

"The Family History"

by Georgiana Severson

To the Honor of my Father and Mother
Written in the Year Nineteen Hundred and Twenty Two

Norway means northern-way. It was given this name by the Vikings. Norway is a small country, extending north and south, between the mountain chain Kjölen, which separates it from Sweden, and the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans.

The oceans roar along its rockbound coast and rage and hurl the waves in white showers of spray against the sky. The aurora borealis flashes like a huge shining fan over the northern heavens, and the stars glitter with a keen frosty splendor. But in summer, all this is changed, as suddenly as by miracle. Then the sun shines warmly, even within the polar circle. Innumerable wildflowers sprout forth, as quickly as the snow melts away.

In the northern districts, it is light throughout the nite. Even during the few hours while the sun dips beneath the horizon, Norway is called the Land of the Midnight Sun. The summers are short, giving just time for the wildflowers to bloom and fade away and for the harvest to be collected, and often times they are nipped by a summer's frost. During this period of continuous daylight, the stars are never seen. The moon appears pale and shed no light upon the earth.

But as the days grow shorter and the summer sun fades gradually away, twilight comes once more. The stars, one by one, make their appearance, shining brightly in the pale blue sky. The moon shows itself again as the gem of night and lights and cheers the long and dark days of the Scandinavian winter. The heavens again appear in a blaze of light and glory before the aurora borealis.

Norway is noted throughout the world for its exquisite scenery. But being a rugged country, there are but a few fertile valleys. In most places, the ground is very stony, therefore hard to cultivate, so the harvest is not very large. Dairying is the principle occupation in the inland districts. In summer, they bring their cattle up in the Sater, which is high up in the mountains. They usually go up to these summer farms from the later part of June until the later part of August. The winter makes his appearance, and often times, they are caught in a snowstorm as they are descending these summer quarters.

Girls are usually the shepherds that attend the cattle in these summer farms. Here they are kept very busy when not attending to their herd. They make cheese & butter to store up for the long cold winter. The lives of these girls are very lonely as they are miles away from their homes and the summer farms are far apart. So usually Sunday afternoons is the only time they have for a little recreation and they visit one another. From two to three girls are kept according to the size of the farms. Perhaps once or twice

during the season someone from home comes up to bring home some of the winter supplies.

Fishing is the main industry on the coast and is the principle product of export. Norway is divided into districts and is about the same as we call counties here in the States.

The Norsemen are a Germanic race and belong to the great Aryon family. Their original home was in Asia, which the ancients called Bactria, near the sources of the rivers Oxus and Jaxartes. Not only are the Norsemen supposed to come from this region, but the ancestors of all the Aryon Nations, which now inhabit the greater portion of the civilized world. The early Italic tribes, from which sprung the world's empire of Rome, trace their descent from the same ancestry. The Vikings landed in Norway, between the ninth and tenth century.

Valdres is a district in Norway, which is the main feature in my story. Valdres is an inland district and lies in a very picturesque locality, though some parts again have sort of a weird appearance which makes it rather romantic.

Here in Valdres, in different parts of the districts, was the birthplace of all my ancestors or as far back as I can trace them. It also was the birthplace of my father and mother. Father spent his childhood and into early manhood. But mother was just a babe of four years when she, with her parents, came to America. Few of my older ancestors ever left their birthplace and lie at rest in the church yard where they were brought in their mother's arms for holy baptism.

My father was born at Byornsplassen, Valdres, in the year 1847, May 2, and was christened by the name of Knud. Here in Valdres, he spent his happy childhood with his playmates. They went rambling in the hills and fishing in the mountain streams, picking wild berries, etc., and was a good shot at wild game, though just a lad. Father, in his young manhood, was quite an expert on skis and made a number of daring jumps. He was also very clever in dancing, Spring dance and Halling, the two national dances in Norway. A person has to be quite an athlete or sprinter to dance one of them as it requires a very nimble and active person to dance it successively. So from judging from all those activities, he must have been a happy and jolly youth. And this wonderful disposition has stayed with him all through life.

At the age of twenty-one, he bade farewell to his home and country to see the new world America and left Christiania [now Oslo], Norway, March 26, 1868, with his sister Tora, for companion. They made their voyage on the steamer Austrian of the Allen Steamship Company and landed in Portland, Maine. There they traveled on to Green County, Wisconsin. They remained there about a year. Then from there, they moved to Otter Creek, Wisconsin, which was father's first real home in America. His first boyhood companion in America was Gilbert Gilbertson of Otter Creek. When first landing at Otter Creek, father stayed with mother's aunt, Tharan Bremmon [Taran Brennom?]. One day during the holidays of the year 1870, mother, with her parents, came to visit her aunt. At the age of 17, shy and pretty, she first met father, twenty-three years old, strong and

robust. They started their romance, trusted and true lovers, and were married March 11, 1871, at the Dodgeville Church, which was about seven miles from mother's home. The ceremony was read by Rev. Ness. They celebrated their wedding festivities in the old pioneer way. Three or four teams of horses with friends and relatives escorted them to church to seal their marriage bonds. Ole Smemon, the violinist, played sweet strains of music to and from church, as the usual custom in those days. The attendants were both my grandfathers, Miss Julia Dale, and Sigurid Gjored. After the ceremony, they all drove back to mother's home and the wedding nuptials were celebrated for two days with friends and relatives.

