

## Bew Wenzel's story

### *The presence of pandemics in our family*

Ola Svensson and Bengta Svensdotter lived in Rönås, near Kyrkhult, in Blekinge, Sweden. Ola supported his family as a tailor (skräddare) with his sewing machine positioned at a front window to view the road when anyone came by. Around their cottage, Bengta's love of flowers was evident in the wildflowers she grew and shared with friends and neighbors for funerals and special occasions. She also was known for a good cup of coffee, the aroma of which sometimes brought friends in as they passed on the road.

In this home, they brought eight children into the world, losing three of the boys before they were five. Their daughter, Olga, was a teenager when the Spanish Flu surfaced in Sweden and was asked to assist neighbors in their illness in the fall of 1918. On December 12, 1918, Olga herself became a victim of the Spanish Flu pandemic becoming the fourth of Bengta and Ola's children to die. Of the remaining four, the two daughters stayed in Sweden, married and moved to Malmo. The remaining two sons both immigrated to America with the younger of the two, Erik Olson, establishing his family in Wisconsin.

Future generations arrived to continue the family of Bengta and Ola and today there are two great grandsons, our nephews, who carry the heritage forward in the US. One of them has pursued the study of epidemiology with interest and expertise in the Spanish Flu epidemic, not realizing as a student that one of his ancestors succumbed to it so many years ago in Sweden. He is presently working with the New York Health Department on a team of epidemiologists in dealing with our present pandemic in 2020 over 100 years later.

Vilshult was my father's departure point in emigration from Blekinge. Slagernässjön is a lovely lake which my father enjoyed as a child and told of catching crab and selling them to the Tulseboda Health Resort in Kyrkhult. We stayed at the Galaxan Motel on the lake when visiting enjoying their lovely garden of wildflowers. My grandparents lived in Rönås just outside of Kyrkhult.