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The Story of a Box

Another story that proves that this is a small world

BY HELENE LEAF

Recently my husband and I traveled for two weeks in Sweden which is the ancestral home for both of us. Our journey took us to Norra Solberga parish in Jönköpings län which is where my Dad was born in 1902.

There with the guidance of a local genealogist, *Willy Gustafsson*, I was able to see and visit the places from my Dad's childhood. The house where he had lived (Nydalen) had been moved, and there was now a gravel pit in the spot where once three houses (Nydalen, Nyholm, and Katrineholm) had stood, houses that my grandparents and great-grandparents and some other relatives had lived in.

We toured the Norra Solberga church for which my grandfather, *Marcus Pettersson*, had been the *byggmästare* [master builder] when it had been built 1898-1902. That was certainly a thrill. It was also moving to see the places and see the names of these places that had been part of my Dad's early life and that of his family in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The last place we stopped at with Willy was the house at Lilla Fågelhult. Why this is meaningful probably can best be explained by the following story written by *Henry Rydell* in 1967 in Swedish and attached to the bottom of a wooden box.

A translation:

"In the year 1884 tenant farmer Claes August Rydell sold his farm in Norra Solberga parish to church builder Marcus Petersson. Peterson

was a nephew through his wife Britta Lovisa Marcusdotter and also a son-in-law of C. A. Rydell's brother, the tailor Carl Johan Peterson from cottage Nyholm, Norra Solberga parish, through his marriage with Hanna L. Carlsdotter. Because of the difficult economic conditions for Marcus Petersson, the farm went back to the previous owner. During the short time that Marcus Petersson owned the farm, he had, with the aid of his father-in-law, chopped down some of the farm's trees to build a new farm house for his family. C. A. Rydell then sold the farm to builder Holm in Eksjö, and according to "Calle in Nyholm," Rydell took the cut timber by train to Motala, where he used it to construct a new farm house on that land which he had bought in

Holms Norrgård in Motala.

"These proceedings brought on a quarrel between the brothers C.A. Rydell and C. J. Peterson and the quarrel remained unresolved, most likely because of the great distance between Norra Solberga and Motala.

"In the fall of 1967 the farm house on Holms Norrgård was torn down by the new owners – Motala City – and the undersigned, grandson of C.A. Rydell, salvaged some of the wood and from some of the lumber made four jewelry boxes. On Josef Furhammar's – a grandson of the tailor C.J. Peterson – 75th birthday, the 17th of December 1967, two of these boxes were handed over as a gift in the relative's name, that these boxes must be given by him as an in-



Lilla Fågelhult, Norra Solberga, September 2004.

heritance to sons Sten and Leif Furhammar. The two other boxes shall be given as an inheritance to my two children Birgitta and Bo Rydell. These two sibling pairs, who are also second cousins, must take good care of the inherited property and let it go further in coming generations to the oldest of the family line, and the box, made from wood from Lilla Fogelhult, must always recall about the bonds of relatives which bind these four family lines to the two Småland brothers. “*Tidevarv, tidevarv försvinna, släkten följa släktens gång*’. Motala the 16th of December 1967.”

Henry Rydell

The two brothers, Carl Johan Pettersson and Claes August Rydell, never spoke to one another for the rest of their lives. Carl Johan Pettersson died in 1904 in Norra Solberga, and Claes died in 1920 in Fivelstad, Östergötland.

Their children and grandchildren had maintained some contact over the years both in Sweden and the U.S., through letters and through visits in both countries. Marcus Pettersson (my grandfather) immigrated to Chicago, Illinois, in 1902 and changed his last name to *Norlin*. His wife and children followed over the next 14 years. Marcus himself never returned to Sweden, but some of his children went back to visit.

The Family Tree

Long ago I had received a family tree that had been made by H. Rydell in 1967. I did not know who this man was, but in 2002 I had written to two men named Henry Rydell in Östergötland hoping that I would be able to connect with the right Henry Rydell.

At that time, Henry's health was not good so he was unable to answer me, but his son Bo did write back and when my sister and husband were in Motala that summer, they visited with Bo and his family and received some written information about the box. It was in Swedish and not translated until after they arrived home. Until 2002 I had known

nothing about the boxes.

From some family letters I had known that my grandfather had had some dealings about Lilla Fågelhult, but he and his family never moved there. Before this new information, Lilla Fågelhult was going to be one of those mysteries that some day I would unravel. Now some of those letters made more sense.

