



Hilding Bernhard Bengtson

March 2, 1913 - April 6, 1967

1913 in History

March 2, 1913: Hilding Bernhard (**Bernie**) **Bengtson born** in Hordville, Nebraska.

March 3, 1913: **Woman Suffrage Parade** of 1913: A group of 8,000 supporters of women's right to vote, led by Alice Paul of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, was besieged by a mob as the marchers, mostly women, paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC, on the eve of the presidential inauguration.

March 4, 1913: **Woodrow Wilson was inaugurated** as the 28th President of the United States.

March 6, 1913: The tercentenary of the reign of the **Romanov dynasty** was celebrated across the Russian Empire. Tsar Nicholas II, the last of the dynasty, would be deposed less than five years later.

March 10, 1913: Died: **Harriet Tubman**, 98, former slave famous for conducting thousands to freedom on the "underground railroad". She was given a burial with full military honors at Auburn, New York.

March 11, 1913: Edmond Perreyon of France set a new record for **highest altitude in an airplane**, reaching 19,281 feet.

March 16, 1913: **The first animated cartoon series** made its debut in movie theaters, as filmmaker Émile Cohl produced 13 episodes adapting *The Newlyweds*, a comic strip by George McManus.

March 23, 1913: On Easter Sunday, **tornadoes swept through Omaha**, Nebraska and killed 150 people. The storm was followed by heavy rainfall as it moved eastward over the next four days, killing more than 1,000 people in "the **most widespread natural disaster** the United States had ever endured."

March 25, 1913: **Great Dayton Flood**: The Ohio River valley was flooded by heavy rains, rising to the highest recorded levels to that time and killing more than 500 people. Hardest hit was Dayton, Ohio, where 400 drowned, on the Great Miami River and the Mad River. There was heavy damage to other cities in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois in what would prove to be "The **second-worst flood of the 20th century** in America," exceeded only by the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927.

April 5, 1913: **Ebbetts Field** opened as the new home of baseball's **Brooklyn Superbas** (later the **Dodgers**), who played an exhibition game against the New York City team from the rival American League. The former "New York Highlanders" had a new name, the **New York Yankees**. The Superbas won, 3-2, before 25,000 fans.

April 16, 1913: Dr. **Albert Schweitzer** of Germany arrived in Lambaréné in Gabon, beginning his **mission to Africa**, combining evangelism with the founding of a hospital.

November 6, 1913: Mohandas (later "**Mahātmā**") **Gandhi** is arrested while leading a march of Indian miners in South Africa. These events eventually led to his work for the independence of India.

December 1913: Karen Christenze Dinesen, later known as Baroness **Karen Blixen** and author **Isak Dinesen**, leaves for Africa by ship from Naples. In January 1914 she joins her second cousin Bror von Blixen-Finecke in Kenya, marries him, and starts a pioneer coffee plantation near Nairobi. Her time in Africa led to her famous novel, *Out of Africa* (1937; movie 1985). Much later the phrase "Out of Africa" was adopted by anthropologists to summarize the emergence of modern humans from Africa, a theory confirmed in the 1980s by DNA of modern humans, and evidence based on physical anthropology of archaic specimens (fossils).

Thanks to Wikipedia.

Hilding Bernhard Bengtson (henceforth “Bernie”)¹ was born March 2, 1913, in rural Hordville, Nebraska, to John Bengtson and Gerda Clarissa Bengtson (née Person). He was welcomed to the family by a sister, Olivia, and two brothers, Sigfrid and Leland. Another brother, Clarence, would arrive three and a half years later. Hordville is a small community in Hamilton County on the south shore of the Platte River, about 100 miles west-southwest of Omaha.² The Bengtson family had lived in the area about three and a half decades, since Bernie’s grandparents moved there from Illinois in 1877.

