

## **Historical Information on August Johnson and Lydia Helin and their Families.**

### **Part 4: THE SKOKOMISH VALLEY - Beginning in 1913.**

Apparently August continued searching for better farm land while they were living in Matlock. Eventually he found something that looked better in the Skokomish river valley. So in 1913, August bought 164 acres in the "upper Skokomish Valley". He bought the land from Otto Auble for \$18.00 an acre: a total of \$3000. Herbert Helin recalls that his Uncle August was able to sell timber on the Matlock homestead for \$5000 to use as capitol for this purchase.

Our family and those who live in the Skokomish Valley all refer to it simply as "The Valley". I use this same designation for this area in the rest of this write up. Emma Richert wrote a good book about the settlers in the Skokomish valley in 1964. The title is, "Long, Long Ago in The Skokomish Valley." This was reprinted in 1984 but is now out of print. This book has good information on the area, and a little information on the August Johnson family. I refer to key sections of her book in the footnotes.<sup>1</sup>

When August and his family moved to "the valley", the land they bought was not yet developed. So he built buildings on the farm there, just as he had in Matlock. His son Arvid had graduated from grade eight by then, so the two of them went to the new place in the valley first before the family moved there. They built the big barn first using poles for the rafters which they hauled from the Matlock area - quite a distance to haul them with horse and wagon! This was logical, however, as this type of long straight pole was more readily available in the Matlock area than in the Valley at that time. The building which the family lived in at first, later became the "milk house" when he built their large 2 storey house.<sup>2</sup> Sawed lumber was readily available by this time, so he bought the lumber for his buildings.

My father and my aunt Emily remember a few details of their move to the Skokomish valley. She had started grade one in the fall of 1913 at the "Wayside School" near the homestead in Matlock. In January of 1914 they moved to the valley and she finished grade one there at the Mohrweis school near their new farm.

They rented out their homestead in Matlock for a time and then later sold it.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Developing the Farm:**

They brought their livestock with them from Matlock, of course, but they didn't have an orchard on the new place when they first moved. Aunt Emily recalls that Mr Auble gave them fruit from his orchard for a time. They planted their own trees and in a few years had their own orchard on the new place and continued their practice of canning garden things and fruit for the winter.

The children continued to share in the chores and the work on the farm just as they had in Matlock. Only now they were a little older and more capable of accepting responsibility. The boys were expected to work hard in the garden, the fields, and in clearing additional land.

The largest trees had been logged off their land in the valley before they bought the place, just as in Matlock. However for the land to be planted to crops, etc, they needed to remove stumps and clear



other small brush. Whenever the planting and other farm chores were caught up, he and his sons kept clearing more fields on their place. Dad recalls: "To clear the fields of stumps, we used black powder in sticks for blasting the stumps. It was called Sudatol. Sometimes it only burned. The better stuff which was available later was called Pyratol. We also used a team of horses with block and tackle to pull out the pieces."<sup>4</sup>

### **Did they ever have problems with the Indians?**

There were native Americans near where they lived. But both in Matlock and the Skokomish Valley the Indian questions had been settled before they arrived. So there was very little contact with the Indians and no problems between them and their family.

### **Family Visits:**

The two families of Lydia and August continued to get together for special events even after August's family moved to the valley. Because of the distance, these were limited mostly to Christmas and the 4th of July after they moved. The trip from Matlock to the valley took about 6 or 7 hours by horse and buggy. (They would have used the Eells Hill road to enter and leave the valley at that time.) Later, by Model T Ford car, the trip took about 2 hours.<sup>5</sup>

My dad recalls: "For Christmas, we used to have wonderful times with the Helin family. We would go over to their place in the horse and buggy one year and then the next year they would come to our place. We would get together like that about twice a year. Because of the distance between our two places, we would stay 2 or 3 nights at the place chosen for the celebration that year. Besides Christmas, the other time was the 4th of July. We'd have some little fire crackers for fireworks."

"At Christmas my dad would always read the prophecy of the virgin birth from Isaiah and then the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke. This was his custom from my earliest memory. We have followed this family tradition in our home also."

