

Olga Sally Burgstrom  
and  
August Julius Neilson  
written by  
their daughter Verna Neilson Forsyth

This is taken from a journal entry of my mother; all that I have that she wrote in her own handwriting, about half a page.

My father started out to work one morning on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1889 but when he got down the road a little way he said to himself, maybe I had better go back as it wouldn't be safe to leave home. So he turned back just in time to go to Wahoo about 5 miles away to get a midwife, her name was Mrs. Simpson, and she brought them a girl who was me and they named me Olga Sally Burgstrom. My father was working at the time on Aunt Nellie's farm. Her husband was Ola Nelson; he passed away shortly after but had come to see me when I was 4 days old. He told my mother I was a pretty baby but she said she didn't think so as I was so thin. She thought he said that just to be nice. I was born in the state of Nebraska about 35 miles west of Omaha. My address was Wahoo, Saunders County, Nebraska.

I'm glad she wrote that much. Her handwriting was very nice and she could read and write Swedish perfectly. She had taught herself.

As my mother said in her short biography, her maiden name was Olga Sally Burgstrom, born 6 Nov 1889. Her parents were Axel Nelson Burgstrom, born 19 Feb 1865, and Nilla Paulson, born 25 Dec 1850. She married August Julius Neilson (known as Julius), born 14 Dec 1889. His parents were August Swen Neilson, born 7 Jun 1867, and Matilda Petronilla Johnson, born 21 Dec 1862. Julius was an only child and Olga's family included Amanda, Blenda, Edward, Olga and Henry.

We are purebred Swedes on both sides of our family. Through a miraculous healing of Mama's older sister, Blenda, in Sweden, the family said if they ever came to America they would join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The healing of Aunt Blenda happened when she was one year old and was dying with pneumonia. My grandmother asked Axel to hold her until she died, as she seemed to be taking her last breath. He said, "I heard of some young men in this apartment building who pray for the sick". He ran to get them and they administered to Blenda and she was immediately made well.

Many years later, after they had come to Utah, Aunt Blenda had another experience with the healing power of the Priesthood. At the time, she was the mother of nine children and had become very ill. Her doctor said she would not recover and so he sent for her husband to come home from a business trip in Europe. Aunt Blenda felt that if she could have a

blessing from the same Elder who blessed her as a baby that she would get well. They found he was the recorder in the Salt Lake Temple. Before he could come to her she passed into the spirit world. A man came to her and told her to give her children good books to read. She later said it was so lovely there that she didn't want to leave. But she could hear her children crying so she agreed to come back to her mortal body. She then told the Elder he could give her a blessing, which he did. He promised her that she would be well and live as long as she desired to. She was passed ninety when she died.

When Mama's mother, my grandmother Nilla, was young she worked in the palace in Sweden. She got in trouble with a Prince and the result was a little girl, Amanda. The prince was banished for some time and Amanda was raised by her grandmother, whose name was also Nilla. They also met the missionaries and when Amanda left Malmo, Sweden, for Salt Lake City as a young girl her grandmother Nilla knew she'd never see her again and was so overcome she went down to the ocean to bath her face in cold water. Amanda was my mother's oldest sister. Grandma was about 35 years old when she married a man 15 years younger, my grandfather Axel. They came on the high seas to America, a trip that took them six weeks.

The missionaries found them in Nebraska and Mama was baptized in a horse-watering tank by Elder Hatch, Duane's Great Uncle. Missionaries from Southern Alberta also came to their home, William Redd from Raymond and Brig Lamb from Cardston. Grandma Nilla longed to go to Zion. Grandpa Axel became a motorman on the streetcar and wanted to stay in Omaha until he got a pension. So Grandma Nilla and her children, Uncle Ed and Aunt Blenda and Mama and Uncle Henry went to Salt Lake City. Grandma Nilla never learned to speak English and it was hard for the young people who were quite new converts to fit into a ward in the city. Uncle Ed was very strong; he wrestled with Jack Dempsey and roved around, mostly working in the mines. Uncle Henry was a gifted musician, but in later years he wouldn't play because he said it wouldn't be perfect. He became a barber and the best pool player in Utah.