The Bengtson family was Swedish-American, evangelical and devoutly religious in the Augustana Lutheran tradition, quite conservative, and Republican in the tradition of Lincoln. Bernie’s grandfather, D. John (Johannes) Bengtson,³ had settled with his family in the Land of Lincoln (Galesburg), in May 1868, shortly after arriving from Sweden, thus only about three years after the president’s violent death.⁴ D. John sent his sons to Augustana College in Rockford, Ill. because he wished them to be sufficiently educated to avoid the physical demands of manual labor, and also because he hoped one or more of the lads would be called to be a pastor. As it turned out, this would not happen till the next generation, with Bernie. (Bernie’s father, John, did do some studying for the ministry, but he did not get as far as ordination.)⁵

The strong evangelical streak in the Bengtson family began when D. John was spiritually transformed in a revival that swept Sweden in the 1860s. A traveling tailor, D. John held Sunday services in homes he visited for business, and when he arrived in Nebraska and found that the only Swedish-speaking church in Hamilton County was Baptist, he walked 16 miles to the nearest Lutheran pastor to talk about establishing a Lutheran church. Before long D. John had erected a sod house for his home, and it was also the place where the first service of the new Fridhem (‘Home of Peace’) Lutheran congregation was held. In 1883 they dedicated a proper wood-frame church building. Decades later his grandchildren, including Bernie, would be baptized in the Fridhem Church, and the congregation still continues in Hordville.

The Bengtson family was bilingual. Though both of his parents were born in the U.S.A., all their lives they were more comfortable with the Swedish language. In Bernie’s childhood English was the language of business, government, school, and amongst other neighborhood children, while Swedish was used in church, prayer, and speaking within the family, especially with the older folks. But even then the use of Swedish was in decline, especially after WWI. This bilingual background, which gives a person linguistic versatility, must have benefited Bernie years later, when he was thrust into a different multilingual environment in Africa.

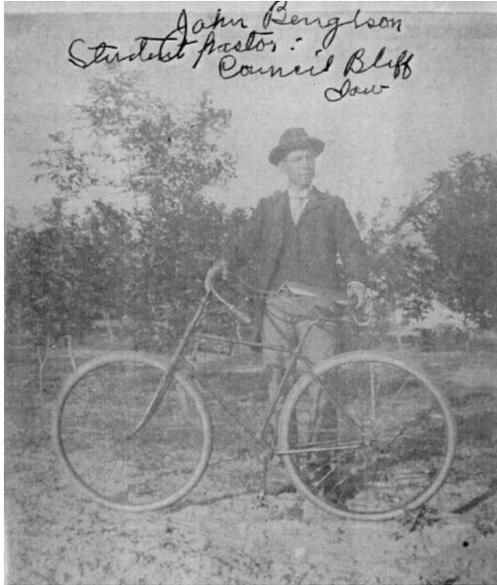
¹ Bernie did not like the name “Hilding.” To his parents it was an old Nordic word for ‘warrior’, but in archaic English it means ‘a base contemptible person’ or ‘base menial wretch’ of either sex (as used by Shakespeare), and he once got a letter addressed to *Miss Hilding Bengtson*.

² Tiny Hordville has a website!: <http://www.hordville.org/index.html>

³ D. John Bengtson was known in Sweden as Johannes Bengtsson i K rsveka (= John, son of Bengt [Benedikt], who lives at K rsveka). We have not been able to find out for certain what the “D.” stood for. One old relative thought it was *Da(h)len* ‘(man of) the dale, valley’.

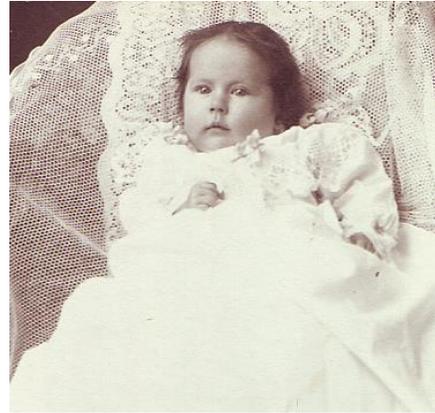
⁴ Galesburg was home to a famous Swedish-American, the poet Carl Sandburg. One of his works was a multivolume biography of Lincoln, which Bernie owned. Sandburg died the same year as Bernie.

⁵ According to his daughter Olivia this plan was terminated “for health reasons.” See the photo of him in Council Bluffs, Iowa.



