

FAMILY BACKGROUND Ole Andreas Rasmussen Blindheim was named after the owners, Ole and Anna Blindheim, of the ranch where his family had a 'husmannsplass'. Got the name Rasmussen from his father Rasmus Mikkalsen. Blindheim was the name of the farmland of which his family's 'husmannsplass' - Reitebakken - was a part. There was only one 'husmannsplass' on the Blindheim farm. Neighboring farms had 2 or 3. Blindheim is near Aalesund in western Norway (Moere og Romsdal). To the northwest of Reitebakken was Storfjord, which led to the Geirangerfjord. Beautiful country. Would see Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany go by from time to time in the early 1900's. He vacationed in Norway quite often. After Aalesund burned down, they named a street after him because they thought so much of him. Ole's community was connected with 2 parishes - Sykkylven and Oerskog. He went to Sykkylven. He was born April 17, 1891.

PARENTS Rasmus Mikkalsen Blindheim and Agnetta Marie Blindheim.

GRANDPARENTS Paternal grandfather was Mikkal Andreas Rasmussen from Nordfjord. Others with the name Rasmussen had a 'husmannsplass' named Engeboe in Hornindal, Nordfjord (Sogn and Fjordane). Grandmother was Gunnhild Jensdatter Rote from Nordfjord. Grandparents came to Sykkylven when Ole's father was about 12 years old. Bought the farm of Vik at the end of the Blindheim-Vik River. Lost the farm after a few years due to poor conditions. Ole's father became a tradesman - builder and carpenter-like his father. They could build anything. They made caskets in their spare time. When Ole wanted to scare the children in the neighborhood he would take them to the barn in the dark and show them the caskets. Grandfather (maternal) was Nikolai. Came from Aursnes, where James Arness and Peter Graves are from. Grandfather told Ole to stop in Minneapolis to visit Peter Andreas, the grandfather of James Arness. Grandfather fished with Peter Andreas in the North Sea, near Aalesund. Nikolai also started Reitebakken, which Ole's mother inherited. Ole was only 6 when she died. Tells about her death.

Maternal grandmother, Olava Marie, took care of Ole after his mother's death.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS Five children. Ole was number 4. Younger sister, Hansine, died of tuberculosis when 10. Mother died of a heart problem. They lived in a long house with a grass roof. Grandparents lived in the back part of the house. They raised Ole. Grandmother told Ole, 'Be frugal my boy. Save your money. Put it in the bank.' Two older sisters, Matilde Gunnhild and Olava Marie were named after their grandmothers. Brother, Nikolai, inherited Reitebakken. When Ole and Nikolai were working in Alaska, Nikolai was using his money to keep Reitebakken going.

CHILDHOOD HOME (REITEBAKKEN) One long building and barn with caskets stored away. Reitebakken is located up on a 2nd or 3rd plateau looking over Blindheim and northwest over Sykkylvensfjord and Storfjord. Could see Aursnes in the same direction. Lived at Reitebakken until he had to start making his own living. Had to do this before he was confirmed in 1906.

In 1904, the city of Aalesund burned down completely. Ole's family had people come to spend the night in their barn. During the next 2 years, Ole at 13 years old was hired as a 'dreng' or farmhand on a 'husmannsplass'. Had 20 goats on the farm. Ole had to bring grass into the barn and go up on the mountainside with a long rope to help get the young goats home. Worked long days. Earned 100 kroner (crowns) and meals during the season. Had to get used to goat's milk. It made him strong. Husband in this family was making good wages in Aalesund. There was a lot of work in Aalesund because the whole town had to be rebuilt.

Ole's father was well established during this time. Worked for 'ullvarefabrikk', a woolen mill with 1000 employees in Langevaag south of Aalesund. Grandfather ran the 'husmannsplass'. Ole learned a lot about farming from his grandfather. Father came home for the weekends on Saturday night. Made cloth in the factory. Father had to maintain and install the machinery. Worked there until he retired. He was 85 when he died. Father remarried in Langevaag; was his third marriage, his second marriage was to Karolina. Had two children, Anton and Ragna.

Anton became a seaman. Later educated himself. Became first engineer in the merchant marines, served during WW II and was stationed at England.

