

FAMILY BACKGROUND Thora Gjelstad was born in 1902, the third of February. Her maiden name was Toerklep, and she was the 'minste', the youngest of nine children.

EMIGRATION She was four and a half years old when she immigrated in 1906 to America with her parents; her father, her oldest brother and a brother-in-law came in 1905.

Her father's name was Johan Toerklep; he kept that name when he was in America. Her mother was Anna Kristina. Father came from Toerklep but mother was born in Horten in Vestfold. He was brought up on a farm, but that one was sold. Their family had a small farm when Thora was young.

EMIGRATION Father came to America because they suffered a fire twice, and there was no insurance. Also, at that time many people were emigrating to America. They came to Stanley, Wisconsin where they stayed three years, and then to Tacoma where Thora grew up.

They didn't have relatives in Stanley, but there was work available for her father and siblings at a sawmill.

The trip over was very good on the 'Oskar', a Danish boat. The weather was very bad and no one could come on deck. Went through Ellis Island.

IN AMERICA Mother and father didn't learn English; the kids spoke English to parents, but parents answered in Norwegian.

After three years, the family moved from Wisconsin possibly because of the bad climate. Traveled to Tacoma by train; Father worked for the railroad in Tacoma. She and her mother and father returned to and stayed in Norway from 1914-1916. An older brother, Johan Arnt, was drafted to serve in the military during WWI. He was sent to France and died in 1918; is buried in France.

MOTHER AND FATHER IN NORWAY Father wanted to return to Norway and it happened to coincide with the 1914 exhibition at Frognerseteren in Oslo where he worked (?). Father hadn't planned to return to Tacoma, but he didn't get a steady job in Norway. It was hard on Thora to return and go to Norwegian school. Tells that she learned to read Norwegian by studying gravestone inscriptions. They got reasonable travel from Tacoma to NY with the railroads.

Thora's oldest brother in Norway was already married and didn't want to go to America. No one in the family had settled in America except her sister, Sigrid, and brother, Einar; both were in Tacoma. Thora and her husband visited for two months in 1960.

Sigrid was married to John Barkost, and she remained in Tacoma her entire life. John built houses; he came from the same bygd [community] in Norway.

The family moved to Tacoma in 1916 when Thora was 14; she had finished school and did not continue on.

She was more pleased with the weather in Tacoma than Wisconsin. Besides, there were the mountains—Mt. Tahoma, a beautiful place.

Thora met many Norwegians in Tacoma. She helped her married sister with her house. In her free time she went shopping.

The family stayed with Sigrid and John. Then, the three—mother, father, and Thora—returned to Norway in 1918. Thora was not quite 18 years old. One of her sisters had been married in Norway and still lived there. Oldest brother was there too. They were much older than Thora [18 and 20 years older, respectively].

When father returned to Tacoma in 1916, he continued to work for the railroad; youngest brother [Sigurd] worked for a factory. Thora's brother Einar, owned a little restaurant and she worked as a cashier there on and off. Restaurant [can't remember name] was in downtown Tacoma; served middag [noon meal] and sandwiches.

Thora did not belong to any youth groups in Tacoma, but she attended Norwegian festivals because here were so many Norwegians around. Besides other Scandinavian people, there were Italians in their neighborhood.

Thora also worked at a place that made brooms handles; did machine work; got decent wages; worked there around one and a half years. Her first job was at the restaurant, and then the factory work was her second and her last job in America.

RE-EMIGRATION Her parents decided to re-emigrate to Norway in 1918 because Mother hoped to bring Arnt's remains to Norway, but that never happened. In Norway, her father worked for the railroad; had no trouble getting a job. Sister bought a little farm, and they lived there. Father had gone to hospital for an operation soon after they returned. They lived off an inheritance from America during that period.

She still misses Tacoma, especially the climate. Thora could have stayed in America, but she was the 'baby' in the family and parents couldn't do without her.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY She met her husband in Vestfold. They were married 52 years, from 1925 to 1977. Before marriage, she did housework. They lived in Stabekk outside of Oslo, and then moved to Oslo. Her husband was a 'snekke' [carpenter]. They had two children, a girl and a boy. Each had two sons, so she has four grandchildren. The youngest grandson, Anders, sat in on the interview.

CONNECTIONS WITH AMERICA After leaving America, Thora continued to write to the families in Tacoma. Sigrid's daughter, Lorraine, visited Norway with her family. The only time Thora and her husband visited in Tacoma was in 1960. It was 41 years since she'd been in Tacoma. Tells about how she retained a Tacoma accent.

Discussion with son about teaching children American accent.

Thora brought some American customs back to Norway. Her brother made very good American pancakes, hotcakes, in the restaurant, and she continued to make them in Norway. Served them at breakfast for the most part with syrup and butter.

Son tells about receiving packages from America, how exciting that was. She also hung up long stockings [julestroemper] at Christmas.

Einar married an American and his family visited back and forth between America and Norway. He enjoyed very much coming to Norway.

Thora thinks Tacoma was wonderful, liked it better than Seattle. Liked Oslo all right. After she got so sick, she came to the home where she presently lives, but she'd rather be in her own home.