

Tuberculosis - The Tragic Story Of The Bernhard Olson Family

Bernhard and Nellie Olson emigrated to Otter Tail County from near Yankton, South Dakota, with their six young children by covered wagon in 1913. They carried everything they could to build a new life in Trondhjem Township. The wagon was crowded and overloaded, but they managed to find room for their precious piano. The 300-mile journey by wagon must have been agonizingly slow.

The Olson family settled on a farm about halfway between Pelican Rapids and Rothsay, three miles east of the South Immanuel Lutheran Church. Bernhard and Nellie had a strong faith, and the family quickly assimilated into the congregation. The older children attended school just a mile away at District #78.

The gently rolling land was rich, and the farm prospered. Cream and eggs were sold at either the Rothsay or Pelican Rapids creameries for a good price, and the wheat crops were superb. The future looked bright for Bernhard and Nellie. As the Olson farm prospered, the family grew, adding seven more children over the next decade and a half.

Then disaster and heartbreak struck the Olson family. The farm economy went into recession in the 1920s when prices plummeted, and in the 1930s, severe drought inundated the Midwest. Farmers everywhere suffered. But the biggest



OTC Sanatorium 1913 – The Ottertail County Tuberculosis Sanatorium on Otter Tail Lake operated from 1913 to 1955. It was painted white when members of the Olson family were patients in the 1930s and 1940s. (Photo from the collections of the Otter Tail County Historical Society, Fergus Falls)

tragedy for the Olson family was when Nellie fell ill with tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis, the “Forgotten Plague” that nobody talked about

Tuberculosis, or TB as we refer to it today, has afflicted humanity worldwide since ancient times. It is a chronic disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB can affect any body part, but most usually the lungs, hence the chronic coughing and the name “consumption” as it was referred to in the past. It progresses slowly, often over several years, and the mortality rate is high when left untreated. TB touched almost every family in America, and a cure or treatment baffled early medical science.

In the 1800s, European physicians

experimented treating TB with bed rest, good nutrition, sunshine, and fresh air. They also realized that the disease was contagious, so isolation was necessary to slow the spread of TB. Tuberculosis sanatoriums came into existence where patients received the special care they needed, and the mortality rate was reduced. But only the more affluent could afford a stay at a private sanatorium.

Private sanatoriums for the treatment of tuberculosis became popular in the late 19th century, but they were generally located near population centers, and few people had the money to pay them. TB, for the average person was often a death sentence, and no one wanted to talk about it, especially if it was a close family member.

In 1903, the Minnesota legislature

approved public funding for the treatment of tuberculosis, and soon public sanatoriums to treat patients in the rural parts of the state were built. Otter Tail County was the second county to build a TB sanatorium in 1913. The 36-bed facility was located in the country on the west side of Otter Tail Lake near Battle Lake, hence the nickname “Battle Lake San.” The official name was the Otter Tail County Tuberculosis Sanatorium. It was staffed by nurses and a doctor as the medical director.

The treatment plan was to let the body heal itself and consisted of a nutritious diet, bed rest, sunshine, and fresh air. Patients spent hours resting outside in the fresh air, barely clothed on open balconies in all but the coldest weather and then under several blankets. Some patients improved, others did not, and many died. The mortality rate at the “Battle Lake San” was 32%.

Sanitation was paramount, with the staff wearing masks to avoid becoming infected, but some were and became patients themselves. Body fluids from coughing were collected in special paper cups to prevent the spread of infection to other body parts. The patient's bedding and clothing were also thoroughly washed and sanitized.

Surgical treatment was used in the most challenging TB cases. It was usually to collapse the infected lung for a period of time to let it heal. Once tests indicated no active bacteria, the lung would be re-inflated. In the most severe cases, the lung was removed.

It wasn't until the mid-20th century that the antibiotic

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Marlyn and Beulah Westby 50th 2004 – Marlyn and Beulah Westby celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2004. (Photo from the Olson family collection)

RHS Crowns 2023 Snoball Royalty



The members of Snoball Court for Rothsay High School are, from left, front row-Raylaynd Brandt and Wyatt Pace; middle row-Curtis Opsahl, AnnaBella Poitra, Madi Tollerud, Queen Kenadi Carlsrud, King Logan Blumer, Hayden Emery, Grace Carlsrud, Easton Kort; back row-Hunter Marquardt, Michael Wendling and Justin Kugler.

