



A Family Grew in Brooklyn

by

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Grandpa Anders Hanson Wettergren (Pop)



A stocky 5'8" tall. Born in Bakka, a very small town in the middle of Sweden. He was bright as a child and even "preached" from the Bible at one time. His real talent lay in art. He went through the Swedish Art Schools of the day and spent some time studying in England.

He met his later wife Sophia in Stockholm. She bore him two daughters, **Ruth** and **Esther**, in Sweden. Somehow they married, came to the USA, about 1888, and settled in the Swedish section of Brooklyn (Bay Ridge). **Lilly**, my mother, was the first born in the USA (1890). Followed by four more girls, one of which died in infancy, and last of all **Rudy**.

Pop was one of the popular Swedish house painters and decorators of the time in New York. He made good money but blew it on drinking bouts. He was an active member of the Socialist Party -- the extreme left of the time -- 1890 to 1910 or so.

All the girls had musical training opportunities -- Ruth and Connie kept up at the piano, Lilly at the violin, and Marie at voice. They would entertain at the Socialist Party meetings (source -- my mother Lilly). At any rate they grew up in poor circumstances. Pop apparently retired early, took to painting in oils again and let the kids support the family as they grew up.

At their summer tent on Lake Tiorati near Bear Mountain, NY, he was a good swimmer and led nature walks in the surrounding woods.

He painted large pictures for his children - mostly copies of nineteenth century French artists. He did smaller originals -- two ships for my dad and Rudy and several for Joseph Rintelen.

He was quite deaf when I knew him. This plus his struggles with English made him a withdrawn person in my eyes. I had almost no direct contacts or inputs from him. He was a regular visitor to Manhattan's excellent museums. Since the subways and elevators cost only 5 cents, this was cheap entertainment.

As he aged he became anemic and infirm. I gave him liver extract shots to no avail. He died at about 80 years, exact cause unknown.

Grandma Sophia Wettergren (Mom)



She had incapacitating back trouble and spoke very little English. She and Pop lived upstairs at 108 Forbell St. with one or more of their children. Connie was always there; others came and went. This house was a sort of shelter for the family in times of need. She was a very good cook, having done it on a large scale in Stockholm. With help from her daughters, she handled cooking for the family and for holiday gatherings. As these grew larger with time she would make a small before dinner “Smorgasbord” at these times. I liked the pickled beets but not the fish.

My memories are of her on a stool in the kitchen or on a rare outing in a wheelchair - perhaps to see Lawrence Tibbett in a movie. I learned a few Swedish words from her and the others but it was *verboden* to teach me the language. What a waste! I was going to be a real American!

Her passing from complications of adult onset diabetes, ultimately pneumonia, at 80 years old was my first brush with death and funerals -- not my dish of tea.

Aunt Ruth

Pianist and teacher with “a pupil of a pupil of a pupil of Liszt” on her business card. She married Rudy Friedel, an outgoing red-headed German, NY City fireman. They had a son Robert, crippled by polio as a child. He died of appendicitis shortly after graduating from Cornell’s Agricultural School.

I spent one or two weeks of summer vacation with them at Tiorati and/or Meadowbrook but seldom saw them at other times.

Later on she apparently lost the ability to cope with her life and ended up in an institution.

Aunt Esther Rintelen

Typical build - tended to fat - outgoing - party giver, party lover - very active. Married



Joe Rintelen while very young. He was connected to the well known German family. He was the “gentleman” of the family, according to my mother, but also from my own close observations. He taught me to drive, for one thing.

Esther demonstrated cooking ware in Manhattan and Brooklyn department stores. she was matron of her *Eastern Star* chapter and made friends wherever she went, which was many places. They moved around a lot as Joe was a traveling salesman for Dr. Scholl’s foot products and had various territories; e.g., they lived in West Newton, MA, while he had New England as his territory. I traveled with him on one of his rounds there and he introduced me to lobster and French fries in Portland, Maine.

