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Meeting my Grandmother for the first time

Part II (Part I in SAG 2016/1)

BY DIANE PINCUS OBER

She wanted more out of life than to live the rest of it on a farm with all the routine tedious chores. From the surviving postcards that she kept, my grandmother, Julia Andersson, had many friends who signed off with the hope that she would write to them again soon.

Still, farm life was solitary. She was 21 years old. Her younger brother John had left for America in 1905. Her dear brother Karl had left for America in 1907. Their destination was Loveland, Colorado where Uncles Otto and Axel Petersson lived after immigrating years earlier.

Julia decided to seek her fortune in America too. She left her parents and the farm at #5 Solberga, Gräsård, Öland, and traveled to Copenhagen to sail to New York. She packed her recipe notebook ready to meet her dear friend Ida Carlsson and begin her new life.

In America

Julia arrived in New York October 1909, met her friend Ida Carlsson and settled in at her place at 74 - East 55th Street. Like Ida Carlsson, Julia immediately found work as a servant. Within a few months

she had a position with a doctor's family in Kerhonkson, New York, then later, for another family living on Long Island, New York.

Following the paper trail preserved by her saved postcards, Julia had moved to Los Angeles by March, 1911, and lived in the Boyle Heights area. Julia did stop in the Denver area to be near her brothers for a few months before continuing on to Los Angeles.

Meeting a young man

It turns out that Julia's address in Los Angeles was within 2 miles of her future husband's home. He was an apprentice baker (b. 12 May 1880) before he left Hamburg, Germany, on the *S/S Persia* at the age of 16. From the moment he stepped onto American soil in New York, he had a trade from which he could make a living. He first worked as a cook in Mobile, Alabama, and upon returning to New York, was a pastry chef at the Waldorf-Astoria and Grand Central Hotels.

Within one year of Julia's moving to Los Angeles, she is married to this German baker, Albert Pincus. They are married in San Francisco on January 14, 1912. One year later her first son is born, and, in 1915, their second son is born and the family is living again in the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles.

Their own bakery

Within nine years of their marriage, Albert bought the Bake-Right Bakery on Main Street, Alhambra, in the Los Angeles area. He produced a full line of breads and pastries and would accept special orders for parties and ceremonies.

As happened with many immigrants, life was too hard in America and many returned home. That was true for Julia's brother and two uncles – Uncle Otto who had been a citizen for 12 years, and Uncle Axel Petersson who returned home after seven years.

But for these two immigrants, Julia and her husband Albert, with their skills and hard work, the American dream did come true and they did build a prosperous life and raised two sons.

From the photos of their two young sons, I see a happy family and proud parents sending photos back to their families in the "Old Country".

A move to San Francisco

In 1924, the family is in San Francisco, the boys attend Lutheran school, and Albert and Julia own "The Old Fashioned Bakery" which advertises cakes for birthdays, weddings and ceremonies. Julia worked side-by-side with her husband in the bakery and raised two wonderful sons, Raymond and Leon.



The house where Julia lived with her friend.



Albert Pincus 1924.

Unknown Jewish background

Around 1937, Albert and Julia sold the bakery after Albert suffered a breakdown sometime after 1937. Maybe it was the hard work to provide for his family during the Depression. Maybe Albert received letters from family in Hamburg detailing how impossible life had become under Hitler, especially for his family. They were Jewish.

To my knowledge, no one in his American family knew that his German heritage was Jewish. Albert bore that burden alone, but evidently kept in contact with his relatives in Germany which may explain the cause of his second breakdown around 1950 when he disappeared for about two weeks. Maybe by then he had learned the fate of what remained of his family in Hamburg. His sister Rachel had been sent to Riga, Latvia, on a transport with other Hamburg Jews and murdered. His other sister Jenni had been transported to the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp and later to Auschwitz where she was murdered. His brother Leopold suffered Gestapo harassment, interrogation, and prison but survived because his wife Klara, was German. One cousin escaped to the Netherlands only to be captured there by the Nazis



Julia with her first grandson 1942.

and murdered. Another cousin survived the Shanghai Ghetto and returned to Hamburg after the war. Another cousin did not survive the Lodz Ghetto.

This must have been a terrible burden to bear alone. He wanted to protect his family in the “new country” from the anti-Semitism of the “old country.”

A country home in Napa Valley

Later in 1937, Julia and Albert bought a country home set on 42 acres of orchard and woods just south of St. Helena, Napa Valley, California. There was an orchard with pear, prune and a few cherry trees as well as a small hillside vineyard.

It must have been a welcome respite from the bakery work that started before dawn each day

Julia cared for a family of foster children for a short time until their mother could return to take care of them. Neighbors who were children at the time, remember Julia as a kind sweet person who made them sandwiches out of cottage cheese and homemade blackberry jam.

Julia and Albert returned to live full time in San Francisco on 43rd Avenue and were loved by their two sons and seven grandchildren. Albert worked in a mailroom of-



Albert (r) working at the Post, 1950s.

fice until he fully retired.

Julia died 26 Mar. 1961, and Albert died 12 Sep. 1961. They are both buried in St. Helena Public Cemetery, St. Helena, Napa Co., CA.

Epilogue

I was 16 years old when Grandmother Julia died and I remember feeling the deep grief of losing her and realizing that I didn't even know her. After more than half a century, I finally have a portrait of her as a person before she became
my Grandmother.

*Signed with love,
Your granddaughter,
Diane*

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Follow-up to the article “A journey across the Atlantic in 1908” in SAG 2016:2

SAG reader *Jan Kärrman*, Uppsala, Sweden, has identified the man who wrote this article about his voyage with his brother Erik in 1908.

The writer was Karl Henrik Holmsten, b. 30 Oct. 18173 in Grundsunda (Vrnl.), son of the blacksmith Per Erik Holmsten, b. 10 Sep. 1848 in Gideå (Vrnl.) and his wife Ulrika Kristina Boström, b. 19 Mar. 1853 in Grundsunda. Later the family moved to Njurunda (Vnrl.), where son Erik Almar Holmsten was born 22 Jul 1883.

On 12 Dec. 1891 the father Per Erik died, and his widow and the children moved to Östersund (Jmtl.), from where the sons moved in 1908 to the U.S.

Karl Henrik, who was married, returned to Sweden, where he died 2 Jun. 1959 in Malmö.

His brother Erik stayed in the U.S and settled in Chicago, where he worked as a blacksmith. He was married to Alma (?) and had several children. Erik died on 14 Aug. 1957 in Chicago, and was then a widower.