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An Extreme Case of Twinning

BY JAMES E. ERICKSON

Introduction

While doing research at the Swedish Emigrant Institute (*Svenska Emigrantinstitutet*) in Växjö a number of years ago, I happened upon the paper trail of a Swedish family with a truly amazing anomaly. As I scanned the household examination roll (*husförhörslängd*) from Lofta parish (*socken*) (Kalm.) that covered the years 1891-1897, I came to page 196, where the laborer (*arbetare*) Nils Peter Trybom, his wife Charlotta Carlsdotter, and nine children were recorded at Fridhem under Hälgsjö (Figure 1). What made this page unique and what initially caught my attention was this—the minister's entries document a family with four consecutive sets of twins (*tvillingar*), all born in Lofta during an eight-year period (January 1886 to September 1893).¹

In November 1894, the Trybom family moved to Väsby Mellangård in Västra Eneby socken (Ög.). While living in this village, the tenant (*hyresgäst*) and bookkeeper (*bokhållare*) Nils Peter Trybom and his wife Charlotta Carlsdotter added four more children to their family, including another set of twins and two singletons (Figure 2).² In March 1902, this couple's last child, a daughter named Lilly Margareta, was born in Norrköping Sankt Olai socken (Ög.).³

Note: Birth records confirm that the three youngest children shown on this document were, in fact, born in Västra Eneby socken, not Lofta socken as recorded.

Thus, Nils Peter and Charlotta had a total of fourteen children – a singleton female followed by five consecutive sets of twins (2 male/male sets and 3 male/female sets) born during a ten-year period (January 1886 to November 1895) followed by three additional singletons, 1 male and 2 females, (see list of children on the next page).

Such numbers beg the question: "How unusual is it for a woman to have five consecutive sets of twins?"

Personernas namn, stånd, embete, yrke och näringsfång, (backstuga-, inhyres och fattighjon), nationalitet (om främmande), lyten (svagsinta, blinda, döfstumma).		Födelse-		Aktenskap.		Hittflyttad		Död.
		år.	mån. och dag.	ort, (socken i kn., stad).	Gift, Ekt eller enka.	från (socken i kn., stad eller pagina i husförhörs- boken).	år, månad o. dag.	
1.	Nils Peter Trybom	54	21	Lofta	82			
2.	Charlotta Carlsdotter	50	12	O. Ed				
3.	d. Gustaf Vilhelm	82	14	Lofta				
4.	d. Carl Adolf Eriksson	86	3					
5.	d. Nils Axel Sigvard	86	3					
6.	d. Carl Adolf Eriksson	87	20					
7.	d. Sigrid Eva Christ	87	20					
8.	d. David Ragnar	90	3					
9.	d. Selma David	90	3					
10.	d. Josef Eriksson	93	18					
11.	d. Selma Maria	93	18					
12.								

Figure 1. The Trybom family, with four consecutive sets of twins, is living at Fridhem under Hälgsjö. Lofta (H) AI:30 (1891-1896) Image 211 / page 196 (AID: v23173.b211.s196, NAD: SE/VALA/00231). (Arkiv Digital).

15.	Hyresgäst bokhållare							
16.	Nils Peter Trybom	54	21	Lofta	82	Lofta	91	29
17.	Charlotta Carlsdotter	50	12	O. Ed				
18.	d. Gustaf Vilhelm	82	14	Lofta				
19.	d. Carl Adolf Eriksson	86	3					
20.	d. Nils Axel Sigvard	86	3					
21.	d. Carl Adolf Eriksson	87	20					
22.	d. Sigrid Eva Christ	87	20					
23.	d. David Ragnar	90	3					
24.	d. Selma David	90	3					
25.	d. Josef Eriksson	93	18					
26.	d. Selma Maria	93	18					
27.	d. Lilli Margareta	95	28					
28.	d. Alva Rebecka Charlotta	95	28					
29.	d. Ruth Viktoria	97	12					

Figure 2. The Trybom family, now with five consecutive sets of twins, is living at Väsby Mellangård. Västra Eneby (E) AI:19 (1893-1899) Image 417 / page 402 (AID: v27170.b417.s402, NAD: SE/VALA/00445). (Arkiv Digital).

