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My Swedish adventure

- or how to spend a month in the land of the ancestors

BY LORI FERGUSON
Winner of AFS 2013

Looking back, I suppose I've always had a fascination with the old family photographs. I remember looking through my great-grandmother's (Ingeborg Anna Augusta Olson b. 1893 Chicago, Illinois) photo albums as a young girl with my grandmother (Marie Elisabeth Dahlgren, nee Olsson) and wondering what life must have been like for her, a first-generation Swedish American at the turn of the 20th century. It would be decades before that same fascination led me on a journey to discover my Swedish heritage that ultimately resulted in meeting our long lost Swedish relatives.

A growing passion

My passion for genealogy began when my grandmother's cousin Betty came to visit. My grandparents and Betty looked through old photographs and reminisced about days long gone. They talked about all the things they didn't know and never thought to ask when they had the chance. I realized this was a deep and meaningful gift I could give them and I set out to learn everything I could about our family history.

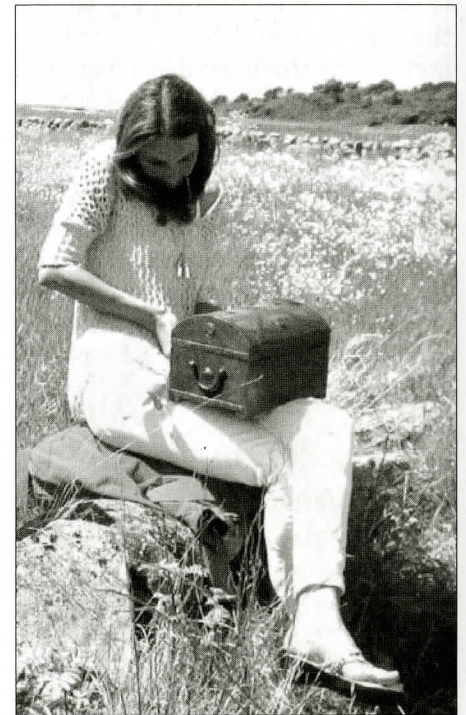
Through research and determination, I was able to find old census records, marriage certificates, and obituaries. Each new discovery was shared with my grandparents, and quite often, would jog a memory long forgotten. I found distant cousins where our families had lost contact generations before. Pictures were exchanged, and in some cases, even memoirs written by earlier cousins long gone. However, it still wasn't enough, I wanted to know more! Who

were they? I had names and dates, but where did they live? What were their lives like?

A TV show is announced

One day I saw a post on a Swedish genealogy message board about a new reality show being filmed in Sweden. My grandparents (Allan and Marie Dahlgren) had always been very proud of their Swedish heritage but never had the opportunity to visit. How wonderful would it be if they could see it through my eyes? It would take three seasons, and my grandparents didn't live long enough to see it, but the third time was a charm, I was going to Sweden!

Allt för Sverige is very different than our American reality shows. Marketed as "The Great Swedish Adventure" here in the U.S., it's been described as a cross between *Who Do You Think You Are* and *The Amazing Race*. Challenges are based on Swedish culture and traditions. Each week there is a team challenge and the winning team is safe, while the losing team must meet in an individual competition to determine who will leave *Allt för Sverige*. You don't have to be the best, you just can't be the worst; it's very "lagom" when you think about it. Alliances won't help you and you can't vote your fellow contestants off the show. Along the way we visit areas unique to our family history, and each contestant is treated to what we call our "special day," a trip to our ancestors' homeplace. The "grand prize" is a family reunion with your long-lost Swedish relatives.



Lori on her special day in Halland.

The adventure begins

My plane arrived at Arlanda airport around 9:00 in the morning on a beautiful spring day. In baggage claim I was greeted by the production team and met my fellow cast mates, nine other Swedish Americans, complete strangers at the time. Together we began a journey that would change our lives in ways we had yet to comprehend. With cameras rolling, we grabbed our luggage and walked towards the exit. There was a group of people holding signs and one of them said "Ferguson," they were our Swedish relatives! Not more than an hour into our "Great Swedish Adventure" and we were able to meet a relative; we had all received a taste of the grand prize.

