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## To our father, Nils William Olsson

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# To our father, Nils William Olsson

We have known you Dad, as a remarkable person pursuing a higher purpose for a long time (in fact, all of our lives!). So we are pleased to have this opportunity to step back and recognize how special you have been in our lives. During this time we have seen you in many different ways. You have lived in various places. You have performed in different jobs. Despite the variety of locations and occupations, you have persisted with that one passion for discovering more about Swedish immigrant history.

As we understand it, you became interested in Swedish family history long before we were around. This interest just grew stronger and stronger, as you immersed yourself in the archives, as you spent hours viewing microfilms, as you typed at your desk the thousands of 5 x 8 cards of people's biographical histories.

As children we were told of our ancestors, where they had lived and what they had done. We took for granted everyone knew about their ancestors. As children we learned words like passenger lists, church records, archives, and microfilms as other children learned the words TV or potato chips. Again we assumed everyone knew these words. It was not until later that we realized how unusual this was.

Underneath the words of genealogy and the facts of ancestor research there lay a deeper teaching that you gave us: we learned about the meaning of concepts like devotion, persistence, and higher purpose. We saw the personal satisfaction and joy you expressed when you succeeded in discovering something about past generations that no one living knew. We learned about the love of discovery, to get to know something, to understand more about the world than you knew when you got up that morning.

We came to know what it means to be seriously engaged in research and learning. We came to appreciate what it takes to accomplish a task. It means to continue, in spite of hurdles and setbacks, by keeping the goal in mind, to succeed. We learned how much you loved what you did. Your persistence and continued devotion to furthering Swedish immigrant research have inspired us.

Throughout the years, we have realized how much our mother, your wife, Dagmar, helped. Dagmar always encouraged and supported your work. Her unflinching devotion to you and your research taught us how important is the commitment to others and to their interests. You have been one of Mother's higher purposes, a person she has been devoted to, and a source of joy.

Today in our “use and throw-away society,” it is refreshing to see you bucking the system and digging into the past and being rewarded with the knowledge that is folded away in archives. It is encouraging to see you so passionate about your research, when so many others have little to be devoted to except their TV schedules, what the latest movies are, or what new music is playing.

You and Mother taught us, through your example, to be tenacious and devoted and persistent and to love what one does. Thank you both so very much.

Karna, Greg, and Chris Olsson



*Nils William and Dagmar Olsson, Christmas 1998. Upper left: Nils William's parents, Albin and Mathilda Olsson. Middle: Nils William and Dagmar Olsson, 1940. Upper right: Dagmar's parents C. A. and Amanda Gavert. (Collage courtesy of Karna Olsson.)*