### **Visits from Others:**

Martin Samuelson, brother-in-law<sup>6</sup> to August, visited them in the valley in June of 1921. He appears in a large group photo of the Swedish Evangelical Covenant Church of America Annual Conference. It was held that year in Western Washington June 23 and 24, 1921. Apparently he was a delegate from their church in Chicago Heights Illinois.<sup>7</sup>

There are snapshots of him in his vest and tie, "helping in the haying"!! Also a good photograph taken in Shelton at a photographers of the Helins and August Johnsons with Martin Samuelson included.

### **August's Craftmanship:**

When visiting Mr Helin in 1993, we were looking at the cabinet which joins the dining room and the kitchen. The cabinet goes through the wall with doors on both the kitchen side and the dining room side. He said, "This cabinet was built by Uncle August Johnson. He came for a visit to see my mother,



Lydia. They are brother and sister, you know. He took time out and stayed here a week or two just to visit. So he built this cabinet while he was here. He cut a hole through the wall. We had a school teacher board in our home sometimes, and they ate here in the dining room. We would serve the food through this cabinet. Our family ate in the kitchen."

My Mother recalled, "I lived in the house which he built in the valley for two years after your dad and I were married. There was a cabinet like that which came through from the dining room into the kitchen there."

It's a good piece of craftsmanship. It runs from floor to ceiling. There is glass in the doors on the dining room side in the upper half. Dishes stored in it are accessible from either side.

### **Educational Opportunities, etc:**

An old record book for the Mohrweis school near their home in the valley, shows records for all but Arvid's schooling. He had graduated from Grade 8 at the Wayside school in the Matlock area and did not attend in the Valley. All the Johnson children had good grades and good marks in deportment.

Like Arvid did in Matlock, when Arthur and Sigurd graduated from grade eight they didn't take additional schooling but helped their father with work on the farm. The three girls had the opportunity to go to high school. Because of difficult transportation, the oldest girls had to stay with a family in Shelton where they would work around the house for their "board", as they called it. Ellen didn't graduate from high school, as she quit school to care for her mother when she became ill. When aunt Emily was in high-school, the school started running a bus to the valley and she rode this each day for her last years of high school.

Some years later, aunt Emily took college level study in a Bible Institute first in Canada and later in Chicago. My father took one semester of Bible Institute before he was married and later when he had 5 children he graduated from a Bible Institute in Canada. Aunt Esther graduated from a Business College. None of the others took advanced education.

### **Music in the family:**

The August Johnsons had a nice pump organ in their home. Many American homes of that time had such organs. The one the Johnson had was complete with a fancy top part above the organ which had mirrors, and little shelves in it. These organs were usually ordered by mail order in those days.

All of the family sang acceptably. They sang hymns and other songs together as a family. I don't believe any of the boys learned to play the organ, though I believe all three girls did. Emily could also play the clarinet and Arthur played the trombone.

### **Did August ever drive an automobile?**

My dad tells an interesting story of his father's effort to change from driving a horse and buggy to driving a Model T car. This happened when he was older, probably in the 1920's. His oldest son Arvid



had been working for others in the logging and had earned a little money, so he paid for the first car the family bought until his dad could repay him later. About this same time, the Helins also bought a similar car. Herbert always drove his dad wherever he needed to go and my dad or his brothers would drive grandpa August where he needed to go.

My dad recalls that his father didn't like needing to have a son always drive him places. So one day his dad decided to try driving the car himself. He began backing it out of the shed where it was parked but turned the steering wheel too soon so the front wheel caught on the side of the shed. In an effort to stop, he called, "Whoa! WHOA!", and pulled on the steering wheel! (He was accustomed to doing this for horses.) Every time my dad tells this story, he still chuckles.

This bent the tie rods (part of the steering) on the Model T but they were able to straighten this themselves. After this experience, he decided to have my dad or Arthur drive him wherever he needed to go. So this was a transition which he didn't make.