From Sigtuna to Söderköping to Motala

We filmed three episodes in the first nine days. Our journey took us from the church ruins of Sigtuna to the museums of Stockholm. We explored the fairy tale city of Söderköping and traveled by boat on the Göta Kanal to Motala where we dressed in traditional *folkdräkt* and marched in the National Day Parade!

I learned early in my journey that it was a lot more difficult than I thought it would be. I missed my family something terrible. I had a cell phone and all the advantages of modern technology; I couldn't even imagine how difficult it must have been for our ancestors. I thought about my third great-grandmother, Augusta Cederholm, leaving Sweden and wondered if she knew she would never see her sisters again when she said her goodbyes. It was a humbling experience.

To Stockholm and the Royal Wedding

From Motala we traveled to Stockholm where we had our first break. It was the weekend of the Royal Wedding: Princess Madeleine was marrying Christopher O'Neill. As Americans without a monarchy of our own, seeing a Royal Wedding Procession was quite the treat! It was during that weekend I received a call from the producers; they would pick me up on Monday for my "Special Day"!

My Special Day

As a contestant on *Allt för Sverige*, you never know where you are going, everything is a surprise! My relative at the airport, Sverker, was on my grandmother's side of the family. I was very surprised when we arrived in Varberg, Halland, where my grandfather's father (Algot Braddock Goodwin Dahlgren) had been born. We checked into the historic *Hotell Varberg* and I had some free time to experience the magic of Varberg on a summer night. As I walked through the city, I thought about my



The 2013 group in Motala on June 6 (Sweden's National Day). From left Lori Ferguson, John Stenson, Eric Basir, Michael Peterson, Shane Booth, Rebecca Redner, Matthew Anderson, Dawn Anderson, and Dianne Bennett. (Not in picture: Laura McIntyre.)

ancestors who had walked the same streets over 100 years before. I imagined they might have even stayed at that same hotel on one of their many trips.

The next morning the producers took me to a beautiful field full of wildflowers with a view of the sea! I opened my treasure chest filled with pictures, old documents, and a letter, and learned more about my grandfather's *farfar*, Frans Reinhold Dahlgren, and his wife, Anna Britta Andersdotter. Frans (known as Fred in the U.S.) was a dreamer and an entrepreneur. He had traveled to Braddock, Pennsylvania, in 1871, where he bought an inn he called "The Hotel Thierhorn"; he was rumored to have made the trip between Sweden and Pennsylvania 13 times. Sometimes he took his entire family, at other times he made the trip alone. Frans and Anna had lost several babies in Braddock to a disease that wasn't common in Sweden, so when they were expecting another child, they sold the business and returned to Varberg.

This was an exciting time in Varberg; it was a popular resort town and brought tourists from all over. Frans bought a large house named Ormanäs *Slott* and a nightclub and restaurant called *Pehrssonska trädgården*; it was said to be quite popular. Then

the economy, and perhaps new liquor laws, caused financial hardship. Frans was forced to file for bankruptcy. In the spring of 1908, at the age of 64, he returned alone to Braddock, Pennsylvania. His wife, Anna Britta, joined him a year later. Back in Braddock, Frans took a job as a night watchman for the local steel company. He was elderly and

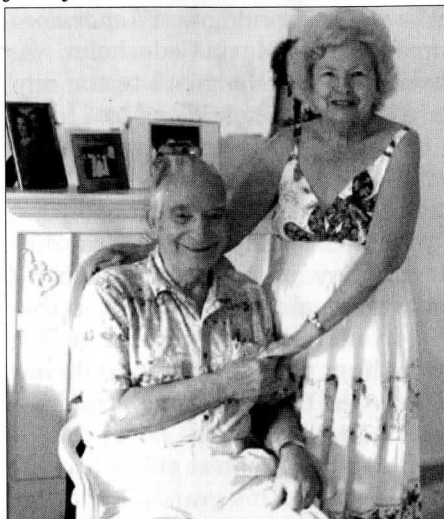


Anna and Frans Dahlgren with their daughters Emma, Matilda, and a third child, maybe Alma.

losing his vision and used to walk the train tracks back and forth to work. One fateful night in 1922, he died, killed by a train. Anna passed away soon after; they are buried with three of their children in Braddock Cemetery.

