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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Here you will find information about interesting books on the immigration experience, genealogical manuals, books on Swedish customs, and much more. We welcome contacts with SAG readers, suggestions on books to review perhaps. If you want to review a book yourself, please contact the Book Review Editor, Dennis L. Johnson, at <1_viking@verizon.net> or Dennis Johnson, 174 Stauffer Road, Bucktown Crossing, Pottstown, PA 19465, so he knows what you are working on.

Making money

A Matter of Trust, Taking a \$2 Stock to \$140,000, Glen R. Johnson, Keller Publishing.com, 2011, Hardcover, Illustrated, 450 pages, Amazon.com, \$16.50 plus shipping.

Of the hundreds of thousands of Swedes who immigrated to Minnesota and adjacent Midwestern states in the nineteenth century, a few achieved great success and recognition, but most lived hard lives. The generation of their children, (1880's to 1960's) also produced quite a few accomplished and successful people. Most have now passed on from this earth. Less well known are the accomplished and successful from the third generation who were born in the 1920's and 1930's, and are now mostly retired. This was the generation born into the Great Depression, experienced World War II and the era of great population growth of the 20th century. (Many fell in World War II or honored their country as part of "The Greatest Generation," so named by Tom Brokaw in his book). These folks, like most of their predecessors, lived successful but unremarkable lives which mostly shared in the growing prosperity of the latter part of the century. A significant number were able to become notably successful in their fields and accumulate substantial wealth or otherwise gain personal recognition.

One of those in the latter group is *Glen R. Johnson*, now retired in Florida, who rose from humble farm beginnings in Minnesota to achieve success through his energy, imagination, and hard work in his newspaper career and political activity in his early years, and later as an innovative executive of a small investment company to help it grow to a multi-billion dollar corporation. His personal memoir, *A Matter of Trust*, has recently been published to provide a chronicle of his life. His book is dedicated to his wife, children, and extended family, and his life story shows what perseverance, hard work, and a little bit of luck can do in achieving the American dream.

Glen Johnson was born May 2, 1929, on the family farm near Lake Lillian, Kandiyohi County, a small town not far from Willmar in west central Minnesota. He was an only child but born into a large household which included his parents, his grandparents, an aunt, an uncle, and a hired man. His grandfather, Anders Gustaf Johnson, born 1860, came to America at age 10 with his parents Lutter Jonas Jonsson and Brita Persdotter in 1873 from Gagnef, Kopparberg län (Dalarna). Gustaf also had three sisters and two brothers in the family group, their destination listed in *Emigranten* as Willmar, MN. Glen's grandfather Gustaf married Christine, also from Dalarna, in about 1885 and Gustaf and Christine continued to live on the family farm in Lake Lillian. Glen's father, Oscar Johnson, was born in 1902 and later married Ruth Anderson from Stillwater, MN. Glen's mother, whose

parents had come from Dalsland in 1858. Glen's parents Oscar and Ruth continued to live on the family farm and eventually took it over, enlarging the farm to some 800 acres.

Although farm life was hard during the Depression, Glen describes his early years with warmth and affection. He had to rise early for chores and worked hard as soon as he was able, while attending grade and high school, and relates many humorous and adventurous anecdotes. The Armistice Day Blizzard of Nov. 11, 1940, is recounted in detail, a storm which I remember as well from another part of Minnesota. Glen was good at baseball and other sports and even tried out for the St. Louis Cardinals in 1946 and 1947, but did not make the cut. (He saw that as fortunate, considering his subsequent career.) Glen's father encouraged him to stay on the farm, but he sought an education beyond high school. He enrolled at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, attending with many World War II veterans on the GI Bill. He needed a change, however, and after one year transferred to the Minnesota School of Business in Minneapolis. Living near the University of Minnesota, he often attended their football games.

While living in Minneapolis, Glen met and fell for a Lake Lillian girl, LaVonne Corley. Later that year they were married at the Grace Lutheran Church in Lake Lillian (referred to as "The Norwegian Church"). Glen's church was the Swedish Lutheran Church, at the other end of town. They lived for a time in LaVonne's parents' home, then moved to the



