

(35) Mamie Norsen

This is Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota, a Saturday KMRS News Feature. Today we're talking with Mami Norsen of Wheaton, MN and Mamie, I know that you're ~~Swix~~ Swedish and you're folks came over from Sweden. About what year was that that your folks came over from Sweden?

My folks came from Sweden in 1882. They came to Lake Park, MN where dad had a brother living, he was studying for the ministry in Rock Island, Illinois, but his family lived there and they stayed there the first winter. Dad did work ~~on~~ building on ~~the~~ railroad out from Fargo while he was there and ^{the} ~~my~~ first child, my oldest sister, was born 3 weeks after they came here.

Q: I think it was about a year or so and they came down to the Wheaton area. Tell us about how they picked out the land.

In 1883, they heard there was an opening for homesteads down around here, so my dad and his brother, Olaf Larsen, who also came with them, his brother-in-law, he was married to dad's sister. They came down ~~on~~ here to see about the _____ on the homesteads and ~~ix~~ there was a family living across the road where we now live by the name of _____. They stayed there and dad stepped over on the quarter where we now live and he said "I think this is the poorest land but here I feel at home, so this one I'll take." His ~~x~~ brother-in-law took the quarter west of him and here they made their home.

Q: ~~When~~ ~~the~~ Of course, there wasn't any house of anything and that first house that your dad built, what kind of a house was that?

Well, my dad went to BrownsValley, the nearest town, ^{his} not the nearest town, but it's 24 miles south, Herman was the ~~next~~ nearest town, 3 21 miles east. He went to Browns Valley and got his lumber for the first home he had \$24 to buy with and he built a basement, a dug out basement with 2 rooms and a shanty roof and there they started.

Q: You had quite a big family, lots of brothers and sisters, that's quite a few people in 2 rooms.

Ya, we were a big family. Two of the girls were born before we got here but we wer~~e~~ 7 children while we lived in the basement and my grandmother, my mothers' mother came from Sweden when I was a years and a half old and she lived with us for 20 years. So there

were 10 people living in the basement house.

Q: O.K. That ~~s~~ sounds like a lot of people ~~xxx~~ in one small house. Well, a little bit later, the first house was built or the second house actually. Did your ~~h~~ dad build that too or have that built?

Yeah, our present house was built later I think in 1891. ~~xx~~

Q: Did he build that or did he have some crews do it?

Well, I think he had some ~~s~~ help to do it, but I ~~x~~ ~~x~~ suppose he ~~x~~ had ~~x~~ some help to ~~build~~ build it but I suppose he did a lot of it himself.

Q: Especially today as we tape here adn we've got these winds outside and we know that winter is coming. Back then they used to have some storms and some blizzards that they still talk about. What do you remember you folks telling about those early blizzards?

Well, my dad said that it would storm 3 days. It would blow from direction and it would storm for three days and then the wind ~~xxx~~ would turn and blow and storm 3 days from the other direction, and once he was almost lost, he got to his grainery bin, he ~~xxx~~ didn't know which direction the house was. He had a compus and he managed to ~~h~~ see what direction and he made it home, otherwise he would have ~~xxxx~~ been lost ~~xx~~ in the ~~xxxxxxx~~ storm.

Q: Bac,k in those days they didn't exactly have a fast car that you could jump in and go to town, what was the mode of transportation those early years?

My dad and his brother-in-law had a yok of oxen when they first started farming here and our dad used to kid us ~~xx~~ and say if we ran out of ~~x~~ matches we'd have to drive 21 miles to Herman with the oxen.

Q: Those oxen, that was a two day trip. ~~x~~ One day to ~~xxxx~~ get there and one day to get back.

It was a two day trip. One day going over and one day coming back. I know he used to teal us about his sister, Mrs. Larson, would go with him and they'd go to Herman.. They'd sleep under the wagon overnight.

Q: Talking to you, maybe your dad was quite a remarkable man, he was the guy who was

always looking toward the future and always finding a better way. Tell us about some of the different ~~wa~~ things he was responsible for.

My dad was a real go getter and I said many times, I think he had many brains than all his ten kids put together and still none of us were retarded, just ordinary kids. One brother was a national bank examiner, one was a piano tuner and my youngest brother ~~W~~ Joe, was a farmer, he was a real good one. I had 3 sisters that were school teachers.

Q: One of the things your dad did was get together to start a rural telephone company and ~~evidently~~ eventually became the manager and lineman with 300 phones. That must have been a pretty busy job.

~~Y~~ Yeah, it was back I can't recall ^{exactly} what year it was 1904 or 05 I think. He wanted to organize a rural telephone company, get telephones and he called 8 neighbors together and ^{they} had ~~then~~ ~~xxx~~ a meeting but they didn't decide anything, then he didn't give up. He called another meeting and then they decided to organize and build and they started building and everything was done by hand in those days, digging for the poles and everything, and they built lines and they had over 300 telephones and dad was the manager and lineman. He could repair those old complicated telephones ~~that~~ stayed on the wall with a battery ~~in~~ in them. If you got a call from someone that phone was out of order, he'd hitch up the two fast horses that were fast on the road and go and if he couldn't repair the ~~z~~ telephone there he'd bring it home repair it, and take it back again.

Q: He got one of the first cars, which helped ~~g~~ him a little bit that helped get out to those calls a little bit faster? That car wasn't as fast as we know them today though?

~~Then~~ I think ~~x~~ he was one of the first ones to get a car, ~~is~~ was a little one seated buckboard that he got around in. It ~~went~~ went 20 miles an hour and when he got up to the hill, I remember him telling, when he got up to the hill here up by _____, it wouldn't, he got up and walked when he went up the hill and got in when it got up the hill.

Q: So it wasn't the most powerful car in the world. So you've stayed on the home place all except a couple years you were up at Duluth.

What was that?

Q: You stayed here on the homeplace here in Wheaton.

Yes, I stayed here on the homestead all my life except those 2½ years that I was in Duluth, ^{with} my aunt.

Q: Now things have ~~x~~ changed and of course you were talking about when Wheaton wasn't even here. Things have really changed. Do you like living around this area? Are there pretty friendly people ~~living~~ around the Wheaton area?

Oh yeah, there was no ~~r~~ailroad going through here or any town here when they first started here ~~by the way~~ all the people around here were Scandinavians mostly Swedish. My dad used to teach Sunday School, he had a Sunday school class in the Norde school house over about 40 kids. Big and small all in one class and then he had Sunday school in the south schoolhouse with quite a few ~~x~~ children there.

Q: He was a man of many talents?

Yeah, he was a man of many talents, he could sing and play guitar in his younger days, he could preach even if it was necessary and we had lots, in those days there's a lot of traveling ~~x~~ preachers that came around, so we had so many ministers in our home that we ~~x~~ kind of grew up with them.

Q: Well, Mamie you still live here and you still take care of the place and you're pretty independent to take care of yourself, tell us how old are you?

Well, I'll be 90 years old on Dec. 2nd. I wasn't to say this that the Lord has been good to me all these years and I have no complaint to make and I trust Him for the future for the days ahead whether they be many ~~xf~~ or few.

Q: Thank you very much. We've been talking with Mamie Nossen of Rural Wheaton on Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota a Saturday KMRS News Feature.