Esther warned me that my quick wit, perhaps inherited from my dad, could hurt people. He had apparently hurt her feelings by some witty but barbed remark. I have been conscious of this and have bit my tongue occasionally ever since.

Their son Joseph was the apple of her eye. She arranged for them to follow him around to California and later Texas and New Mexico. She and Joe lived into their nineties in a trailer next to Joseph and Helen in Truth or Consequences, NM. (Is Aunt Esther still alive?)

Lilly



My Mother (not Mom or Mommy), not quite five feet tall. Solidly built, very serious and determined. Due to family circumstances, she had to go to work at an early age, finishing high school and “business” school at night. After some starting jobs, one at Meyerowitz Optical (bring me some hairlines), she became a secretary at Adams Express. She was very proud of her expertise with onion skin carbon copies. She kept up her violin and was a member of the Brooklyn Baptist Temple Orchestra, another source of pride and satisfaction to her. Sydney Nummy was a room-and-border at the Wettergren’s. He and Lilly eventually courted and married in 1919. Theirs was a joint ceremony with sister Dollie and Lonnie Dickerson.

Mother and Dad bought the two family masonry house at 108 Forbell in '19 or '20. I was born there in 1921. Things went well for them almost through the booming '20's as Dad was given more and more responsibility at work and finally broke down under the pressure and never really recovered his confidence. (more when I get to him)

Mother took the role of head of the household in addition to mothering me -- paying the mortgage with rent from upstairs, a dress shop which she ran in our living room, and pay from a clerk job which Dad managed to get before the Depression broke.

She emphasized education without preaching it directly to me. Despite a serious eye operation in first grade I kept up with my class with her help and persistence during a full term's absence.

She was certainly frustrated by their change in fortune and later suffered what was probably a kind of depression which kept her in bed at times. Connie and John were very good and kind to me at those times.

She lived the rest of her life in a sort of coping mode in the security of her house. Perhaps my good academic record and early work and night school efforts gave her a vicarious satisfaction. She became increasingly dependent on the Morses as time went on. Finally she became too much for them to care for. At their call I went to Brooklyn to find her unable to travel commercially. I hired an ambulance and flew her out to Midland. (Who's flying the plane?) We entered in what was at that time a reasonably good nursing home in Midland. Her condition deteriorated until her death in 1969. Betsy, typically, was very faithful in visiting her, often in my absence, due to my job at Dow.

Aunt Connie



A positive, upbeat, reliable, hardworking, unsophisticated but sensitive person. Another Wettergren build, never too fat, at about 5'2". She and my mother were close as they grew up and even more so later on.

She worked at Macy's department store in Manhattan (people from Brooklyn called it New York). She made many friends there, known to us as the Macy girls, who came to her wedding *en bloc*.

She and John Morse, who boarded upstairs with the Wettergrens, eventually courted,

married, and had a lifetime loving relationship.

Connie loved to have fun. She would clown around with kids and others, especially at family gatherings. She'd get everybody laughing, including John. His Swedish serious side would come through and he'd finally say, "That's enough, Connie," and she'd quiet down until the next time.

John prospered at work, but it changed them very little. They put money and effort into Meadowbrook after the Tiorati "Summerhem" was shut down. Edwin was born about that time. I remember her taking me to the local German ice cream parlor when she was pregnant, wearing a somber black silk maternity dress. We had sundaes, a more or less rare treat.

After we sold Mother's house, the Morses moved to Meadowbrook to stay. I think Connie missed the bustle of the neighborhood. They continued to be good hosts in summertime. They both lived well into their eighties. John lasted longer since he was quite a bit younger. (I'll get to him later)

Aunt Marie



Another Wettergren type, she tended to be stout. Loved her sweets, as we all did. Not the most attractive of the girls but intelligent and hardworking, was a longtime bookkeeper at the *New York Sun*, one of a number of city newspapers now long gone. James Cagney was an office-boy there at one time, and Walter Pidgeon's sister was Marie's coworker. I remember having New York drug store lunches with her while sitting on high stools at the counter.

She married Americo Fernandez, a Cuban tailor who later ran a shop in our neighborhood. (After his death she married Carmichael "Mike" Williams.)