My father's people had come to Utah and then to Canada from Spring City, Utah before 1900. My father, Julius, went back for a visit in Salt Lake City at the age of 21. His mother's brother Albert had married Amanda, Mama's half sister. He met Mama and fell in love with her and asked her to wait for him and he would come back in a year for her. In the meantime she worked for Sister Bennett, the lady that wrote the 'Gleaner Sheaf'. Her little son who became Senator Bennett used to iron

handkerchiefs for Mama when she helped them. Papa went back to Salt Lake in a year as he said he would. Mama's two big brothers accompanied her to Canada coming by train to Stirling in 1912. They were married and my mother found it a little hard to adjust to country life. She was very neat and clean. Ladies have told me she was pretty. Because Papa was an only child his parents thought it would be selfish of the young couple to move to a place of their own even though my Dad had a homestead in Del Bonita. So they lived with his parents.

Elva was first to be born, delivered by Sister Little, then Ralph, delivered by Sister Sommerfeldt. Then brother Delbert and I, Verna, four years later. I was born in the hospital, as by then my folks had a Model T Ford and my father always said he broke the speed limit at about 35 miles per hour to get to the hospital. My mother felt like that birth was a holiday when compared to the others on the farm. She lost a little boy that was fully formed when I was 13 months old. Papa buried him in the field. This was very hard on Mother but 6 years later our baby sister Mary Matilda was born. The Relief Society President Sister Rose Lowry rode 2½ miles to our place on a horse in a blizzard to deliver her. The baby had a cord around her neck and was blue as a piece of cloth. She was delicate and sometimes Mama rocked her all day long. Elva said she'd come home from school and the breakfast dishes would still be sitting on the table. Papa was very busy with the animals. He often brought weak lambs in to warm them on the oven door for a while. Everyone old enough helped out in the family. Elva said Papa often took them to school in a sleigh in the cold winter.

I write this from my place as 4<sup>th</sup> child in the family. I bounced behind Elva on old "Snap". He was so stiff from being foundered and I was so sore, Mama poured cornstarch on me and I notice that it is used in the hospital today. Our family members were kind to each other but the boys liked to tease. When Mama was in bed with the new baby, Mary, Delbert was chasing me and I fell into a torn ragged tub and cut my head. It was hard for a mother with noisy kids. Sometimes she'd say, "Julius, you just like to stay out in the barn with the animals". Men would take Papa to help them buy sheep. They said he could tell what a sheep had eaten ever since it was born.

The Del Bonita land came back to my father so he sold it to an elevator man in Whiskey Gap who later went into the army in the Second World War and his debts were cancelled and so Papa didn't make anything there. Once Elva and I drove in a buggy to the Del Bonita place to bring home some garden vegetables. Pa also had men owing him money in

Cardston. The Depression was on and they said they could give him some lots in payment but he said he couldn't pay the taxes, so those debts were cancelled too. We didn't have very nice furniture. Mama said the furniture was all the farm machinery out in the yard.

When Mary was 3 she had polio. Sister Lowry came and gave her a few drops of turpentine on a spoon of sugar. She kept taking convulsions. We wondered if she got it from cats. She always had about a dozen to play with in the hayloft. Mama wouldn't allow cats in the house, maybe just an old Tom, if he lay quietly behind the stove. She loved animals and cooked extra porridge for them.

Mama said she was timid to say the prayer when Grandpa would ask her, not having grown up in the church. She was very strict about morals though, with her it was black or white, no shades in between. She was gifted with dreams and could discern if people were sincere or phony. She said she longed to have a place of her own, she wished she could scrub her own table legs etc. There was no vitamins then and she said when she expected babies she sometimes felt like eating chalk. She must have lacked calcium.

Wash day was a pain. The white clothes had to be boiled. The clothes sat in tiny bunches on the oilcloth table with nothing colored touching the whites. I didn't like it when my Dad calcimined the walls and took down all the pictures. It seemed such a mess. Now we have nice paint. The farms had a lot of flies so it looked nice to get the specks covered. Mama always had a white streak at the front of her hair. It looked nice but it had come from her falling off a corn husking machine when she was 16 years old and hitting her head.

Our grandparents moved back to Salt Lake City thinking the climate would be better for Grandma as she had rheumatism very bad. When she was very sick Papa rented out the farm and went to Salt Lake City to be near his mother. She passed away the day before my 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday. I remember Grandpa kneeling down to put some beads around my neck and starting to cry. He loved his wife very much and took very good care of her. They loved Canada and when they went back to Salt Lake City she wrote that she was lonesome to hear the wind blow.

