

In the book, Swedish Root, Oreogn Lives, I tell the immigration story of my father and grandparents who emigrated from Sweden in 1948. My father at that time was 17 years old and spoke no English. What follows are some memories that he wrote several years ago as he reminisced about his childhood in Västerbotten. His narrative ends a bit abruptly as World War II draws to a close; however, this ending is more fitting than it might seem. By the time the war was over, my dad and his parents had already turned their attention from the difficult war years to a new beginning in America.

I wish to thank Ingeborg Dean for “translating” my father’s notes and preserving his authentic voice. Now in his mid-eighties, Dad still has a hint of a Swedish accent, and thanks to Ingeborg’s careful editing skill, you’ll be able to “hear” the cadence of his native tongue in the words he writes. –Rhonda Erlandson, August 2014.



Mr. Rolf Erlandson and the Sweden he left.

This story begins in Lapland, Sweden, this part of the country known as “The land of the Midnight Sun”. The terrain is rolling type hills, occasionally high enough where a wide perspective of the country can be viewed, and from where hundreds of lakes can be seen dotting the landscape.

High jagged mountains can be found in the upper northern part of Lapland, and many excellent fishing streams with cold, clear water. In Lapland you will find large areas forested, the most common trees being fir, pine, and birch groves. Aspen and mountain ash can be found in abundance, especially around creek beds.

Norrland is in general sparsely populated because the southern part of Sweden was first populated due to fertile soil and milder climate which was more attractive. Lapland is the home of the (Lapps) Sami people. It is not an uncommon sight to see many large herds of reindeer migrating past the villages and small towns, located close to the streams and rivers winding their way to eventually emptying into the Gulf of Bothnia (known in Sweden as Bottniska viken).

While the search for food by the reindeer brings them down into the lowlands, the Lapps follow their herds, closely guarding them from the dangers present on their migration route. This was always an exciting time for both young and old alike. It was always fun to watch the skilful ways the Lapps handled their herds, also it was a colorful show with the Lapps in brilliant red and blue costumes and always recognized by the great fluffy red tassel on their hats. When the Lapps appeared on the scene, everyone knew that the much welcome spring season was just around the corner. After many months of dark, dreary, and cold days, this was the favorite time of the year for most people in the north.

The Lapps usually lived in tents fashioned from reindeer hides and supported on small tree poles, built in the fashion of the American Indian tents. These of course were moved many times during the migration period. During the winter months the Lapps would make handcrafts, such as shoes made from reindeer

hides. They would also make different beautiful kinds of ornaments from reindeer horns. These items were then sold when the Lapps set up camp close to towns.

I was born and raised in this environment on a small farm in a town called Vägsele. My parents owned a home and acreage at this location, and my Dad would supplement his wages from wintertime logging by farming our land.

My recollections begin when I was about six years old (ca 1937). The house I was brought up in was small. It consisted of a medium sized kitchen that also served as a bedroom in wintertime because of the heating problem in the rest of the house. Our large living room was mostly used in the summer time.

The upstairs was unfinished, but in later years one bedroom was completed to one side of the house. Electricity was a fairly new convenience at that time, and only the downstairs section was wired, and for lights only. For heat we had a large wood cook stove in the kitchen, and that had to serve as the entire heating system for the house, as well as a place to cook the meals. Because my Dad was really good at cabinet making, most of our furniture was home made, and it was very well made, sturdy and serving its purpose very well.

People in the country were, for the most part, self-sustaining. Very few things were needed from the grocery store, and bread was always one item that was always prepared and baked at home. This bread was different from the kind of bread we are used to now, from the standpoint that it is really thin and made into large rounds. This type of bread was eaten at practically every meal. A lot of work was involved in preparing and baking it. The day before the baking, the dough had to be prepared in a large wooden tray that resembled a small boat. Then the dough was left to rise until next morning when the actual baking would take place. Usually enough bread was baked at one time to last for several months. Sometimes two people would bake for two days at a time.