Their first born was their son Bernt Olaf, born Dec. 27, 1871, at Otter Creek, Wis. Bernt or Ben, as we usually called him, was two years old in 1873. They moved to Swift County, Minnesota, to take up homestead land. Here they lived in a sod house for a few years, like so many pioneers did those days. And two daughters were born. Rogena born July 17, 1875 and Oleana Toneta born Oct. 7, 1878.

In the year 1879, they settled down on their homestead land in the spring. This little settlement was called Six Mile Grove. Here they made many friends, true and faithful neighbors, each sharing each others hard struggles of pioneer days. Some of the first settlers and neighbors at Six Mile Grove were Ole Corneliuson & family, Halvor Rodale & family, Nels Brakke & family, Micle Meggie & family, John Duallie & family, Andrew Johnson & children, and mother's sister's family.

Father held a public office for 16 yrs as a school clerk for the Six Mile Grove community and was also a chairman of the Board of Supervisors for 16 years.

Father and mother were general favorites of the neighbors for their gentle and neighborly ways and always willing to give a helping hand to anyone in need. While living at Six Mile Grove, three more children were born to them: Ole Andrew born Dec. 2, 1881; Karine Josephine May 8, 1884; Georgiana Sophia born May 15, 1887 [ed. author of this story].

Father decided to explore the golden West:
Out where hand clasp's a little stronger,
Out where the smile dwells a little longer,
That's where the West begins.

Out where the sun shines a little brighter,
Where the snow's that fall are a trifle whiter,
And bonds of homes are a wee bit tighter,
That's where the West begins.

Out where the skies are a trifle bluer,
Where friendship ties are a little truer,
That's where the West begins.

Out where a fresher breeze is blowing,
Where there's laughter in every streamlet flowing,
Where there is more of reaping and less of sowing,
That's where the West begins.

Out where the world's still in the making,
Where fewer hearts in despair are breaking,
That's where the West begins.

Where there is more of singing and less of sighing,
Where there is more of giving and less of buying,
And a man makes friends without half trying,
That's where the West begins.

Father commenced his journey out west May 2, 1889. Bertha Johnson, mother's sister's eldest daughter, accompanied him out west. The first stopping place was Tacoma. Tacoma was then the largest city on Puget Sound. Cousin Bertha remained here but father traveled on to Chehalis Co. This part of the state was then in a heavy timber belt and went to work as a woodsman. Here in a small clearing he built a small house and mother and the family were sent for. The farm was sold and the stock and farming implements, etc. were sold at a public auction. Auction sale consisted of 35 head of cattle, 14 sheep, 2 horses, chickens, turkeys, and our dear old dog Tiger was given away.

Mother and family bid neighbors & friends a tearful goodbye at Benson, Minnesota. Mother's trip across the continent was not very pleasant, unaccustomed to traveling and with so many little ones to care for. Besides her own family, she had two of her sister's children, that were motherless, to look after. Conductors were not overly pleasant to tourists and were at times very disagreeable so one can imagine the discomfort mother had to bring the family out west.

The food I will not mention, which was very amusing, to the custom of now days. But, however, it was wholesome and country life suggestions. But often times we have had many a hearty laugh at little incidents that happened.

Father met us at Chehalis with a vehicle, which mother I'm sure was very glad after her long wearisome journey. So we went to live in the little house in the heart of the forest. We had many thrilling adventures here in the woods. The East had it's own discomforts, from fighting prairie fires and running to the cellar for safety from electric storms. Then the wild and woolly West, to be frightened from wild animals in the woods, which were then very numerous. It wasn't an unusual thing to see tracks of different animals around the house in the morning and hear them scurrying away in the timber, such as bears, cougars, deer, etc.

Father and my eldest brother, being away at work, were just home weekends, so mother and the younger children were left alone getting accustomed to the new life in the

wilderness. But in spite of the hair-raising moments, there were many happy days too. A neighbor, Mrs. Bossard, lived some distance away but close enough to see each other once and awhile. She was also alone as her husband was also at work in the lumber camps. Mother and the older girls had many a happy time together.

