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Fran Paulson

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The staff at the SAG Workshop

The staff members are scrutinized by a group member

Continued from SAG 4/04

By FRAN PAULSON

The members of the staff of the SAG Workshop are an interesting group. Elisabeth and Ulla come from Sweden, Priscilla from Minnesota, Jill from Swenson Center and Nils William's son Chris and daughter Karna from Maine. They are cheerful, always ready to answer a question or point one in the right direction. They are so knowledgeable and helpful that others, not just our group, often try to take advantage of their expertise. There's often a lineup of people waiting for an answer when you arrive at their desk but it is best to stay put and wait. If you leave hoping to return when the line is shorter you are likely to find it is even longer.

Elisabeth Thorsell became interested in genealogy in the 1960's and being a researcher at heart she read everything she could find about it. That led her to Nils William and his writings about Swedish American genealogy. She wrote him and eventually met him when he came to Sweden on one of his genealogical trips; he invited her to come to the U.S. to help with the workshops. When he had to stop traveling in 1998 and daughter Karna took over the workshops, Elisabeth stayed on to help. Each year more and more Swedish civil records are being put on CD's and Elisabeth brings the newest ones. This makes it easier to continue your search after the Parish

records end. When those you are searching for haven't made the list yet, Elisabeth just smiles and says, "Maybe next year."

Ulla Sköld comes with her husband *Daniel* to help her shirt-tail cousin, Karna. She's a wiz at deciphering flashy Swedish writing that Jill and the rest of us find impossible. Ulla reads the unreadable and then will add a bit more to the telling. When she reads they were "very poor" you can almost feel the pain. If it reports the person is "very weak" or was given "communion at home," Ulla will say the person is at death's door and suggest you look in the *Död-boken*. Daniel, her husband, can also read the words but then you miss the



The SAG staff escaping from the group and sneaking a cup of coffee at Borders. From left: Priscilla Sorknes, Ulla Sköld, Elisabeth Thorsell, Chris and Karna Olsson, and Jill Seaholm. October 2001.

drama Ulla adds. He and Karna's husband, Phil, always plan an exploration. This year they took off for Las Vegas leaving their wives to answer our questions.

Priscilla Sorknes started as a language buff and indirectly that led her to genealogy. In 1968 she was in Germany studying language and while on break she decided to visit Norway. She found the farm where her ancestors had lived and she wanted to find out more. When visiting with one of the locals she was shown a book on Norwegian farms; she coveted it but was told that it was out of print and unavailable. Her host, "out of the goodness of his heart", offered to sell her his; he would get a new one when and if they reprinted it. Priscilla bought the well-used book and found pages torn and missing; the gentleman bought a brand new book in a few months. But that old book piqued her interest and she has been a genealogy maven ever since. In 1986 Priscilla traveled to Norway with a genealogy group that included Nils William. They spent two weeks traveling together, exchanging philosophies, and admiring each others interest in genealogy. Later, Nils William asked her to help with his workshops and she joined the staff in 1993; she's been helping ever since. In recent years, Priscilla's husband, a retired Lutheran minister, *Earl Grefsrud*, has been accompanying her to the workshops. He loves resale shops and finds them a cheap source for the books he reads while Priscilla helps the confused. This year he had to search the shops for more than books; Priscilla's walking stick was left behind in their Minneapolis garage.

Jill Seaholm first came to the SAG workshop as a participant in 1993; in 1994 Nils William asked her if she would help and she's been doing that ever since. Jill is a graduate of Augustana College in Scandinavian Studies and started working at the Swenson Center in 1992. Before that she worked as a travel agent and helped in her family's stained glass business. Jill says her job is being a tutor, giving basic instructions, and

says she spends most of her time explaining how to do things. One thing she doesn't try to do is read the florid and curvaceous writing on those church records; she leaves that to Elizabeth, Priscilla, and Ulla. Jill brings a computer and several CD's from the Swenson Center with her; they often come to the rescue when facts elude the seeker. Her husband, *David Garner*, likes to accompany Jill to these workshops when he can. He's been known to help confused souls make peace with a computer and he mans the cameras when everyone lines up for the group shot.

Chris Olsson, Nils William's son and Karna's "baby brother" had no interest in genealogy. He knew his father was considered an expert but paid little attention. He was drafted when Nils William had to stop conducting the SAG workshop. Karna took over and she needed help. Chris says, "I don't consider myself a genealogist but I can read Swedish." Reading Swedish is a plus but it isn't everything; sometimes Chris struggles to decipher those records before sending the questioner to Elisabeth, Ulla, or Priscilla. Chris says his father imbued him with a love for all things Swedish and he has found that sharing this with others is a satisfying thing. Today it takes two Olssons, Karna and Chris, to carry on the work of their father.

Karna Olsson is den mother, the guiding light, the coordinator, mother confessor, handholder, problem solver and anything else she needs to be. Karna is there when a participant needs an extra pillow, recommendation of a place for dinner, and to issue a reminder about making a reservation for the airport shuttle. But she didn't get involved this year when the water line broke and noisy plumbers kept Jill awake all night. Karna reads Swedish but like Jill and Chris there are times when she too has to send for the experts and the last word.

I find it interesting to ask each of our experts the same question; the answers are always individualistic, each one puts their own spin on it. Afterwards I pick the one that ap-

peals to me and will make the best story. Genealogy can really be fun when you do it with this incredible group of people.

Fran Paulson lives in Chicago and can be contacted by e-mail: <FCPaulson@aol.com>



Fran Paulson. 2003.

News from Salt Lake City

According to information discussed on the mailing-list of the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG), representatives of the Family History Library are now scanning documents, instead of filming them. They have recently been working in the collections of an historical society in Ohio, scanning funeral home records and several other types of records. It seems that the records are scanned at a very high resolution, so the sharpness will be exceptional.

This is still a test going on, so it will be quite some time before one can find scanned records in Salt Lake City.