No one had access to refrigeration, so in order to preserve the bread it was usually stored in as cool a place as could be found, such as the upstairs in the house. In our case the upstairs was unfinished with just some boards laid down for a floor. One of my chores at night was to bring down enough bread for our evening meal. There were, of course, no electric lights upstairs, so most of the time we used an inadequate lantern and, occasionally, just a candle. Whenever I would hit the top step on the way down with the bread, that's when I would allow my imagination to run away with me. Invariably the bread fetching would end up with a record dash over to and back from the bread stack. It being dark and scary, I usually didn't take the time to look where I was going, and practically every time I would step on the loose end of a board. One can imagine the racket I made. It sounded like a bunch of cattle in a stampede.

As far as modern conveniences in our house was concerned, there were none. Our water supply was across the street. A ten gallon bucket with a large scoop was our drinking water bucket. Any hot water that we needed had to be heated on the stove. The bathroom facilities weren't any better. No indoor plumbing was available in our town, and everybody had their individual out-door facilities, which left a lot to be desired in a cold and snow laden country like ours.

I think that what I found most difficult to get used to was a newly-stuffed straw mattress. In our kitchen we had a home-made wooden bed that would fold out to a double bed, and in this we used a straw mattress. The new straw in the mattress would protrude through the cover, constantly taunting and jabbing every time one moved. It was not until one had spent many uncomfortable and sleepless nights that one could begin to feel like it was worthwhile to sleep on such luxury.

Because there were no factories or department stores or any other type of employment around our area, each and every one had to be as much self-sustaining as possible. This is why most everyone in our town had a few farm animals. Our family was no exception. We had cows, chickens, a few sheep and a pig. The only thing we didn't have was a barn. That we shared with my Grandparents. They were living very near our place. Every day, morning and evening, trips were made to Grandpa's to do our chores, milking and feeding our stock.

Everyone of course would be looking forward to summer time and the midnight sun. To me it seemed like we were always going to bed awfully early because the sun was shining late at night. One thing bad in summer was the mosquitoes. They could at times almost take the joy out of the warm, light, summer evenings. We had our sleeping quarters in the upstairs in the summer time to keep cool. This was nice, except there always seemed to be a lone mosquito flying around, and one could hear it but not see it. Sometimes it seemed like hours before it made the mistake of landing within reach.

In wintertime we would pay for our long daylight summer days. At times, depending on the weather, it would be quite dark around two or three o'clock in the afternoon. In wintertime, the chores and the travel to my Grandpa's place, the road framed in high snow banks, especially stick in my mind.

In Sweden it is quite customary for the women to do the milking, while the men do the barn chores, feeding and cleaning the cattle. While my Mother and Grandmother took care of the milking, I usually had a few chores assigned. Of course, my Grandpa always found time to play hide and seek with me. It always seemed spooky to me to go into the dark, back part of the hayloft and hide, and I always felt really brave when I would finally work up enough courage to go to my hiding place. I could hear my Grandpa looking for me in the dark. At the same time, he would make spooky kind of sounds, and usually after a few minutes of that I could not stay in my hiding place. I would come out of hiding, scared and with my imagination on the loose. My Grandpa always chuckled to himself, knowing I had once again given away one of my hiding places. Eventually, even hide and seek would become tiresome, and I would soon seek other amusement, such as watching the horse have his evening oats and hay. It really sounded good when the horse crushed the oats or the hay with his teeth, and I always wondered if it tasted as good as it sounded.

Soon, however, I would tire and like any other child, I had to be doing something else even if I knew I would be getting into trouble, such as chasing the chickens around the barn to try and catch them. I really had no idea of what to do with them, if I had actually managed to catch one of them, but it was fun to keep the chickens moving. This game usually did not last very long before I was told to lay-off or else. No one seemed to have any sense of humor.

There is always a bright side to every story though, and the trip home from the chores was something I always looked forward to. The stars on a clear night always seemed to be unusually bright. Occasionally a falling star would blaze its way toward the horizon to finally disappear from our view. The moon would light the vast snow fields, and the trees cast eerie shadows on the snow drifts. This had a kind of mystical effect, but in the company of Mom and Dad I felt quite secure in being so close to the suspense I was sure existed just beyond the tree line.