Guinness World Records lists the following three records, which provide a framework for comparisons:

1) The first wife (died ante 1770) of Feodor Vassilyev (1707-1782), a peasant from Shuya, Russia, gave birth to 16 sets of twins;

2) Barbara Zulu of Barberton, South

Africa, bore 3 sets of girls and 3 mixed sets in seven years (1967-73); and

3) Anna Steynvaait of Johannesburg, South Africa, produced 2 sets [of twins] within 10 months in 1960.⁴

The Trybom children

dtr. *Gunhild Linnea*, b. 16 Nov 1882
in Lofta.
son *Gustaf Adolf Gerhard*, b. 3 Jan 1886
in Lofta. **Twin.**
son *Nils Axel Sigurd*, b. 3 Jan 1886
in Lofta. **Twin.**
son *Carl Adam William*, b. 20 Oct 1887
in Lofta. **Twin.**
dtr. *Sigrid Eva Christina*, b. 20 Oct 1887
in Lofta. **Twin.**
son *David Ragnar*, b. 3 Sep 1890
in Lofta, d. there 1 May 1891. **Twin.**
son *Helge Daniel*, b. 3 Sep 1890
in Lofta. **Twin.**
son *Josef Gideon*, b. 18 Sep 1893
in Lofta. **Twin.**
dtr. *Sally Maria*, b. 18 Sep 1893
in Lofta. **Twin.**
son *Isak Anton Emanuel*, b. 28 Nov 1895
in Västra Eneby, d. there 16 Aug 1896.
Twin.
dtr. *Alba Rebekka Charlotta*, b. 28 Nov
1895 in Västra Eneby. **Twin.**
dtr. *Ruth Viktoria*, b. 13 May 1897
in Västra Eneby.
son *Göte Emanuel*, b. 11 Oct 1900
in Västra Eneby, d. there 14 Oct 1900.
dtr. *Lilly Margareta*, b. 13 Mar 1902
in Norrköping S:t Olai, d. there 16 Mar
1902.

The biology of twinning

Twins are two offspring produced during the same pregnancy that have one of two origins. They are either *monozygotic* (identical), in which case they originate from just one fertilized egg (*zygote*) that then splits to form two separate embryos, or *dizygotic* (non-identical or fraternal), which result from the ovulation of two different eggs and their subsequent fertilization by two separate sperm during the same cycle.⁵ In the Trybom family example presented herein, the two male/male sets of twins could be either monozygotic (identical) or dizygotic (non-identical); we'll never know. The male/female sets are dizygotic.

Since they come from the same fertilized egg, monozygotic twins have the same DNA composition. Conversely, dizygotic twins, which come from two different eggs, do not have the same genetic makeup.

Is there a family history of twinning?

The father of the five consecutive sets of twins, *Nils Peter Trybom*, was born at Lilla Rätö, Lofta *socken* (Kalm.) on 21 August 1854, the son of Johan Peter Trybom (1828-1900) and Lovisa Nilsdotter (1827-1911).⁶ Nils Peter was the third of eight children born to this marriage. Among the eight siblings, there were no twins.⁷

The twins' mother, *Charlotta Carlsdotter*, was born at Ytterby, Östra Ed *socken* (Kalm.) on 10 February 1859, the daughter of Carl Magnus Olofsson (1822-1881) and Cajsa Lisa Andersdotter (1818-1862).⁸ Charlotta was the fourth of five children born to this marriage. There were no twins among the five siblings.⁹ After Cajsa Lisa died in 1862, Carl Magnus remarried in 1864 to Maria Lovisa Andersdotter (1845-1903). This second marriage produced seven additional singleton children, but no twins.¹⁰

Going back one more generation on the maternal side we have Cajsa Lisa's parents – Anders Nilsson (1780-1828) and Anna Jansdotter (1794-1844). This couple had six children (three boys and three girls). None of them were twins.¹¹

Based on this admittedly cursory look at the offspring of two generations on the maternal side – grandmother Cajsa Lisa Andersdotter and great-grandmother Anna Jansdotter – there does not appear to be a family history of dizygotic (non-identical) twins.