WORK Worked on the farm that his 'husmannsplass' was part of. While his employer was out fishing, he took care of the horses and hauled milk to the dairy. This farm had quite a few cows. The women milked the cows. Made about the same wages as the year before but got a suit of clothes as well. First job when 13, this job when 14, and job at Loeset (nearer irskog) when 15. Did the same kind of work. Grandmother sent word for him to come home. She was 86-87 and knew she would die soon. Ole was responsible for her funeral. Neighbors let him have the funeral at their house. Wasn't enough room at Reitebakken. Pastor that confirmed Ole conducted the funeral. Ole was comfortable around him. Grandmother was born in Tynes. Had spent most of her life at Reitebakken. Her maiden name was Sivertsdatter. Their farm in Tynes was called Sivertsgaarden. Ole had to arrange for a big meal at the funeral. Friends helped out. Served what they had on hand, something freshly baked like lefse.

CHRISTMAS Had lots of 'good eats'. Was always satisfied. Had lots of lefse and homemade bread. Didn't have pies or cakes. Tells about the first time he had pie (raspberry) in America. His friend Louis said, 'This is good bread.'

NORWEGIAN FOOD Would have oatmeal for breakfast and fish for dinner. Many different kinds of fish. Had sheep and pigs on farm. Ate pork, faar i kaal, leg of lamb, spekekjoett. Stored food in their stabbur. He made a lot of friends with it (spekekjoett) when he came to America. That was all he brought with him except for a change of socks. Knew he could buy everything he needed here.

CHRISTMAS Visited neighbors often, but especially at Christmas. Had a meal in each of his neighbors' homes. Christmas lasted 20 days. 'Kjeldeness (?) knute er julen ute.' Sang a lot, as each house had one or two musicians. Fiddle was played more than accordion. Guitar, mouth organ, and zither were played also.

WORK After confirmation, Ole got a job at a cement block factory on the Blindheim-Vik River after he was through working as a 'dreng'. He could make as many bricks as any of the other guys. Worked with a friend, Lars Olsen Vik (Louis Vik when he came to America). They talked a lot about America. Decided to go in 1908. Left Aalesund on July 4, 1908.

EMIGRATION AND FEELINGS ABOUT LEAVING NORWAY Decided to go no matter how bad he felt about leaving. Grandmother had already passed away. Grandfather Nikolai was still living. Hard to say good-bye to him because he knew how he felt. Ole wrote him many letters. Sister, Matilde, was left to take care of him. Ole and Lars knew many who had gone to America. Ole's brother, Nikolai, was in America, and Lars' brother had been in the Klondike (Yukon) for about five years. He'd brought home \$5000 - 6000 dollars from his stake and got married. Ole thought he'd possibly return to Norway after 6-8 years. He and his brother bought some lots in Fauntleroy(?).

Ole tried to sell them but couldn't even get as much as he'd paid for them. Hard times then many people out of work. Would have gone back to Norway if he could have sold those lots.

WORK IN SEATTLE Found a lot of idleness. Found a job working on boomer logs on Lake Union. Earned only \$1.50 a day. Then started in the dairy business. His brother, Nikolai, and Ole Lowell were both carpenters. Ole was just a common wage earner. That's why he could earn only \$1.50. Earned \$5 a day in Alaska. Lowell was from Nordfjord.

TRIP TO AMERICA Left Aalesund on the 'Jotunheim', which used to be a fjord boat, this took them to Bergen. It was difficult for him to be on the sea. They took the ship 'Hera' from Bergen to Stavanger, from Stavanger to Newcastle, England. Ole and Louis then took a train to Liverpool. Liverpool was quite an interesting experience for them, all the different people. Ole and Louis took the logsteamer 'Maritania' to New York. They even paid extra (47 crowns) to take this boat. The 'Maritania' was the sister ship of the 'Lusitania', the fastest ship being able to cross the Atlantic in five days. The 'Maritania' was brand new, very comfortable. Ole and Louis didn't like the British girls working on the ship though, they were always begging for tips. Ole was seasick on this trip also. They were amazed at how much a huge ship like that vibrated because of the speed. But their journey set a record: four and a half days. When they arrived at Ellis Island, all they had to do was roll up their sleeves and show vaccination marks.

