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Home, Sweet Home

In a rambling house on a shady street in Shenandoah, Iowa, lived the Samuelson family. Meet now the father, Sven August; the mother, Alvida Mathilda, and the seven lively children, Agnes Mathilda, Ellen Maria, Mabel Olivia, Carl August, Frank Delbert, John Henry and Hazel Edna.

In that era, the early 1900's, no one in that close-knit, modest family dreamed that Agnes Mathilda, the eldest daughter, would one day be recognized as one of our national leaders in education, friend of governors, legislators, university presidents, authors, church leaders and many other top figures in related fields, as well as men, women and children in all walks of life.

Naturally, in those early days, Agnes picked gooseberries, pitted cherries for her mother's jam, hovered over her own little flower garden and shared the chores with her brothers and sisters.

The Samuelson children loved their home, across the street from the lumber yard. They thought it a pretty place, surrounded by rose bushes, fruit

trees, flower beds and a broad expanse of lawn. They welcomed the visits of the itinerant salesmen who brought coffee, tea, extracts and liniments.

Their parents were God-fearing industrious folk, married in 1885 at the home of the bride, Alvina Mathilda Johnson, near Shenandoah. Sven August Samuelson came to America with his parents, Carl John (1824-1903) and Sophia (1822-1907), and his three brothers, Andrew, Axel, and Charles. They settled on a farm near Lockridge in Jefferson County, Iowa, in 1869. The log cabin, built by Carl for his family, stood for many years as a symbol of pioneer life.

In Upland Cemetery, near Lockridge, is an interesting monument, comprised of the bell from the church which called the pioneers to worship. A number of Samuelson relatives are buried here.

Agnes Samuelson's father was a section foreman on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy railroad in his early days in Shenandoah. Later he became interested in business and was one of the founders of the Shenandoah Building and Loan Association, and had an insurance agency as well. At the time of his death he was associated with the Samuelson-Linquist Implement Company. To eke out his modest income, Mr. Samuelson also sold steamship tickets for the Cunard Line, for passengers who emigrated from Sweden.

Persons who settled in this country often sent overseas for their relatives, and August Samuel-

son handled their transportation arrangements. Frequently these newcomers stayed in the Samuelson home until their relatives could come for them. Thus Agnes and her sisters had their first teaching experience — translating for the strangers and teaching them some words of English.

It was a good home. Mother Samuelson always had pots of blooming plants in the window of the house at 810 Fifth Avenue in Shenandoah. There was “wall-to-wall” carpeting of colorful stripes woven from balls of carpet rags. “A new rag carpet was an event,” Miss Samuelson recalls. Not so delightful to the children were the woolen stockings their mother knit for them. “They were scratchy,” the educator admits, “but with heavy underwear and snug outer garments, they kept us warm in zero weather.”

An exciting event of the winter was the appearance of half of a butchered hog, suspended from the swing in the back yard. “That meant pork roasts, chops, head cheese and liver for the family,” comments Miss Samuelson. “Quite different from today’s purchase of food from markets or farmers for storage in the big, deep freezer.”

Both parents placed education and religion at the top of their list of “musts” for their children. All of the young Samuelsons attended school and church regularly. They received top marks for school work and attendance, but no special notice was taken of these accomplishments — there were

no stars for excellence; no rewards for good report cards. The parents took these satisfactory records for granted.

There were plenty of home chores for these boys and girls. Carrying wood for the fires kept the boys busy. Cleaning kerosene lamps was a Saturday morning task for the girls. Churning butter and operating the old-fashioned washing machine were routine before-school assignments.

But there was lots of fun, too. The boys rode broomstick horses with all the vim of Kentucky Derby jockeys. The girls played house and sewed for their dolls. These youngsters had no Little League, but the neighborhood boys played their own brand of baseball. On summer evenings there were games of hide and seek, run, sheep, run, and tag, and indoors everyone enjoyed amateur theatricals, dominoes, jackstraws and riddles.

Like all children of that day, the small Samuelsons played April Fool jokes, hung May baskets, enjoyed Hallowe'en fun and got a great thrill when they marched with schoolmates in the annual Memorial Day parade, carrying flowers to the Rose Hill cemetery. They all loved music, and evening might find the family grouped about the organ.

They looked forward to the yearly Sunday School picnic at Porter's Lake, near Shenandoah. Piled in a hayrack, the children rode to Uncle John Johnson's farm for a tremendous picnic din-

ner, after which they presented a program and were rewarded with treats of homemade ice cream. Swinging out over the lake on a rope swing was a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

Topping most of the local events was the annual fair, to which the whole family trekked happily to admire the agricultural exhibits, home canning and fancy-work displays. And *look!* Blue ribbons on Hazel's entries from her sewing class! They watched the balloon ascension — an early exploration into space — were awed by the silver-tongued orators who held the grandstand crowds spellbound, and even had a few precious nickels in their hot hands for rides on the merry-go-round and the Ferris wheel.

All of the Samuelson children learned to read, speak and write the Swedish language fairly well. In the earlier years, services in the Lutheran Church in which the children were confirmed, were conducted in the language of the founders, but during World War I the English language was adopted for all church services. But along the way the Samuelson children were learning the language of their grandparents through home teaching, vacation Bible School, church meetings, conversations with elderly people who preferred to speak in their native tongue, books presented at Christmas programs and books in the home.