Bernie's Father

Inscribed "John Bengtson student pastor :
Council Bluffs, Iowa"
Thanks to Elaine (Anderson) Murphy



Baptismal photo

Hordville, Nebraska 1913



Olivia, Sigfrid, Leland, Bernie

Little Bernie looked about 2 or 3
Thanks to Elaine (Anderson) Murphy



Bernie's Parents

John & Gerda
Wedding picture – October 1901
Central City, Nebraska



Bernie and Clarence

In March 1919, when Bernie was only six years old, the family packed up and moved from Nebraska to the Canadian province of Alberta. Grandpa John Bengtson laid claim to the “Southeast Quarter of Section 24, in Township 15, Range 16,” *i.e.*, 160 acres on the eastern shore of the Bow River. The Bengtsons and the other newcomers were mostly Americans of Scandinavian descent from Minnesota, Illinois, and Nebraska, and the new community was originally known as the “Swedish Colony” or “Upland.”⁶ In May 1919 the settlers met to establish a congregation, the Swedish Evangelical Salem Lutheran Church. Grandpa John was a prime mover in this effort (as his father had been in Nebraska four decades earlier) and he was elected to the first board of deacons. Grandpa John also served as minister for most of the services held in members’ homes (at first, tar-paper shacks) until 1921, when they were conducted in the new two-room schoolhouse, named “Jenny Lind School” in honor of the famous Swedish singer. All church services were in Swedish until 1924. Eventually the colonists asked the Canadian federal government to establish a post office. Some of the pioneers, who came from Scandia, Minnesota,⁷ suggested the name of their former community, and thus in January 1924 the name *Scandia* was agreed upon.⁸

For the first 17 years before their home was built the family lived in the same building with the livestock. As Bernie’s brother Clarence related,

As I lay in my bed at night I could hear the horses chewing on their hay and they would shove it from one end of the manger to the other. On occasion I heard the lowing of the cows, and in the morning the friendly nicker of the horses as my parents entered the barn to milk the cows.

Eventually they had established a large estate on which they raised crops with the help of irrigation canals, and also tended a large herd of beef cattle, and other animals. The Bengtson boys grew up learning the cowboy skills of roping, corralling, branding, and driving cattle. Alberta has vast areas of prairie grassland and in the spring Grandpa John and the boys drove the herds out to one of these grazing grounds that they leased. The Bengtson ranch had a brand with the shape **JB** (after the patriarch John Bengtson) so they could distinguish their cattle in case they got mixed with other herds or were “rustled.”

Bernie was confirmed in the Christian faith on September 2, 1928. Salem Lutheran Church presented him with a new Bible.⁹ It must have been well-used since there is a note that it was rebound at Calgary only ten years later. Many passages are underlined and embellished with notes in Bernie’s graceful, flowing script, with a fountain pen. Bernie later obtained a small New Testament and Psalms in Swedish, inscribed with his signature and “Lutheran College & Seminary, Saskatoon – Fall, 1942,” in the same fluid calligraphy.

Bernie had to drop out of high school after his junior year to devote his energies to the Bengtson ranch for almost a decade. Note that it was 1930, the Great Depression, which affected Canada to the same degree as the U.S. And if that were not enough, it was also the time of the Dust Bowl, which devastated the North American prairies from Texas and New Mexico in the South to Alberta and Saskatchewan in the North. The Bengtson ranch, like all other ranches and farms in the prairies, was severely impacted by the Dust Bowl which greatly reduced their ability to raise

⁶ These and other historical facts are drawn from the book *Scandia since Seventeen*, published by the Scandia Historical Committee (1978).

⁷ J.A. Hawkinson (Håkansson), Albert Swenson, and Frank Swenson, from Scandia, Minnesota, purchased the first parcels of land in Upland in June 1917.

⁸ Ancient geographers and historians, such as Ptolemy (2nd century) and Jordanes (6th c.) thought Scandinavia was an island, called *Scandza* or *Scandia*.

⁹ Standard American Edition of the Revised (“King James”) Version, issued by Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1901.



Confirmation Class
Salem Lutheran Church, Scandia Alberta
Bernie is second from left – Sept. 2, 1928



“Trick photography”
by Bernie’s brother Sigfrid (Sig)
Elaine Murphy comments: “Uncle Sig was quite the photographer too, developing his own prints. He was so special, loved kids. Taught his dog to count. The dog rode on the running board to their car ... etc.”



Bengtson Men
Leland, Bernie, John, Sigfrid, Clarence



Cadet Bengtson – 4th from left in back row.
Canadian R.O.T.C. 1940s



“Chicken hatchery 1935”



Bernie and friends

cash crops and fodder for the cattle and other animals. In hard times like this school was a costly luxury for farm and ranch families.

