

Immigration
By Kathryn Cubato

What a delightful surprise to receive a letter in the mail with a copy of my grandfather's naturalization paper. A man in Alpena, David Douglas, has been researching the Olsen/Olson family history and found it and sent it on to me. It had my grandfather's signature, so I now know how he spelled his name, "Fredrik Bjartnes," a few more pieces of the life of a person I never knew but yet is still important to me. How did he feel when he signed that document? Was he proud to now be a citizen of the United States of America? By the careful penmanship he used, I want to believe he was proud and happy.

His journey here from Lier, Norway must have been long and difficult. It must have been traumatic to leave the land he knew, many of his friends and family, his customs, even his language to travel to this new land where he hoped for a better future. His journey probably reflects that of many who made the same decision to emigrate, including others in my family and my husband's family as we are both offspring of the first generation that was born here. I don't know all the details, but there are a few stories that were told and are interesting to relate.

My grandfather was the last of five brothers to immigrate and he was a young unmarried man at the time. We believe the travel was by boat to New York, by train to Detroit and by boat to Alpena. When he arrived, he was met by his brothers and they noticed that he needed a haircut so they took him to the barbershop and left him waiting there while they did some other errands. When they came back to pick him up, he still had not had his hair cut. Puzzled, he asked his brothers in Norwegian, "Is everyone here named Next?" It was cause for laughter but is an example of the difficulties with a foreign language.

We believe that Bjartnes/Olson brothers worked in the lumber mills in Alpena at that time. After my grandfather found work, he sent to Norway for his sweetheart, my grandmother Karen Hermanson, who worked there as a milk maid. Her mother was quite ill, so she put off the journey for a year, but the next year knew that she would have to come or give up the dream of joining Fredrik. She traveled with her friend who was to become Mrs. Asa Vam, planning to see her sister Ingebord Peterson who was already in Alpena area and expecting her second child. When the ship made a stop in Newcastle, England, our grandmother received word that her mother had died back in Norway. Then she arrived in Michigan to learn that Ingebord had died just a week or so earlier. When Ingebord's daughters were elderly women, the eldest, Martha, told us that her first memory of Tante Kate was of a tall young woman pacing the floor crying with her face in her hands. In the picture of the wedding that followed soon after, the young bride looks sad and quite forlorn.

I know very little of Karen and Fredrik's life together except that they moved to a farm in Spruce, had eight children, my father John being the youngest. My grandfather had what was then know as cardiac asthma and died when our father was eight months

old. My grandmother said that from the time Daddy was born until Fredrik died, his care was so demanding that she never really went to bed. She would simply wash and change clothing and catch cat naps when she could. The summer of 1908 was the year of huge forest fires in Canada that left the State of Michigan under a smoky cloud. Breathing was so difficult for Fredrik that she would take him out to the orchard where the trees filtered the air a little. Karen ran the farm and the children alone for the next seven years. Then she married a widower, Alec Ellison, and moved to his farm on Swede Road.

My husband's grandparents, John and Josephine Cubalo, were immigrants from Poland. The story is that John was in danger of being conscripted into the Prussian army so a friend, who was a cook on a ship, hid him in the galley. So he came illegally to America on the same ship as his future wife. They moved to a farm near Lincoln where they raised nine children, three boys and six girls. The last of that generation died recently at age 104. There are many stories but few of them written for our generation.