Americo was a baseball fan, managed a local sandlot team, and took me to many ball games. Sometimes to the Yankees if he got free tickets from the *Sun*, but mostly to semi-pro games which were well-organized and had good players. His favorites were the Cuban stars, of course. He knew some of the players. One of them gave me a very worn out first baseman's glove.

They also took me to movies and other places in New York. They had no children and

so had time for me. Maybe they enjoyed doing such things with an appreciative kid.
Marie died of complications of adult onset diabetes.

Aunt Dollie

Maybe the best looking, but still a Wettergren. More worldly than the others.

She married Lonnie Dickerson in the joint wedding mentioned in my mother's sketch. He was a Wall Street barber for many years. My main contacts with them were at family gatherings. Dinners were prepared upstairs while the men played poker and smoked cigars. No booze here, but the Rintelens served highballs when they entertained.

The Dickersons later bought a house in St. Albans, Queens.

Lonnie developed TB and was in and out of the sanitariums at Saranac Lake, NY. This was before any antibiotics, including the very effective TB drug Rifadin developed by Lepetit, the Italian drug company later purchased by Dow.

Uncle Rudy R.O.F.W



Baby of the family and apple of my mother's eye. She had tended him and most of the younger babies. "Lilly take the baby" she would remember was the word of the day.

He was a bit taller than I -- beefy at times, good looking, little formal education but very intelligent and well read in certain areas. He enlisted underage in the WW I Army Air Force and served as a mechanic at Selfridge Air Force Base in Michigan and Texas. He worked as a mechanic after the war but his engaging affable personality led him into sales at a subsidiary of the International Nickel Co. He sold Monel metal for water heaters and other uses in some of the fancy bars and restaurants in Manhattan. He caught the salesman's disease -- heavy drinking -- and struggled with it until he quit cold as his father had done when Prohibition came in.

He married Helen Nordberg, a self-centered artist who knew Pop and whom my mother hated with a passion. Rudy made good money and they lived well, even had an English maid for a time. They had stormy times - several separations which became fi-

nal, but no divorce.

They had a daughter, Pernilla, whom Helen pampered and alienated from him. He was always “trying again” with her without success. He supported them under a separation agreement and began living modestly with my mother in my old room after I left for the Navy and later college.

He had been a very heavy smoker. He gave up cigarettes but continued with a pipe which he inhaled forcefully and deeply. It was no surprise when he came down with lung cancer. My mother nursed him almost to his death.

He filled the role of favorite uncle. Generous and interested, he gave gifts that I would not have received otherwise, like a penknife and a pocket watch and chain (made of Monel metal, of course).

He took me to some of his favorite restaurants and bars when I was home on leave. He started my interest in classical music through his record collection. (My informing him that I was going to enlist in the Navy makes a good story.)

Toward the end he lived a more or less reclusive life in a house he had built near the Morses in Meadowbrook until the cancer took him.

My Father - Sydney Alexander Nummy



Mother's pictures show him to be a slender, mustached, derby-hatted young man five feet four or five. He filled out later on the Wettergren diet. Born in the town of Bessbrook, County of Armagh in Northern Ireland of George? Nummy and Kathleen Culleford,

who was an English governess to a wealthy family in the area. This Grandpa had been involved in the

linen trade, but I know very little about him. Their family consisted of Katy, Emma, Sydney, John, and Ada, in that order. All born in Ireland. They came to Brooklyn in the mid-nineties just after Ellis Island came into use.



Dad had very little formal schooling, but his mother was quite capable of teaching the basics plus stories, songs, and poems which he taught me when I was very young but are forgotten now. He had very good English, at times with a North Ireland accent, espe-

cially when at his family reunions (according to my mother). I could pass grammar tests by listening and picking the right answer which would “sound” right to me. That was part of a good “head start” which also included my mother reading to me a lot.

He told about being a messenger for a ship chandler as a boy, being rowed out to anchored ships in New York harbor to deliver mail and packages.

