

Following their footsteps

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Swedish journalist traces grandparents journey.

Swedish journalist Per Nordangård is on a mission.

In addition to visiting places where his grandparents traveled 75 years ago, Nordangård is stopping in towns and cities with Swedish heritage.

Gothenburg was one such stop for a couple of days last week.

Founded by Swede Olaf Bergstrom in 1882, the city is named Gothenburg after its sister city Göteborg, Sweden.

Göteborg is home to the Göteborgs-Posten newspaper where Nordangård is a columnist.

While in Gothenburg, he visited The Times, the Gothenburg Historical Museum, the Senior Center, the Sun Theatre and Gothenburg Public Schools and stayed in The Resting Place bed and breakfast which is owned and operated by Forrest and Jewel Johnson who have Swedish heritage.

Nordangård said he was impressed by the school and the entrepreneurial spirit evident in the business community.

"And all the work put in by the voluntary sector to secure the welfare and the cultural heritage

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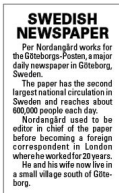
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of Gothenburg," he said.

People were friendly and helpful, he said, and seemed genuinely proud of their home town.

Because of that pride, and being from "the other Gothenburg (Göteborg)," Nordangård said he was proud of himself.

The biggest surprise, he said, was waiting at a railway crossing for a long train to pass.



"Coming from a country where trains normally consist of a handful of cars, it was quite an exotic experience," Nordangård said.

During their sojourn years ago, Nordangård's grandparents visited families in the United States who had immigrated from Sweden.

"They wanted to see how they were doing separate from Sweden," he said. "They took the train all over America."

Nordangård noted that Nebraska was well known for Swedish communities like Gothenburg.

While traveling to and through the United States, Nordangård is writing columns about who and what he encounters and is sending them to Göteborgs-Posten.

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His grandfather also wrote and sent columns to a local paper but it was in Småland.

Småland is a province in the southern part of Sweden.

Nordangård will rely on his own observations and his grandfather's articles to include in a book he is writing.

His two-month trip started in England, where he left by boat, and continued through the Panama Canal (like his grandparents) and up to Los Angeles, CA, where Nordangård strolled through a neighborhood where an uncle once lived.

"He wrote lots of letters to me, especially when I was in the hospital for rheumatism," Nordangård said. "He wrote about politics, life and hard times."

Nordangård said his uncle was the symbol of someone who lived his dreams and left Sweden.

Nordangård traveled to northern California before flying to Denver, CO, and finally into Gothenburg.

Last Wednesday, he flew to Minneapolis, MN, and would later travel to Chicago and New York City.

While in Gothenburg, Nordangård talked about how Sweden has changed in the last 20 years.

"It's the most multi-cultural country in Europe," he said. "It has the largest immigrant population which has dramatically affected politics."

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This change has also brought about nationalistic feelings which "aren't pretty," Nordangård said.

Recent immigrant groups have included Africans and Middle Easterners, especially from Syria, which number thousands each week.

"Everyone gets a visa because of the war there," he said.

Despite the difficulty of learning the Swedish language, Nordangård said he supports immigration because cultural growth is needed in Sweden.

Nordangård noted that Sweden is still a newspaper-reading country, adding that at least one or two papers exist in every small town.

Nonetheless, he said the print media in general is trying to figure out how to develop revenue streams from the Internet to support news-gathering costs.

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