

When I emigrated to America

a life story by Hans Gösta Andersson



Hans Gösta

My mother, Tilda Augusta Andersson, delivered me to the world on January 30, 1904. It was a delivery without professional assistance because it took place in an isolated house ten miles from nearest civilization, and plenty of ice and snow in the way. It was a difficult birth for her and for me.

In 1906 my family (mother Tilda, father Hans-Fredrik, my sister, Svea and myself) moved from our home at Lilla Björnmossen to a place by the name Jädraås, in Gävleborgs County, closer to civilization and with a population of 500 people. It was located in the Iron Land – a part of the country where iron mines and blast furnaces once gave life and activity to the district. My father worked for Dala-Ockelbo-Norrundet Järnväg and became the Station Master in Jädraås in 1906. My sister Annie, and my brother Thure, were born there.



Jädraås Station

Jädraås had a public school which I attended for a few years. Jädraås was a place surrounded mostly by forests and in the wilderness I, myself and three or four more children were lost at one time for several days and nights. Also on another occasion I fell into the river that flowed through the village and I had a close call with death. The current took me for a swift ride to the top of the dam where the water was rushing over. A protruding nail caught my kilt and kept me hanging there until rescuers came and helped me back to solid ground.

In April of 1914, the Anderssons moved to an even bigger place by the name of Norrsundet, on the bay of Bothnia (Baltic Sea), where my father got the position as Station Master in 1914. Norrsundet had a population of 1200 people. I continued my education there until graduation from the Swedish public school system on May 15, 1917. I was 13 years of age and was considered to be ready to go to work and earn my own subsistence. But I had objections, I wanted to continue my education.

In Norrsundet I had no possibility to do it. I would have to be sent to a city where they had High School and College, but it would cost money! Money the family did not have. A great-aunt of mine, Stina Hallin who lived in Falun, offered to help me. She died when I was 18 years old and at that time I had graduated from High School and had some college. But I was far away from where I wanted to go.

I had heard that America, a country far away, was to many, the Promised Land, and where anybody with courage and determination could make a dream come true and at the same time I believed that "Where there is a will, there is a way". America was the solution to my problem, I thought.

When I told my parents of my decision, they gave me their love and support. My father also warned me "If you fail to get success, be brave in the attempt." I'm proud to say that I think I was brave in the attempt.

I arrived in New York, May 17, 1922. I had just turned 19 years of age, had a student visa, could read and write English as well as Swedish. I found my way to an aunt and uncle (the Tinnerholms) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I stayed with them 6 months while I went to a trade school where I learned to run a lathe, how to use it, read drawings and make useful things on it.

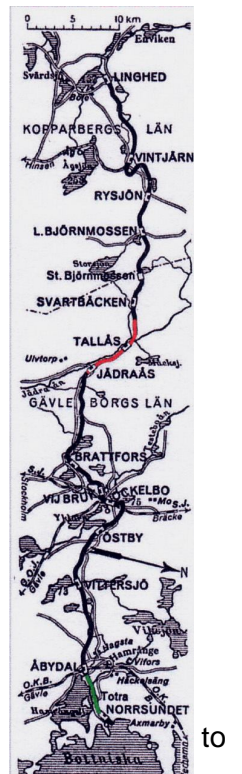
In the fall of 1922, I got my first job turning shafts to the right diameter, leaving thousands of an inch for grinding. Easy work and good pay, twice as much as I had gotten if I had not had the training. For the next few months, I worked hard with plenty of overtime at double pay an hour, lived cheaply and saved a lot.

I had been in America almost one year. I left the lathe and took a short trip back to Sweden, perhaps to stay. But my stay in Sweden didn't last more than a few months-- I realized that America was the place for me...where my opportunities would lie.

I signed on as a crew member on the *MS Kungsholm* out of Göteborg, and arrived in New York on May 1, 1923. I worked my way back to Chicago, Illinois. I worked my way through school working various jobs. I went to the University of Chicago and took premedical courses. When I had the credits I entered Northwestern University's Medical and Dental School in October 1927. This was to be a six year course ending with both a dental and medical degree.



High School Graduate



Norrsundet Station



MS Kungsholm

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At that time I had \$3,000 in the bank, all earned from working on the lathe. Everything went fine for the first two years. In the third year it was getting tough! My money gone, I managed to get a student loan of \$2,000 for the next three years. Smooth sailing for the next two years but at the end of the second, I was broke again despite several small jobs during this time. In October 1932, I tried to get another loan for \$1,000 but no luck. In October, 1932, I received my dental degree. I was just one year away from the medical degree that I hoped to earn.



NWU Graduate

Depression had come to the United States. People begging or selling apples on the streets everywhere. No spare money around and no work. Time for decision-making again. I hitchhiked to New York City with thoughts of getting a job on a boat, living cheap and saving money for my last year in school. I stayed there for a week or two at the Swedish sailors and immigrant quarters at 6 Water Street in Battery Park, New York City. I worked at a nearby restaurant washing dishes in exchange for food. No luck in getting a job, so I started out for Boston. I had a friend there, Alf Birkram, who sold supplies to the boats in the harbor, hoping that he might be able help me.

The truck that I was riding in stopped in Providence, Rhode Island. Without money I had to walk the streets there. The Salvation Army gave me a bed and something to eat. One day I walked to the State Institutions (IMH) in Howard. There I had a talk with Dr. Sturgis, the head of the infirmary. He was very friendly and my troubles must have touched his heart strings and a desire was born in him to do something for me. He got out a billfold and handed me a 5 dollar bill and promised to try to get me a job.