Somehow he ended up in the department store business. He was more than presentable, smart, and ambitious. S and H Kress Company hired him early in the 1920 boom times and pushed him into more and more responsibility as a buyer and in opening new stores for them.

The business took him to Albany at times. He used to tell about riding there on the Hudson River Nightline boats. I later rode the Dayline to Bear Mountain. It made a lovely outing along the Palisades and up to the mountains. We could also reach Tiorati from Bear Mountain.

He was riding high in those days. He became a member of the Masonic York Lodge which was fashionable in Manhattan at that time. Somehow it became too much for him. He suffered a nervous breakdown and was never the same again. I think he worked for Abraham and Strauss store in Brooklyn for a while and then ended up in a clerk’s job in Manhattan - a comedown to be sure but it lasted almost through the Depression and provided a weekly pay envelope while millions were out of work in the U.S.

A second wave of Depression in 1939 put his employer - “Weidens” - out of business. He became an outside salesman for his nephew also in the upholstery supply business, but in Brooklyn. This situation made my mother very uncomfortable, even resentful.

About this time I started work and night school so I was able to cover my related expenses but still relied on “108” for bed and breakfasts. Later I was able to make a small weekly contribution.

Dad was a heavy smoker like Rudy. He also switched from cigarettes but to a deadly-looking small cigar (if second hand smoke could kill, I’d have been dead long ago). He had no detected lung cancer, but developed heart problems. Medicine in the Brooklyn neighborhoods was not the best, and he received inadequate treatment. He died at the age of 65 while napping, after walking around the block, perhaps to sneak a smoke and maybe a sip of whiskey, a small bottle of which was found in his overcoat pocket later on.

We had a sometimes stormy non-relationship, e.g., once in an attempt at a driving lesson. In his palmy days he had bought a large Buick touring car which later became the Wettergren bus to Tiorati. He later had a 1929 Pontiac which he stopped driving due to eye problems. This I inherited when I got my driver's license. I fixed its steering problem and enjoyed it until I left for the Navy.

He was proud of my Navy career and wore my seaman's pea coat after I was commissioned and didn't need it anymore. He had a good sense of humor and wit. He told a good story and enjoyed an outing to his family's get-togethers when the "Irish" would break out all around.

He had a habit at the end of a joke of repeating the punch line and then giving a snort of appreciation.

John Morse - nee Jonsson



My natural cousin and uncle by marriage to Connie. He was Pop's nephew from Westberg, just across the little valley from Bakka, Pop's home town. He was born and raised in this rural area not far from the town of Rättvik near if not on the large Lake Siljan.

He worked hard as a boy farming in the little valley for his family and some of his neighbors and helping his builder father. He learned to handle horses from farming and how to do masonry, carpentry, and anything else to do with construction. All of which he put to good use in the US later on.

The story went that he left Sweden to avoid several years of compulsory military service there and partly at the urging of Uncle Ole, Pop's brother, who apparently had lived an adventurous romantic life in the western US.

Ole and John resembled each other somewhat, being rawboned and muscular unlike Pop Wettergren. John had reddish hair. He roomed in the small bedroom upstairs. He picked up a very good English but always with a trace of Swedish accent in his speech.

His first job in America was running a two-horse tiltable scoop earth mover on construction sites. A perfect fit for his background (a dead-end job?) With high school equivalency from Sweden he enrolled for a time at Brooklyn Polytech at night.

How he got into lithography I do not know. He became expert in color separation

photography, and served on national technical committees. He held several patents on color printing -- a success story indeed.

In some ways quiet with a stubborn streak but in others aware and sensitive. Once he started a letter to me with an apology for his limited English and went on to write full of understanding and in prose that any educated person would have been proud of.

I grew to appreciate him more and more with time. The most appreciated compliment I ever received was as I left Meadowbrook on my last visit with him. As we shook hands and hugged goodbye, he said, "You are a good man, Bill."