Living here in the heart of the forest a few months, we moved across the river from Chehalis, a small town. Here father put up another small house, not very substantial, as it was built temporarily. Here Helen was born Jan 6, 1890. Some people by the name of Bordsen living here were very kind & neighborly.

This river we lived close by was fed by mountain streams and overflowed in winter and early spring. But it being a new life to father & mother, they were very much frightened one evening. A big storm started and with it, the river commenced rising and got so high that the house, not being built very strong, as I mentioned before, gave away. And down came our house. You can imagine our fright. Mother, with Helen in her arms, just 2 weeks old, stood looking out of the window, as a big tree fell, just missing our small abode. So our good neighbors came to our rescue and took us to their home and cared for us all until the storm and high water had subdued. Father repaired our frail house in better conditions. Then in the spring, father & mother's sister's husband built a big scow and took our belongings and large family & sailed for Gray's Harbor City. During our journey, we had many a funny experience. We must have looked very much the same as Noah and the Ark. But we landed safely at Gray's Harbor. Here we tied the scow on the beach and lived in it a few months until father had built a house further up in town. Here mother's health gave away and was in bed most of the time for two years. Oleana & Ole resumed their school studies and I commenced school for a few months that year.

Gray's Harbor was booming then and looked quite prosperous to an Easterner. Father & Mr. Winters bought some school land, twenty acres each or a forty-acre tract. Father also bought a 10-acre tract up in Humptulip Valley. Gray's Harbor soon lost it's booming and splendor as it was then in the panic or hard times, in the early nineties, so father decided to move further north to seek a better living and came to Everett Apr 4, 1893.

Everett had about 1,000 inhabitants at the time. The town was in two sections. Bayside was called Port Gardner, named after the bay, and the other half was called Riverside, which was the main part of town. It had the most buildings and business houses. There were a few streets graded, Hewitt Ave. being graded at our arrival. Then Broadway, Everett, California, Pacific, and Cedar, which was the street we lived on. Here Ole and Karine commenced school again on Pacific Ave, then the Monroe School on California & Maple and later Georgia & Helen started.

Sister Rogena was then a young lady, working in a boarding house for Westcotts, there meeting Louis Weiss. After a short romance, was married in Everett March 17, 1893, by Rev. Banks, a Baptist minister. Father and Oleana were the only witnesses at the ceremony, at the parsonage. Mother had prepared a little wedding supper at home on the corner of Cedar & Fulton. Having their home prepared on Pacific Ave. near the Monte

Cristo Hotel, the following children were born to them: Alvin Lester, Ralph Durwood, Hazel Irene, Clarence Norval, Rollen Benjamin, and Harold Clifford.

Father and mother moved to Everett & Virginia Street. Later sister Jennie (Rogena) and her family moved & located right near us and were neighbors.

Oleana, my second eldest sister, met Mr. Andrew Hedlund at a little gathering. Their romance lasted for several years and were married at home in Everett March 21, 1900, by Rev. Blakkan. They adopted Andrew Howard, who was born Nov. 24, 1915.

In the year 1903, father purchased the property on north Colby Ave., which is still our home. April 20, 1904, mother received a sad message that my brother Ben was badly hurt. He and three other young men had taken a subcontract from Mr. Gorig to rebuild a bridge over a river at Bellingham. A decayed pile of log had fallen and struck him, killing him instantly. Mother and Oleana & Louis Weiss, my eldest sister's husband, hurried to Bellingham hoping to be able to comfort him but the sad news was told to them by the contractor, that he had passed away. The shock was great indeed, as it was our first real sorrow. He lies at rest in the Evergreen Cemetery and the little lot is kept up winter & summer by mother with beautiful flowers, smiling their love & esteem for his sacred memory.

Like in most large families, there has been sorrow & heartaches, but there has been lots of happiness also, making life seem a long wonderful dream. The remainder of the family, in the meantime, had grown up and friends & parties were numerous, as father and mother were always happy to see us have a good time.

Georgia, the chatter box of the family, commenced to think that single life was never meant for her. So meeting Percy Elvin Marsh at a country dance one evening, their friendship grew into love and were married at home March 18, 1911. It was also Percy's 21st birthday. After seven years of blissful married life, Percy was taken seriously ill with the influenza that was raging so terribly at the time and died Oct. 10, 1918, being loved by us all. We missed him and miss him still. His beautiful character & happy disposition is a fond recollection to us all. Mother called him her youngest son, as he was younger than my brothers or other brother-in-laws. He also lies at rest in the Evergreen Cemetery about 100 yds from brother Ben's resting place.

