

FAMILY BACKGROUND Born Thor Olsen Lillelien (little hillside) on November 27, 1887 in Vestre Gausdal (Svatsum district), Oppland, Norway about 25 km northwest of Lillehammer. Changed names when getting emigration papers.

PARENTS Parents were Ole Lillelien and Eline Tronson. Both were raised in this area. Father had a little, run down farm - a steep hilly place with lots of rocks. Made a living from the cows: milk, cream, butter. During the summer Tom herded the cows up into the mountains. Had a special, cold room in the summer house where he stored the butter and cheese he made. Came down in the fall with the cows and put dairy products on the market. He also herded sheep and goats.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS There were 10 children: Amund, Thor, Ole, Kristian, Edvard, Anna, Elise, Othilde, Olga, and Inge.

CHILDHOOD Remembers best of all how his dad worried about money and taxes, so afraid that the family would 'be out'. That's why Tom emigrated to America, to try for a little money, first as a builder and then as a farmer. As a child he worked around the home haying, *etc.* Vestre Gausdal was basically a dairy area.

SCHOOL The Lien's lived on the north side of a narrow river valley, and the church and school were at the bottom of the hill not far away. Went to school until he was 15; remembers the snowball fights well. He was confirmed at 15, and between the ages of 15-21 he worked at home. He had no plans for further schooling, as his school days were not that promising and he felt he should help with the money problem.

EMIGRATION At 21 he wrote to his Uncle John (mother's brother) in SD to send a ticket. In the spring of 1908 he and two schoolmates emigrated to the US; all had relatives to go to. The trip across the ocean on an old Danish ship was really rough. He stayed in bed; most hung over the rail. Tom took some Norwegian goat cheese and rags along in a little trunk, and a violin (classical type). This violin was given to him at age 9. A schoolteacher taught him to play in the evenings, learning tunes by ear and pitching the violin from a piano. He played for many dances in Norway and America: waltzes, polkas, and others he doesn't remember.

None of the three immigrants knew any English, but they had no problems on the boat.

NEW YORK Arrived and went into a big building to be checked and catch the train. He showed them his South Dakota ticket; they put him on the train and away he went, traveling alone: Chicago, Minneapolis, Florence, South Dakota. Minneapolis sounded like Norway because of all the spoken Norwegian. In Florence (about 10 miles northwest of Watertown) Tom went to the bank, a prior arrangement with his uncle and the bank called this uncle, John Haugen who had been in South Dakota for 4-5 years. John came and got him.

SETTLING IN Tom went to work for John who was a builder and also had a homestead. For the next few years (4-5), Tom helped with building and did field work. He liked shocking grain and cutting wheat, a hard job but it paid pretty good. When it was threshing season, Tom went from farm to farm with the threshing crew where he had the job of running the steam engine.

ENGLISH Hadn't picked up much. Uncle and his family spoke Norwegian. Tom learned to talk English little by little.

TO MONTANA Tom had another uncle (a wheat farmer) in Montana; he thought he might work for him but never did. This uncle had changed his name from Amund Haugen to Amund Medrund: 'Norwegians go by anything that came handy.' Amund lived by Lewistown (center of the state) which had a Sons of Norway lodge and quite a few Scandinavians around. Tom played the violin for them at dances, earning \$4-5 an evening.

Tom was hired by a great big cattleman on an old ranch and became a cowboy. Looked after and milked cows, fixed fences - always something to do. Uncle John moved to MT also and began a building business: Tom joined him to build four school houses out in the country.

HOMESTEAD LIFE IN MONTANA Tom bought 320 acres of land around Miles City (southeastern Montana) and had in mind to do spring seeding. He purchased two more horses (had two already) and some equipment in Miles City. On his way home (65 miles to farm) he was informed that war had broken out. He sensed that he'd be going and it happened: the Army drafted him. He had dug a well (before he had to carry water a half mile) and built a small house on this homestead.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENT The climate was rough: cold (4-5 below zero), windy, blizzards. For firewood he used the local sagebrush or traveled a long way (40 miles) to the forest for firewood. Was bothered by rattlesnakes, but no wild animals. For building they bought wood or went to the forest. For food, he remembers only chewing on something; had pancakes for breakfast.

A BLIZZARD STORY Recalls traveling to the woods one winter, a two-day journey, and staying overnight at the Benton (?) cabin. The following day, they (he and a neighbor) started out again, going kind of uphill until they got to the flats, which led over into the woods. He looked over to the right - up north - and saw the butte white from a blizzard. It 'chilled him right there' because he knew the blizzard would catch them, and it did. They couldn't see the road or anything, and gave the horses 'their head'. The horses took them into the woods where it wasn't too bad at all. That night it was 45 below zero: 'It was cold to get in and out of bed.' That was a dangerous experience, and although Tom was okay, his neighbor had frostbite. This fellow lived about a half mile away from Tom; there were lots of homesteaders around. It was 65 miles down to the closest town, Miles City.