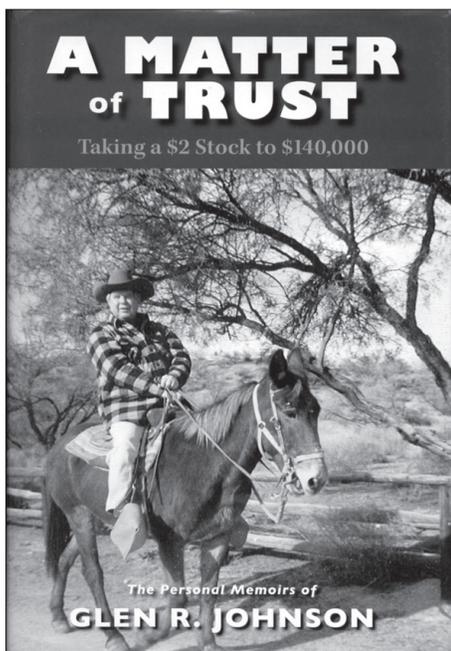
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summer kitchen on Glen's father's farm. He quickly realized that the farm would not support the people living on it unless he found other income. He soon had the idea to start a small newspaper and after several trial efforts, soon bought out an existing paper in the area, which he renamed the *Lake Lillian Crier*. This paper survived for some 12 years and, with other work and helping on the farm, supported Glen and his growing family. Their three children were born while Glen and LaVonne ran the newspaper.

Glen had early developed an interest in politics, writing editorials for his newspaper on many subjects, and working as precinct chairman in his own district. His instincts were strongly liberal, in spite of living in a conservative community, and his articles showed it. He began attend-

ing district and county meetings and assisted in campaigns in his district, learning many of the ins and outs of campaigning for office. He later ran Hubert Humphrey's campaign in his district, and got to know him personally. This led to an invitation to run for Minnesota State Chairman and contacts with many other state and national Democratic politicians, and to a job opening in Minneapolis as an area manager for the Savings Bond Program in Minnesota. His success in moving this program from last to first place among all state programs caused him to be appointed state director of the program.

Further success in this post caused Glen to be selected as national director of the Savings Bond program by 1967, and a move for his family to Washington, D.C. There his hard work and imagination caused the program to be greatly invigorated during his two years service. The election of Richard Nixon in 1968, however, meant he was replaced as a political appointee, and once again he was job hunting. Glen's many contacts in the banking business and elsewhere resulted in several job offers but with some negatives he did not like. After a short period with one credit card marketing company in



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New York, he received a job offer “out of the blue” from an investment company based in Pittsburgh, Federated Investors. He joined the firm to market a newly created government securities fund, based on his success in marketing savings bonds with the Treasury Department. This position, and his move to Pittsburgh, shaped his life from that time on. He had been incredibly successful as a salesman, and he applied the same creativity and energy to this new assignment. His new Money Market Fund rapidly expanded, increasing greatly in value to the benefit of Glen and other early investors. A major part of his book is devoted to describing his approach to managing and marketing this fund, primarily to the trust departments of banks around the nation. From the time the Government Bond Fund was created, in 1969, Federated Investors grew from about 78 million dollars in managed assets to nearly 400 billion dollars by 2009, through growth of funds and mergers and acquisitions.

This growth brought great wealth to Glen Johnson as well as the perquisites of a successful executive, including the use of a personal business jet aircraft at his disposal. As he approached retirement, he and his wife moved to and expanded a large home in Marcos Island, Florida. He did not forget his roots or his Lutheran faith, however, as he moved into philanthropic and charity activities. He has maintained and restored his family farm in Lake Lillian as a historic site, his wife’s family cabin in Stillwater, and has been a major benefactor to the First Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Thiel College (a Lutheran-related college in Green-

ville, PA), the University of Pittsburgh, and Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN. He and his wife have also assisted the Florida Gulf Coast University, the Chautauqua Institution in Jamestown, NY, and the Seacrest Country Day School in Naples, FL. Glen has also served as chairman or director of Thiel College, Boston University’s Morin Center, Swedish Council of America’s Royal Round Table, Abraxas Group, Inc, LCA Board of Pensions, and Gustavus Adolphus College. He has also been the recipient of many awards and honors from these and other organizations.

Glen Johnson attributes most of his success to his exceptional skills as a salesman, inspiring confidence in others to invest in his products and marketing them with imagination and integrity. The salesman in him is somewhat rare in the mostly reticent and reserved Swedish Americans of his generation, but he seems to have been gifted with an unusually high level of skills in this realm. His memoir includes in the appendix testimonials from half a dozen prominent friends and associates who state their admiration of his unique skills and success in the investment field and in his leadership in philanthropic activities.

Glen Johnson does not dwell in the book about his family life, but does include many photographs and anecdotes about his own family and his extended family of relatives and in-laws. His life was not without pain; of his three children, two were tragically victims of chronic diseases in mid-life, his youngest daughter Lori to cancer and his son David to liver failure. He and LaVonne now enjoy six grandchildren of varying ages. He also recounts several adventures in his life, including learning to fly, vacation trips in a travel trailer with his young family, a trip to Sweden to hunt ancestors, his activities in owning several “collector

cars” in Florida, and even brief descriptions of the many secretaries he had over the years. He even confesses that his many years as a liberal came to an end by 2000, when Al Gore was nominated for President. He felt “his party had left him” and he became a conservative.