I worked and lived at the IMH for half a year until Dr. Sturgis arranged for me to meet with Dr. Ladd, the superintendent of the Exeter School. He directed me to Ladd School in Exeter, Rhode Island, where Dr. Ladd was superintendent. I took the train to Wickford Junction and then walked by foot the remaining eleven miles to get to the school.

Dr. Ladd said that he could use me if I did a good job. I would get \$150 dollars per month, room and board. I thought I was in heaven, a room of my own, clean clothes, plenty to eat plus money!!! I stayed there nine months. Then an even better opportunity presented itself.

A Cranston dentist, Dr. McGovern, had died suddenly with a big practice and a wonderful staff. I was offered the chance to take over the practice. However, \$2,500 was required. Of course I did not have anything like that. Then, Dr. Ladd stepped in, without me even asking for it, he gave me a check for the amount.

In 1934, I opened my own private practice in the Eden Park section of Cranston. The second floor consisted of a waiting room, exam room, and lab. The building housed the offices for other doctors and dentists. I began to earn good money, and I paid off my debts. I forgot all about returning to Northwestern for the final year to get my medical degree. I was able to save money more and more and I was soon pretty well off financially. I was also able to send money back home.



My dental practice

On June 29, 1938, Ruth Malmberg and I were married by Rev. Carl Sandberg in a small ceremony in the rectory of Bethany Lutheran Church.

I took her and my brand new automobile to Sweden, to visit with relatives there, to show them how things had gone for me since my departure in the spring of 1922, for America, the Promised Land, which was my choice. In retrospect it proved to be the right place and thing for me to do and go. It gave me all the opportunities I needed to succeed. Upon returning from our honeymoon, Ruth and I would live in the Comstock Apartments at 1 Rickard Street around the corner from my office. Ruth would not return to teaching but would work in my office until 1941.



Honeymooners

In November of 1941, Ruth and I bought her dream house at 15 Fairfield Road in Cranston. And the family grew: Stephen was born in 1942, Rachel in 1944, and Kurt in 1946 and Carla in 1950.

In the early 1950's I bought the camp in Greenville. I found the ad in the newspaper and when I saw this log cabin nestled in the woods, it reminded me of Sweden. The cabin was located on Hawkins Pond with a stream that ran by the side of the house. There was a bridge over the stream. The bridge would be rebuilt several times over the years, especially the railing which I wanted to be made of birch. After we moved to Florida, we would still return there every year to spend the summers.



Ruth and I at camp

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My brother Thure, immigrated to the US in 1939 and enlisted in the military so he could get a citizenship quicker. He fought and was wounded in the Italian campaign in WW II. He settled in Rhode Island and also married a girl of Swedish descent.

I retired from dentistry in 1957, and I was 53 years young. Retirement would not mean sitting around in a rocking chair. I was always focused and determined as I looked into the future. Because of the long winter nights, Swedes have always been attracted to the sun. In this next phase of my life, I saw myself as an orange grower. Of course, I probably first saw it as a monetary investment, but I was also challenged by learning something new and the hard work. So I moved my family to the South.

Our new home would be situated off Tuskawilla Road on Lake Burkett near Goldenrod, Florida. If you were to look at a map of Florida, you could not have found Goldenrod. It would take a detailed map of Orlando to find it. The house had ten acres of orange groves in addition to grapefruit trees and dwarf banana trees and a kumquat tree...and some navel oranges.

I also had forty acres of oranges in Deland and another thirty acres in Howie in the Hills. We grew Valencias, Naval, Parson Browns, and Hamlins. In Florida most oranges bloom in March-April. The "early" varieties, such as Hamlins and Parson Browns, reach maturity in October through January. Later variety such as Valencia matures in March-June.

In 1989 there was a bad freeze, and most of my trees in the grove around the house froze and died. I looked out at 600 dead trees, wondering what to do. I was 85 years old, and it would take new trees five years to fruit, so I decided to sell off the groves in Deland and Howie, but continued to maintain the ten acres around the house.

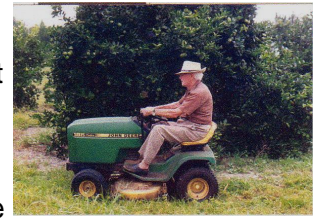
In 2003, I celebrated my 99th birthday in Goldenrod before moving to the house I bought in Jefferson, Georgia, near my daughter, Rachel, who was taking care of my wife who had Alzheimer's.

In 2006, when Rachel and her husband decided to build their own home and move to St. Helens, Oregon, I moved with them. Although I cannot drive myself like I used to, and now need to use a walker, I have been driven around by others in the Northwest of Oregon to see parts of my new home state. I find it very beautiful, especially the Columbia River, and the rocky coast. It reminds me of Sweden.

In retrospect I left Sweden in the Spring of 1923, in pursuit of the education and future that was not available to me there. I thought my prospects would be better in America, the Promised Land. It proved to be the right place and thing for me to go and do.

I found out there is a truth in the saying:

"Where there is a will, there is a way". I had the will, and I found the way!



Harvest time



Birthday Party



Hans Gösta

Story written by Leif Rosqvist, the editor for New Sweden Cultural Heritage Society and SRIO newsletters, based on material provided by the Anderson family.

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