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Anna Märta's Story

Emelia Thunander Nordling*

Editor's note: I am indebted to Wayne Ohlsson of Salt Lake City, Utah, who brought this story to my attention. He provided me photocopies of three separate documents—a one-page, hand-written announcement that begins with the phrase “Open Calling;” a four-page, typewritten manuscript with the title “Anna Martha’s Story” and the notation “written by Emelia Thunander Nordling;” and an article from an unidentified Swedish newspaper with no byline entitled “Anna Märta’s egen berättelse” (Anna Märta’s Own Story). Wayne received this material from Lettie Thunander Sartorelli of Gaastra, Michigan.

The following translation of an introductory paragraph in the newspaper article provides some valuable background information: “A granddaughter of...Kristian Lund [Anna Märta’s father], Mrs. Christine White of Iron River, Michigan, brought this interesting document [the one-page, “Open Calling” document] when she visited her cousin, Mrs. Anne Marie Gullberg, in Undersåker last summer. Christine’s father, Lars Lund, who was married to Marta Johnsdotter, immigrated to Michigan, U.S.A., in 1924. It was Lars Lund’s sister, Anna Märta, who got lost by Åreskutan, but was found again after seven days of wandering in the forest. As an adult, she also immigrated to Michigan. She had married before she emigrated. Anna Märta’s daughter, Mrs. Emelia Thunander Nordling, tells about the family’s difficult life as pioneers in a short biography about her mother. It ends with her mother’s own story about the dangerous adventure in her childhood.”

It appears as though the four-page, typewritten manuscript, which is reproduced below, was the basis for the Swedish newspaper article and not an English translation of it. A figure and footnotes have been added by me to supplement the original manuscript.

oOo

My mother was a brave and kind woman who worked hard all her life until she died at the age of sixty-two. She was born in Sweden and lived there until she had married my father and had two small children. When my sister and brother were one and three years of age, respectively, they decided to come to America, the golden land of opportunity. They traveled third class, and my mother and both children were sick all the way across the ocean.

They came to friends in Northern Michigan and lived for a short while in Stambaugh, where my brother Edwin was born. They soon moved to Bates and settled on a forty-acre tract of forest land. Living was hard and it took many

* Emelia Thunander was born in May 1906 in Bates, Michigan, the daughter of Emil Thunander and Anna Märta (Martha) Kristiansdotter Lund.

hours to clear the land and make a small farm. For the immigrants, who could not speak the language, it was not the good life they had hoped to find.

They were used to hard work, so as the years went by, they tilled the land and raised their four children. I was born a few years after they had moved to Bates. When they reached middle age and the children were grown and married, the Depression hit us all. It was shortly after Franklin Roosevelt became president that she was taken ill with her last illness. Conditions were getting better and she would have had a time of easier living, but she did not live to enjoy it.

During the winter of her last illness she wrote the true story of her seven days on the mountain near her home in Sweden. She said she had no legacy to leave us but she had had one experience during her childhood that few people could match. This story will keep her memory alive with each telling, from one generation to the next. This is her story.

Anna Märta's Story

I was only seven years old on the September afternoon when I disobeyed my mother, disrupted the whole neighborhood, and caused my parents seven days and nights of fear and anxiety. We lived on a small farm in Fröån, Sweden, near the mountain of Åreskutan. The men had to go far off in the woods to work so the women and children took care of the cattle and the other chores.

The farms were small and pasture space was limited, so during the summer and fall the cattle were taken up on the mountainside to graze. Usually two women and some of the children would stay right there with them. They would stay in a small shelter and make cheese from the milk. During the day the children would stay with the cattle while they grazed near the mountain. Sometimes they would be near the edge of our little farm and I would beg my mother to let me go and watch them.

On this certain afternoon in September of the year eighteen hundred and seventy nine, I was again asking my mother if I could go for a little while. I ran to the edge of the clearing, but was soon playing with the calves and the children on the other side of the fence. When I saw that the herd had moved some distance away from where we had been at first, I knew I had better run home before my mother would start worrying about me. I started back but soon came to a fork in the road and did not know which trail to take. I decided on one path, which soon dwindled to nothing, and I knew I was lost. I suppose I panicked and ran until I was exhausted. I soon lost the wooden shoes that were tied to my feet.

I remember quite clearly the first night, but after that the days and nights were one continuous nightmare of running and crying and falling down exhausted and sleeping wherever I fell. The first night I still had hopes of being found or finding my way home. I finally came to two big rocks, crawled between them, and laid down. It was cold and I wasn't dressed for the night chill, but I remember dreaming that my father came and covered me with his *päls*, which was a coat made of bearskin. I felt warmer then and slept until morning.

