

It was frightening to see how many people gathered in large groups, traveled long distances, and generally did not avoid contact with many people during the Thanksgiving weekend. I know that people miss their families. I also know that we are very fortunate to have an extended family close by. Even though we do not visit each other inside, we can stand outside and talk. But, even if we didn't, I would still feel that way too many folks are not taking this coronavirus pandemic seriously, and somebody often suffers with serious illness or death from the disregard of others.

I think we have come to be a selfish species. Perhaps, it is in our genetic makeup, although we also seem to have an altruistic bent, a quality that would seemingly cause us to do everything we can to protect the health and safety of our fellow human beings.

I thought a lot about this in regard to the past. One does not have to look back so very far to see how communications have improved and changed life these past few decades. When Runo and I were first married and living in Sweden, I had to reserve time for a transatlantic phone call to talk to my family. I thought that was a wonderful thing, because I was fully aware of how the possibilities for keeping in touch with friends and relatives had, even then, improved from my forefathers' days.

My grandfather, Lars Erickson, came to America when he was still shy of his eighteenth birthday. He had older siblings Emil, Nils, Ingeborg, and Alma and a younger brother, Elof, and a sister, Anna Kristina, who was a toddler when Lars left home. His father died the next year, but his mother lived for another fifteen years. Nils disappeared somewhere in America, though Lars did see him a few times before his older brother "went West," his stated goal. Ingeborg died in 1921, Alma in 1906, and little sister Anna Kristina in 1901. Lars never saw his parents again after he emigrated, nor did he have a chance to once more meet his sisters.

In 1927, though, after 44 years in Michigan, Lars traveled back to his old home and spent six weeks visiting his two remaining brothers—Emil, the eldest, and Elof, the youngest, plus other members of the family. A niece had saved the letters Lars had written after his trip and gave them to me years later. I was born many years after my grandfather's death, but those letters gave me some insight into him and also into the tenuous communication between family members on two sides of the Atlantic until quite recent times.

Even earlier, though, Lars and his Swedish family managed to keep a connection. Letters took weeks, not days as they did when I lived in Sweden in the 1970s. It was also not a sure thing that they would arrive at all. Still, news travels around the world, and what Lars' family read in the newspapers there sometimes caused them great concern. One letter from Maria Larsdotter, Lars Erickson's mother, survives. She actually addressed her message to Cornelia, Lars' wife. She explained that it had been a long time since they had heard from Lars or had written, because Elof had been sick and they waited until they could say that he was well again.

Ingeborg, Lars' sister, wrote a note to him at the same time. She admitted that they had been very worried, because they had read in the

newspapers about all the big forest fires in this part of the country. She went on to tell him the local news—primarily, who had died.

Lars made his trip to Sweden in 1927. Before 1930 had arrived, he and both of his brothers had died.

When I read the letters that my father's cousin Anna had given me, communications she had received from "Farbror Lars" after he returned to Michigan, I understood how important this Swedish family was to my grandfather. And, when I hear how people can't bear to wait out this pandemic before gathering in large groups again, I can only shake my head. And wonder about us all.