

## **Family History of Vaino (Wayne) Neva**

Isaac Niva (pronounced Nee'-va) was born in 1859 in Karungi, Sweden, near the Tornio (Torneå) River, which is the border between Sweden and Finland, to I. Niva and K. Niva.

Isaac came to the United States in about 1880 and lived in Silver Bow, near Butte, in the Territory of Montana. There Isaac married Kristiina Olson on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of July, 1889, when Isaac was aged thirty years and Kristiina aged twenty-five. Kristiina was born in Tyrnävä, Finland, in 1864, the daughter of Ole (Suutari) Olson and M. Olson. (The name Olson may have been taken upon immigrating to the U.S.)

Isaac and Kristiina, along with their two girls born in Montana, Aina and Selma, moved to north-central North Dakota in 1897. Isaac homesteaded land in Towner County, near Perth. He and Kristiina built a sod house. The prairie grass was thick, and it was cut out and stacked like bricks. The walls were white washed and the floor was trampled until it was as smooth as linoleum.

Isaac farmed with oxen. Oxen had a mind of their own. If they got hot and thirsty, they would take off to a watering hole. Isaac got disgusted with the oxen. He took them to town and traded them for a team of horses.

Isaac and Kristiina had five children: three girls, Aina (b. 1895), Selma (Sally) (b. 1896) and Jennie (b. 1898) and; and two boys, John Emil (b. 1900), who died at child birth, and Vaino, who was born in 1901 in Rolla, North Dakota. Vaino's name was later Anglicized to Wayne Neva.

After the girls were out of the house, Isaac quit farming and moved with Kristiina and Wayne to Astoria, Oregon, where Isaac may have worked in the fishing industry. Kristiina died there in 1917, when Wayne was about sixteen years old. They moved back to north-central North Dakota and lived in Rolla. Isaac retired there, then died on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of October, 1923, when Wayne was twenty-one years old.

In about 1926, Wayne married Anna Herrala, daughter of Otto Henry Herrala and Lidia Alina Koski. Lidia was born in 1886 in Atlantic Mine, Michigan. Otto was from Oulu, Finland, where he was widowed. Without telling his parents, for their own safety, he fled Finland in the middle of the night to avoid being drafted into the Russian army. It cost sixty dollars, a large sum of money, to gain ferry from England to the U.S. He settled in Redridge, Michigan.

To Wayne's union with Anna was born Inez (b. 1927), Evelyn (b. 1929), Ronald (b. 1934), Fred (b. 1939) and Helen (b. 1937). They lived in various towns in the area: Hansboro, Rock Lake, Cando, Perth, and Bisbee. Wayne and Anna rented homes, and money was tight, but they had a big garden. Anna canned vegetables and made home-made root beer.

Wayne learned carpentry skills, perhaps from his mother, and worked for farmers. He seemed to have a talent for carpentry, even without formal training. As for school, he only completed fifth grade.

Opportunity for work was limited in North Dakota, and his wage was more or less fifty cents per hour, whatever he was able to negotiate. In 1940, World War II had broken out and there was much work to be had in Minneapolis, Minnesota, building defense plants. Wayne Neva moved his family to Minneapolis and worked building a plant in Rosemont, Minnesota. By then, he had become skilled at his carpentry craft, and he joined the carpenters' union with a wage of one dollar-thirty per hour. That was quite a jump in pay. The minimum wage, then, was thirty cents per hour, so union carpenters were making five times the minimum wage. This made him a strong union advocate.

In The Great Depression, many banks failed and savings were lost. As a result, people came away with a great distrust of business and financial institutions. Wayne, too, was distrustful of the business world, so he never took the insurance offered by the union.

His son, Ronald, recalled of his father, "For only having a fifth grade education, he had a good mathematical mind. He was able to perform the mathematics his trade required. When I was in high school, I was taking algebra and was amazed the way algebra could solve many problems. I thought I'd test my dad by giving him a typical algebra problem. While I was getting a pencil and paper for him, he solved it in his head. That day I gained a great deal of respect for his intelligence.

"Dad played guitar. He sang Finnish songs and ballads. He was a social person, and Mother and Dad had many visitors. Mother often commented that she felt people liked to visit because of Dad's conversational ability.

"As a carpenter, he was in demand. Dad built several houses. He built about three homes in Minneapolis and two in Sebeka, Minnesota, along with a wooden silo. The amazing part to me was that he didn't have the wide array of power tools that are available to modern carpenters. He would sharpen his hand saws, for which he took great pride in their cutting efficiency. He was truly a master carpenter.

"He had a God-given talent for wood working. He had the ability to use what was at hand. He and Mother bought their house at 215 Gerard Avenue in Minneapolis. He needed trim for around the doors and windows. I thought he'd buy pre-fabricated trim, but he came across rough-sawn oak from a packing crate. He hand-planed the boards and fashioned them into trim that was equal to factory standards.