SCHOOL IN NORWAY Ole went to school until he was 14-15. He was also confirmed. He had to walk three miles to school; in the winter, they skied. School was held everyday in winter. There were two classes, small school and big school, with three grades each. Ole Strummer was his teacher in the big school. Ole B. really values the education that Mr. Strummer gave him.

ARRIVAL AND SETTLING IN AMERICA California, Alaska, and Washington. Ole had no knowledge of English when he arrived. Louis knew more, so he served as translator. At Ellis Island, a man came up in a horse and wagon full of boxes about 1 x 1 ft, which were full of lunch stuff. The man was yelling \$1, so they each got a box for the train ride. Their train trip (on the Southern Pacific line) took them south past the White House, Virginia, Carolinas, Louisiana, and Texas. It was really hot in Texas - watermelon season. In New Mexico they met a Swede returning from Sweden, who befriended them. Their train trip took 7 days. In spite of the record-breaking ship crossing, the whole trip took an average time. Ole had swollen feet for sitting for 7 days with tied shoes and no moving around. They ended up in San Francisco because they had a friend there in a lumber town (Albion in Mendocino County). They just showed up at the lumber camp and got jobs. Their first job was loading railroad ties, very tough work as they were sinker ties. Next job was digging ditches, which Ole liked. He worked really hard so that he wouldn't lose his job. They earned \$2 a day plus room and board.

LEARNING ENGLISH Ole made friends with an old man (his boss), Tom, who taught him English. He also learned from reading the newspaper. Ole wanted to know what was going on.

WORK: They worked 6 days a week, 10 hours a day, starting at 7 am and finishing at 5 pm. Started working in the lumber business in September. At the end of December, they started North. Their boss did not want them to leave for Alaska; he said it would be a mistake. But Ole and Louis already had everything worked out with Ole's brother in Alaska.

ARRIVAL IN SAN FRANCISCO A man with a team of horses asked them for their address - he was a 'taxi'. Ole sat with him in the driver's seat and Louis hung on in back. Once when Ole looked back, Louis was way back in the road trying to catch his hat, which had flown off. Ole tried to stop the horses by going RRRRR (rolled 'R'). That's how they stopped horses in Norway. The driver looked at Ole like he was crazy - when Ole looked back, Louis was back in the wagon with his hat on, so Ole told the driver it was okay to go ahead. Since they arrived in San Francisco in the middle of the day, they ate at a restaurant - pointed out the food they wanted. Then they visited with other Norwegian immigrants and headed for Albion.

TO ALASKA Ole and Louis went to Alaska in Jan. 1909 by traveling to Seattle where they saw Smith Tower being built. (Ole was mistaken about how long they stayed in Albion - they didn't leave until March when the Valdez Trail would be clear.) The steamer was to leave on a Saturday night. They met many people who had just returned from a trip to Norway who were going back home to Alaska. Ole and Louis listened to the Norwegian dialects to figure out where they were from. One of the Norwegians thought that Ole was his brother, Nik, and asked him what the heck he was doing there on the steamer. This man, Jack Viken (?), had worked with Nik in Alaska.

ALASKA They arrived in Anchorage to take the Valdez Trail to Thompson Pass. All the Norwegians on the boat plus Ole and Louis headed out, equipped with the usual: wool socks, a pair of rubber shoes (rubber bottoms and laced, leather tops), and felt shoes. The trail was broken, but it was slow going in the snow. Ole partnered with Jack Viken. Some of the men had horses to take them across the pass. These men had some spekekjoett, but they left it outside overnight, and some wolves ate it. The interior of Alaska had dry snow and Ole used his felt shoes. He and Jack traveled quickly and arrived first.

WORK Mining in Alaska. Nik had been in Alaska for 2-3 years, working through the winters. The Ester Creek mine (outside of Fairbanks) was owned by Jim Hammo and Clarence Berry (?). During the summer, there were 100 men working in this underground mine. Ole worked as a bellboy (explains job). After one season, he joined his brother doing pipe work. They worked at Conrad(?) (below the mine) sinking a shaft into frozen ground, 10 hours a day and 6 days a week. Ole and Nik worked 18 months without leaving or missing a shift. The job paid \$5 a day plus room and board. Ole stayed in Alaska for two years longer than Nik, who went back to Norway.