Our next stop was the Dahlgren farm where Frans had been born! Unfortunately, there isn't much that remains from my ancestor's time, but I was able to walk the grounds and had a nice talk with the current owners. It was simply amazing.

The previous year, 2012, had been a tough one. We lost Gram in July and Grandpa just a few months later. They were cremated and the majority of their remains had been



Allan and Marie Dahlgren, Grandpa and Gram.

interred, but I had two keepsake urns that held a small amount of their ashes, less than a quarter of a teaspoon. While there was one for each of them, the inner vials were the same, my grandparents were together. When I learned I was going to Sweden I knew what I had to do!

My grandpa and I had looked at pictures of Varberg and the harbor many times on the computer and I knew both of my grandparents would have loved to see it. With the historic fortress to my left, the *Kallbadhuset* (old bathhouse) and pier to my right, and sailboats out in the water as the sun set, I released my grandfather's vial of ashes in the water... I had taken my grandparents to Sweden.

Back to the group

We left Varberg early the next morning and drove to Norsesund station where I met my cast mates on the train. As we were driving I saw Nääs fabriker in Tollered, once the factories where my grandmother's farfar had been raised! After filming at Floda Station, a place that was familiar from an old family post card, we had lunch at Nääs Slott, where my grandmother's farfar's mor had worked as a maid! The time in Göteborg was special, three of my grandmother's grandparents had been born in Tollered and Hemsjö and I knew I had relatives close by.



The Dahlgren farm in Lindberg in Halland.

From Göteborg we went to Karlstad where we were able to tour with Donnez, a Swedish dance band. I think most of us agree it was one of our best nights as a group. Then we were off to one of my favorite places, Mora, in the heart of Dalarna. We toured the Anders Zorn Museum, were treated to traditional folk music, saw the Grannas Olsson factory in Nusnäs, and even painted our own Dala horses!

To Gotland

Our final destination was a *Stuga* at Tofta Beach on the island of Gotland.



The Gotland five: John, Lori, Rebecca, Michael, and Matthew.

Most of my ancestors came from countries on the Baltic Sea, and living so close to the beach in Florida, I felt like I had come full circle. I was a little nervous and wondered if this would be where my journey came to an end. Either way, I was going to enjoy each moment. Over the next few days we swam in the Baltic, explored the medieval city of Visby, and had our final team challenge, which my team won. I had just made the final four!

After four glorious days at the beach it was time for the finals. The pace was picking up now, as the final four begin a series of three individual challenges. We headed to Bungenäs on the northeast side of the island

and had our first of the competitions at an old limestone quarry. Somehow I managed to sneak into the third spot and I was safe! We spent the evening at a beautiful *stuga* on the coast of the sea where we made Swedish meatballs for our last dinner together. We talked about how Sweden had changed us, our favorite places, and what we would remember most. We had now spent more than a month together and were bonded by an experience that few could ever understand. It was a beautiful evening but also bittersweet as we knew it was coming to an end.

The following morning began with an early filming schedule. We had our last breakfast together, now down to three, and headed back to the quarry for the final two competitions. Until this point I had been safe, but I hadn't managed to place first in an individual challenge.

I won!

As luck would have it, it was finally my turn: I won *Allt för Sverige!* The next few hours went by like a dream. I was able to call home and share the news with my family, and was reunited with my final 4 cast mates. The show was pretty much a wrap; all that remained was the reunion. The entire production crew and the four remaining contestants boarded

the ferry for a late night return to Stockholm.