What are the odds?

The twinning rate for monozygotic (identical) twins is random (one birth does not affect the next; they are independent events) and universal (it is the same in all populations). It has remained constant worldwide over time. The chance of having monozygotic twins lies between 1 in 333 (or 0.3%) and 1 in 250 (or 0.4%).¹²

By comparison, twinning rates for dizygotic (non-identical) twins vary considerably in different populations. In these cases, two births are not completely independent events. The chance of having dizygotic twins ranges between 1 in 167 (or 0.6%) and 1 in 22 (or 4.5%).¹³

In theory, to calculate the odds of having two consecutive sets of dizygotic twins, you would take a known twinning rate for a given country and square it.

For example, $1/167 \times 1/167 = 1$ in 27,889. But we know that a history of dizygotic twins on the mother's side increases her chance of twins the next time; and a woman who has had dizygotic twins has four times the normal chance of having them again in a subsequent pregnancy. Taking this into account, the above calculation would have to be adjusted as follows: $1/167 \times 1/42 = 1$ in 7014.¹⁴

The Trybom 5

So what are the odds of a woman having consecutive sets of dizygotic (non-identical) twins in late 19th century Sweden? The twinning rate for Sweden in 1900 was about 14 per 1,000 births (or 1 in 71).¹⁵ This number should be a reasonable approximation of the twinning rate in Sweden in the 1880s and 1890s as well; so I used it to calculate the odds for one plausible scenario of twinning in the Trybom family as discussed above. Here is a summary:

- 1 set of twins: 1 in 71 chance
- 2 consecutive sets of twins: $71 \times 18 = 1$ in 1,278
- 3 consecutive sets of twins: $71 \times 18 \times 18 = 1$ in 23,004
- 4 consecutive sets of twins: $71 \times 18 \times 18 \times 18 = 1$ in 414,072
- 5 consecutive sets of twins: $71 \times 18 \times 18 \times 18 \times 18 = 1$ in 7,453,296

In this case, the odds of having five consecutive sets of dizygotic (non-identical) twins are an astounding 1 in 7.45 million! The Trybom 5 do indeed represent an extreme case of twinning!

Endnotes:

- 1) *Husförhållanden*, Lofta (Kalm.), AI:28 (1881-1891), p. 226; AI:30 (1891-1897), p. 196.
- 2) *Husförhållanden*, Västra Eneby (Ög.), AI:19 (1893-1899), p. 402.
- 3) *Födelsebok*, Västra Eneby (Ög.), (1895-1921), image 9, No 40; and image 40, No 40; and *Födelsebok* Norrköping S:t Olai (Ög.), (1899-1904), p. 266, No 99.
- 4) www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/most-sets-of-twins-same-mother
- 5) Comparisons. "Draft (based on the published articles: Pison and Couvert, 2004; Pison and D'Addato, 2006), p. 1 at epc2006.princeton.edu/papers/60568
- 6) *Födelselängd*, Lofta (H) C:6 (1854-1861) p. 17. No 72.