BACHELOR LIFE Before Nik left, he and Ole had bought a one-room cabin because they were tired of sleeping in the dorms. 'Batching' was rather primitive, and Ole read a lot. The Fairbanks Miner News came daily at the mine. One Christmas Eve when he was alone, he walked into Fairbanks for the night, 10 miles from the mine. When he got into the town saloon, he was frozen. It was 58 degrees below zero outside. In order to relieve the pain he had to put ice on his cheeks all night long at the local hotel where he usually stayed.

SEATTLE Ole never regretted coming to America. He says his purpose was too strong: to get independent and do something interesting. Ole left Alaska in the fall of 1919 and went to Seattle; there was lots of unemployment. Ole Lowell was a top notch builder and carpenter, he was appointed to Col. Chittenden, the builder of the locks on Lake Washington. He still couldn't sell the lots of land that he and Nik had bought earlier, so they decided to start a dairy.

DAIRYING In 1914, Ole, who had the money, took Lowell in as a partner as Lowell had the abilities to build the barns and milk houses so they could get licensed. The business nature in Ole's blood got him interested in the dairy business. They rented 10 acres with a big house on it from a retired farmer called Hammer. They named their dairy the La Ville Dairy. Tells story of how they picked out the name. Kept business for 2-3 years - thrived as a home

delivery dairy. They delivered around Green Lake, 12th Ave. N. and 55th. Mrs. Lucas was a good customer. One quart of milk sold for 10 cents, and in summer, 12 quarts were \$1. The business which began in 1914, developed into three big routes in Seattle by 1928. In 1928, Ole merged with Kristoferson (?) Dairy: 'Blindheim-Kristoferson Dairy'. Many small dairies were merging to become large outfits, e.g., Carnation. He retired in 1942 from the dairy business but continued to work for several more years at the 'Dungeness-Sequim Co-op'.

Ole managed this co-op with an assistant, Edward Gruger; worked there five years until 1949. Had a blueberry farm around 1950 - 1966. Wife's health became bad in 1966, and he retired permanently.

MEETING SPOUSE Ole met his wife through his dairy business. He drove by her house everyday on his route. Her father was also in the dairy business (was the first milkman at the University of Washington). Ole knew of his wife through the Lowell's before he met her; all his friends used to 'brag her up'. One evening she and her sister came over to visit. After that, he received letters from her. Often he would give her a ride when he was on his deliveries, and she was going in the same direction. They were sweethearts for 7 - 8 years, because the dairy couldn't support two families. They got married August 30, 1919 and lived on Beacon Hill. Ole says it was worth waiting. Anna was not Norwegian; her family was from Slesvig (Saxony ?), Denmark. Her father, August and family had first been in Texas, then to Seattle on Beacon Hill. August was a carpenter with a good trade. Bought 160 acres at \$4 an acre. Ole and Anna had two children, Agnette Wilhemina, born 1921, and Alvin Louis.

DAIRY BUSINESS There was a tuberculosis outbreak in the herds, so Ole sold the cows and developed a pasteurization business about 1922.

BANKING IN THE 1920s He had heeded his grandmother's advice about saving money and had \$800-900 in Washington National Bank managed by Dexter Horton. One Christmas Ole went to the bank to make a withdrawal only to find the bank closed, and Horton on his way to Mexico with the bank's money to buy a banana ranch. Ole got back only 50%. His next monies were invested in Scandinavian-American Bank, which paid back 85% when they had trouble.

Ole invested all his free money into the Norwegian-American Line after the bank failures.

TUBERCULOSIS EPIDEMIC Ole's brother-in-law, Paul Fisher, lost most of his herd. When Ole's cows were given the tuberculin test, 30 out of 32 had negative results. Only two cows had to be butchered, and Ole's only compensation was the two hides. His herd had a good record of being healthy and producing high quality milk.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES Member of several clubs but held no offices. Ole attended the Swedish Club as a guest of Kristoferson. Ole was a 50-year member of the Sons of Norway.

The Norwegian Commercial Club was his main interest and activity. He helped organize and name this club, was a charter member in 1930-31, and was appointed its tenth president.

RETURN TRIPS TO NORWAY The first trip back occurred in late August 1958. They visited with six friends from his confirmation class and with his family, staying with his brother, Nik.