His has been a rich and full life for this descendant of poor Swedish immigrants in Minnesota. His book will be an invaluable resource for his family and later descendants as well as an inspiring story for many readers. Many family and business photographs and other illustrations are included to help tell his story, and the book is well organized and supplemented with appendices relating to his life. The book is an excellent example of a personal memoir although one need not be unusually wealthy and successful to undertake such a task. It would be desirable if all seasoned citizens would write their own memoir as a gift to their own family and descendants. They could then be better known to their descendants as a person, and just not names, dates, and places on their family tree. And for historians, the time covered by such a memoir gives a valuable picture of the attitudes and conditions shaping the lives of those that experienced them.

Dennis L. Johnson

(Note; the subject of this review is not related to the Book Review Editor).

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Book Reviews



Island life in Sweden

Rose in the Sand by Julie Catterson Lindahl. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011. 244 pp. Amazon.com \$15.79.

Julie Catterson Lindahl is an American living in Sweden. *Rose in the Sand* is her uniquely personal voyage of discovery – of nature, of the ways of a new and different society, and above all, of herself. She presently describes herself as an author, columnist, and social entrepreneur. In her biographical note she explains how in 2000 she and her Swedish husband Claes decided to “take a temporary break from their safe, urban existence to try life with their small twins on an island in the Nordic wilderness.”

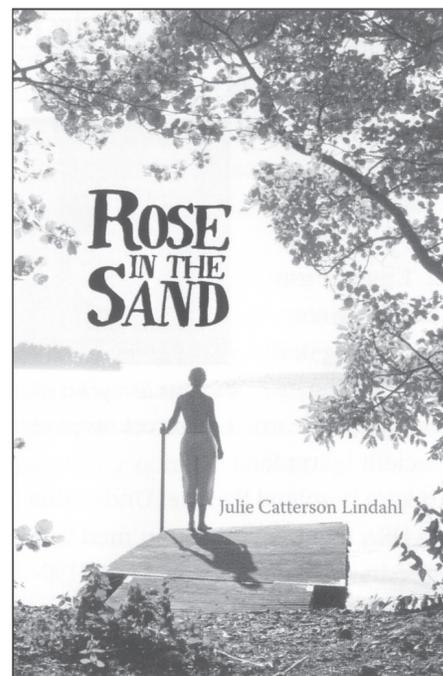
Up to that time, Julie had lived a highly cosmopolitan, big-city life on the fast track in many countries in different parts of the world. She was the daughter of sophisticated and widely travelled parents, had gotten her B.A. in English literature at Wellesley College, and her Master’s degree in International Relations at Oxford. This was followed by successful career in the international corporate world. Although she does not discuss in depth the motives behind the decision to move to a remote island on Lake Mälaren (which she does not name), they were clearly those that inspired Henry David Thoreau to move out into the woods to Walden Pond in Massachusetts in 1854, he wrote “to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life . . .”

For Claes, this environment was not unfamiliar. On the island his grandfather had built his country get-away, which he had often visited as a boy, and in which the family now set up housekeeping. But for Julie and the small twins, it was all new.

What was intended to last only a year turned out to be a decade. Swedes traditionally break down the four basic seasons of the year into eight mini-seasons, such as “spring-winter,” “spring,” “pre-summer,” and the like, each only a few weeks long. This seasonal succession, each with its distinctive natural characteristics, provides the framework for Julie’s account of her family’s life on the island.

The account begins in “pre-autumn” with Julie standing alone with her thoughts on their boat landing in the rain. She reflects that up to now her life had been spent “in the pursuit of someone else’s dream, on a horizon far away from my own.” She realizes that although daunting, this move to the island was the “precondition for something strong and authentic to be born.”

The chapters following describe the Lindahl family’s Spartan – but not always so simple – life on the island and their neighbors there and on the nearby rural mainland, especially those who like themselves lived there year-round. They become intimately familiar with the nature that surrounds them, which they discover is not always so benign. Every living thing consumes other species and is, in turn, part of the natural food chain. There are dangers as well and some truly dramatic incidents, such as when Julie, returning from town by night, is blown adrift in a fierce winter storm, unable to start the motor in her boat. Altogether, she is remarkably courageous and determined to fit into her new environment. At the same time, she learns much about traditional Swedish customs and ways of thinking,



away from cosmopolitan Stockholm.

Rose in the Sand is a delight to read. Julie Lindahl writes beautifully, combining specific detail with sensitive, lyrical descriptions of the surrounding nature during the constantly shifting seasons, together with her own reflections of life. At times her prose is truly poetic.