Memorable to Agnes Samuelson even today are all of the worship services, particularly the

"Julotta" service, held early Christmas morning. The family rose at dawn, to be at church at 5 a.m. The little church was fragrant with pine. Candles gleamed and a verse of scripture, fashioned from tinfoil, stretched across the wall above the pulpit. It said to the worshippers: "Ara Vare Gud i Höjden." ("Praise Be to God on High.") The services opened with the grand, old hymn, "Var Hälsad Sköna Morgonstund." ("All Hail to Thee, O Blessed Morn.")

This observance, and the children's program on Christmas evening, were the highlights of the holiday season, with emphasis always on the Christ Child, rather than on Santa Claus. At the Christmas program by the Sunday School children, each had a part in recitation, song or dialogue. The youngest ones opened the program by coming to the altar rail to say the words, "Se Gud's Lamn." ("See God's Lamb.") The children were rewarded by gifts of an orange, a sack of hard candy and a story book for each.

Pastor of this Lutheran Church for a number of years was the Reverend G. O. Gustafson, father of A. C. Gustafson, for many years the chief clerk of the House of Representatives of the Iowa Legislature. At each Christmas program, Pastor Gustafson gave a tänkesprak — a memory verse — to the children to be remembered during the year. Sometimes this verse was taken from 2 Timothy 3:15 — "Efter du af barndom hafver

kannat den Helige Skrift, kan hon dig undervisa till salighet geinom tron pa Kristus Jesus." ("And from a child thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto Salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ.")

At home, on Christmas Day, the family gifts might be placed in a decorated clothes basket, to be opened after the bounteous holiday feast, or arranged beneath the Christmas tree.

In Miss Samuelson's library are a number of cherished Swedish books, including religious volumes inscribed by her father and mother. A rare possession, also, is a beautiful hand-tooled Bible, illustrated with colored plates, a treasure which belonged to her maternal grandparents.

Sorrow has touched the Samuelson family several times. The father's death in 1906 preceded those of Ellen in 1914; Mrs. Samuelson in 1941, and Carl in 1946. The death of August Samuelson would have brought desperation as well as sadness to many families. Agnes became the principal breadwinner, but all of the children helped as they could. Ellen and Mabel taught in country schools when they finished high school. Mabel also gave music lessons to pupils in Shenandoah and Essex. Carl, Frank and John carried papers for the Shenandoah *Sentinel*. Hazel worked in the Henry Field Seed House. The industrious clan had no thought but to carry on.

The family moved to Iowa City in 1921 so that

the children might attend the University of Iowa. Carl received his medical degree in 1923 and was a practicing physician in Sheldon, Iowa, at the time of his death. John, an economics major, was awarded the B.S. degree in 1925, and Hazel, majoring in Journalism, received her B.A. degree in 1926. She was the first woman to be named editor of the *Daily Iowan*.

Agnes took time out in 1925 to receive her B.A. degree at the University of Iowa. Attendance at summer sessions; correspondence courses; two years' study at the University of Nebraska, and courses at George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee, crowded among busy teaching schedules, all combined to assure her top honors, including election to Phi Beta Kappa, and to the awarding of her M.A. degree in 1928.

Hazel and Alex Miller were married in 1924. He served as county attorney in Polk County and later entered law practice with his father, Judge Jesse Miller. Hazel served for many years with the Massachusetts Protective Association and the Paul Revere Life Insurance Company, resigning to become national secretary and treasurer of the Women's Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Mabel was married to Martin Ackerson of Superior, Wisconsin, in 1916. At that time she was organist and choir leader in the Bethany Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minnesota. They

lived in Iowa City in 1925, when Martin Ackerson, an army officer, was stationed with the ROTC at the University of Iowa. Their son, Frederic, was born that year, and slept in the cradle which had rocked all the Samuelson children and a few cousins, besides.

Colonel and Mrs. Ackerson and Frederic, then a high school senior, were at Schofield Barracks at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Mrs. Ackerson and Frederic returned to Des Moines to stay with Agnes and Frank at 722 Polk Boulevard, headquarters for the Samuelson family.

Fred was graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1942 and from the University of Iowa in 1944, taking the accelerated course. Douglas, the son of Major Frederic and Mary Ellen Ackerson, was born in Washington, D. C., in 1958, and a second son, Norman, was born in 1961 in Baden Baden, Germany. Colonel Ackerson, Frederic's father, was returned to the mainland and served in a number of army assignments until his retirement in 1946. He died in 1960. Mrs. Ackerson now lives in Des Moines.

John Samuelson married Miss Edith Eide in 1950. They live in Des Moines where Mrs. Samuelson is with the Internal Medical Clinic, and her husband is with the United States Postoffice.

Frank Samuelson has been a membership clerk with the Iowa State Education Association for 23 years. He is active in church work, a member of

St. John's Lutheran Church, where he has served as usher and secretary of the Sunday School.

The mother of the Samuelson children died in 1941 in Des Moines. Many years had passed since she came to America as a young child. Her parents, Carl William Johnson and his wife, Breta Maia, emigrated from Arlingsas, Sweden, in 1868. The family, which included Mathilda's brother, John Frihof, had a rough time on their six-weeks' ocean voyage and their subsequent covered wagon trek across the country. They stopped first in Illinois, proceeding to Stanton, Iowa, and then on to Shenandoah. In their copy books the Samuelson children learned that Shenandoah means "Daughter of the Stars" and that the town was named for the Shenandoah Valley.

Agnes Samuelson pays this tribute to her mother:

Mother Samuelson's story is one for the books. Combined in her were all of the splendid attributes of the pioneer woman. She worked hard, but always her goals were love, excellence, dedication and service. She had the utmost respect for religion and learning, and her children are grateful that her fundamental qualities are reflected in their lives. They are unanimous in calling her *the greatest person they have ever known*.

DOROTHY ASHBY POWNALL