We understand that it was during the latter part of this leave of absence from school that Bernie felt a calling from God to devote his life to his Savior Jesus Christ. By the end of the 1930s the Prairie Provinces had pretty well fully recovered from the hard times, and Bernie went back to high school at the age of 27. He graduated as the class valedictorian, and then went on to Camrose Lutheran College in Camrose, Alberta. After that Bernie enrolled in the Lutheran College and Seminary in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan for his pastoral training. We do not have exact dates, but all of Bernie's higher education must have taken up the period from 1941-1946.

In 1946 Bernie was ordained a pastor in the Augustana Lutheran Church. That summer he accepted a call to be a summer speaker at a Bible camp in Wisconsin, where the camp nurse was one Doris Mae Furrer, a young lady who had recently mustered out of the U.S. Army Nurses Corps and enrolled in the Lutheran Bible Institute (LBI) in Minneapolis. Bernie told Doris that he was going to Africa as a missionary, and Doris replied "it will be hot there." They fell in love and within months, on May 4, 1947, they were married in Forest Lake, Minnesota. Their honeymoon in Canada, including Banff and Lake Louise, was spectacular and romantic. Later that year Bernie and his bride accepted a call to the Augustana mission field in Tanganyika Territory (now Tanzania), British East Africa.

In late summer Bernie and Doris set off for Africa, and the last leg of their voyage was on a ship through Egypt on the Suez Canal. There they stopped for the obligatory visit to Giza, and the camel ride to see the Sphinx and Pyramids. When they arrived in Africa in September, 1947,¹⁰ one of the first orders of business was orientation to living in an alien land, and intensive classes in Swahili, the *lingua franca* of East Africa. Doris was already pregnant and in March 1948 a son, John, was born in the Bumbuli mission hospital. About twenty months later a daughter, Phyllis, was born at the Machame mission on Kilimanjaro.

Our first long-term home was at Shigatini, in the Pare Mountains, a moderately high range comparable to the Appalachians.¹¹ The highest peak is about 8000 feet. We lived in a stone masonry house built by German missionaries decades earlier. Missionaries had found out by bitter experience that people of European descent who try to live in the tropical zone thrive much better at higher altitudes, where clean water is abundant and the climate is milder, than down on the hot, dry plains or on the hot, damp coast. There are many stories of missionary families decimated by tropical illnesses, and living in the mountains offered some protection from those. Nevertheless, we slept with mosquito nets over our beds to keep the carriers of malaria and sleeping sickness away.

At Shigatini, and later in our other African homes, we employed African servants to help with child care, cooking, cleaning, and laundry. This was beneficial to both sides of the deal: missionaries were freed from home chores to pursue their appointed work, and the servants enjoyed monetary income that was a huge boon to them, though small by American standards. We kids came to love our *ayahs* (nannies) who were our constant companions much of the day, and we learned African culture and languages from them easily and naturally.

British East Africa was formerly German East Africa (1891-1918). The Leipziger Missionswerk, a German Lutheran evangelical organization, began its work in Tanganyika in

¹⁰ Elmer Danielson wrote "Pastor and Mrs. H. Bernhard Bengtson had arrived from America just in time for the Conference" held at Machame (Kilimanjaro), Sept. 14-17, 1947. About 2 years and 2 months later Phyllis Diane Bengtson was born at Machame.

¹¹ From this point the story will be narrated from the perspective of Bernie's children, with "we," "us," "our."



Calgary 1935
A serious student



On honeymoon 1947



With Bernie's family in Scandia 1947

Front row: Grandpa John and Grandma Gerda
Back row: Clarence, Ilene (Rosdal) Bengtson, Virginia (Anderson) Hildenbrand, Doris, Bernie



Bernie with his niece, Elaine
Thanks to Elaine (Anderson) Murphy



Destination: Africa 1947

1896, but in 1934 the Nazi regime forbade German churches to continue supporting foreign missions. In 1938 Dr. Reusch (see below) traveled to Minneapolis to negotiate the transfer of Leipzig's missions to the Augustana Mission Board, so Bernie and his fellow Augustana missionaries replaced the Germans, though some of the latter were able to continue under Augustana direction.

