

Marta Helesina Erickson Stromberg Bjurman was born on 23 June 1892 in Anundsjö, Öndernland, Sweden. She was of Laplander parents and often told of the harsh living conditions near the Arctic Circle.

Helesina's mother passed away when she was very young and her father remarried. With that union came two half-brothers. Helesina was treated poorly by her step mother, and this could have been the reason she decided to immigrate to America.

On October 11, 1912, Helesina purchased passage, steerage class, to Duluth, Minnesota. Her journey took her to Gothenburg, Sweden, then on a steamer across the North Sea to Grimsby, England. She then took a train to Liverpool where she boarded a Cunard steamer for America. The 20-year-old Swedish woman spoke no other language, but found other Swedes aboard with whom to associate.

The trip to Boston was uneventful. After arriving in Boston, Helesina was transferred to New York and processed into the United States through Ellis Island. She said that experience was traumatic, as she and other immigrants were stripped naked and thoroughly searched for lice, ticks, and other parasites. This was done in a large room with men and women together.

She then boarded a train for Minneapolis with a transfer up to Duluth, Minnesota. Helesina finally arrived at Duluth on October 31, 1912 and shortened and "Americanized" her name to Helen. She worked for her sponsor for a year and then moved to Minneapolis where she got a job as a cook and housekeeper for another wealthy family.

She lived in a boarding-house for young women, and in her spare time studied to be a nurse. One summer weekend a friend at the boarding-house invited her to a family picnic. It was out in the country on a farm near Barron, Wisconsin, where her friend's family lived.

"It will be fun!" Her friend said.

During the warm muggy afternoon, as the guests all talked in groups waiting for the big meal, Helesina noticed a good looking young man talking to her friend's parents. Suddenly he looked her way and their eyes locked. His name was John Bjurman, and he was instantly in love.

Helesina and John were married on October 6, 1917. They lived and worked on the family's dairy farm in Poskin, Barron County, Wisconsin and began their family. My mother, Helen, was born in the family home on December 10, 1924. She was the fourth child of seven children. There were five daughters and two brothers born to Helesina and John.

My mother, Helen, and several of her siblings moved to the Los Angeles area at the beginning of WWII. The depression took the family farm, and Helesina and John also moved to California, where John went to work in the shipyards.

My father, Austen Excell and his sister Venice, moved from Springdale, Utah to Los Angeles, where he went to work at Lockheed. It was there he met my mother, as both worked on building aircraft.

Dad joined the Army Air Corps and flew B-24 bombers over the European Theater. After the war, dad and mom returned to Springdale where they went into business.

My grandmother, Helesina, and grandpa John, moved to Springdale after they retired.

My last visit with grandmother was in August of 1971 just prior to my mission to Korea. She passed away in April of 1971, prior to my return. She was a true pioneer and blazed a trail from the Frozen North of the Swedish Laplands to sunny Dixie.