When the roads were clear we used a simple machine called “spark” for transportation. This was a type of sled with a seat up forward, a set of handle bars and long steel runners. The operator would balance on one of the runners, holding onto the handlebars, while propelling the machine with the other, free foot. To steer you just applied pressure on the handlebars, left or right, depending on the direction you wanted to go.

Jobs were hard to come by, so a lot of items even as inexpensive as a daily paper were not enjoyed by every household. However, my Grandpa was a subscriber and therefore, after the barn chores, we always had to stay long enough for my Dad to scan the headlines and debate the political news with Grandpa. During the paper reading and political arguments between my Dad and Grandpa, I always retreated to Grandma’s high-backed rocking chair in her living room. In this rocker I traveled many miles pretending that I was in a plane, and sometimes I pretended that I was a ship captain. During these imaginary travels I really would give the rocker a work-out, and this would go on until my Dad and Grandpa had the world situation under control for that evening.

After the milking chores and the political discussions, it was time to head back home to our house. This did not mean the end of the day. There was still the chore of separating the milk while it was still fresh and warm. The milk had to be separated from the cream that later was used for our homemade butter. Our separator was, of course, hand operated because very few electrical machines were available. This chore usually signified my bedtime, and from my bed I would listen to the drone from the separator. It would soon put me to sleep, and I’d be off to dream land.

My hometown was a very small community nestled to itself in the northern portion of Sweden. There was one lone dirt road through the center, connecting many other, some smaller communities with civilization. The surroundings were pleasant, wooded areas, a rolling hill type of country.

I have always dreamed of living next to a river or lake but was never fortunate enough to do so. Our closest body of water was located approximately a half hour by bicycle from our home. This water consisted of a river, calm and peaceful in summer, but which could be quite treacherous in spring time, when the dams were opened up for spring runoff. This river was very good for fishing and when I was a young boy my mother, myself and sometimes a friend of mine would spend many good days fishing up and down this river. Small lakes were also located at various locations about the same distance from our home as the river. Since lake fishing was not my favorite, I found myself on the lake shore only occasionally, not always in a fishing mood but to enjoy the beauty of the lake and its colorful surroundings.

The main industry in our community was logging and farming. The logging operation at that time in Sweden was a very hard, primitive, and frustrating job. To begin with, a logger is totally at the mercy of Mother Nature. The weather conditions from beginning to end of the operation played a major role. All logging was done by hand, with the use of a horse and a set of specially made sleds. It was back breaking work. If Mother Nature provided a mild fall, the swampy areas would not freeze deep enough to support a horse pulling a load of logs. Since each logger usually did not have more than the one horse, and a situation like this existed, it could be extremely bad for the horse. Under the strain of the load and with unstable footing the horse could inflict serious damage to itself, to the point where it would have to be stabled for sometimes a long period of time, and in more serious cases would have to be destroyed. This would cause the logger a serious loss of revenue, and in the latter case, the loss of a winter's pay.

In and around our community the logging was done strictly by hand, no power tools of any kind were available. Power tools were too expensive for the average small time logger to purchase. When a logger moved into an area, the tool supply usually consisted of a five-foot, one-man cross cut saw, a single bladed ax, some spare handles, a "beaver spade" used for barking the logs, a shovel, and a frozen lunch.

The snow depth was always a problem, depending on how the snow drifts had accumulated around the tree trunk. The depth could range there from two feet to four feet. In order to fell a tree, as much as possible of this snow had to be cleared away from around the trunk in order to cut the tree as close to the ground as possible. If not, too much of the tree was wasted, and besides, the stumps would be too tall and would have to be cut again in the spring. The government regulated this very closely, and if not done right, it would of course cost money.

After the tree was down, the limbs off and cut into proper lengths, the small end of each piece had to be barked back at least one foot and all the way around. This barking procedure had mainly two purposes, number one being that when the logs were scaled for size, the owner was paid for the wood only and not for the bark. The second reason for doing it was that when these logs were floated down the river, there was less chance of log jams forming. The bark was slippery and would not jam easily in rocks and limbs.

