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# The Boring Side of the Family

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# Angela Sorby

## HERITAGE STATEMENT:

My father and his family moved to Seattle, Washington, from Norway in 1957. WWII had devastated Norway's economy and my grandfather, Aage, found better prospects painting houses in the Ballard area of Seattle, which was populated largely by other Scandinavian immigrants.

## AUTHOR BIO:

Angela Sorby was born in 1965 and raised in Seattle. She is the author of two poetry collections, *Bird Skin Coat* (Wisconsin, 2009) and *Distance Learning* (New Issues, 1998), and a literary history, *Schoolroom Poets* (UPNE, 2005). She teaches at Marquette University.



## THE BORING SIDE OF THE FAMILY

Their dramas were too minor  
even for the local paper,  
*Arbeiderbladet*. No “family lore” either—  
no drunks, no runaway brides.

Climate’s half to blame,  
though the dull nail in the dull  
coffin was Christianity,  
a faith that carried them mildly

on its back, like Mary and Joseph’s  
donkey. It walked. It never spooked.  
*Lady Luck? Good fortune?*  
No: they were Lutheran,

and what they had was Norway,  
though its fjords and peaks  
allowed only partial visibility.  
They carried it across the ocean

and unpacked it in Seattle:  
Norway. My grandmother  
taught piano, playing with perfect  
posture the music of composers

more tortured than herself,  
while my grandfather carved  
Mickey Mouses (Mice?)  
from scrap lumber.

His Mickeys were clever  
contraptions: gravity forced  
their hinged legs down a slope,  
Hop! Click! Hop!

But then Disney lawyers  
sent him a threatening letter,  
so he boxed up his mice  
in the basement, which was a “finished”

second house under the first:  
same wall-to-wall carpet,  
same muted pinkish furniture.

Later, my grandfather

told us that in 1940s Norway,  
during the German Occupation,  
toy factories were repurposed  
to make weapons, so he fed

his family of five by covertly  
making and selling Mickey Mice  
while out of earshot the Resistance  
built bombs and blew up bridges.

Hop! Click! Hop! And I thought,  
*yawn*. Absent gunpowder,  
absent an internal vein of evil,  
goodness grows plain,

rural and bland as boiled potatoes.  
Only after they died—all of them,  
Walt Disney, my grandparents, the Nazis—  
did I realize how intense it is

to pull off the pot lid  
and stick a fork in, to find that, yes,  
the potatoes are ready,  
low on scent and spice but dense

with the starch and sugar  
that forces one eye to spring,  
underground,  
from the eye of another.