### **Two Major Traumatic Changes for August's family:**

The first major change for the family came during WWI. Their oldest son Arvid entered the military and was receiving training to serve as a noncombatant in a nursing unit.<sup>8</sup> At first this was at an Army training base nearby. Then he was transferred to a base in California. Not long after his transfer to California the war ended so he never went overseas. Grandma Annie was distraught over his leaving for the war, especially his transfer to California. She got so bad that she was treated in the mental hospital in the area for several years and was then cared for at home by members of the family. Though she lived until 1948, she never recovered the use of her mind. (Wesley recalls, that as a child he and the family used to pray that "grandma would recover her mind.")

In 1925, Ellen died of Tuberculosis when she was 27. Her oldest sister, Esther, nursed her in her final illness in a special quarantined room which her father built for her on the big porch of their house.<sup>9</sup> None of the rest of the family caught this disease. This illustrates that the cautions they took with contagious germs were effective.

My dad recalls her death clearly but he has difficulty talking about it. Whenever he does, it brings tears to his eyes and into his voice. Perhaps the whole family was present for her death. As she breathed her last, she looked upward and raised her arms and said, "Jesus". They believe she at that moment saw into heaven and recognized her Saviour as she died.

I'm sure these two traumatic events were very difficult for each member of the family.

### **Marriages for the Children:**

In her book, Emma Richert called them a "togetherness family."<sup>10</sup> But as their children married and had their own families, some of them scattered around the USA.<sup>11</sup>

Arvid married in 1924, Esther was married in about 1926 and Arthur was married in 1930. Arvid and Arthur each bought their own places and stayed in the valley and raised their families there. After Esther



was married, she and her family lived in Olympia, WA for a number of years and then moved to the Los Angeles area in California where their children still live.

### **Contact with Sweden:**

Ingrid Brannstrom<sup>12</sup> in Uppsala remembers that August used to write letters to her mother, Maria. He probably wrote his sister Ida and his brother Johannes as well. On our visit to Sweden in 1994, we found pictures of the family here in the States which they had sent to the family there in Sweden. The largest picture we saw of August's family was taken at the time Aunt Ellen visited them in Matlock. Both the Helins and Johnsons are present and they are all dressed in their best clothes, seated at a table outside in their "summer house". This was probably taken in about 1913. There was also a picture of Herbert and Linnea inside their house. Visible on the wall are photos of Lydia's parents. This was probably taken in about 1910.

My dad (and Herbert Helin) recall that in perhaps 1930 his father discussed the idea of Lydia and him taking a trip back to Sweden for a visit. She wasn't interested in making the trip then so they didn't go. It was only a few months later that he discovered he had cancer and died a few months after that. He is buried in Shelton.<sup>13</sup>

When August died, Lydia probably wrote the family in Sweden to tell them of his death. Ingrid Brannstrom remembers her mother Maria crying when she received the letter. Ingrid was 15 at the time. Lydia no doubt continued to mention occasional news of August's family when she wrote letters home to Sweden. When these letters stopped in the 1940's, there was a language barrier which effectively ended the communications between the descendants of August and the family in Sweden until this was reestablished in 1993.<sup>14</sup>

### **Grandchildren for August:**

All August's children were hard working people and had reasonably good health all their lives (with the exception of Ellen). The other 5 children all made good marriages and raised families. These 5 families had a total of 25 grand children for August. His first few grandchildren were born before he died.

### **The "Home Place" in the Valley:**

For several years after his death, my dad and his sister Emily took care of their mother and farmed the home place in the valley. My cousin Thelma recalls details of her visits there as a girl:

"Grandpa's farm was in the beautiful Skokomish Valley in Washington. I remember being in his barn and collecting eggs from the hen house. There was a hand pump for water on the back porch and no indoor bathroom at that time. Grandpa cut down the trees, made them into lumber and built the large two story house himself with help from Frank Helin. The house had a huge kitchen with wood-burning stove, separate parlor used only on Sundays or special occasions. It had a porch that went almost all the way around the house. There were many bedrooms upstairs. One of them had a closet almost as big as a modern bedroom."



"We loved to visit the farm and usually woke up to Mother and Emily laughing in the kitchen below. Our bedroom had a hole in the floor to let warm air from the kitchen go to the upper floor. We also liked to "spy" on Mother and Aunt Emily through the peephole. Good smells of breakfast also came up by the hole."

