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Book Reviews



A Bridge Disaster

The Halfway to Hell Club. In Search of Lindros and the Other Men who fell in the Gate, by Börje Lundvall. Publisher: Lundvall Konsult och Design (27 Feb. 2015). Paperback 260 pages. ISBN-13: 978-9163769566. Available from Bokus.com (a Swedish bookstore). Price 200 SEK + postage.

An exciting genealogy trip is offered by Börje Lundvall in the richly illustrated book *The Halfway to Hell Club* with some clarification of the title despite the confusing subtitle: "*In Search of Lindros and the Other Men Who Fell in the Gate.*"

The story's beginning is in the Småland cottage in Halltorp, just south of Kalmar, which the author first visited in 1964 in his grandmother's company. Börje was then 10 years old and they came to celebrate that great-uncle (*gammelfarbrodern*) Karl Lindros had reached the age of 90. The meeting with the engaging birthday child was reinforced by what Börje heard about Karl Alfred Åke, the old man's son's emigration and his tragic death on 17 February 1937. He and nine other bridge builders were killed when a construction platform collapsed from the nearly completed Golden Gate Bridge, the era's perhaps most acclaimed bridge construction project.

Charles Lindros, as he called himself in America, was born in 1906 in Söderköping, and had six years of elementary school and some easier jobs before his emigration in Novem-

ber 1925. The 19-year-old's destination was California, due to three cousins who had already emigrated to San Francisco.

It went well for them and Albin and Fred's construction company gave a job to the newcomer. But the Great Depression lurked behind the "roaring twenties" and Charles had to devote himself increasingly to seeking new jobs in various locations in California. The source material about the thoroughly optimistic man is far from rich, but thanks to the author's research efforts fired by his indomitable energy, his ingenuity, and via long research trips in the U.S., Charles Lindros's life path is shown in a fascinating way. The initial source are the letters home to his family, the first only a few weeks after landing in New York. Three letters from 1926 bear witness to the difficulties for a job-seeking immigrant, long before the start of the Depression.

According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Charles lives in the idyllic town of Eureka, in the middle of "Redwood

country." He finds jobs in lumber camps and sawmills, and sends a series of photos from there home.

At the end of the year he is again without a job, but in a letter from the spring of 1931 he tells that he has escaped the perilous life as a hobo by finding a farming job up in the mountains. Life brightens for him when he met Marie Zimmerman, whom he married in December of 1934.

The sensational project of building the bridge over the "Golden Gate" been underway for about a year, when Charles got a job there as a construction worker. It was a stroke of luck the Lindros couple probably thought. But then came the fatal day in February 1937, which became the worst disaster in the history of the bridge construction, and was reported all over the U.S., but not mentioned in Sweden.

In her state of despair Marie felt that she had to inform the unknown family in Sweden. Her touching letter starts "I wish the person reading this letter will break this awful news as gently as possible to Charles's people. It just about kills me to have to write it."

Here ends the thread in Börje Lundvall's chronicle. It has become multifaceted, thanks to the author adding knowledge about the immigrant country at large and long hours in the research field. The result is eminently commendable.

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