12 Mile
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The Rosebush

Who does the best
His circumstances allows,
Does well, acts nobly.
Angels could do no more.
December 14, 1927
Mama

FROM DORA NELSON'S (HULDA'S DAUGHTER) AUTOGRAPH ALBUM

When I was a little girl, I liked riding on the glider in the swing set in my parents' yard. I couldn't ride high off the ground, but my ride was smooth and nearly effortless--almost like being carried in the air. Behind me was a pink rosebush growing by itself and a little to the left was my mother's flower garden. Between them was a birdhouse for wrens, plain common birds with a cheerful chirp. The wood house nearby was empty because all the wood had been burned in the kitchen stove the previous winter.

One summer evening, as I floated on the glider, I heard the train whistle and the rattle of metal wheels on tracks from the west where the sun was setting. The sound easily passed across Highway 55, across Reuben Peterson's land, across Chester Mill's fields, and up our hillside farm to me. Since I was alone, the whistle seemed to have a message.

I wondered where those rattling wheels and freights cars were going and where my life would lead. I knew it would be far away, but I didn't know where. These mysteries didn't disturb me; rather they left me at peace.

My dad liked the sound of trains. He told me the air had to be just right for the sound of the train to reach our farm. He also told me his mother always wanted to live close to a railroad track so she could hear the whistle blow. The same spell caught me when I was a little girl.

Even though I was only two when my father's mother, Hulda Mainquist, died, I felt close to her. When I made Swedish meatballs, Dad was pleased because they reminded him of his mother's cooking. Another time as I was knitting mittens, he again remembered her. When I wore my long hair up for a high school play, Nola Mills, a neighbor, said I looked just like my grandmother. I knew little of her, but any resemblance was an honor.

Like my grandmother, I can get a hearty meal on the table in good order, and I know how to meet the social and physical needs of others. In fact, I even majored in home economics in college. When my life is cursed with failure, her blessing and my father's for my domestic gifts comforts me.

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My grandmother, Hulda Saf, emigrated from Smaland, Sweden in 1889. When she left home as a sixteen-year-old girl, her father called, "*Var sacker att tillbaka.*" ("Be sure to come back.") They didn't tell each other how much they loved each other because it was too deep in their hearts. It was hard not to cry. They knew that for families, as poor as themselves, a reunion after crossing the ocean was rare.

It was hard for Anders and Charlotte Saf to imagine their oldest daughter leaving. They were fortunate that the Mainquist family in Iowa had agreed to pay Hulda's passage in exchange for a few years of domestic labor. The couple also felt fortunate that the Orlander family agreed to also look after Hulda until she reached the Mainquist farm in Iowa. Hulda earned good grades and worked hard at home, too, but regardless, Charlotte and Anders worried about her. She was only sixteen, barely confirmed in the Lutheran faith.

Hulda hated leaving her family and Smaland, but when she read the Mainquist letter soliciting domestic help, she knew she should go. Her family's finances would be eased, and she was young and unafraid. Hulda knew she would miss her sister Anna. Maybe when Anna was older, the Mainquists would send for her and they could be together.

Anders and Charlotte Saf thought perhaps Hulda could marry a young farmer who would provide well for her. The Mainquists did have sons of the right age, and the family was prosperous.

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Beatta Mainquist made certain Hulda worked hard for her passage--even by Scandinavian farm standards, but Hulda never complained. It would only make things worse, and it was her decision to leave her home of Safway for Stanton, Iowa. When Beatta and her husband drove to town, he held the lines while she held the whip. Sometimes Beatta puffed a cigar while Hulda worked.

One of their sons, Axel, was taken by Hulda. ~~She had a~~ trim figure, a fine face, and ~~eyes as blue as the sky~~. She was a hard worker and her hips were broad enough to bear sky blue eyes
healthy children. Axel decided he would marry Hulda.

Hulda was thrilled. She knew this was the match her parents had hoped for. Besides, he was a good looking man and a sharp dresser. She was so proud to be seen with him at church that she could feel the envy of the other young women.

Want to use ||||| in all stories except "My Father's SF

church that she could feel the envy of the other young women.

Hulda had a light blue wedding dress sewn to highlight her blue eyes. Even Beatta commented on how lovely she looked. She knew what her father would say, "Your eyes look as blue and clear as a lake on a Midsummer's Day."

Axel brought the buggy to the house and got the bags. He helped Hulda in the buggy, and they waved good-bye to the elder Mainquists. He smartly cracked the whip and trotted his fine team to the Tecameh, Iowa courthouse. Axel put his arm around her and boldly kissed her. Hulda wished her parents could be there.

After the civil ceremony and signing the legal papers, Axel asked, "Would you like to go for a stroll, Hulda?" "Oh, of course, Axel."