It was during the midst of the world's war, brother Ole enlisted July 16, 1917, with Company A of the 14th infantry and served until after the armistice was signed April 1919. He was made corporal after a few months service and later was promoted to sergeant. Also won a medal for sharp shooting. Alvin Lester, sister Jennie's eldest son, was drafted July 25, 1918, with Company K of the 13th Infantry and served until July 1919. Ralph, the second son, enlisted Aug. 14, 1918 with Company 46, 12th Br. and served until Feb. 6, 1919. Needless to say, how happy we were to have our boys safe from the thoughts of horror of the battlefields, although we were very fortunate that none of them were sent overseas or saw real action but were drilled in various camps ready for a minute's notice.

Then June 1920, sister Helen went to see the rugged hills of Alaska. Over the mighty waves of the Pacific Ocean, she landed in Ketchikan and became infatuated with Isaac Villanueva and was married June 27, 1920.

Georgia commenced to think widowhood was too lonely for her so Olaf Severson promised to love, honor, and cherish her for the rest of their lives, and were married November 5, 1920, by Rev. Norgaard.

Hazel, Jennie's only daughter, was married Aug. 16, 1920, to John Nelson. The wedding was celebrated at her mother & father's home at 3621 Wetmore Ave. with a large gathering of relatives and friends. A son was born to them July 11, 1922.

Mother and father celebrated their Golden Wedding day March 11, 1921, at their home. Relatives & friends were there to congratulate them on their long journey through life. The toastmaster of the evening was Mr. Helgeson and these words were mentioned: Their wedded life had not always been strewn roses, for there had been sorrow and heartaches as well as happiness. But side-by-side, they came smiling through. A few of their friends that were there were also present at their Silver wedding twenty-five years before. A beautiful golden tea set, gold coin, flowers and other remembrances were received from those present in honor and memory of the wonderful occasion.

It is now over a year ago since I commenced our family history and nothing of any importance has happened, but it is to be continued as time goes on.

Mother's Early History:

Mother was born in Valdres, Norway, at Pighaug, Hidalen, the same birthplace as her mother. Mother lived here until the age of four years. Then they commenced their journey to America March 1857. They stopped at Drammen Norway until April to make their preparation for sailing which was a long journey in those days. They made their journey across the ocean on the sailing vessel Bröbak [sp?], which took them 12 weeks to cross the ocean. Mother was in company with her mother & her uncle and aunt on her mother's side, and her three sisters: Annie, age seven; Olena, age 6 months; and Toneta, age 2 years, who was taken sick and died. She was buried at sea after a little service had been rendered by the captain. And her baby sister Olena died shortly after they landed in America.

They landed at Quebec, Canada June 1857, then journeyed on to Blackearth, Wisconsin and settled down at Otter Creek, Iowa County. Grandfather Gilbertson bought a farm and this was their home the rest of their lives. Grandmother died at an early age of 42 years. Then grandfather remarried and raised a second family.

Here in Otter Creek, Mother spent her childhood and until her early marriage. Mother's best girlhood companions were Maria pou Bakko, as she was called, and Julia Dale, Sigurid Gjored, and others.

"Our Family"

Father:

Knud Benson

Born: Valdres, Norway; May 2, 1847

Died: Everett, Washington; December 19, 1926

Mother:

Gunhil Gilbertson

Born: Pighaug, Hidalen, Valdres, Norway; July 10, 1852

Died: Everett, Washington; May 9, 1934

Children:

Bernt Olaf

Born: Otter Creek, Wisconsin; December 27, 1871

Died: Bellingham, Washington; April 20, 1904

Rogena ["Jennie"] Gertina

Born: Swift County, Minnesota; July 17, 1875

Married: Louis Weiss

Died: Everett, Washington; November 20, 1949

Oleana Toneta

Born: Swift County, Minnesota; October 17, 1878

Married: Andrew Hedlund

Ole Andreas

Born: Six Mile Grove, Minnesota; December 2, 1881

Married: Ada Habel; March 7, 1934

Died: Seattle, Washington; May 20, 1955

Karine ["Karie or Carrie"] Josephine

Born: Six Mile Gove, Minnesota; May 8, 1884

Died: Everett, Washington; June 18, 1927

Georgiana ["Georgie" "Georgia"] Sophia

Born: Six Mile Grove, Minnesota; May 15, 1887

Married: Percy Elvin Marsh; March 18, 1911 (Died October 10, 1918)

Married: Olaf Severson; November 5, 1920 (Died June 20, 1972)

Died: Everett, Washington; August 7, 1987

Helen Clara

Born: Chehalis, Washington; January 6, 1890

Married: Isaac Villanueva

Married: Alfred Croft; September 1938 (Died Oct 11, 1938)

Died: Everett, Washington; May 27, 1971

Disclaimer:

Transcribed August 2011 by Gayle Weiss from Georgia's handwritten diary book. Some but not all spelling and punctuation have been changed/corrected. Sentences and writing were interpreted as best as possible.