Meeting my family!

My family reunion was held in Skåne and was one of the most amazing days of my life, second only to the day I married my husband.

Sverker, my relative from the airport, was waiting for me with four other relatives when I arrived. Then I was told to "look up" and all of these wonderful people starting coming down the hill! More than sixty of my Swedish relatives, from both Grandma and Grandpa's side of the family, came out to celebrate with me. We enjoyed a wonderful lunch at Östarps *Gästivaregård* complete with *Spettekaka*, a traditional dessert from Skåne, and had some time to visit. Then, before I knew it, we had to leave.

My family reunion included the descendants of Augusta Cederholm's sisters, Elsa Catharina Cederholm (b. 1828 Knislinge, Skåne) and husband Per Thysell (b. 1828 Tryde, Skåne), and Mathilda Eleonora Cederholm (b. 1842 Harlösa, Skåne) and husband Fritz Engelgert Claesson (b. 1825 in Öved, Skåne). There were also descendants from August Larsson Olsson's sister Emma Christina Larsson (b. 1865 in Skallsjö, Västergötland) and her husband Henning

Johansson (b. 1868 in Skallsjö). On my Grandfather's side there were relatives who descend from Anna Britta Andersdotter's (married Frans Reinhold Dahlgren) 1st cousin, Johannes Larsson (b. 1837 in Söndrum, Halland). This side of the family is part of the Långarydssläkten, in the Guinness Book of World Records for being the largest charted family.

Knowing my relatives were still there having *Fika* without me was so difficult, but I had learned to trust production. Whatever plan they had made for me was going to be very special.

Our next, and final stop, was the Hunneberga Bed and Breakfast in Harlösa which now sits on the land where my grandmother's *mormor's mor*, Augusta Maria Cederholm, was born in 1844, 169 years to the day! As I stood in that field and looked out at the horizon it was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen – so breathtaking it brought tears to my eyes!

I had kept my second keepsake urn of my grandparents with me every step of the way. It was in that field I realized I didn't need it anymore; they would always be with me! I released the last of my grandparents' ashes.

One of the greatest gifts in my life was the love of my grandparents. My grandmother never knew Augusta



The family reunion.

other than through pictures and stories, but her love had lived on. Her spirit remained in the hearts of the people my grandmother had loved and lost, many years before. Leaving a part of them in this beautiful place where Augusta had grown up felt so incredibly right.

After the last scene had been taken and the crew was packing up, I turned the corner and there was Sverker; he was staying at the bed and breakfast with his wife! I had a few minutes so we walked over to an old stone building. Later, we learned it had been owned by our common ancestors, Magnus Cederholm and Maria Nilsson. Then it was time to leave, I gave Sverker and his wife one last hug, my journey had come full circle.

Only one of us could win the grand prize, however. I truly believe that all 10 of us were winners. The experience of discovering Sweden, the family history we've learned, and the relationships we've formed...this is the true gift of *Allt för Sverige*. The show is long over and that part of our journey is complete. But the true journey is only beginning, and will last a lifetime as we get to know and love our Swedish relatives.

More on Lori's ancestors

Augusta Maria Cederholm was born in Harlösa, Sweden. She immigrated in Oct. of 1890 with her four daughters, Maria Olsson (b. 1870 in Lund), Hedda Ingeborg (b. 1873 in Lund), Ella Elisabeth (b. 1875 in Lund), and Ebba Augusta (b. 1877 in Lund). Her son Emil Magnus (b. 1871 in Lund) had immigrated 2 years before, apparently to set up their home in Chicago, Illinois. Hedda Ingeborg died in Chicago in 1893 from tuberculosis. Maria Olsson (my 2nd Great Grandmother) died in 1896 from typhoid fever.