By: Jeremy Rasmusson

Snoball week was held February 6th through the 10th. The week started off with a pep fest to get ready for the week of basketball games. Both the girls' and boys' basketball teams competed in different activities during the pep fest. Every day except Wednesday had a basketball game either home or away. The “Fill the Bill” on Thursday against Hillcrest was very successful raising a total of \$2192.35 for the Bill and Dar Rose Scholarship Fund. The win against Hillcrest by the girls basketball team was another thing to celebrate. On Wednesday the student participated in a basketball tournament for their activity. As usual many students participated in the dress up days.

The candidates for king and queen this year were Logan Blumer, Justin Kugler, Michael Wendling, Kenadi Carlsrud, Hayden Emery. Unfortunately, Sydnie Molter was ill and could not take part as the last senior candidate. Hunter Marquardt and Madi Tollerud represented the junior class, while AnnaBella Poitra and Curtis Opsahl the sophomore class. The freshman attendants were Grace Carlsrud and Easton Kort. The first-grade attendants were Raylaynd Brandt and Wyatt Pace. At Coronation, Logan Blumer was crowned king and Kenadi Carlsrud was

crowned queen. Regarding his thoughts on being this year's king, Logan Blumer said, “It was a great honor to be the king for Snoball and I enjoyed it a lot.”

After the crowning, the talent show started. There were many enigmatic performances done by the students. Two students played a ukulele and sang a song. The teachers went on stage, and each tried to play an instrument, producing mixed results. Katie Reber attempted to paint a picture with someone else acting as her arms and created a work of art. Several of the boys carried out a “synchronized swimming” performance that made the whole gym erupt with laughter. But the most popular act was Peyton Christensen dressed up as Napoleon Dynamite and doing his dance. “It was awesome to be involved and to be up there,” he said.

This year's coronation was very different from previous ones, but it was certainly a very memorable one. The student council worked very hard to make the week great for the students and they hope to have another great Snoball week next year. The emcees, Madison Tillman and Peyton Christensen spent a lot of time working on their performance. All of the talent show participants spent hours practicing their performances, which showed in their performances.



Emcees for the program Madison Tillman (Pedro) and Peyton Christensen (Napoleon Dynamite) doing their sign language dance.

Reber Is Chosen As Sub-Section 23 Triple A Winner

The Triple ‘A’ Award honors high school seniors throughout the state in the categories of academics, athletics, and arts. Students who have a 3.0 or higher-grade point average and who participate in Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) sponsored athletic and fine arts activities are eligible to be selected by their school. Each school may choose a boy and girl to send forward to the sub-section.

In Rothsay this is voted on by the teachers and coaches. They look at all eligible students' academics, how many sports a student is in and how much they participate in arts. This year the winners chosen to represent the Rothsay Public School were Katie Reber and Wylie Brenden. Congratulations to them both.

After being chosen by the school district the candidates move to each sub-section where two award winners (one boy and girl) are selected. To move to the next level the Triple ‘A’ Award recipients are selected through a multi-level process involving member schools

of the MSHSL, the MSHSL's administrative regions, and a special committee of educators, business leaders, and members from the fine arts and athletic communities.

Congratulations to Katie Reber on winning the Sub-Section 23 Triple ‘A’ Award. As the Sub-Section 23 Triple ‘A’ Award winner Katie will be honored at a luncheon on February 8 at Thumper Pond.

Two award finishers from each region (one boy and one girl) will be invited to a recognition banquet in March and League officials will announce the four statewide Triple ‘A’ Award winners at that time. All 32 finalists will also participate in an on-court ceremony during the Class AA championship game of the Boys Basketball State Tournament. The statewide award winners—a girl and a boy from Class A and Class AA schools—will also receive a four-year \$1,000 scholarship.

We wish Katie good luck as she moves forward to the next level as she represents Rothsay Public School and Sub-Section 23.



KATIE REBER