

My Great-Grandmother's Spinning Wheel

Joy Shong

When I was a child back in the 1950's we visited my grandparent's on their farm in Spring Lake, Wisconsin, between Spring Valley and Elmwood whenever we could. My mother's favorite aunt, Christine Hogenson Jacobson lived on a farm around the corner about a mile away. My mother would always find time to go visit Christie, and I always wanted to go along. I wasn't so much that I liked seeing this very tiny, sweet, elderly lady (I thought she was born old), but I liked to visit the spinning wheel in the upstairs bathroom.

I don't remember when I first saw the spinning wheel but it was probably on one of the visits when I needed to go potty and couldn't wait to get back to Grandpa's farm. It was love at first site. I was fascinated. I would beg my mother in a whisper to go upstairs, but always had to wait patiently (Ha – impatiently!) until mom and Aunt Christie had their cookies, coffee and a good visit. I can't remember if I was ever allowed to touch it.

This farm house actually had indoor plumbing, which was also a treat, since my grandparent's farm only had an outhouse and a tin tub in the milk house for baths. Water had to be carried from the pump or dipped out of the milk tank for baths. Aunt Christie's bathroom was large enough to have a dresser along with the fixtures, and plenty of space for the spinning wheel.



Best of all, I was promised the spinning wheel in the event of Aunt Christie's death. When she eventually passed away in 1961 when I was 12 we trekked over to her house and took the spinning wheel, carding paddles, and skein winder. Since my grandmother still raised sheep she had some wool in the house. She showed me how to set up the wheel, card the wool, and spin. I tried it, and found it is a lot harder than it looks.



taken when the new spinning wheel arrived from Norway.

I was told that this was the new spinning wheel that had been sent over from Norway in the early 1900's. There was even a photo an album of my grandpa's mother with the wheel. As I started researching family history it dawned on me that the reason she had her photo taken with the wheel on the farmhouse porch was the same as when grandpa took a pictures of the new tractor. Pride. That photo with Ragnhild Ryhaug Hogenson, Christina and sister Minnie, must have been

Ragnhild had brought a spinning wheel with her from Norway in the 1870's. That wheel, with the date 1877 painted on it, was relegated to the attic. The new wheel is made in the same basic style as the old one but the dimensions and the wheel supports are different.



Old spinning wheel from Folldal/Alvdal
Norway with initials RJD dated 1877



Over the years whenever I visited museums I looked for wheels like the one I have but never found one. They were smaller, or larger, or the bench (the flat board that all the parts are attached to) was at a steeper angle, or the spindles were configured differently.

Imagine how surprised I was when I visited the folk museum in Tynset, Norway and found a spinning wheel that was the twin of mine. And again on the Ryhaug farm Ragnhild came from that there were two more spinning wheels similar mine.

Both wheels, mine and the one in Tynset, have initials "BPC" carved on the bench that holds the wheel. I have written to the museum requesting information about spinning wheel makers in the early 1900's in the area of Folldal – Alvdal – Tynset.



Spinning Wheel in museum in Tynset, Norway

The spinning wheel has been prominently displayed in all of the houses I have lived in. This year a friend taught me how to spin again, and I still find it harder than it looks.



Christina Marie (Hogenson) Jacobson