This logging operation usually took place in extremely cold weather, and it was a slow and frustrating task. The logs, after having been felled and cut, had to be piled together in such a fashion that a horse could be maneuvered in and close enough where the logs could be loaded on the special sleds and transported to the river. Here again, very cold weather had to set in early in the fall in order to provide an adequate thickness of the river ice. The reason for this was that the logs had to be unloaded on the ice, stacked in neat piles for easy access of the scalers. Then in spring time when the ice melted, the logs would drop into the water, ready and waiting for the annual spring log drive.

Springtime, and especially summer, are very much looked forward to in Sweden. The cold and dark winter days with the moving about limited by snow and poorly kept roads made people feel like prisoners toward the end of winter. The spring sun would peek through and immediately the whole area

seemed to come alive. One could look across the fields and everything seemed so clean and bright. The trees drooping with snow on their branches looked like giants with white fur coats. If one observed nature closely, one could even see the change in the animals. I especially enjoyed looking at the squirrels moving from tree to tree and always playing a peek-a-boo game from opposite sides of the tree trunks. The air was very light and clean and would carry the bird sounds for what seemed miles. To me the woods were fascinating, almost like a world of its own. On skis one could glide on snow without a sound and at times come really close to game without being detected and be able to watch their behavior and play.

The snow would soon begin to melt and slowly disappear. The small creeks would become rivers and swell over their banks. This, of course, would create a new playing field. It was much fun to dam up these creeks, fill them up with small logs and twigs and then release the water with the logs. We had a regular log drive going and this was usually a lot of fun, and everyone always managed to get good and wet.

At this time of the year the real log drives would begin. This was kind of the topping of the cake for the young as well as the older men. The pay for these log drives was excellent, and it was usually an around-the-clock show. Besides the exhausting work, it was always a great deal of danger involved. In spite of all this, everyone seemed in good humor and did not seem to mind it too bad.

Usually when the log drive progressed to its closest accessible location near our town the ladies of the town would bake and prepare a lot of goodies, and everyone, including the children, would make it a holiday on the banks of the river. I always looked at this as a very exciting time, because I always managed to partake in some way in a real log drive.

On occasion I would get to take a boat ride with my Dad or Grandpa across the swift, white, foamy water out to a log jam to set a dynamite charge in a strategic place to dislocate the log jam. This always scared me, but the excitement overpowered the thoughts of danger, and I never turned down a chance to go. At the same time I had a lot of respect for the water. Its power was fantastic. A log could be snapped in two like a match stick with what seemed like no effort at all. These men participating in the log drives to me were real heroes, moving to and fro from log to log that barely supported them from one to the other.

By this time of year the days begin to lengthen day by day. The shades of summer are showing their colors, and spring flowers begin to appear, giving the hillsides a glow of yellow and red. Spring advances fast, and one morning you get up and sure enough, the so much welcome summer is here.

Summertime

At the beginning of summer and when school is out, that's when the busy season begins. Because we lived in the Land of the Midnight Sun the growing period was short but very fast.

To illustrate what a typical summer day in our household would be like, it began as follows. Around five in the morning my parents would start the day with a quick breakfast. Then the barn chores would have to be tended to. The milking and cleaning of the barn were first on the list. As soon as the milking was completed the cows were turned out into a holding pen. That's when I would begin my job. I would head them out and take them on a two mile hike to our pasture. Our property was divided into two sections, the timber section a good two miles from our home. This section was used for pasture. In area it was approximately seven square miles, mostly timber, but enough pasture and creek bottom for the cattle to graze on all summer.

Most farmers in our area did not have enough cleared land or seeded fields to support cattle over the long winter months and had to lease hay fields from the government. These fields were not cultivated but mostly river swamp that would drain in summer time and produce a kind of water grass. However, the cattle liked it and it had a fair amount of protein content.

These fields were too rough for any type of machinery, so it all had to be cut by hand. While I was taking the cattle to the pasture, my parents would head for just such a place. Our rented field was approximately five miles from our home, but we had only two bicycles in the family, so my Mom and Dad would ride double to and from work. Going to the field was not too bad, since it was downhill most of the way, but coming home was another story. After the five mile bike ride, we had to board our row boat and row upriver for about ten minutes before we reached our destination. I would always leave my bike at the pasture gate, and as soon as I had the cattle securely inside their fence, I would take off on my bike and join my parents at the hay field. By the time I arrived, my Dad would be in full swing with the cutting. He would use a hand scythe, the only tool that could be used because of the rough ground. It was extremely slow and strenuous work. My Mother and I would come behind and rake the hay by hand into windrows for drying. Because the hay was quite sparse, it would be quite dry and fluffy in two or three hours. Around noon the cutting would come to a stop and we would race for some shade and dig into our knapsacks for our noon meal goodies. After our meal and a short rest, we had to prepare for a different procedure in the hay making.