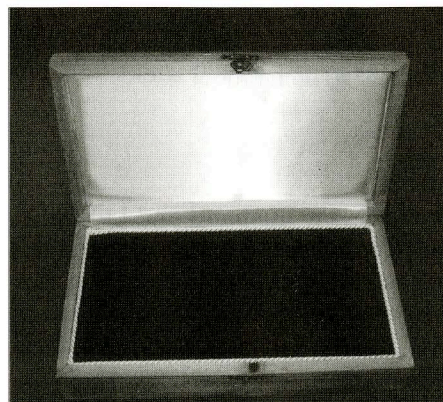
To Sweden

Before I left for Sweden in September 2004, I knew something about the boxes, and I knew where two of the boxes were, with Bo and Birgitta Rydell. When I was planning my trip to Sweden, I thought that I would like to see one of these boxes. I decided to contact the children of Josef. My only problem was that I did not know the names of these people. I knew what Josef's birth name was, but when I met him in 1960, he had not used the Carlsson name. Siblings and cousins could not remember the name either, but eventually it came to me - *Furhammar*. From there it was easy. There are only 29 Furhammars in the Swedish telephone directory. Several letters to Furhammars in Sweden produced two answers and I had the right people. On our journey in Sweden we visited Leif Furhammar and his wife Bar-

bro in Stockholm and Sten Furhammar and his wife Britta in Borås.

The BOX

At both places we saw the BOX and Leif gave me his box. I was thrilled to have this remembrance of my grandfather and of Sweden.

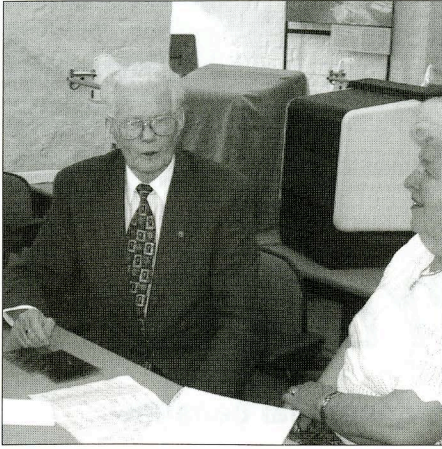


Henry Rydell

Henry Rydell was very interested in genealogy. In 1972 he came to an I.O.G.T. conference in the U.S. At that time he also visited relatives in Massachusetts and the Norlin (Pettersson in Sweden) relatives in the Chicago area. He presented a fifth box to my Uncle Oscar who has since died and the whereabouts of that box is unknown. Before he came to the U.S.,



Front: Barbro Furhammar, Helene Leaf with the Box, Leif Furhammar. Back: John Leaf, husband of Helene.



Henry Rydell at the Landsarkivet i Vadstena. (Photo: E. Thorsell).

Henry had visited Norra Solberga and places and people familiar to the Marcus Pettersson family (now using the name Norlin). He visited Lilla Fågelhult. This is what he said about it in 1972, "*I Fogelhult är allt sig likt - den grå ladugårdslängan var gråare än tidigare - och mangårdsbyggnaden som Din far planerade bygga om står där så vacker i dalen med körsbärsträden omkring, och är nu sommarbostad för syskonen Rolf.*"¹ And the houses where the Marcus Pettersson family (Nydalen) and Carl Johan Petterson (Calle in

Nyholm) lived were gone as Henry noted, "*Men skogen börjar att växa upp vid husgrunden där 'Calle och Lotta' i Nyholm verkade och levde, och naturen tränger även fram och vill återerövra marken kring Ert hem - sedermera Ranglaryds skolhus. Men minnen sveper fram bland buskar, träd och blommor!*"²

In 2004 Lilla Fågelhult is still there and looking very nice. There is a big gravel pit where Nydalen, Nyholm, and Katrineholm had been. Nydalen was used as Ranglaryd's school from 1918 until 1948 and then it was moved to Eksjö, place unknown. Perhaps that is a riddle for the next trip to Sweden.³

1 From a letter written in Motala by Henry Rydell to Esther Norlin, July 27, 1972.

Translation 1: Everything is the same in Fogelhult – the gray barn is grayer than before – and the farm house that your father wanted to renovate sits there so beautiful in the valley surrounded by cherry trees and is now a summer home for the Rolf siblings.

2 Ibid.

Translation 2: The woods have begun to grow on the house site where Calle and Lotta worked and lived and nature even crowds and recaptures the land around your home – nowadays Ranglaryd's school house. But memories sweep through amongst the bushes, trees, and flowers!

3 Editor's note: A local historian in Eksjö, *Elisabeth Leek*, through her contacts found out that Ranglaryd school was closed down in 1948. Some time later the house was torn down and the lumber was used to renovate a house called Fridhemsberg, at Fridhemsbergsvägen 15 in Eksjö. It is now said to be a typical Swedish yellow house with lots of white trimmings (*snickarglädje*).

Re *Henry Rydell*; he was a good friend of the editor's and this article was a nice way of remembering him.

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