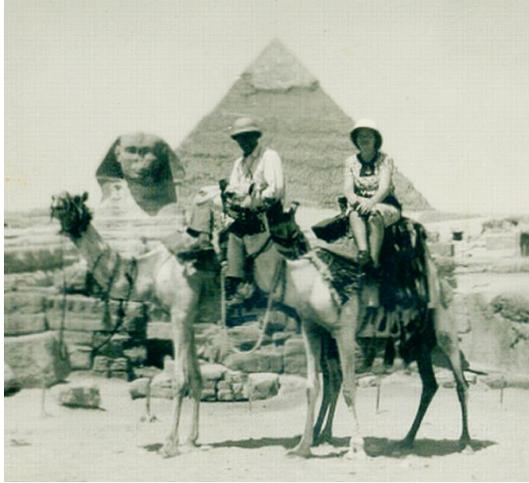
Bernie and Doris, and their kids, were confronted by no single African culture but by *many*. Tanzania is one of the oldest inhabited areas on earth, is tremendously diverse and home to at least 120 different ethnic groups. As Bernie described in his Master's thesis, the Pare area where we lived had been inhabited long ago by click-speaking hunter-gatherers ("Bushmen"), then (3000-6000 years ago) by Cushites from the North (traditionally descended from Noah's grandson Cush), who introduced farming, then, around the time of Christ, by iron-wielding Negroid Bantu-speakers of West African origin, then by militant Nilotes (Masai, Barabaig, etc.) coming south along the Nile River from Sudan with large herds of longhorn cattle (15th – 18th centuries AD). The non-African cultures that played important roles in the land included Arabs, Persians, Portuguese, East Indians, Greeks, then the Germans and British. When we went to Arusha for shopping or a movie it included a stop at Naranjan Singh's grocery store,¹² and we hankered for the "fast food" – *sambūsas* – spicy meat pies peddled by Cushite (Somali) street vendors. Bernie did not shrink from meeting people from exotic cultures – on the other hand he respected and enjoyed them and instilled in us an appreciation of the vast variety of God's children. "Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight" was not just a song but a living reality for us.

The area where we lived had been a source of slaves for the Arab slave trade. For centuries Africans were paraded in shackles down to the coast and the big slave market on Zanzibar Island. The Sultan of Zanzibar ended slavery in 1897, and the British tried to eradicate the trade, but Doris told us she talked to an old man in the Pare region who remembered that sorry era and had seen the caravans of people strung together by their necks. The European colonial powers in East Africa, German and later British, operated under the assumption of racism and white supremacy. In Tanganyika we witnessed some manifestations of *Apartheid*, though not quite as pernicious as in South Africa. For example, in the towns there were three sets of public restrooms, for Europeans, Asians, and Africans. Bernie took us into an Asian bathroom once to show us how senseless it was and how he abhorred this segregation.

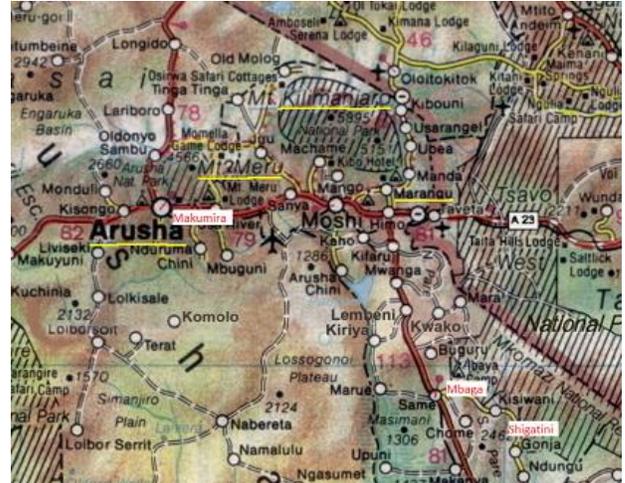
The cultural gap between white American Lutherans and Black Africans was, naturally, enormous. As historian David Johnson put it, "Augustana missionaries received no substantive training to prepare them for the cultural differences they would experience." Bernie and Doris' fellow missionary Martin Olson said African church leaders "reasoned out things entirely different from our conceptions of logic, in fact in many cases directly opposite from our way of thinking. To 'think Black' is difficult for us." Bernie gradually came to understand and respect these differences, and realized that in many ways African thinking was actually *closer* to the Middle Eastern Hebraic thought patterns of the Bible than his own Northern European mindset was. This realization percolated in his mind for many years and culminated in his Master's thesis.

