

Collector: Jim Leary

October 29, 1980

Informants: Clarence & Alberta Isberg

A folklorist's work is fraught with near misses, unexpected pleasures and disappointments. I wish I had had a bit more time when I visited the Isbergs on October 22. Sunday morning, October 26, I received a call from a distraught Mrs. Isberg. Clarence had "just fallen over" on Friday. He died a short while later. His singing will never be recorded, but I do hope to visit Mrs. Isberg at a later date to talk about her husband's singing and his record collection.

The obituary in the Daily Press (see attached clipping) said the funeral would take place Tuesday, the 29th, at the Saron Lutheran Church. I arrived for the service presided over by Pastor Sterling Nelson. There were a good many people gathered as I slipped into a back pew. The service began with "an old Swedish hymn" translated into English: #474 in the Lutheran Book of Worship, "Children of The Heavenly Father." Pastor Nelson delivered a fine, anecdotal and personal sermon. He spoke of Mr. Isberg as an "honest, trustworthy and popular" man. And he went on to give the man's background. Born in the Birch Lake area, Isberg's parents had died when he was still in his early teens. A hard worker from an early age, Clarence had met with a number of difficult setbacks including several industrial accidents and a heart attack. Despite hardship, the pastor continued, Clarence and his wife continued to love each other. According to local testimony, they always sat close to one another while driving in their car, as if young lovers. Embittered because local church folks didn't help his family when Clarence's parents died, and put off by earlier Swedish Lutheran prejudices against people of other faiths and ethnic backgrounds, Clarence had only recently returned to the church and was taking religious instruction at the time of his death.

An old neighbor, George Dybedol (also "born again") followed the sermon with several hymns - each was prefaced by an anecdote about Clarence. Recalling that Clarence had told him years earlier that "you're going to sing at my funeral," George launched into "Beyond The Sunset." Later George sang "The Pearly Gates Will Open." Two of the verses of this Swedish hymn were rendered in the native tongue, while two were English translations. The service closed with "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." After briefly hanging around to greet Pastor Nelson and offer condolences to Mrs. Isberg, I departed.