

## I THE HERITAGE . . .



**M**y father, Gunnar Kristofferson Selvig, nearly lost his life when he emigrated from Norway in 1871. Had the vessel, on which he brought his bride to this country, sunk, as it nearly did, this book would not have been written. The vessel actually foundered and sank on the return voyage with all on board lost.

Father was a seaman, first mate, at the time of his marriage. He often spoke of voyages to Archangel, to Mediterranean ports and to "Rio", as he called it, Rio Janerio, Brazil. His closest escape from a watery grave, we children finally managed to learn from him after many importunities and requests, occurred in a dense fog.

"Providence was with us that day, that's certain", he said. The ship was moving slowly in the iceberg area in so thick a fog one could see only a few yards ahead. Nothing could be seen or heard. Suddenly, the fog lifted! The ship had almost reached a towering iceberg that loomed before them. There was time only for a split-second veering away to avoid a fatal head-on crash. He could not tell us how it happened but the ship swung clear, crashing lightly against the mass without damage. Then fell the fog again! It was beyond human means and skill that the ship was saved and that father lived to sail another day.

The sea took its toll frequently among sea-faring folk of south-western Norway and claimed his father when father was eleven. This left his mother with a brood of nine children, four boys and five girls. Father was the seventh child. His mother Siri Gunnardsdatter Ovstebo, was an indomitable character.

It was of no uncommon experience that a sailor's wife became a widow. My wife and I visited the home place in Norway, Selvig, in 1931 and heard from the neighbors stories of her fortitude and leadership. She went by the name of Siri Aune. She became the community's counselor, mid-wife, nurse, conciliator, gardener, fruit grower and in modern parlance, psychiatrist. She was strong. Her own sense of duty and her devotion to God led her through an active life. Up to the time of her passing, at 83, she read her Bible without aid of glasses and her dark, almost black, hair was unstreaked with gray.

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We also visited Hognestad, some thirty miles south of Stavanger, whence came mother's people. We secured family records back to 1666, the earlier ones being not immediately available. I remembered my maternal grandfather and saw a marked resemblance to him among the folks we met at Hognestad. Sandy hair, full bearded man. Blue eyes.

During our sojourn, the Stavanger "Tidende" published a story of one of my maternal ancestors, Hans Torson, born in 1757. He ran away from home and resided in foreign lands many years. When he returned he said he had fought in seven countries and by the side of three kings, besides having been on a whaling voyage to Greenland. In 1795 he married Ane Bertha Gregorius, nineteen years of age, when he was almost twice her age. They had nineteen children. A twentieth would

would bring the family a premium from the King. This never occurred. She attained the age of 94.



FATHER, MOTHER AND INFANT CHILD.

*“No land in the world offers people the opportunity  
for a good life that does America.”*

Mother was the first born of seven, three boys and four girls. Her father and mother lived in Stavanger until they sailed on the “Undine” on the 26th of April, 1871 and reached New York about July 10, 1871. Father and mother went to Chicago where he found work as a sailor on the Great Lakes. They must have lived in Chicago during the Great Fire of October 9, 1871, but I do not recall talk of that catastrophe. Later they moved to Rushford, Minnesota where two of mother’s sisters also lived.