Fröån

| Personens namn, födelseort, yrke och näringsfång (bäckstuga, inhyses- och fattighuset), nationalitet (om främmande), lyra (orangeblå, blå, röd, vit, svart) | Födelse- | | Ålder | | Äkt. | Barn | Andra |
|---|-----------|-----------|-------|-------|-----------|------|-------|
| | År | Månad | År | Månad | | | |
| <i>M. Olofson Sundt Sr.</i> | | | | | | | |
| <i>Anna Krista Eriksdotter Hellberg</i> | <i>77</i> | | | | <i>77</i> | | |
| <i>Arb. Kristina</i> | <i>77</i> | <i>12</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Arb. Kristian Sundt</i> | <i>77</i> | <i>5</i> | | | <i>77</i> | | |
| <i>Arb. Barbro Persdotter</i> | <i>77</i> | <i>10</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Arb. Anna Märta</i> | <i>78</i> | <i>15</i> | | | | | |
| <i>J. Lars Johan</i> | <i>78</i> | <i>15</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Lars</i> | <i>78</i> | <i>27</i> | | | | | |

Fig. 1. Portion of page 208 of the household examination roll for Åre Parish (1876-1884). Here we find listed at Fröån the Arb[etare] Kristian Lund, his wife Barbro Persdotter, and their three children—Anna Märta, Lars Johan, and Lars.

I woke up very hungry but there were no berries left and I couldn't find anything else to eat. There were days when I couldn't find water, and I chewed on bark and leaves. It is strange that I did not get poisoned but nature must protect little lost children in the forest. There were wolves and big brown bears in the woods, but I did not see them. One night I thought I heard someone calling and I tried to answer but I couldn't seem to make them hear me. It may have been a dream but it could have been some of the many groups of people who were looking for me.

Meanwhile, people from miles around dropped their work and came to join in the search for the little lost girl, but as day after day went by without finding me, they almost gave up hope of ever finding me alive. But they did not give up

the search.¹ In those days people were superstitious and there were some that were said to have a sort of sixth sense. These people seemed to be able to predict happenings and even cure a person of a sickness, although he may be many miles away.

As a last resort, someone suggested going to see one of these men who lived in another township. Mr. Lofberg, a neighbor, offered to go.² When he reached the home of Mårten in Halabacken, he was astonished to hear that the man already knew the reason for his coming. Mårten said to him, "So you have come. Well, you could just as well give up the search for the girl, because you will not find her that way. She is alive and safe and will come out by herself near Fäviken. It will not be long now."

Mr. Löfberg brought back the message, but my parents found little comfort in it because they could not believe that I could live that long in the forest without food. However, they did not give up the search and still continued to pray for my safe return.

The strange thing is that it happened just as the man had promised. Near noon of the seventh day I came upon a path that looked as if it had been recently used. I followed it and soon heard cowbells, and then came to a herd of cows with their attending children. They called to their mother, "Here she is; here is the little girl from Fröån who has been lost."

The mother ran out, picked me up and carried me into the shelter and immediately sent someone to the nearest farm to give out the good news to my parents. It took quite a while to get the news to my parents as I had come out of the woods twelve miles from my home and had probably run hundreds of miles. They still did not believe that I was alright until they saw me. People had been warned that if I was found they were not to give me a big meal even though they knew that I was starved, but I remember thinking it was terrible that these people would not give me more than some warm milk when I was so hungry.

My father came to get me as soon as he could get there, and I think there were no happier people in the world that night than my parents, knowing that their little Anna Martha was safe at home with them. It took many weeks before I was completely well as my feet were raw and swollen and I was thin and weak from the ordeal. The memory of those seven days has never left me; it is as fresh in my mind as if it were yesterday.

¹ The following urgent message was apparently sent through the villages surrounding Fröån: "Open Calling / As the Fröån crofter Kristian Lund's little daughter, 7 years old, disappeared from her home last Friday evening by going into the forest and getting lost and searches have been conducted ever since the first evening by available people from Fröån, and today with reinforcement from the villages east of the church, but still not finding the lost child, people living in the area from Edsåsen to Hålland shall send one person from each household to report to the mentioned Kristian Lund in Fröån to participate in the search. This order is conveyed from man to man without interruption so that it will reach the households as quickly as possible and nobody who lives in the area may neglect this calling, which is our inescapable duty to report to the above-mentioned place as soon as possible to take part in the search for the lost child. / Åre and Fröån, 12 September 1879. / This calling may also be taken to Fröån and given to Kristian Lund." - Translated from the original handwritten document, which was too dark to be suitable for publication.

² This individual was most likely *arbetare* Erik Andersson Löfberg (b. 1836) who was living at Fröån with his wife and six children. - Household Examination Roll, Åre, Af:10, 1876-84, p. 209.