In Sweden hay is left out to dry on racks. These racks are usually constructed right in the field spaced evenly for the amount of hay from the field. The hay is left to dry on these racks well into the winter. The hay is more easily transported in wintertime on sleds with hayracks than it would be in the summer. It is taken to a hay barn, and as soon as there is more room there, more hay is brought home.

Usually all of the afternoon was devoted to raking the hay into small piles, and my Dad would then pick them up and neatly pile each load into a drying rack until that was filled up. By the end of the cutting season several racks, eight by twenty feet, would line the field.

Late afternoon, I would again have to prepare to leave. The cattle would have to be gathered from the pasture and brought home for the evening milking. When I got to the pasture and I was in luck, the cows would be close to the gate, but more often than not they would be somewhere to the back of the pasture. This usually did not make me very happy for two reasons. By this time I was tired from the day's activities, and I did not exactly need the extra walk. Furthermore, I was a little scared to trample through

the woods by myself. Moose were plentiful in our area, and at certain times of the year the Bull Moose could be dangerous. I always had an eye peeled for such a confrontation, but I never had any trouble that way. Nevertheless I still imagined all sorts of things, and I usually felt good by the time I found the cows. At least I felt they were some company.

By the time I made it home with the cattle the folks were usually home also from the field. My mother would have some food started. After the meal it was milking time again. Since it was customary that the women did the milking up north, my mother would, of course, begin her chore. The cleaning chores in summertime were light and no feeding was necessary. Usually when the barn cleaning was completed we would begin the daily maintenance on our hay cutting equipment.

The hay scythes had to be sharpened every night; usually 3 to 4 scythes were sufficient to carry us through a day. This particular grass would tend to dull a blade in a short time. To sharpen these blades, we used a large round grind stone about 3 feet in diameter. A wooden fly wheel was attached to the opposite end of the drive shaft, and this was powered with a hand crank. Yes, you guessed it – “I” was the powering source. I always felt this was a very boring and tiresome job, but the minute I began to slow down, I was told by my dad to speed up or else. By the time all this was done, we were ready for bed and a good night’s sleep. People in the USA used to ask if we had any problem sleeping with the sun up around the clock. Well, let me assure you that after I got to bed, there was no problem with sleeping. However, every so often a mosquito would find its way into our sleeping quarters and you probably know the feeling – you can hear it but you can’t see it. You lay there fighting sleep yet determined to silence the intruder. Usually after what seems like hours, your temper is at its breaking point and you finally zero in on the Kamikaze. Then peace and quiet returns.

Not always did I spend every day hard at work in the field. Once in a while I would take time to go down to the river and try my luck at fishing. Usually I would get the urge to do some exploring and whenever this happened, I invariably overstayed my leisure time and had to work a lot harder to catch up.

Cowboys

In my home town, there were approximately 23 homes. Practically every one, with the exception of the general store owner and the bus company, depended on farming and lumber. Most of the townspeople had small sections of land, usually a part of it cleared by hand and part of it might have some standing timber. This was used to supplement the living from farming. Using part of the land for pasture was not a common practice in our area; my family was actually the only one at the time utilizing our land for pasture. So in order to graze their cattle in the summer time, it was necessary for the villagers to form a co-op and hire a man to drive the cattle for the summer – a cowboy so to speak, without a horse. The word was usually let out, that such a person was needed. Several people, usually young people from the surrounding towns would be looking for a summer job and would answer the call. After the candidates were known, the townspeople would call a meeting, and from this meeting a suitable candidate for the cowboy job was picked. At a later meeting, with the hired man present, salary, privileges and days off were ironed out.