"Another early memory is of visiting Aunt Lydia's at Christmas. It was the only place I saw real candles burning on a Christmas tree. My mother was nervous about that because several of us girls had long hair and she was afraid of the fire."

"My uncle Sigurd and my Aunt Emily took care of grandma until Aunt Emily got married (about 1937) when she (Grandma) came to live with us in Olympia, Washington."

"Some of my happiest memories are of the Christmases there when all the families came to our house for Christmas Eve, since Grandma was there. Grandma didn't know us, though, or even my mother, her daughter. Mother cared for her tenderly and selflessly until 1948, when she died at our home, by now in California, having been bedridden for about a year." The funeral was held in Shelton and she is buried there in the family plot.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Emily and Sigurd also marry and leave the Valley:**

After Emily was married in July 1937, she and her husband moved to a suburb of Chicago, IL. They raised their family there. My parents, Sigurd and Elvera were married a few months later in October 1937. After their marriage, they lived for two years on the home place in the valley. After that they lived in small towns on the Olympic Peninsula for 11 years and then had churches in several other places in the Northwestern USA. When this was written in 1994, they were retired and lived in a small town one hour drive north of Seattle.

#### **Family worship:**

My Dad recalls: "My dad would have Sunday school for our family in our home. He would require each of us children to memorize a verse during the week out of the Bible and give it (recite the verse to the family) on Sunday morning. My sister Esther used to practice the verse with me that I was supposed to say. (Emily recalls that my dad helped her with her scripture memory.) Practice, practice, practice. He would read sermons out of D.L.Moody or other men of God. D.L.Moody was a great preacher and my dad had some of his sermons."<sup>16</sup>

Thelma says<sup>17</sup>: "Grandpa was a devout Christian. When he realized he had cancer and wouldn't live long, he told the family that his greatest joy was that **every time** his family got together they had prayer and Bible reading. Since they all helped on the farm, they ate all meals together so that meant they had reading and prayer many times a day!"

All of August's children were active in various churches all their lives, helping as Sunday School teachers, etc. Uncle Arthur played the trombone well, and did so at church each Sunday to accompany the congregational singing. Aunt Esther's husband, Alfred Jacobson was a lay preacher in addition to his other work. Aunt Emily and my father helped in starting small churches and Sunday schools or taking



leadership roles in an existing small church in various places. Aunt Emily's husband did some preaching in small churches and rescue missions though he was a building contractor by profession. My father was a logger in our early family life, and after Bible School he pastored small churches. Sometimes the church could pay only a partial salary so he would work at some other employment as well to help with family expenses.

### **Great grandchildren for August:**

Of the 25 grandchildren, all but two married and have children. His grandson, Marty Wilkinson, was killed in an accident on a construction site. (His widow and two children live near his sister.) The rest of the grandchildren were still living when this was written in 1994. The oldest celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary at the end of August, 1993. Most of them have one or more college degrees. (Many of them became teachers or school administrators.) Most of them are grandparents and some are great grandparents by now. The youngest is my youngest sister, Charity. She has been married several years and in 1994 had 3 adopted children.

### **What was August Johnson like?**

Aunt Ida, widow of Arthur Johnson, says that she knew her father-in-law, August, before she married Arthur. She says about August: "He was a very kind man. I think he was very good about doing things for neighbors. He was stern in a way. I had a lot of respect for him. I knew him probably two or three years before we were married. But he only lived a few months after we were married. We were married in October of 1930. I think he died in May or June of 1931. And then Frank Helin died within 2 or 3 months of his death."

Thelma says that her mother, Esther, said of her father, "he was a very serious man, hard-working, strict, not one to joke or laugh, but **very kind**. He did not like laughing at meals. One time he went hunting and killed a deer but after he saw the beautiful face he couldn't bring himself to ever hunt again. My father said of my mother, Esther, 'The law of kindness was in her mouth.' Mother was, apparently, a lot like her father. Everyone loved her gentleness."