- 7) *Husförhörlängd*, Lofta (Kalm.), AI:18 (1850-1855), p. 306; AI:20 (1855-1860), p. 212; AI:23 (1861-1865), p. 210; AI:24 (1866-1877), p. 267.
- 8) *Födelselängd*, Östra Ed (Kalm.), CI:4 (1854-1861), p. 91, No 4.
- 9) *Husförhörlängd*, Östra Ed (Kalm.), AI:12 (1856-1860), p. 22; AI:13 (1861-1866), p. 225.
- 10) *Husförhörlängd*, Östra Ed (Kalm.), AI:13 (1861-1866), p. 225; AI:14 (1867-1872), p. 230; AI:15 (1872-1876), p. 228; AI:16 (1877-1882), p. 247.
- 11) *Husförhörlängd*, Östra Ed (Kalm.), AI:7 (1817-1824), p. 5; AI:8 (1824-1830), p. 6; AI:9 (1831-1840), p. 14; AI:10 (1841-1846), p. 15.

- 12) For a general discussion see D'Addato et al., "Trends in the Frequency," pp. 1-2.
- 13) D'Addato et al., "Trends in the Frequency," pp. 1-2.
- 14) See sample calculations in Ben Carter, "Double Treble: What's the chance of having three sets of twins?" at <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22813345>; Joanna Morehead at <https://www.theguardian.com/.../2013/jun/15/life-with-three-sets-twins>
- 15) D'Addato et al., "Trends in the Frequency," pp. 3-4.

Editor's note:

Nils Peter Trybom died 23 Feb 1933 in Östra Eneby parish, (Ög.).

Widow Charlotta Carlsdotter Trybom died 24 Jan 1936 in Östra Eneby parish (Ög.).

Information from Swedish Death Index 7.

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Allt för Sverige 2018

The new season for the popular reality TV program is currently being filmed on location in Sweden.

The participants are:

- 1) **Tanya Edgil**, 39, Hamilton, AL, student and housewife. She is a direct descendant of Erik Jansson, founder of Bishop Hill, IL.
- 2) **Christina Wight**, 34, Maryville, TN, special needs teacher. Her paternal grandmother was born in Sweden, but abandoned all Swedish traditions when she married an Italian. This is why Christina wants to learn them all.
- 3) **Domonique Jackson-Russell**, 34, Seattle, WA, lawyer. She is also an Afghanistan veteran. Her maternal grandfather immigrated from Sweden.
- 4) **Susan Snyder**, 58, Roswell, NM, salesperson. Her paternal grandfather immigrated from Sweden, but took his family back to Sweden, and later returned to the U.S.
- 5) **Ashley Mullinax**, 32, Clifton, VA, preschool teacher. Her love for Sweden comes from her maternal grandmother. Her hobby is to paint Dala horses. She and her grandmother are both members of the Vasa Order of America.
- 6) **David Neslund**, 42, Sutton, AK, CAD-designer. He and his wife, with Swedish-Norwegian roots, live in the Alaskan wilderness. Their ancestors lived way back in time on almost the same



latitude in Scandinavia. David wants to bring some Swedish soil to his own land in Alaska.

- 7) **Andrew Morrison**, 28, Scandia, MN, films documentaries. As a child he had to participate in so many Swedish traditions, that he just hated them as a teenager, but his interest came back. He wants to rekindle the "true" Swedish traditions in Scandia, as he thinks they are lost.
- 8) **Kevin Chown**, 48, Escanaba, MI, rock musician. Kevin grew up in a musical family, both father older brother are also musicians. He has played with artists like Chuck Berry, Ted Nugent, and Chad Smith. Right now he plays with Finnish artist Tarja Turunen.

- 9) **Kyle Johnson**, 29, Independence, MN, teacher. His Swedish ancestors immigrated to Independence, and lately their farm was for sale, and Kyle bought it as he did not want it leave the family. He wants to come to Sweden to see "the most beautiful country in the world".

- 10) **Louis Larsson**, 52, Covington, KY, music teacher. His interest for his Swedish roots started growing when his daughter was born. Now he has many questions about the country: how are the people? Are they more like himself? Could he live in Sweden? He hopes to get some answers when he finally comes to Sweden.

Information from *Sveriges Television* and an article in *Expressen* 16 May 2018. The show will air in the fall of 2018.