They also dealt with religious diversity. Each tribe had its traditional, generally "Animist," religious beliefs. Muslim missionaries began arriving in East Africa around AD 1000, at first from Persia (Iran), spreading their faith to Zanzibar and the coast, and later farther inland. (We called them "Mohammedans" in the 1950s.) The first Christians in Tanzania were Roman Catholics, beginning with the Portuguese in the 16th century, and Catholic missions have persisted ever since. The German Lutheran Leipziger Missionswerk began its work in Tanzania in 1896, laying the

¹² Naranjan Singh's store was featured in the movie *Hatari* (1962): see photo section.



Giza, Egypt 1947



Northern Tanganyika



Missionary Conference 1947

Doris and Bernie are second and third from right in the back row



Pare Mountains at Shigatini



The Danielson family

Eleanor, Wilfred, Evelyn, Elmer, Laurence, Lillian, Luella, Lois – Elmer was Bernie's "boss" on the mission field



Familiar scene in the mountains

Women toting goods on their heads – to or from market.

groundwork for the American Lutherans who succeeded them, and in many cases worked with them.

Northern Tanzania is dominated by the presence of Africa's highest mountain, Kilimanjaro. It is the highest free-standing mountain in the world, and its peak is visible from a large area of northern Tanzania and southern Kenya. Bernie spoke about Mount Kilimanjaro in his sermon "Take the High Road":

Far across the waters, in a land whose shores are lapped by the waters of the Indian Ocean, rises the sweeping skyline of a majestic mountain whose snow-covered peak towers to nearly 20,000 feet. On its vast slopes live thousands of dusky-skinned people, busily caring for their banana groves, coffee plantations, and on the plains their corn fields, which are as basic to that country's economy as they are in our own state [Iowa]. When these energetic people want to visit their relatives and friends in other valleys and other slopes of the great mountain, or set out to attend a church celebration or baptism in some other congregation, they have their choice of roads.

They can take the Valley Road. Hot, dusty, thronged with people, jostling each other, competing to get early to the market (good price for what you sell, or cheap for what you buy). Dog eat dog, do or get done by. Arrive hot, dusty, out of sorts with yourself and others. That's the Valley Road.

And then there's the Mountain Road! It points you to the skies, your eyes are directed heavenward. Cool and invigorating is the air from the snow fields above. Green are the surrounding banana groves, higher the evergreen forests. Beyond you stretch the vast plains lifting to the skyline fifty or 100 miles away. Everything combines to make your journey a continual benediction, God seems close, thoughts can be high on the Mountain Road ...

We visited the Kilimanjaro area many times at mission stations like Machame and Marangu, and Phyllis was born at Machame because of the excellent mission hospital there. The way of life in the Pare range where we lived is comparable, on a smaller scale, to that of Kilimanjaro.

Kilimanjaro reminds us of one of Bernie's missionary colleagues, Dr. Richard Gustavovich Reusch (1891-1975), who was a "larger than life" character. A former officer of the Russian Imperial Army, he had been active in the Leipzig Mission in East Africa since the 1920s, and later with the Augustana Mission.¹³ Dr. Reusch was world famous for climbing Kilimanjaro 50 times. Dr. Reusch was also the author of the *History of East Africa*, which Bernie quoted in his master's thesis. We kids were unaware of these accomplishments. Phyllis barely remembers meeting him at a mission station near Arusha. She picked up the vibes that he was "special." Bernie liked to quote Dr. Reusch calling our brother Paul "my little meat-eating friend."

We remember other German missionaries, including nurses that we knew as "Sister Liddy" (Doer) and "Sister Jenny." These sisters were not Catholic nuns but Lutheran deaconesses. (Bernie had a cousin who was a deaconess, Sister Emily Bengtson, sister of the Cousin Ruby mentioned later in this account.) The Waltenburg and Böhringer kids went to school with us at Kiomboi. Bernie's Swahili Bible was printed in Stuttgart (1939) and on the front endpaper he wrote, in pencil, "H. Bernhard Bengtson, Lwandai, Usambara, Febr 1951." We later became aware of the great sacrifices of the German missionaries. Two of them, Ewald Ovir and Karl Segebrock approached the leaders of the Meru tribe in 1896, asking for a plot of land to build a church, school, and medical clinic. Unfortunately, the young Meru and Arusha warriors did not know how to

¹³ <http://www.lmw-mission.de/de/missionar-343.html> ; http://augustanaheritage.org/Dan_Johnson_Presentation_on_Reusch.pdf