Axel stopped in front of the saloon. "I have to go in and have a drink with my pals." Hulda was left alone on the sidewalk because women were not allowed inside liquor establishments. While she heard him laughing and bragging about how he had just wedded, she watched passersby turn their heads away in pity and shame. Hulda wondered what the night would be like if her husband was drunk. She tried not to cry as she remembered her father's words, "*Var sacker att tillbaka.*"

It was July 3, 1891, and Hulda was eighteen years old. In 1892 she would give birth to Lillie, the first of ten children. Lillie would die of pneumonia, and, another daughter, Edith, would die of tuberculosis. Axel would take treatment for alcoholism three times, to no avail.

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In the last picture of my grandmother Hulda, she held me on her lap on the front porch of my Aunt Dora's home. Wearing a simple cotton dress, she possessed the confidence and warmth of a woman who had held and loved many children. She was 81 and I was 2. Years later Dad talked about that picture with pride and love.

I first knew of my grandmother through a big pink rosebush--perhaps a yard high. It was at a time when I never imagined my father having a mother. The rosebush grew alone in front of our kitchen window, far away from my mother's two flower gardens. The rosebush was also next to the septic tank. When the septic tank was dug up, a deep ugly hole appeared, but the rosebush calmly watched and survived. To me, however, it was an odd place for such a pretty flower.

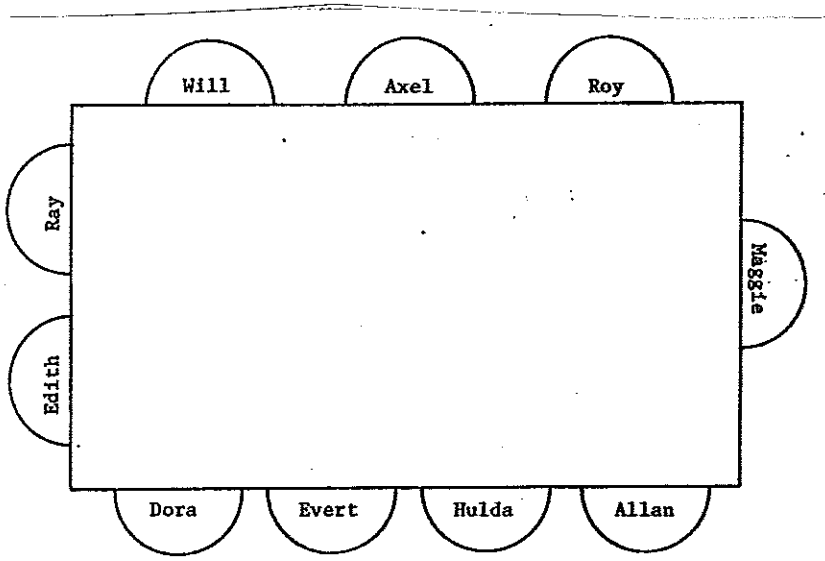
I asked my mother about it. She said my father had given my grandmother the rosebush and she planted it there so she could enjoy it as she worked in the kitchen. Dad would have been pleased she liked the rosebush so much. Like most Swedish farmers, it was hard for my dad to tell people he cared about them. That made buying nice presents for the people he loved, like his mother, important.

My father took us to the cemetery on Sundays to water the red geraniums over his parents' graves. I read "Hulda Charlotte Mainquist--1872-1954" and "Axel Emmanuel Mainquist--1868 to 1929." They were strange names from long ago and far away. Both the upright family stone "MAINQUIST" and my grandparents' flat stones were from an expensive blue granite that came only from Sweden. I was told that my grandmother insisted on the expensive blue stones when her husband died--despite the financial woes of being a part of a farm family during the Depression. The site of the pretty blue headstone and red geraniums with the green grass made me pleased to be a Mainquist even though my grandparents were not even real enough to be ghosts.

I would learn that my sister's dresser and bed had belonged to my grandmother, Aunt Dora would give me candleholders my father had given my grandmother, and I would shell peas in her dishpan. I knew the pastor's chair in my church was given in my grandmother's memory because it said so on a brass plaque. When my Aunt Maggie died, she called, "Mama." My knowledge of my grandmother was scant, but it was clear she was loved and important.

When I was in my thirties and forties, Dad said little things about his mother. He said often she walked to Mary Lake because it reminded her of home in Sweden. Dad was proud that at night she read the *Omaha Herald* out loud to improve her English and that at the end of her life she spoke the language with only a slight accent. He talked of her walking barefoot in the summer, gathering eggs the same time everyday, and loosening her crown of braids at night. My father reminisced about gently releasing her from the responsibility of milking cows when she grew too old for such hard work. Dad especially liked telling of how his mother put the potatoes on the stove for lunch, walked the mile round trip to get the mail, and then returned home to serve potatoes for a farm lunch. This was the poetry of the pink rosebush by the kitchen window.

