fellow after her all the time, and her sister went up to him and said - 'Don't care for her! She's going to get married in America!' There was dancing and music on the boat. She didn't get seasick as the weather was nice. She had been seasick before on the coast of Norway and 'you feel rotten'.

SETTLING IN Everything went fine. She and her sister went to Minneapolis where her brother was. Martha left Agny in Minneapolis (Agnny got married later and lived in North Dakota). Nils met her in Minneapolis, and they returned to Tacoma to be married in Nils' house next door to where she presently lives. It wasn't a very big wedding, but they had a party after.

SETTLING IN Her husband was a fisherman and gone a lot. The present house was built 37 years later (about 1958). Nil's mother was here with Martha; they got along fine.

She learned English herself from hearing others speak. She went to a school for awhile. Citizenship was acquired by marriage. She didn't work outside the home in America. Had two children: Viola Woods and Noble Nilsen. Noble is a carpenter, as is Viola's husband. Viola has four children: Phillip, Kristine, Doris, and Laurence.

FISHING Fishing was a hard life. In summer Nils fished up toward Alaska. Viola tells a story about one of Nils'

boats burning on Noble's birthday (he was born on August 13, 1924 - a Friday.) Much conversation between Inger and Viola.

CHURCH Martha has been somewhat active, belonged to and served in Ladies Aid at Emmanuel Lutheran Church on the north side. (More conversation between Inger and Viola.)

SCANDINAVIAN ORGANIZATIONS She belongs to Daughters of Norway.

NILS Passed away in 1968 at 82 years old. Martha was alone with the children when he was out fishing. She didn't like it because she was in a strange country and had to put up with everything. The language was the hardest thing because she couldn't talk to the people. She managed shopping by sending Viola to shop and pay bills. (More conversation between Inger and Viola about Martha speaking English and Viola understanding Norwegian.)

RETURN TRIPS TO NORWAY The first trip was in 1937; Martha and Viola (15 years old) visited the family. Martha's parents were still alive, her father reaching the age of 103 when he died. (There is a photo of this visit with all the people identified.) Nils and Martha visited in 1962. Martha made a third trip in the late 1960's accompanied by two of Nilsine's children, Ruth and Per.

FAMILY REUNIONS IN AMERICA None. Einar was in Canada, Sverre in Minneapolis, Agny in North Dakota, and Line now lives in Seattle. Johan is in Norway on the family home.

NORWEGIAN HERITAGE Martha makes rice mush, broed, and a soft lefse used for dessert, 'morlefse'. She also makes 'krinalefse'. First, a flat round flap is made and then the flap is spread with a batter using a creased (grooved) tool, and it is baked again. (Martha shows the tool she uses for this.)

Martha also makes goro, fattigmann, krumkake, and berlinerkranser.

CHRISTMAS EVE NOW Viola talks about how the second and third generation Norwegian-Americans continue cooking some Norwegian foods, but customs are changing.

Snakker litt norsk. Martha says 'Det var meget hyggelig at du kom over aa snakke med oss.' Recites a saying about 'huldra i huset'.