This cowboy had the right to request someone to go with him for the first week or so. Since he was often not a local man, he was not familiar with the area, and having a local person along in the beginning gave him a chance to get acquainted with the area. Also, cattle for the first few days on the loose were usually hard to handle. This then made it a much easier job for two people.

This man would bring the cows down to the river banks or to the logged off mountain slopes where they would spend the day roaming and grazing all day long. His job was to see that all the cattle were together and none of them would stray too far from the group. Toward evening he would head the cattle toward home on a slow pace, timing it so he would have them home by milking time. At least one cow from each farmer usually was chosen as the lead cow. This one would have a bell around her neck and therefore was easier to keep track of. These bells were made from brass and could be heard for a long ways. Each owner knew the sound of his bell and could tell if his cows were in the group long before you could see them coming.

The cowboy was also responsible for the cows at night and when back in the evening, he had to account for all the animals. If one was missing - usually the young ones - he had to go back and attempt to locate the animal. This usually was the most frustrating part of his job.

The board and room arrangements for the cowboy were the most unique part of the package in that terms were set up according to how many cows a farmer owned. For instance, if you owned five cows, you put up and provided food for the cowboy for five days. After the fifth day, the cowboy moved to the next home. Since no one had more than seven cows, one week was the maximum stay in one place. I and my friends were not old enough to apply for this job. This cowboy however was our hero, and if ever we had the opportunity to go with him for a day or two, we really felt we were privileged and usually had quite a story to impress our friends with.

School days : Some good memories and some I just as soon not think of.

A typical school day would start out with a mile walk to school or, in winter time, skiing to school. I think that when I look back at both countries, the kids who owned a good pair of skis looked upon them as an American boy looks at his car. You felt proud and fortunate to own such a luxury.

In summertime it was a nice walk through the woods, trees, and green meadows and the air was very clean and light. Pollution was not thought of at that time. With the absence of factories in the northern part of our country there was nothing to pollute the air. Birds and small animals were plentiful, and one could almost every morning count on some kind of show and song by our wild animal friends. It would have been real easy to skip school and play in the woods, but I knew that if I wanted to continue living, I had better be there on time.

The school house was kind of a unique old structure with three rooms and a hall. When you first entered from the outside you came into the hallway, which ran the full length of the building. On the left was the teacher's room with, I would say, a half kitchen and a storage closet. Half way down the hall

on the left was a large bucket of water. This was our drinking water, and on the wall above was a cup for each student. On the right was one large classroom, where all eight were taught at one time by one teacher. On the same side as the class room in the hall was a large clothes rack and shelf, which were mainly used in the wintertime, when a lot of bulky clothing had to be worn to keep warm in 20 to 40 degree below weather.

After the bell, which was a hand held brass bell rung by the teacher on the steps of the school, everyone would line up in two single files by the clothes rack and wait for the teacher to give us the command to march to our seats. There was to be no talking at this point. If for some reason one was tardy to class, one would have to knock on the door to the class room and wait for permission to enter. Once inside you had to bow to the teacher if you were a boy or curtsy if you were a girl, then explain why you were late and apologize to the teacher as well as to the class for the disruption.

The size of the class would vary from twenty to thirty children. The teacher was an older lady, married and with two children of her own. Her health was not the best, and her nerves were on edge most of the time - quite understandable with all the age groups in the same room. She also had to plan the day very carefully in order to teach her students of all different ages in one day. Toward the end of the day, everyone knew to go easy on her because her temper was short.

My mother and the teacher never could see eye to eye at its best. Every so often my mother would come to the school for a teacher conference. I call it a confrontation and it always took place in the teacher's room. We always knew when they came out that there had been words between them. I always used to dread these confrontations, because the teacher, in her way to get even with my mother, would take her frustrations out on me in different ways by embarrassing me in front of my school friends.

You might wonder what some of these mother-teacher feuds were about. Well, I will give you an idea of what led to one confrontation. Toward the end of the war tuberculosis ran rampant in our country. It reached epidemic stages, and two of my mother's sisters became ill and were soon diagnosed with T.B. Both of them struggled for a time with the disease, and the doctors did not have the technology they have today. After a long time of suffering, they passed away. Because this disease was so highly contagious, all their books, bed clothing, and any cloth furniture had to be destroyed by burning. Their homes were sealed, and fumigating bombs were placed in each room to smolder away for three days.

