

Autobiography

I was born in Byglandsfjord in the mountainous valley of Setesdal located in the southern part of the home of the old Vikings, Norway. My parents were ordinary farm people. My grandfather on my mother's side had come over the mountains from an adjoining valley. The rest of my ancestors had lived in this valley for hundreds of years back. From records and published books they have been traced back as far as the early part of the seventeenth century. My parents' farm was comprised of only a few acres of good farm land. The rest was woods and mountainous grass lands.

My duty in the early part of my life was to herd cattle in the summer and go to school and catch game birds (which I sold to the storekeeper) in the winter. After I grew older I had to help my parents put up hay in haying time. In the long winter nights we sat inside and read the papers or books and listened to the old folks tell stories. I sat there listening to all kinds of tales, the greater part of which were ghost stories. People in Norway are very superstitious. I know for sure that my father did not dare go very far from the house alone after dark; he always took me or somebody else with him. My father was not an exception to the rule. They probably had heard so many ghost stories during their childhood that they stayed with them all their lives. For my own part, this did not bother me very much.

I used to herd cattle alone in the summertime, and I usually took along a book or some magazines if I could get hold of them. Many times I forgot all about the cows until late at night, being too interested in the book, and then I had to hunt late at night trying to bring the cows back again. But the nights in Norway never get very dark in the middle of the summer. In the winter, however, there are only one or two hours which one can call daylight.

From my reading of all the books and magazines I formed a desire to see what was on the other side of those big mountains. I had a dim picture formed in my mind but I wanted to see it with my own eyes instead of reading of what someone else had seen.

My father had two brothers and three sisters who had emigrated to America many years before. They had families of their own in America. My father also had been in the United States for two years, but did not like it, so he came back to Norway again. I have a suspicion it was because he got lonesome and missed his mother.

Naturally we talked a great deal of America in our home, and I made up my mind to try my luck over there, where it was so easy to make money. When I told this to my mother she would not hear anything of such talk. I was the oldest of the family

and had to carry on the old traditions. My father, on the other hand, said I could go if I wanted to.

I knew my parents had a hard time to make both ends meet, with a mortgage on the farm and high taxes, besides raising a family. So I wrote to my uncle in America and asked him if he would help pay my trip over and said that in return I would work for him when I came over and pay it back again.

My uncle wrote back and told me that he would help and would send the ticket and travel money just as soon as I obtained my passport. He also sent me a paper in which he guaranteed that I would not be a burden to the American government until I became a citizen.

I wrote to the American Consul General at Oslo, and at the appointed date I went into Oslo with about forty different papers stating my character, my health, the health of my parents, the dangerous diseases present in any part of the family, a letter from the tax collector stating that I owed no taxes, and others of similar nature.

At Oslo I had to take a complete physical examination and pass before four or five different inspectors before my passport was issued. If anybody should want to find out anything about me he has only to write to Oslo or to the emigration office at New York where they have a complete record of me and my family up to the time I entered the United States.

I wrote to my uncle in America and told him that everything was ready; then I went home again to await the coming of the ticket and the parting of the next boat. My mother finally consented to my going. The time that I was waiting for the boat I spent in helping my parents put up their hay, and also taking long excursions up into the mountains. Perhaps this was the last opportunity I would have to enjoy their beauty. (I wonder if the Ancient Vikings felt that way just before they started out on their conquests of the unknown world?)

A letter from my uncle arrived, but I could not understand what he had written. It was written half in Norwegian and half in English. So I had to go to a neighbor who understood English, and get it translated. My uncle informed me that he had sent the ticket, and I could get it at the office of the steamship line when I went.

So now I was ready for the journey out into the great unknown world. Now I should find out what was on the other side of those big mountains and the ocean.

The last days at home I spent in visiting and saying goodbye to friends and relatives.