

ENGLEWOOD MEMORIES:

Swedish Businessmen on Chicago's 59th Street

EDWARD E. OSBERG

A half century ago West 59th Street, from Racine Avenue to Halsted Street in Chicago, was almost solidly Swedish. My grandfather, who came to America at age 56, had no need to learn the English language, because nearly every shop and store in this magnificent half-mile was staffed by landsmen from his home country. I have tried to recall many of them from sheer memory. There are no books or papers written about them.

No one who lived then on the street of the Swedes could ever forget Anderson and Jensen's big department store at 59th and Halsted Streets, where only thirty years earlier there had been a cabbage patch. Here one could purchase anything and this was Grandpa's favorite place for Christmas shopping. It was beautifully decorated for the holidays and a thrill for small boys who couldn't wander too far from home.

And I remember so well the Folke Brothers Dry Goods Store at Carpenter Street, next door to the Puritan Bakery. I knew both brothers and they were always kind to little fellows browsing in the store at Christmas time with a dime clutched tightly in one hand, looking for a worthy present for a dear mother. Christensen's Hardware Store was a source of constant delight with its wide variety of goods—especially sporting equipment. It was here where we bought our roller-skates with ball bearings and later our Alfred Johnson shoe ice skates. I accompanied my grandfather there countless times to buy anything from nails to tools. A hardware store of 40 years ago was sheer pleasure for a small boy who was bug-eyed at the infinite variety of things on the market. Mr. Christensen knew me well and I was always welcome in his store.

Across the street was Widen's Bakery, a place I knew intimately. Often I stepped into the back room to greet the bakers, among them Mr. Widen himself. There were the cardamon cof-

fee cakes, *limpa* bread and sweet rye, the *skorpor* (coffee-cake toast) and all the other goodies. I saw my first pie at this bakery. It was a heavily cinnamoned apple pie, almost dark brown from cinnamon, and I begged my mother to buy it. Apple pie was an American dish and we were learning to know more American foods. As is so often the case, the first of anything is the best. No pie has ever since quite come up to the taste and perfection of that apple pie.

Gus Paezler owned the drugstore at 59th and Racine, the same pharmacy later owned by H. B. Lachov. Gus never married. He lived with his mother, Dr. Mary Paezler, our family physician, who had an office together with Dr. Johnson, upstairs above the drugstore. Gus held the second mortgage on my father's house and when Depression days came, helped my father obtain federal help through the Home Owner's Loan Corporation. He also helped me select the right college to enter in 1932. Real neighborly people!

In back of the drugstore, actually on Racine Avenue, was Peterson's Barber Shop. Known to everyone as Barber Peterson, its proprietor was in effect my father's intense rival for business as our barbershop was only a short block away. But in actuality they were close friends who often cut each other's hair. Mr. Peterson, like most of the Swedish businessmen around there, knew me since I was born and was always kind to me. I have often been in his home on Morgan street.

Edstrom's Drug Store was on the northwest corner of 59th Street and Morgan. Mr. Edstrom had a limp—I never knew the cause of it and did not get to know him too well because our drugstore was Paezler's. He was a good friend of David Edgar, the mortician next door, with whom he went fishing and hunting in Minnesota, Michigan, and Canada. Edgar and Son conducted most of the Swedish funerals in Englewood. Oakhill Cemetery at 119th and Kedzie is filled with the bones of the good Swedish immigrants of the "nineties and on" and I'm sure Edgar became wealthy putting them there. But Swedes remained loyal to their own morticians and when they built a new and larger mortuary on 79th Street, and later out in Oaklawn where they are today, their business flourished more than ever.

Across the street from Edgar's was Mr. Peterson's Shoe Store.

This Mr. Peterson was the only Swedish businessman on 59th Street who did not have a pleasing personality. He was a good shoe man, an excellent cobbler, and seemed to do good business, but he seemed to lack warmth and feeling. I believe he tried hard enough but just didn't relate to his fellow man.

Clarence Bergstrom started out with a small garage at 59th and Green Street. Years later, he became the dealer for the new Plymouth and De Soto automobiles. My Uncle Oscar traded in his Stearns Knight and was one of the very first men in Englewood to own a De Soto sedan.

