

Karen Board Moran's thoughts while scanning Jørgen Larsen's forty immigrant journals

Monday, 14 June 2004

I wish I had started this document back while scanning Journal I. This quote reminded me how special these journals were to Grandpa.

I feel often that I am alone, my tools is the only thing I care for, the only things I have left to care for and so my diary is like an old friend there will hide my thoughts and say who and what I have been and it never tell any news.

George Larsen, Sunday, 12 November 1905, Journal VII

How would Grandpa feel about us peeking into his life as a young man finding his way in America? So often I can identify with the frustration of most young people at this point in their life; yet here is a man in a foreign land, speaking a different language, and without family and old friends. His angst over his lost love in Denmark is also similar to early disappointments in most young romances, but his brutal honesty in Journal VI on the anniversary of his broken heart is disturbing. I never remember Grandpa as being mean spirited, but it is **the privacy of his journal we have invaded**. It was the only place he could be brutally honest with no social pretense.

Along with his personal feelings, his diary records day-to-day routine and finances. It also serves as the notebook of his trade as carpenter and his English workbook. I wish I knew if any of the poetry is original. As an avid reader, he shared and pondered many ideas with his "friend".

Aunt Betty (Larsen Andrew) did a wonderful job pulling together Grandpa's life for future generations to revisit in her biography of him—HE WALKS THIS WAY AGAIN (1999).

I wish we had more time to explore his old haunts in Michigan. I'm also wondering if Clara Christensen was a suffragist. She taught in the local schools and was one or two years older than Jørgen. He called her his sister, but would have liked to make her his wife because she was so supportive to him. Her father Chris was his adoptive stepfather in America and their home in Lakeview was important to Jørgen.

Lisbeth Pedersen, director of the Kalundborg Museum, is writing an article (posted at <http://www.kalmus.dk/html/forsk.html>) about Jorgen and his connections with August Rasmussen who was also from the Gørlev area. Life was not good in Denmark and Jorgen appreciated this country.

Here in America I have found people and farmers in the same class but only between my own countrymen. The American farmer demand a lot of work of their help but they work along with the hired help and when the worker does his share you will not find a more polite and thankful person than the American farmer. I like the people there are brought up to work and don't know anything better than to work and keep going, never lazy or slow, they know the work has to be done. I have a reputation to be a good and honest worker but I have learned that from home. I know that if you must stand on your own feet you must be prepared to work and be honest... I give these people a lot of credit. I prefer the American farmer to my own countrymen. They know what they do and how it should be done and they treat their workers as friends and equal...I am sorry I prefer the American way.

George Larsen, Sunday, 14 December 1905, Journal VII (7-15; Andrew, 70)

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February 2009

I thought I would have time to finish this project once I retired, but five years have passed! I am in hopes of finishing this project before we return to Grandpa's birthplace *Gørlev*, Denmark this October. Grandpa passed away fifty years ago on 8 July 1959.

Here's a new mystery from Journal XIX between 3 and 6 March 1908 (19-21):

*I got No 19 nearly full of stories from my every day doings I wonder
what to do to all those books I got 32 in the old country
George Larsen*

Did he or someone else destroy them in Denmark or did he bring them back? Or did he mean that he bought them in Denmark?



One of the joys of being retired is being able to travel across the country in search of our ancestors. In June 2006 my husband and I believe we found the Wagner farm in Northwood, Iowa where Grandpa spent November 1907- March 1908 which helped journals #17-20 "come alive".

Our visit to Delavan, Wisconsin in 1999 helped uncover Grandpa's past and brought journals #21-37 "alive". Keefe's saloon, owned by his cousin's husband, and Highland Park were his home ground in 1908. It was at this resort George once more fell in love with Kristine Nielsen (1889-1910), a Danish laundry girl who called to him while he worked on a scaffold.



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5 May 2009

I found this wonderful quote near Mother's Day so I edited it from the translation done by Paul Sorensen in 1984 for easier reading and emailed it to everyone to celebrate our foremothers.