After ten years, the family returns to urban life on the outskirts of Stockholm. Again, the reasons are not explained, but it would seem that the demands of practical life caught up with them. Julie, nonetheless, ends her account with the realization that “I need not fear that I would lose the person I had become during these island years. She had always been me.”

H. Arnold Barton



Merry Christmas!

Book Reviews



Survive in Sweden

Culture Shock Sweden! A Survival Guide to Customs & Etiquette, by Charlotte Rosen Svensson, Marshall Cavendish Corporation, Tarrytown, NY, 260 pages, 2009, 4th Ed, softcover, illustrated, Amazon.com, \$11.96 plus shipping.

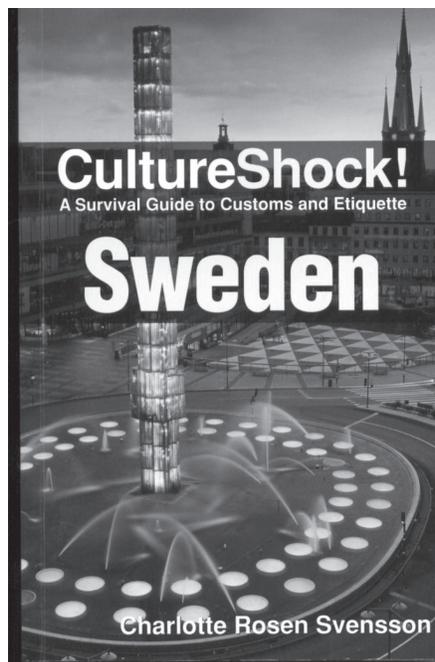
One of several travel guides for Sweden, this book appears to be aimed at the traveler who plans to live in Sweden for a time but is still useful for those planning a first visit or tour. The book is one of a series now numbering nearly sixty to date on various other countries, written by those who have lived in the countries for a considerable time. The author was born in the U.S. but taken to Sweden as a child. After she married, she and her husband, Bengt, moved to Sweden and lived and worked there for some years, so they have almost the experience of the native Swede plus the experience of living or working in a different country and becoming familiar with the customs and language.

In the opening chapter, the author briefly gives an overall view of the nation, touching on the regions of Sweden, climate, lakes and waters, history, the political system, religion, the love of nature, the flag, and the efforts to protect the environment. The Swedish people are described next, various age groups and sexes, the Royal Family, and immigration into Sweden.

Successive chapters touch on so-

cializing with Swedish friends, co-workers, and acquaintances, the process of settling in, differences in lifestyles, dealing with invitations, and entertaining friends. Help is there on finding a place to live, entering the Swedish registration and health care system, banks and money, telephone communication, traveling around, shopping, clothing, and many other aspects of living in Sweden. Useful tips such as the Swedish inclination for promptness, not pushing friendships too fast but letting them occur naturally, doffing shoes in visiting most homes, and avoiding overly opinionated discussions until you know a person very, very well.

An entire chapter is devoted to dining out, how to approach a *Smörgåsbord*, habits with regard to coffee or tea, shopping for foods, alcohol and social drinking, fishing, hunting, and picking of wild foods. For those who are inclined to sports, the outdoor life, self-improvement, the fine arts, and local travel, there is a chapter which outlines resources available and methods for taking advantage of them.



This is Sergel's Square in downtown Stockholm.

Engaging the Swedish language is addressed in some detail. Learning the language, including body language, is described, with tips on Swedish grammar, useful phrases, and difficulties in learning the correct usages. Differences in the use of terms for days, time, and numbers and many useful abbreviations help the reader with many of the practical aspects of learning to function in Sweden.

If you plan to do business in Sweden, there are descriptions of the economy and industry, working hours, vacations and leisure time, Swedes at work, and even finding work as an immigrant (not easy). If you plan to start your own business, there are tips included for that, too, and even for becoming involved in the many types of volunteer work available in Sweden.

A final chapter includes a review of Sweden at a glance, a culture quiz, a list of dos and don'ts, a glossary and resource guide, and suggestions for further reading. A complete index helps the reader find information quickly. The author grew up and was educated in the U.S., Germany, and Scotland, then lived and worked in many countries such as Australia, Hong Kong, and London. Later Charlotte married a Swede she met in Bangkok. She returned to Sweden to live with her husband and children, now living in a small town on the west coast. A stated ambition is to learn to correctly pronounce the 'sj' sound in Swedish, as it is pronounced on the west coast!

This inexpensive guide is recommended for the visitor, but is an especially useful guide to anyone who is not Swedish but may be moving to Sweden to live for a time, or may be transferred there by one of our many international corporations. And it is of interest to many Americans who just wish to know a little more about modern Sweden and its people.

Dennis L. Johnson