Grandpa remarried. He said it wasn't any way for a gentleman to live alone. She was mean to him. Her children were also. In time he took sick but was too embarrassed to tell my dad. Papa went to bring him home; he was only 68. I rode with my Dad when he went to Kimball to get a ride to Salt Lake City with some friends. I was 11 years old and was afraid to ride all the way home from Kimball. The night before, I dreamed there

were monkeys sitting on top of every fence post along the way. On the way home I stopped at Nish's store and bought 5 cents worth of suckers, then stopped at Leir's and shared them with their little children. The boys, Ralph and Delbert, were on a threshing crew so I was helping Papa with the milking. I thought that I milked 9 cows that morning. Maybe it was less; I have a tendency to make stories better than they really were.

We were excited to have our grandfather August Swen Neilson come home to us but he was in very poor condition. He had never been in a hospital before and he said it wasn't right for ladies to have to wait on sick men, so Papa stayed with him night and day for 3 days. He thanked Mama for waiting on him hand and foot, as he put it. In his last days Mama and Aunt Mame tried to feed him a little porridge. Before he went in a coma he lined us all up, his five only grandchildren, and kissed us all goodbye. I secretly thought he was picking out one of us to go with him. His youngest brother, Charlie, and his wife had come down from Mountain View in a wagon. Uncle Fred Puzey came from Champion. I watched everything when Grandpa died. They didn't take them away from the home in those days and neighbors took turns sitting with the body. He talked most about 'Tildy' as he called Grandma and he said to my mother, 'Where ever you put me, put Julius by my side.'

After the funeral Ralph and Harry, his cousin, wanted to play the old phonograph but Papa said it wouldn't be right, so they didn't. After Christmas that year, Mama's father, Axel, passed away in Iowa. Our parents went to Salt Lake City for nearly a month. Mama always thought there was something fishy about Grandpa's sudden death and felt that the people running his farm may have poisoned him. They buried him in Salt Lake City in a bronze casket, which was very expensive in those days. When Uncle Ed came to Iowa to get his father, the people made him get the sheriff. Grandpa was very neat but his papers and trunk had all been gone through. He told Mama he had stocks and bonds and savings but all there really was, was the farm, which was sold for \$10,000 and Mama received a check for \$2,660.62. With that we came out of the Depression, bought a car, more sheep, new mattresses and beds and remodeled the house. The boys got new suits and cowboy hats.

Then Papa took a stroke on a beautiful April morning. The night before he had walked across the meadow in the dark to do his home teaching at Nate Lowry's. Ralph came to the house and said Papa's fainted or something. The boys carried him to the bedroom. He asked them to raise him up. He said, "If something happens to me, be good to your mother. You have the best mother in the world." I ran around the house

and prayed alone with all my might. Then I ran in and said, 'Pa, you're going to get better, I prayed for you.' He cried. Delbert was very tender-hearted. He stood over the bed and cried. He was shy in some ways but always wanted to do his own thing. He was popular and greatly loved but he caused the folks heartaches with some of his weaknesses. Cell Lowry and Lester Albiston had to drag Papa out the door to the hospital. They couldn't help him at all so he came home and lay disabled for a month or more. Having tended my own husband with a stroke, I don't know how Mama did it. No running water or inside bathroom. No one ever said how it was. I wanted to rub his legs and make him well. A terrible shock went through me as I thought I might lose him. After a while Joe Berezay came in his truck and took him to Lethbridge to a chiropractor. He X-rayed Dad's neck and it showed that a bone had slipped and touched a nerve. He said my Dad had broken his neck sometime earlier. {This probably happened when Papa was 14 years old. He had a dandy little horse and liked to show off to his friends. One day he said, "Watch my horse jump over that cow (it was lying down)". But the cow got up and Papa landed on the ground. He was unconscious for 3 days. There were no doctors or hospitals to go to then.} After some treatments Papa was able to walk to the barn with a cane and we all buzzed around him so happy. He did lose his strength but he rode old 'Balley' and milked cows and enjoyed the family. We sat around and sang and played at night and he looked so proud.