“Times were different back then in the 1940s. Dads worked and Moms shopped and ran the house. Families used cash, not checks or credit cards. They paid their bills at a notary public agency. Banks were located uptown and weren’t open Friday evenings or Saturdays, so when men got paid, they had to find a place to cash their checks.

“Neighborhood taverns had cashier windows, and a bad habit developed with many men: they would stop at the tavern to cash their checks, and then they’d have beer. (For years in Minnesota, taverns could sell only weak 3.2% beer, not 6% alcohol beer or hard drinks.) Drinking was a manly activity, and Dad would join his friends at a booth where they would take turns buying rounds of beers.

“Saturdays were shopping days, but Dad would come home late Friday evening from the tavern with part of his paycheck already spent. This caused a great deal of problems between Dad and Mother. Mother was a believer, a practicing Lutheran, but Dad, at the time, wasn’t, so there was a battle of values. They fought once or twice a week! After each fight, my father would be repentant and resolve to change. Dad was not a mean person; he never hit or threatened my mother, and we children were never abused. Even with all this fighting, they never once talked of divorce.

“(When I went to work for Hibbing Taconite Mine in 1975, the condition of my employment was that I had to agree to direct deposit of my paycheck. This greatly reduced family problems, when the wife had the first opportunity for the pay and men would no longer cash their checks at bars.)

“Although we knew Dad’s behavior was wrong, we sided with him because Mother came on so strong. It shows how kids can get mixed up in their thinking. Dad was a social drinker, not an alcoholic. I never saw him drunk. He never drank during the week or at home, and his drinking never interfered with his work. He was an honest man; he never cheated anybody and always paid his bills. When Dad didn’t drink, Mother was happy, and life was good.

“After the war, in about 1946, we move to Sebeka, Minnesota, where Dad bought a small farm. Why this came to be, I do not know. Perhaps, Mother thought a change of area would be a good change for the family.

“However, it was a bad experience for the whole family. Dad tried to farm, but frankly he was not a farmer. He was out of his element. Dad bought six cows from a man; he made payments, but fell behind, and the man repossessed the cows. The farm was only forty acres, not big enough to make a living, and there was not enough carpentry work to supplement his income. So he got a larger farm, about 120 acres, but that wasn’t successful, either. Mother had a nervous breakdown and Dad began drinking again. After only two year, we moved back to Minneapolis. There, Mother recovered, Dad found work, and the drinking tapered off.

“Around 1950, he developed cataracts in his eyes. In those days the doctors believed the cataracts had to be fully developed before they could operate, so his eye sight wasn’t good enough to hold a job. Surgery was primitive, and he was a victim of malpractice, for which his eyes required more procedures. In those days, there weren’t implants like we have now, so his vision was corrected with thick glasses.

“Mother went to work for the Supervalu packing center in Hopkins, Minnesota. Around 1952 or 1953, Dad went back to work. He was a skilled carpenter, so he was able to get the better jobs that were available in commercial building, which required exacting workmanship. He worked on Southdale Center, the first enclosed mall in the world.

“He worked for about four years, but developed other health problems, such as an enlarged prostate. He was diagnosed with a bleeding ulcer, which was treated for a couple of years. He thought it was just his ulcer, but his bone marrow may not have been producing blood. Thinking back, I now believe he actually had prostate cancer, which had spread to his bone marrow.

“In February 1960, when I was twenty-five, he went into the hospital for a blood transfusion and there he died.

“Because of his limited education, and being distrustful of the business world, he never took the insurance offered by the union. So he accumulated about \$17,000 in medical bills, which Mother was left to pay after his death. That was a large amount of money in 1960. She paid the whole bill herself, taking many years to do so. Though her wages were not high, she never considered bankruptcy. That’s the way my parents were, having survived The Great Depression.

“On the bright side, about four years prior to his death, he called for the minister of the Laestadius Luthern church to whom he stated his need for salvation. He repented of his sins.

“Mother and Dad never accepted us children as believers, because we were not affiliated with their denomination. That has always been hard for us to accept. We don’t use the same words; it is semantics. We say ‘born again’ and they say ‘conversion.’ Dad believed that one must ‘receive the blessing for the forgiveness of sins’ from someone in the Laestadian church. Nonetheless, he believed in the essentials of the faith, which all Christians believe. I believe both Mother, who died years later in 1997, and Dad are with the Lord, as it says in Galations, ‘some frustrate the Grace of God.’ The Lord considers the light that people have received.

“Dad should not be defined by a few dark incidents in his life. He should be defined by the whole of his life. My dad was a good dad. He always provided for his family. We were never in want. We were fed, clothed, housed and we never went hungry. He did his best.”

Written by Bryan Neva and Todd Neva as told by Ronald Neva