At this time across town lived a family and their daughter was in my class. The mother had also contracted this terrible disease. She was not in a sanatorium, probably for financial reasons, but tried instead to recover at home. Because of the wide-spread epidemic, health authorities would call at our schools quite regularly and give the children T.B. tests. When they came to our school and gave us the test, a few showed a positive reaction to the test. One of them was this daughter of the sick lady mentioned. This, of course, did not mean she had the disease, but she could be a carrier and possibly pass it on to the other students, especially at cold winter days, when the resistance was at a low. For reasons unknown to me, she was allowed to continue school. As I mentioned, our school was really primitive, and a shortage of books was not at all uncommon so get around this problem, we would share

books. Girls always seemed to be more interested in studies and usually got most of the home work done during class time. I didn't, so of course I had to take most of the home work with me. Since there was a book shortage, the teacher decided I should take this girl's books home and read my assignments. I never could understand why she chose this girl's books out of all the rest in my class. Not only was I to use her books for homework but she and I had to sit together in class and share books there too. To sit with a girl at that age was a no-no among the boys, and as a result I came in for a lot of ribbing from the rest of my friends. Not quite knowing how to cope with this situation and not knowing how explosive it could get, I decided to tell my parents about what was going on. After my mother found out and took some time to build up steam, she marched down to the school, requested a private meeting with my teacher, then proceeded loudly and profoundly to protest this situation. There had, of course, been not so friendly discussions between my mother and this teacher before, so the fuse was short on both ends.

War

December 1939, I am eight years old, and there has been much speculation on the troubled times in Finland. Will they meet the Russian demands or reject them and risk a war? Now the speculations are over, Finland has decided that the Russian demands are too strong, and rather than jeopardizing the country and risk a Russian takeover eventually, the Finnish government has decided that they will fight for their rights at all cost. Finland is now at war.

Sweden being that close and bordering with Finland in the northern section is, of course, also dragged into the political hassle. Rumors and speculations became an everyday routine. Radios in our hometown were a rare thing. Those who were fortunate enough to have one seldom missed a news broadcast. Evening papers were read from cover to cover, and especially news from the front lines.

Sweden chose to stay neutral during the war, but still, the impact and threat of war was real. Many of the young people were already leaving for Finland and the front lines to help the cause on a voluntary basis. It is mandatory for every male when he reaches twenty - or before in some cases - that he serve in the armed forces. It is similar to our basic training; the only difference is that men are subject to recall up to age forty. Each day the fighting in Finland became more intense, border incidents were more frequent. My Dad was still at drafting age, and because of the acceleration in the fighting we knew some day the inevitable would happen and he would soon be called for duty.

The inevitable came. A staff car pulled up to our house, and a smartly uniformed officer from the armed forces came up and knocked on our door. My Dad just happened to be home at this time, and I can still remember the look on his face, when he went to answer the door. The officer was very polite and he diplomatically informed my Dad the war situation had worsened. It was a national emergency as far as defense was concerned and he had been invested with the power to order Dad into active duty as of now. He would have a few hours to pack the bare essentials and put his business in order as best he could on such short notice. This officer informed Dad that a car would be by in a few hours to transport him to his reporting station. He also said he did not expect any delays on our part, and he informed us he was not at liberty to disclose my Dad's destination.

I recall a lot of confusion at our house about that time and, of course, concern about what would happen next. We really did not know if the situation was even worse than we had read in the papers. As months went on, the war became more intense, and we began to feel the strain - on a small scale, of course, compared to the countries directly involved. However, we had our hardships and restrictions. One was the threat of a surprise attack, such as air raids. Enemy planes would at times cross our country in the northern section. I remember such instances: some planes were painted white to blend in with the snow terrain when on the ground. We were also told of German raiding parties that crossed over the border from Norway and that in some instances they harassed, plundered, and killed some people. Everyone kept this on their mind - it could happen where they were and to them. Of course, there was a total blackout and this was strictly enforced. Rumors or not, we were told to stay inside at night as much as possible and keep doors locked and use lights sparingly.