We had good times together going skiing -- usually with Malcolm Schoner -- sometimes on the ski train out of Grand Central Station or he'd drive us to Bear Mountain or some other ski run. Ultimately we went by train to Mt. Mansfield in Vermont near Dartmouth College. He took me there while I was on survivor leave in 1942.

The Meadowbrook house which he modified extensively was his version of the traditional Swedish "Sommerhem." Aging got to him as it does to all of us. He stubbornly stayed on at Meadowbrook despite several bouts of eye trouble, with help in shopping from some neighbors. He lived on his own until his death.

Joseph C. Rintelen, Jr. - "Joseph"



He preferred "Joe" but the family called him Joseph just as they called me "Billy." According to Aunt Esther he was becoming a tough Brooklyn kid until she straightened him out. He took off on an outdoors bent and was active around Tiorati and the Bear Mountain Zoo which he helped to keep supplied with native wild life for exhibition. He also supplied rattlesnakes to a Dr. Dumarz (sp?) at the Bronx Zoo for his work on rattlesnake venom. Imagine Esther confronted with several of them being stored temporarily in her bathtub! He went to Manual Training High as it was being converted to Brooklyn Tech. Spent some time at Brooklyn Polytech at night. Eventually graduated from the day session. He went to Cornell and did a thesis on newt's (salamanders) blood. On to Carnegie Tech and ended up with a Ph.D. in Metallurgy from Duke.

He worked as a supervisor at the International Nickel Rolling Mills in Huntington,

WV. He was married for a while to a frail looking local girl - before the War (WW II) started. He was commissioned a Lieutenant in the Naval Ordnance Department, did some detached service on the battleship *Missouri*, and long after the war retired as a full Commander. He married Helen sometime during this period. He then became head of the Department of Mining and Metallurgy at Texas Western in El Paso.

He and family traveled extensively in summers by trailer. His son Charles married soon after high school. Charles and his young bride produced two sons, Wes and Paul, after which he took off more or less permanently. Helen and Joseph took Charles wife in and were very much involved in the upbringing of their two grandchildren. Without benefit of college they both grew to be big strong and competent. They are both involved in heavy construction machinery. Wes spent a hitch in the Marines and is now married. Paul committed himself to caring for Helen after Joseph died in his sleep at age 90.

Helen is a very positive upbeat person, a desirable characteristic in living with the irascible Joseph. She has been in and out of hospitals and still lives in the summer place they built at Truth or Consequences (aka T or C), NM.

Edwin Morse



Son of John and Connie, lived in the upstairs at 108. I was 12 years old when he was born. We lived physically close but the age gap got in the way of a closer relationship. Besides I left for the Navy when he was only eight years old and never lived very much at 108 thereafter. He liked Meadowbrook and did some camping and hiking in its vicinity. Consequently he entered the Forestry School at Syracuse University, graduated and did some graduate work there and tried forest rangering for a while.

His real love was flying. He learned to fly multi-engined bombers during a tour in the U.S. Air Force after ROTC at Syracuse. He went on to be a pilot for Pan Am and later for Delta after Pan Am folded. Regretfully he died on a flight from Florida to Europe while acting as a flight engineer. He had had to retire as a pilot due to age rules.

While still at Syracuse he met Patti and they married I believe about the time he began the forest ranger job. Needless to say, his untimely death was a tremendous shock to

all, especially of course to Patti. Their three daughters include Sarah, the eldest who has been living in Holland and has two daughters of her own, Amy, the middle one who is pursuing a career in acting (her uncle, Patti's brother, has been in some movies and many TV spots). The youngest is Karin, who has a BA in Ancient Languages and is trying her hand in writing while she works in New York City and commutes daily from Princeton Junction, where they live in the fine house and grounds which Edwin had built and populated with trees he selected based on his forestry knowledge.



Pop, Mom, Uncle Ole



Uncle Ole



Joe and Esther



Lilly



Lilly



Connie



Connie with Kathleen Nummy



Marie



Rudy



Kathleen Culleford Nummy



Sydney Nummy

Sydney, Lilly,
and William



John Morse





John, Connie,
Edwin Morse



Edwin



Edwin with date