Stayed on the farm about five years before the war broke out.

MILITARY SERVICE He was a private and saw action in the southern part of Germany.

A SECOND BLIZZARD STORY (IN SOUTH DAKOTA) Tom needed to care for the cows, etc., on the farm, and the barn was straight across from the house with the granary on the left side and the pump house on the right. Tom thought he couldn't get lost even though it was an awful blizzard. Started out and realized he had taken more steps than usual. Stopped to look around a bit, and just then, the wind let up just a little so it left a tiny little opening, and

he could see the corner of the barn. He had gone by it. 'If I hadn't seen that, I wouldn't be here today - for sure.' People sometimes strung a strong rope or wire between the barn and house or different buildings.

A BLIZZARD AND VIOLIN STORY Funny now, but not then. Tom was sitting there playing (practicing) his violin during another Montana blizzard. Pretty soon he saw the door of his shack open slowly and a gun barrel appear. Tom 'was awful damn sick'. A stranger finally showed, and Tom yelled 'C'mon in'. He gave him supper and breakfast, and showed him where his home was in the morning. The fellow had gotten lost in the blizzard and couldn't see a thing, but heard Tom's violin. He'd decided to kill Tom if he hadn't let him in.

PLAYING THE VIOLIN This violin got smashed by the railroad. He had packed his violin in his trunk along with clothes. Upon receipt of his trunk from the railroad station, he opened the trunk to find the violin in splinters. He never got another good one.

MILITARY Was drafted by the Army. Went home to be called up after passing the physical examination. When others were called and he wasn't, he saddled his horse and rode into the post office seven miles away. There he found his notice, that he should be in Glendive the next morning, 200 (?) miles away. Somebody had a car and gave him a ride; he left directly, leaving everything behind.

TRAINING Went to Fort Lewis in Tacoma, then to North Carolina, and then to the east coast of Canada. From Canada they went overseas by boat in a convoy of six - seven ships. He happened to be finishing submarine watch one night (2 am) when there was an awful explosion. The motor stopped and the boat keeled over. After a while the engine began; it was the boat next to them that went down, killing 500 boys who were trapped in the hole.

ONE THE FRONT Was there about a year and was wounded, but not badly. During an offensive, they had to cross a railroad track. One fellow took a good shot at him, but 'didn't kill me - put me out of business'. The bullet went through the right side of his chest, barely missing the lung. Truck took him back to the hospital. Had a gas mask along; did not experience trench warfare, as they were on the go.

FOOD DURING THE WAR He called it 'slub' (?); looked like a garbage can coming. The soldiers volunteered to go back and pick up these cans; it was kind of a dangerous job. One time they lost the supply wagon and went without food for several days. Tom sold his tin of chewing tobacco for 25 cents. When he got to a little store, he bought a loaf of real dark bread - 'tasted better to me than anything ever did'.

Picking up the food was a dangerous job, because the enemy didn't want them to have food. 'They (the enemy) shot up flares which lit up like the sun was up. When you heard the boom of that gun, you dropped and didn't move until the light died. Then, picked up and went again.'

COMING HOME Asked for a pass to take a trip to Norway even though he was penniless and didn't like to go home that way. But the pass was denied.

CIVILIAN LIFE Returned to his homestead via Miles City; a neighbor was in town and took Tom back home. His homestead looked forsaken, and he knew his dreams were going down the drain. The government paid for veterans to learn a trade; Tom chose mechanics and apprenticed in a shop. He ended up working for a dealer and eventually took over a dealership in Yakima, Washington.

YAKIMA Came here in the early 1920's not knowing anyone. He thought this country was pretty nice.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY His wife's folks were homesteaders in Montana. He had met Tilda Eiken in Montana and married her after the war. They had two daughters: Harriet and Elsie. Harriet was born in Miles City and Elsie in Yakima.

WORK IN WASHINGTON Has lived in Yakima since 1923, working as a mechanic and in charge of a car dealership (Chandler). Didn't like that line of work because it was too dirty. He missed farming; he's a farmer at heart.

CHANGES IN YAKIMA OVER THE YEARS The town 'has grown like everything' even though there are still lots of fruit farmers and apple and pear orchards.

FAMILY LIFE They lived in town. His wife was Norwegian also, but they didn't speak Norwegian at home or teach the girls. At Christmas they had a tree, parties, lefse. His wife was born in Dakota.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES Played for Sons of Norway dances, but never joined.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NORWAY AND AMERICA Norway was so steep and rocky and not much opportunity for an ordinary man. Dakota was a flat country; when the wind blew through the wheat fields, it looked like waves on an ocean. Tom thought, 'Oh boy! That's something!'

NORWEGIAN HERITAGE He is not sorry he left Norway. He was a green kid when he came to America, and his country is the US. Became a citizen in order to get his homestead.

Snakker litt norsk. (After much coaxing by Janet and Tom's family - -) Tom synger sang paa norsk.