From time to time we would hear from my Dad. He was not allowed to disclose where in Sweden he was stationed, but from the hints in his letters we knew he was somewhere on the Finnish border.

Things did not sound good wherever he was stationed and there seemed to be no end to the fighting. Because of the unrest in the world, people seemed to be very tense and any unusual activities or sounds were closely scrutinized and investigated. I remember one such incident that I must admit had me quite frightened. Late one night my mother and I had retired to bed. I was just at the point of sleep when from the upstairs, it sounded like footsteps. Now and then a board in the floor would creak, then rattle and bang as it would when one stepped on the unsupported end. The sounds of footsteps continued across the upstairs, heading toward the stairway leading to the small entry hall down on our level. Of course, by this time I was really scared, and I was imagining all kinds of things. I am sure that by this time my mother was having second thoughts also of what was going on. The footsteps continued. By this time I knew that my mother had made up her mind to face whatever it was, and maybe by a surprise attack, be able to subdue whatever it might be. This she would rather do than just stay in bed and wait for who knows what. The only weapon she could readily get her hands on was a long broom handle. Of course, there was no electricity in the hall part of the house, which did not exactly help the situation. Once more, I tried in vain to talk her into not going out there; however, her mind was made up. I knew I did not want any part of whatever it was, so I proceeded to crawl under the covers as far as I could get. Temporarily I felt a little safer there than in the open.

The moment of truth was there. Armed with her broom handle my mother made a mad dash through the door and into the dark hallway. Immediately a large commotion took place. I was scared to death and it seemed like an eternity. Then finally everything became quiet again. Since I was as far as I could get under the covers, I could not, of course, see what was taking place. However, soon my Mother came into the room. By this time I had managed to work up the courage to peek out from under the covers and could see, by the expression on her face, that the situation was under control and she was the apparent victor. When the dust had settled, I took a look to see what had caused all the commotion. It seems a weasel had somehow got into the house, and as small as the animal was, it sounded a lot bigger

than it really was. However, the creature met his maker with a couple of blows from the broom stick, and that ended a night to remember.

The rationing of food became an everyday problem. It became very hard to obtain coupons, and there was a lot of red tape to obtain just about everything. Hunting almost became a necessity, and any wild game or fowl on the table was always a welcome sight.

Many of the Swedish troops were transported to the Finnish as well as the Norwegian borders as guards. Some crossings had been made at both borders by German forces into Sweden. At this point in the war, it was only speculation whether or not our neutrality would keep us out of the war. The Swedish troops were moved by convoy, mostly at night, and we were not used to such traffic in our area. With all of these trucks, one after the other, passing through our town, it seemed to me almost impossible that such a small country would have so many trucks.

I had not seen Dad for a long time and as the convoys came through every evening I would stand by the road, half frozen, hoping to get a glimpse of him in one of the trucks. Each and every truck and trailer was painted white to blend in with the snow. The troops wore white ski suits with a hood, skis and poles were also painted white. When a group of men camouflaged in this way would move through the terrain they were very hard to detect. This, of course, was the advantage they were hoping for, and this method was used very successfully by the Finnish troops.

Of course, with all the looking and patient waiting I never saw my Dad in any of the convoys. With everyone dressed alike, after a while they all began to look alike. Once in a while one would wave to me and immediately I became excited. It's him! But soon I could see that it was not a familiar face.

Before too long the restrictions on mail became a little more lax, and we began to get some hints to where he was stationed and approximately what was going on in his area. From his letters we found out he was stationed up close to the Finnish border in a place called Boden. Kiruna and Haparanda were also border stations where he spent some time as a guard.

Because of the political maneuvers and bureaucratic pulls, times were very difficult for the ordinary soldiers to understand. Border incidents were an every-day occurrence, and this, in my mind, was a clever plan by the enemy to weaken the resistance. Even in a neutral country it began taking its toll. Desertions and suicides were quite common.

In time this led to the Swedish government denouncing its neutrality. Within hours orders were given to march across the border and give assistance to Finland. About this time the war took a turn for the better, and a peace negotiation began that soon led to an end to the fighting.

