

A Story in the Life of Edwin Otto Carlson

This article was assembled from Edwin Otto Carlson's memoirs by his son Neil Edwin Carlson. Dad was born April 9, 1910 and left Sweden in April 1929 at the age of eighteen. He passed away January 7, 2006.

Logan Avenue to me was just like a second up-bringing. After leaving Sweden in April 1929, at the age of eighteen and not quite dry behind the ears, the youngest in a family of eight, I had left a quiet and peaceful home and surrounding to arrive on Logan Avenue in Winnipeg, Canada. This was an unknown area for me, but full of new adventures.

Living in Dalarna, Sweden, I knew only Swedes, but here on Logan Avenue, I met, and got to know all the other Scandinavian's, Norwegians, Danes, Finns, Icelanders and of course, the Canadians. That was part of the adventure I had gone out in the world to find, but to find work was not so easy. My English was not very good and jobs, as had been promised by the Emigration agents in Sweden, were just not there. The little bit of money I had with me was soon spent. I could not write home for money like some of the other boys, because I had left home without my mothers' permission. My dad died when I was only 4 years old. My letters home were only good news about how I was getting along just fine.

My first summer in Winnipeg is one I would like to forget. The odd days' work for 25 cents per hour did not seem to last. Many were the days when I spent my last nickel on a glass of milk and a cup cake. When I had enough for a meal, I could buy one at the Exchange Restaurant on Main for 15 cents. Just for the record, I made friends with the Swedish grocer Algott Wessberg. He had a store in the Hallonquist Block on Logan and Ellen Street. Wessberg would give me 50 cents to deliver some groceries. I would walk all the way to Elmwood with one or two parcels. 50 cents was a lot of money in those days. Thank God for the Danish Bakery on Logan and Lora, sometimes they would hand out some one-day old Danish pastries, and that I never forgot.

When I had a nickel to spare, some of us boys would walk down to a Dairy on Logan and Sherbrook, where we could buy a jug of buttermilk for 5 cents; and don't think that was not a life saver many times over. When fall came in 1929, some of my new acquaintances and I, who lived in the duplex on Logan Avenue rented by Anders Anderson and his wife Karin from Leksank in Dalarna, were facing a bleak and horrible prospect of winter. As luck was smiling on us, we were able to hire out as bush workers in Ontario. Cutting pulpwood was not the easiest kind of work for me, but I could learn. With an axe, a file and Swede saw bought at Gustafson Hardware store on Logan Avenue, I was keeping up with the rest of them. Camp Larson was the name of the place about 200 miles north of Fort William and Port Arthur. There were about 500 men in the camp and half of them were Finlanders, good people and good food.

We were sent out in the bush in the morning with lunch pails, a package of tea and a jam pail to gather some snow in and heat your water for your tea. I wasn't used to drinking tea as I was a Swede and always drank coffee, but before too long I learned to enjoy my tea.

By the end of March 1930, we landed back on Logan Avenue, but now we had a little money saved and I could pay up Anderson for some rent that I owed him from the summer before.

Some of the businesses and stores we would visit on Logan Avenue were:

#	Logan Avenue (north side)	#	Logan Avenue (south side)
1925			
209	AM Cafe	366	Fred Steele
	New Princess Cafe (later became		
213	Stockholm Cafe)	370	Olaf Norlen
281	Pool Hall - Albert Johnson	372	Rev. Carl Anderson
287	Gotha Cafe	376	Swedish Lutheran Church
313	J.E. Stendahl - tailor	390	Scandinavian Mission Hall
325	Dahl Steamship Agency	392	Norden Cafe
337	Emil Nelson	396	Swedish Canadian Publishing
At Lizzie			Canada Posten
357	Beaver's Confectionery		Swedish American Lines
361	Gus' Barber Shop (Ronnander)		Andrew Hallonquist
375	Fred Okerstrom	402	Hallonquist Block
At Fountain			
397	Salvation Army Hall	406	Hallonquist Grocery Store
		At Ellen	
403	Mrs. Pauline Johnston	& Logan	Scandinavian Mission Church
405	Scandinavian Baptist Church		
413	Scandia Hotel		
	Swedish Cafe		
419	Ole Johnson		
1930			
285	Logan Book Store	208	C.H. Nilson - tailor
291	Princess Cafe	208½	Swedish Consolidated Imports
			Swedish Canadian
307-9-11	Norland Cafe	210	Sales Logan Cafe
		220	National Apts. (J. Carltin, etc.)
		244	Mohawk Block (Stendal)
		246	Scandinavian Bookstore (Jack Neuman)
			(in 1940 owner was John Nelson)
		254	Svea Cafe
		256	Gus Ronnander (Gus' Barber Shop)
1940			
282	Pool Hall (Olson & Johansen)		

I had learned that money doesn't grow on trees, and work was still scarce, so I had to be very careful. By now some of the boys that I knew had written home for tickets to go back to Sweden. I could not ask my mother or my family for money to return home, for that would mean that I had failed, so I had to suffer and accept the consequences.