Delavan, WI 3 November 1908 (24-7)

I love the old rolling fields, the loving home and what childhood offered me. I learned to be satisfied with a little. My loving mother made it comfortable and looked after me so no harm was done. I was her happiness and her comfort. I picked every summer the green fruit and planted our place at home. During the day she slaved [as a maid at the Aagard sugar beet plantation house that was nearby] so in the evening we could enjoy the fruit of her work. We would sit and sing and the song was the Angel Wings. [or perhaps "the song itself was lifted on angels wing"?] I still remember the song and enjoyment. I loved the poor home; the cradle by the window. I loved the surroundings, but you will not understand and what there out in the big world I moved. [or perhaps "and into what a big world I moved into"?] Our poor home we long to see again with its sunburned [sunny?] window. We were happy while we were small and since when thought would pain I had comfort in our poor home. I remember my mother's voice and I will never forget.

Chris investigated a bit and the next day let us all know that:

I believe he was quoting lyrics from memory. Sorry if this dashes any idea that these were memories of g-g-grandma...

*Here is the song I think g-grandpa was writing about "**Jeg elsker den gamle, den vaklende Rønne**", it was written by Olfert Jespersen, 1863-1932, he was a popular conductor in Nørrebros Theater, Casino and Zoo. Put this link in to hear the melody http://www.ugle.dk/den_vaklende_roenne.mid*

This is a good example of why one can never stop questing for the truth, nor accept what seems like a simple answer.

10 May 2009

Today, I found this entry in journal #28 (translated from Danish with punctuation added).

To myself I am as always hard and cold. Nobody can see if [something] was for or against my plans or wishes. I wrote once years back-- hide your thoughts under a happy mind. I have tried it and was lucky, but many times I sink together when nobody but God sees it and you my loyal silent friend know, but hide my feelings.
Yours affectionately Yorgen Larsen 20 Sep 1909

Despite life's ups and downs so painfully recorded in his journals, almost every journal has this positive message or a paraphrased version on the inside covers:

Life is a trial of chances given to us to see how we will act and improve ourselves. Theodore Roosevelt (19-22)

Life is made up by trials and chances given to us to see how we will act to improve ourselves.
George Larsen

These serve the same purpose as his oft repeated *Hang on!* and *Dig in!* (learned from the street boys in Copenhagen). His father and sister advised him to work hard and time heals wounds. When Clara and her father refuse his proposal, they offer this balm to improve his life-- *Perseverance shall conquer.*

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Other favorite inspirational chants are:

*Let us ever through life's journey pursue that path however rough
upon which we need fear no watcher. (written often before 10-11)*

All the world lies still before you little Boy....(32-6 et. al.)

Get in the harness and change your views. (34-2, 35-6)

2 June 2009

The last five journals do not all have blue folders and as I try to organize the papers, I am puzzled by a page dated 1921 by Aunt Betty with this wonderful quote from "daddy to Denmark":

*I have waited a long time to get married but if I had known it would turn
out so good, I would have done it before.*

I have not yet found where this was written in Grandpa's own hand, but will keep looking. A Danish entry in 39-3 translates as something like—life is written in the colors you get....—not what I'm looking for.

4 June 2009

FINISHED!! As an historian, I wanted to pull together Grandpa's story, annotating my discoveries as I read Aunt Betty's transcriptions. On our cross country drive from Tucson to Ellison Bay, I read the hard copies of all the transcriptions that fill a 4" three ring binder. I have a pile of scribbled notes that are basically an index for the transcriptions, as well as the crazy way I process information. Now, I will reread Aunt Betty's book and enjoy the richness of her efforts.

Grampa's reminiscences of Denmark have helped shaped our itinerary for our October 12-16 visit to his homeland and with the descendants of his sisters. Will we still find a cold beer at the Terslow Inn he remembers 31 Dec 1906?

This whole process fascinates me. Grandpa and I were supposed to take an ocean liner back to Denmark after I graduated high school. Sadly, he passed away the summer before I entered 9th grade. I only wish I had consistently kept a diary or journal of my life as detailed memories fade.

Karen Board Moran