The Mainquist Family
Seating Arrangement
1911-1915



This seating arrangement evolved for specific reasons. Maggie, my aunt, sat between Allan and Roy so she could feed her younger brothers, and my grandmother, Hulda, sat next to my father, Evert, in his highchair so she could feed him. Allan further explained, "They tried to keep Ray and Dad separated. It wouldn't have come to blows, but they sure killed each other with looks. For some reason, Roy couldn't sit still. One time, Dad grabbed Roy by the ear and then put him in the closet or something. That goes back to when I can barely remember." Dad's sister Lillie was teaching in a one-room schoolhouse, and his youngest sister Mary wasn't born yet.

Roy added that the food usually started with Axel, his father, and then was passed to Will, the oldest son. This meant that Roy was at the end and had to satisfied with what food was left. Sometimes that wasn't much with ten people sitting at the table.

enough. If the iron burned your finger, it would scorch the fabric as well. When the iron she was using cooled, Hulda returned it to the stove and then picked up the hottest one of five heating. With laundry to press for many children plus her husband and herself, she didn't iron the overalls or underwear.

Wednesday

Wednesday was mending day. Mostly, cotton socks were darned, and workclothes were patched. Hulda also did any other miscellaneous work.

Thursday

Thursday was a day for social meetings.

Friday

Hulda and her daughters cleaned the upstairs bedrooms.

Saturday

Hulda and her daughters cleaned downstairs and baked during the day. Hulda made white bread and a rye bread, most likely the Swedish *limpa*. The women also baked simple, old-fashioned cookies such as molasses and sugar.

On Saturday night Hulda pumped gallons of water and went through a bushel of corn cobs supply enough water for the family baths--from the youngest daughter to the last son, usually a dirty boy. The girls always went first because they weren't involved in the heaviest farm work. The stove was always red hot by the time the last boy had his bath. My father remembered backing his bare behind into the hot stove. Rumor has it the brand name of the stove remained barely visible.

Since the tub was too small for adults, they filled a basin with warm water, grabbed towels and soap, and went upstairs for a basin bath. Even after a week of threshing, this was considered adequate preparation for Sunday for a farmer.

Sunday

Sundays on the Mainquist farm were quiet. My grandmother made what her children called Sunday gravy and what the Swedes called egg gravy for breakfast. Hulda made hers with bacon even though most of the Swedes did not. Dinner always included pie--an economical, high-calorie dessert with crust from lard from the Mainquist hogs and fruit from their farm.

Hulda didn't always go to church, and Axel went even less so, but the children were encouraged to attend Sunday School. Mostly Sunday for the Mainquists was a day to visit neighbors and family.

Sometimes my grandmother knitted mittens or socks for relaxation, but she didn't embroider or do any other fancy work. The practical matters of raising a large farm family were too pressing for such pleasures.

Swedish Recipes

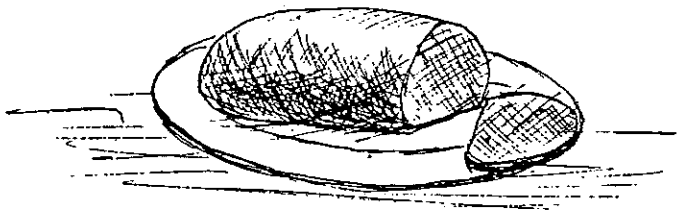
Mother's Breakfast "Sunday Gravy"

Fry bacon strips. Remove from pan. Use as much of remaining bacon fat as desired for flavor.

Place milk in fry pan and heat slowly. Beat 2 eggs with 1/2 C. white flour and 1 C. milk. Add to milk in fry pan. Stir slowly. (I use a spatula to reach sides and bottom of the pan easily.) Do not let it boil or it will curdle. Heat slowly, stir till gravy has thickened.

Add 1 t. salt and serve over crumbled bread or toast.

Provided by Dora Nelson, my father's sister



Casserole Swedish Rye Bread (Makes one loaf)

3 1/2 to 4 C. unsifted white flour
1 1/2 C. unsifted rye flour
1/3 C. packed dark brown sugar
2 t. salt
1 t. caraway seed
2 packages yeast
1 C. milk
1 C. water
2 T. margarine

Combine flours. In large bowl thoroughly mix 1 1/2 cups flour mixture, sugar, salt, caraway seed, and undissolved yeast.

Combine milk, water and margarine in saucepan. Heat over low heat until liquids are very warm (120° F.-130°F.). Margarine does not need to melt. Gradually add to dry ingredients and beat 2 minutes at medium speed of electric mixer, scraping bowl occasionally. Add 3/4 cup flour mixture. Beat at high speed 2 minutes, scraping bowl occasionally. Stir in enough additional flour mixture to make a stiff dough. (If necessary use additional white flour to obtain desired dough). Cover; let rise in warm place, free from draft until doubled in bulk, about 40 minutes.

Stir dough down. Cover; let rise again until doubled in bulk, about 20 minutes. Stir down; turn into a well-greased 1 1/2-quart casserole.

Bake at 400°F. about 40 minutes or until done. Remove from casserole and cool on wire rack.

I like this recipe because it's easy and reliable--The Author.