

THE STORY OF
TWO FAMILIES
AND THEIR
TIMES



CHAPTER TWELVE

WHAT SORROW! WHAT GRIEF!

When I first looked at the only photograph we have of Magnus Chilstrom (Kjöllersström) I saw only the face of an old man with a rather odd growth of hair beneath his chin. It was, of course, the style for some men in those days. Other than that, however, I saw only the face of a very old man. I had no strong feeling for him. He was simply one of many of my almost forgotten ancestors.

Now, after spending so many years trying to reconstruct his life, I see another face. Now that face takes on an entirely different character. I see the face of a brave and courageous man. Magnus is not unlike Abraham in the Old Testament, who also took his family and went off to the west, not knowing where the road would lead. But Magnus may be braver still. He had not only a wife, but six children to worry about as he set off to cross a dangerous ocean, to traverse miles of land, to endure treacherous lakes and to encounter a native people who could scarcely welcome him with open arms.

But, most of all, I now look at that photograph and see the face of a man who endured a lifetime of unbelievable sorrow and grief. I see a man mellowed by sadness and misfortune, a man bent, but not broken.

Unfortunately, I can not look at the face of his wife, my great grandmother Katrina. We have no photograph of her. I can only imagine how she may have looked. Maybe if I look at the faces of four of her children of whom we have photographs -- Ingra Sophia, John Peter, Svenning August and Charles Emil -- I can reconstruct a similar face. Though she died more than a quarter of a century before her husband, her face would also show the marks of grief.

Think for a moment what they endured:

1853 - Magnus is 44, Katrina 42 -- They say goodbye to their oldest daughter Eva. She is 18 and a few months pregnant with their first grandchild. This is like death. They surely must know in their heart of hearts that they will never see her again in this

world. They will never see their grandchildren in Sweden. Indeed, this is like death.

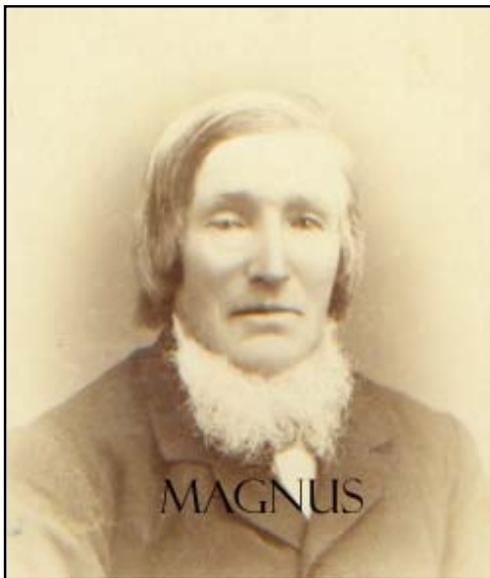
- 1856 - Magnus is 47, Katrina 45 -- While living in Waukesha they get word that Mary, their granddaughter and daughter of Inga Sophia, has died, probably somewhere in Indiana.
- 1858 - Magnus is 48, Katrina 46 -- Daughter Anna, age 20 and married less than a year, dies in Morristown, MN while giving birth to Annie. They are there with her in Morristown.
- 1862 - Magnus is 53, Katrina 51 -- At Twin Lakes they narrowly escape death during the Sioux Uprising.
- 1863 - Magnus is 54, Katrina 52 -- Daughter Louisa, age 23, dies at Morristown while giving birth to a child, who also dies. Word comes to them at their Cannon River home.
- 1866 - Magnus is 57, Katrina 55 - Son Svenning August, their 18-year-old son, dies of unknown causes at their home on the Cannon River.
- 1869 - Magnus is 60 -- Katrina dies in her 58th year after a lingering illness. Now Magnus is alone.
- 1891 - Magnus is 82 -- Mina (Minnie), his 23-year-old granddaughter at Litchfield, dies from pneumonia.
- 1892 - Magnus is 83 -- Word may have come from Pueblo, CO that his great grandson Thomas, age two, had died.
- 1892 - Magnus is 83 -- son John, age 48 and grandson Edward, age 18, die in the farm accident.
- 1895 - Magnus is 86 and dies in Minneapolis after a calf pulls him to the ground and his ribs are broken.

We could probably add one more note of sadness. Though the records are somewhat vague, it's almost certain that Eva, the daughter left behind in Sweden, died when she was relatively young. Word undoubtedly came to Magnus, and possibly to Katrina if she was still alive, that Eva had died.

What can one say? This life, these lives, were Job-like. One grief, such as the loss of a child or a grandchild, would be enough for one lifetime. Yes, we know that death was more common in those times, especially for children and for women in childbirth. But that does not diminish the enormity of all these tragedies. By the time he came to die, Magnus had lost five of his seven children and who knows for certain how many grandchildren and great grandchildren. This is more -- much more -- than one man's measure for a single lifetime.

So many questions linger. Why so much sorrow and grief for one family? How often did they ask themselves if it would have been better if they had stayed in Sweden?

And for all who are descended from Magnus and Katrina Kjällerström , as well as from Johan and Kristina Nilsson, the questions also linger. How can we ever repay them the debt we owe for their courage in coming to America? And if we have inherited some of their spirit, some of their openness to venture into the unknown, some of their determination to make the best of any situation -- how do we show it in the way we live today?



KATRINA