Elva must have been away cooking for threshers because it seems I remember the lovely fall weather and all the work going on the most. Ralph and Deb pitched bundles, so Pa would call me early to milk cows. I loved to do this. Anything he asked of me I loved to do. Our nine cousins came for two months in 1935 and it was an unforgettable summer for us all and even the whole neighborhood. Katharine said she never heard Uncle Julius speak a cross word once. There was lots of washing and cooking, and the shearing and the haying went on. When they left, Elva and I ran around the house and cried.

Nineteen years after his stroke and six long weeks in the hospital, Papa passed away in Calgary. I spent the last night with him and breathed every time he did. Duane and I were married and had children by then so Delbert and May took Mary Olga, and Ralph and Jane took Robert, so I could change off with Mama who had been with Papa steady for 6 weeks. He got an abscess back of his heart and in those days they didn't dare go close to the heart. The operation for a diaphragmatic hernia was the second one they'd done in Calgary and it was too long and too big. I tried that night to get some food for him. I thought maybe that would make him

better. I ran all over the hospital and finally cooked an egg in a sterilizer. I said, 'Pa, we can't get along without you'. He said, 'I know you can't.' Duane came from summer school in Edmonton. Pa said he was the most dependable young man he'd ever seen. My mother said that afternoon, 'I guess we'll have to let him go.' And he passed away in 2 hours. Something happened and he said, 'Now don't get excited, Olga.' He was thinking of her. Elva was expecting Lorna, but Morgan and Ralph and Delbert came for Mama and me as soon as they could. There was a good crop that year but Papa said he guessed he'd spent all his money on special nurses around the clock.

Duane and I were living at Caroline where he was teaching school. We took Mama back to Caroline with us. She was only 59 years old. It seemed good to go back to the bush country; it was like a refuge. We had sweet little children. I played with the ladies softball team. We danced and sang and made the best of our lives. I made a pie for a social and a neighbor was so kind to pay \$6.00 for it. It tasted good but stuck to the pan so bad. We had box socials and every year Duane lost about 30 pounds, he worked so hard at teaching. The Superintendent said he must make the students do more.

Mother told us stories of her growing up years in Nebraska. She told how they could see the deep ruts in the trail made by the pioneers as they traveled to the Salt Lake Valley.

My mother was very appreciative of kind acts and taught us to be the same. After my father passed away her family was her whole life. We were close enough that we could get together real often. She loved her old and new friends where ever she went to visit and her nieces and nephews were very dear to her. She had a great sense of humor and said it felt good to laugh. She said her grandson, Billy, could make her laugh even when she didn't feel like it.

Papa had passed away 31 July 1949 and Mother passed away 4 July 1975. They were married 10 July 1913.

There are a lot more stories and memories that could be told but I've enjoyed writing these pages and hope someone will want to read them. My parents, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, cousins, and children of ours and grand children are very dear to me. I'm a family person but have no children living close. They all have their own lives to live. I had a glorious 80<sup>th</sup> birthday September 3, 2002. I have friends who care about me. I've had my share of troubles but likely more than my share of beautiful memories. "I'm an old chubby, wrinkled daughter of God who loves me".

## More Family Stories

My father was greatly loved by his parents. When he was born Grandma Mathilda was in labor 72 hours and hemorrhaged so badly she was always frail. There were no blood banks or transfusions at that time. She had a little girl named Edna who died when very young and is buried in Spring City, Utah.

Duane and I liked to drive to Spring City when we took care of the motel in Nephi, Utah and Duane was teaching school and going to night school. We decided to find my grandmother's grave in Spring City so one muddy afternoon we went with a young couple who knew the town. There were two cemeteries so we chose the older one. We looked and looked.

Finally I went off by myself and asked the Lord to please help me find the graves. I knew my father's little sister had a lamb on her gravestone. I hadn't walked very far when I saw the lamb and the name Edna Neilson. The graves were covered with weeds and brambles with no one to care for them. I had never had a prayer answered so fast. I felt like my Father had walked with me. Later we went back and cleaned the graves and decorated them.

My father told us of a time when some boys gave him a cigarette; he wanted to be one of the guys so he put it between his fingers but thought he couldn't face his parents if he put it to his lips. So he threw it away and never touched one again.

When life was hard for me I felt my father's help and influence many times. I don't think I ever spoke a cross word to my father. He was very kind to me.