Edholm's Printing Shop near Peoria Street was something out of the early age of type. He hand-set every piece of type with painstaking care and love, and really came up with very good work on his ancient equipment. Many years later, when I opened my practice, I had Mr. Edholm do all my printing. He was very pleased I hadn't forgotten him.

Jenning's Variety Store, next door to the Swedish Mission Covenant Church on Carpenter Street, was a place where I was very well known. Whenever Grandpa sent me there for a bottle of Kuriko, I always received a free nickel bar of candy from Mr. Jennings. So I kept close tabs on the contents of Grandpa's medicine bottle and would anxiously offer to run for another when the supply was low. When I was a little older I discovered the paperbacked Frank Merriwell books in this store and bought many of them during the Merriwell craze on our street of 40 years ago.

The Anderson and Osterholm Paint Store, the only one of its kind in the community, stood at 59th and Aberdeen street. I never knew either of the owners very well but that didn't matter. Otto Swanson worked for them and he lived in the large apartment upstairs over the store. My cousin Ernest was adopted by him and his good wife, so I spent much time both in the store and in the flat upstairs. I ate many good meals at the Swansons'.

Next door to the paint store was Mr. Highlander's butcher shop. Most of our meat was purchased in his shop and to this day I remember that at least twice a week I would be sent over to get one and a half pounds of round steak and a half pound of pork, all run through his grinder. Out of this mother would

make either Swedish meatballs or meatloaf, wonderful beyond description. We kids never tired of them.

Mr. Lundquist, the tailor, had a small basement shop next door to Hocking's Plumbing Shop, just west of Aberdeen Street on 59th. He worked long hours over his suits and coats and seemingly got nowhere. I played with his son Stanley, whom everybody called "Dummy" except me—I called him by his right name and he liked me. One day he was taken away and I never saw him again. He was a Mongoloid child and was sent to a special home.

Just off 59th Street on Halsted was the real estate and insurance office of Clarence O. Rosen, one of the founders of the Englewood Business Men's Association and probably the leading Swedish businessman on our street. In his office he hired a young Swede named Oscar Green, a man who was well known in Englewood for many years for his magnificent baritone voice. He was a staunch member of the Mission Church, where he directed the choir for many years. He also sang at most of the funerals at Edgar's Funeral Home.

There were other Swedish businessmen, just off of 59th Street. For example, there was "Upside Down Johnson," who was known by this strange name because all his store ads were printed upside down in the local paper. Or Peterson at 65th Street who had a huge sign on his furniture store: "What Peterson Promises, Peterson Does." Then there were the many Swedish physicians and dentists in our neighborhood; several on 59th Street, Drs. Johnson and Paezler, mentioned before, also Dr. Vinje at Carpenter Street and Dr. Reuben Anderson at 59th and Halsted Street, both dentists.

But the Swedish businessman our family knew and loved best was Knute Malm, who operated the delicatessen store just around the corner from our house on May Street. Here we purchased all the Swedish delicacies available. He also carried a big assortment of penny candy which we enjoyed. He was a great storyteller and held us spellbound with some of his tales. One in particular we never tired of, the one about King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden and the Pope. When the King had called upon the Pope in a diplomatic state visit, the Papal Father put his foot out to be kissed by the King. Gustavus Adol-

phus promptly drew out his sword and cried out, "Tag den foten, eller jag slår den av!" ("Take your foot away before I cut it off.") We never questioned this story and never tired of hearing it. Fortunately we didn't need the translation. Something is lost in translating anyway, and when Nick reenacted the scene, it was really King Gustavus Adolphus who was saying those deathless words. We were all quite grown up before we realized this story must have been a legendary Swedish schoolboy tale, like our story of George Washington and the cherry tree.

Nick played a major role in the old story of 59th Street; his was a store where everyone gathered and shopped and met their friends and felt welcome, whether the purchases were big or small. In later years he moved with his family to Minneapolis, later retired in Red Wing, Minnesota. By all standards, he was a successful and well-remembered businessman from Old 59th Street.

Most of the men are gone or retired and with them has vanished a pleasant, happy era. The shops, stores, and offices are gone, replaced by other businesses, by different people and by another environment. But I will never forget 59th Street, often dubbed "Snus Boulevard," as it was 40 years ago. I will always call it home and love it, and revere it in memory. There are many others who share these recollections and who often take a nostalgic look back upon those "good old days" centered around 59th Street.