Algot Braddock Goodwin Dahlgren, born 7 Jan 1892 in Varberg, Halland, accompanied his mother in 1908, but returned to Sweden in 1911 and remained two years before he immigrated in 1913 and stayed here in the United States.

Both of my Grandmother's parents were first generation Swedish Americans, Ingeborg Olson was the daughter of Maria Olsson listed above, and Johannes Olofsson, known as John Olson in Chicago, born 1864 in Hemsjö, Västergötland, and immigrated to Chicago, IL in 1889. Her father, Ar-

thur Olsson, was the son of Sophia Olofsdotter, born 1866 in Hemsjö, Västergötland, and immigrated in 1891, and August Larsson Olsson, born 1867 in Tollered, Västergötland, who immigrated in 1891 to Newport, Rhode Island.

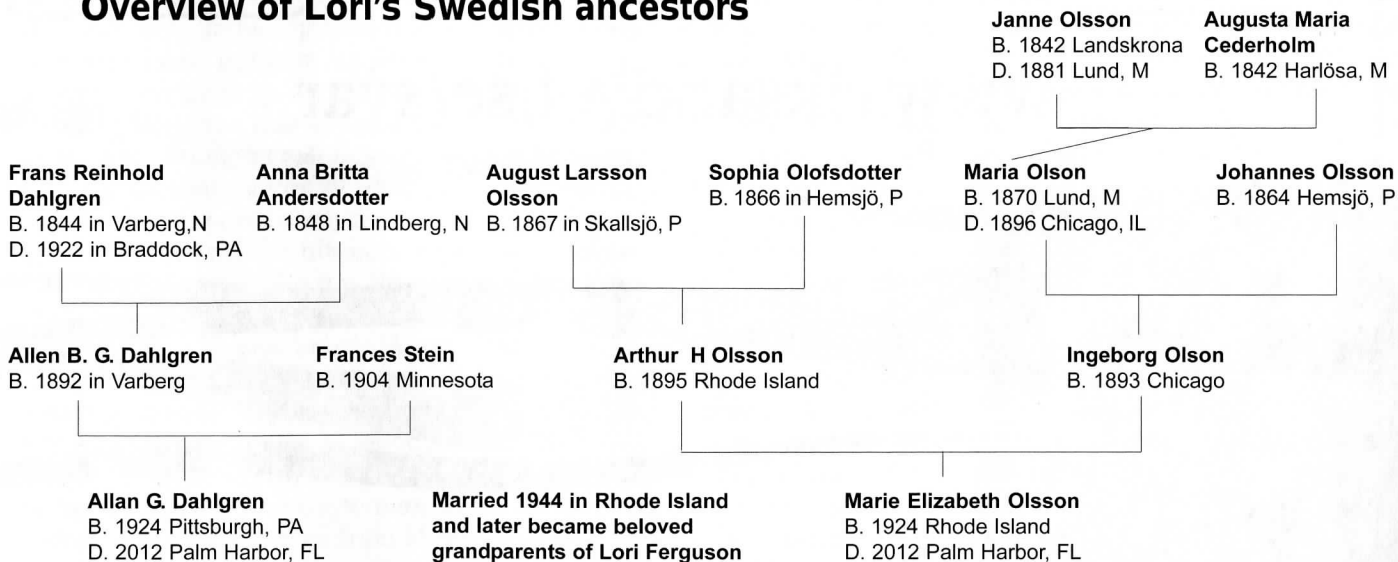


The Olson family in 1904 in Chicago. Augusta Cederholm Olson, with her family in Chicago.

From the left is Ebba (nee Jackson) Olson wife of son Emil Magnus Olson, daughter Ella (Olson) Oden with son Erik Oden, Augusta Cederholm, Ingeborg Olson (my great-grandmother), and standing in the back is Frank F. Roos, husband of daughter Ebba Augusta (Olson) Roos.

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Overview of Lori's Swedish ancestors



M = Malmhus county (now Skåne county); **N** = Halland county, **P** = Älvsborg county (now Västra Götaland)