The summer of 1930 was not any better. I was able to pick up the odd days' work and keep on trying. The ladies in the Swedish Lutheran Church had got together and served the odd meal to some of the neediest, and that was a blessing. I must recall one incident when I met my future wife on the church steps. A friend of mine, Frits Hallberg who was a brother to Karin Anderson where I lived on Logan Avenue between Fountain St. and Ellen St., said to me, "If you come and sit with me on the church steps on Sunday morning, I will have you meet a friend of my girlfriend." One, Beda Linea Rosenquist. Being as shy as I was, I hesitated, but agreed to come along. Beda was a 19-year-old girl from Varmland, Sweden who had come over with her Aunt Helen Nelson. This was more or less the turning point in my life. I joined the church little by little, even though I couldn't afford the membership. Eventually, I joined the church choir as I just loved to sing. Finally, I became a member and have remained that way ever since.



Ed and Beda at their 50th Wedding Anniversary Party

In the fall of 1930, I faced another winter. One day at the end of September, a Mr. Helge Bohlin from Libo, Manitoba came into Anderson's looking for a man to mind the farm while he and his brothers were fishing at Lake Winnipeg. I was mighty glad to accept the job for 20 dollars per month, and being my own cook, I spent a quiet but very lonesome winter. Spring of 1931 saw me back on Logan Avenue. By the time I had learned and improved on my English and I had made more friends. The economy had improved somewhat and there seemed to be a light at the end of the tunnel. The future looked a lot better.

The Augustana Lutheran Church on Logan and Fountain Street was organized in 1890 and celebrated its 100th. Anniversary in 1990. One of the first ministers was Pastor Svante Udden.

I got married to Beda in 1934 and we had our own 3 room suite. In 1936 we made our first trip back home to Sweden for Christmas and that was something I could not dream about a few years ago. As we came back in the Spring of 1937, I had steady work to go back to and life became more or less a bed of roses.

In 1939 I started my own business, Carlson Decorating Co. and from that time on I have never looked back. One of the highlights in my life was in 1962 when I received the appointment by His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustav of Sweden as Council for Manitoba and Saskatchewan, during my term I also received the Knight of the Royal Order of the Polar Star Class 1, so now the immigrant from Sweden, who had nothing to start with was wearing two hats.

Another highlight was when our son (Neil Edwin) was born in 1943. He was a big baby; my wife had a hard time in the delivery. When I came to the hospital I was greeted with tears in hereyes, but also very happy with our son in her arms; her words to me were "Never Again" and that is how it was, we never had any more children, however as Neil grew up to become a young man, we had no regrets. As the years went by, he became very interested in the company business.

I'm very proud to say Beda and I were blessed with three grandchildren as time went on: Neil, Marni and Terri, We were so happy to see the family growing.

Neil was also appointed as Swedish Consul of Manitoba in 1980, another proud moment for Beda and I.

Golf was my passion and enjoyed spending time with close friends; John Landro, Bill Swanson, Joe Lukas and Don Johnson. We formed the "Duffers Club" and golfed once a year at Clear Lake, Manitoba with all of our friends. The "Duffers Club" still meets for golf today. I remember Don Johnson came from Alberta with a driver and won the trophy one year.

We purchased a summer cabin at Sandy Hook, Seventh Avenue, just 5 minutes from the local golf course. Beda and Neil would lay in the sun or swim off the Third Avenue pier. In 1958, we sold our Sandy Hook cabin and purchased one at Falcon Lake, the same year the golf course was opened. What a coincidence.

The winter months were long and cold in Winnipeg. Beda and I purchased a home in the Palm Springs area, Thousand Palms, right on the golf course. We spent our remaining years in California during the winter. Neil looked after the business and I retired in 1977 and I have no regrets. Neil also carried out my duties as Honorary Swedish Consul of Sweden over the winter when I was away.

When I look back, life was hard after I Immigrated to Canada, but I persevered and would do it all again in a heartbeat.

Edwin Otto Carlson