When I look at the achievements of grandpa August, I am impressed. His trip across the Atlantic was not as difficult as that described by the Swedish writer, Moberg in his novel, "The Immigrants." Yet leaving his home country to go to a new land was a major step. Besides the trip across the ocean, he may have spent as long as a week traveling across the USA from the east coast to the west coast by train. When he located a place to establish a farm, one of his biggest hardships began: He worked hard to turn the untamed land into fields and orchard, working with his own hands and a team of horses. Learning to use English with neighbors and friends was another challenging step in the process of establishing a home and family here in this new land. I look at him as a true pioneer in all the best meanings of that word.

Grandpa August died before I was born so I didn't have the privilege of meeting him. As I have studied his life through the memories of others who knew him, I realize that I know someone who reminds me of him: My own father. They lived in different times and in different circumstances but there are many parallels in their character and other aspects of their lives.

One of the things which challenges me about my father is how often I have seen him speak to those he meets about the necessity of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Even now, as he nears the end of his life, he still does this. I think he may have gotten this from his father.

My father recalls, "My dad would make it plain to us that because he was a Christian, that didn't make us a Christian. Each of us children had to receive Christ as Saviour. I imagine I was around 12 or so when I received Christ as my Saviour. My dad said that you should ask the Lord to come into your heart and then you'd be a Christian and I remember doing that."

The inheritance which my grandfather left me is this spiritual inheritance, not one of wealth. I was born into a family where I would learn this same message of the Gospel from my father, who learned it from his father. I am grateful to God for this.

Relatives in Sweden recall that in August's letters to the family there, he always ended his letter by writing, "We will meet in front of the Throne of Grace." This is a translation of a Swedish expression which means he was praying for his family there and he expected that they were praying for him, so they would meet before God in prayer.



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## FOOTNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> "Long, Long Ago in The Skokomish Valley" by Emma Richert. I refer to it below by the abbreviation, "LLA." Note that Emma Richert's sister Alvena married my dad's oldest brother Arvid.

<sup>2</sup> See LLA - page 24.

<sup>3</sup> They sold it to the Rabbidus. Their daughter Tina was born there. When she grew up, she married Walter Shaw. Eventually she inherited the place from her parents. Though her husband has died, she was living on the place in 1993 when this was written. She graciously gave us a tour of the place when my parents visited her place with me that year.

<sup>4</sup> See LLA - page 7.

<sup>5</sup> See LLA: section on Roads - Page 50, and Transportation - Page 57.

<sup>6</sup> August's sister Anna and Martin Samuelson met in Sweden, came to the USA, and settled in Chicago Heights where they raised their family.

<sup>7</sup> His granddaughter Joanne Arvid showed me this photo July '96.

<sup>8</sup> It seems both August and Annie were conscientious objectors. Only their oldest son Arvid was obliged to serve in the military and he served as a male nurse.

<sup>9</sup> See LLA - page 25.

<sup>10</sup> See LLA - Page 24

<sup>11</sup> Today, his grandchildren and their descendants are scattered in several areas of the USA and a few are in foreign countries.

<sup>12</sup> Ingrid and her husband Olaus are retired in Uppsala. We visited them in their apartment on our trip to Sweden in 1994. She was then in her 70s. She is the youngest daughter of Maria, August's sister and is the youngest person in her generation.



<sup>13</sup> His wife Annie never recovered the use of her mind after her illness, so she could not participate in writing letters to Sweden.

<sup>14</sup> There continued to be contact between Anna's descendants and some of the family in Sweden up to the present. However, none of August's descendants were aware of this nor were others in the family in Sweden aware that this contact existed either. Today many of the family in Sweden speak English and have a great interest in continuing contact with the family here in the States.

<sup>15</sup> As of 1995, the family members buried in the family plot in Shelton were: August and Annie, Ellen, Arvid, and Arthur.

<sup>16</sup> Both my dad and Aunt Emily recall the sermons by D.L. Moody the best. They say this is because D.L. Moody would use interesting illustrations which caught their attention as children.

<sup>17</sup> Thelma's recollections are quoted from a letter she wrote Aug 14, 1993. The details she recalls about our grandfather August and his family are a colorful addition to this account.