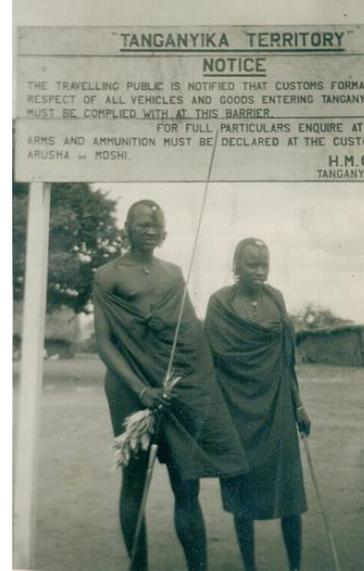
Mission house at Shigatini¹⁴



Missionary gathering at Shigatini 1951
Bernie & Phyllis in foreground



Beautiful ayahs



Masai moranis (warriors)
Some of them picked up cash posing for tourists.



Pre-1953 stamp
King George VI



1953 stamp
Queen Elizabeth II

¹⁴ This photo was found on the web, taken by Jürgen D. Müller in 1987:

<http://ulaya.blogspot.com/2007/01/die-erste-reise-nach-tanzania.htm>

distinguish the peaceful missionaries from the German soldiers who were overrunning their country, and they and two African Christians with them were spared to death.

Some of our best friends in the early years were Elmer Danielson and family. They had been in Tanzania since 1928. After a furlough Elmer returned to Africa in 1940 ahead of his wife Lillian and six children, who boarded the S.S. *Zamzam* on March 20, 1941, with the intention to join him in Africa. The Egyptian ship carried 201 passengers, of which 144 were Christian missionaries of several denominations, and was sailing “blackened out” to avoid attention from German warships. Nevertheless, at 5:30 a.m. on April 17 the *Zamzam* was shelled by a German raider, the *Tamesis*, in the Atlantic Ocean between South America and South Africa. Miraculously, no passengers were killed or seriously wounded. After the German crew realized the *Zamzam* was not a warship, they took the passengers aboard before the ship sank at 2 p.m. Elmer heard via short-wave radio that the ship had been sunk and was understandably devastated did not learn until more than a month later – May 21 – that his family was safe. The passengers had been transferred to a prison ship, the *Dresden*, which eventually took them to Europe, whence they returned to America on the *Exeter* on June 24. Dr. Danielson was appointed Superintendent of the Lutheran Church of Northern Tanganyika in January 1947, and he was thus Bernie’s “boss” on the mission field. He also collected folklore of the Iramba tribe, and Bernie quoted some of the Iramba proverbs in his master’s thesis.

Elmer Danielson had a very enlightened attitude about race relations, unlike some other missionaries. Already in 1939 he articulated that the goal of Christian missionaries in Africa was “the establishment of a self-propagating, self-governing, self-supporting African Church” and that the goal of every missionary was “to work himself out of his job as soon as possible.” In his mind the missionary had to have “a high regard for the Negro as a human being in the [United] States, and a sympathetic, helpful attitude toward Negro problems in the States” as well as Christian love and respect of Black Africans. As mentioned above, Bernie shared this attitude and imbued it in his children.

Other good friends on the mission field were the Hedmans, Bolstads, Tengboms, Youngdales, Olsons, Jacksons, Fribergs, and single ladies like Lois Bernhardson, Pauline Swanson, Edna Rolands, and many others. You can see some of them in the photos.

The missionary life in East Africa brought upon Bernie and Doris a huge change, not only in contacts with exotic cultures, but also on the practical side of life, having to go back to nineteenth-century (or earlier) methods. The homes we lived in the first few years had no electricity, no telephone, and no mail delivery, not to mention no grocery store, drugstore, hardware store, plumber, etc., without traveling 25 miles or more on narrow and bumpy dirt roads to a town on the plains. Much of our sustenance depended on African neighbors who brought foodstuffs such as chickens, vegetables, and milk in old wine bottles to our door in exchange for some pence or a shilling, or even as an offering or tithe. The light at night came from kerosene lamps. Washing clothes was done with washboards and big bars of blue soap. And so on.

This technologically primitive environment brought out the ingenuity of Bernie, and Doris, for that matter. For example, when we were living in the old German house at Mbaga: the house was spacious, with verandahs (porches) front and back, but there was no running water. Bernie got some plumbing materials and carried them and his tools up the mountain slope behind the house. It seemed like about 50 yards up a rather steep slope, but it was well wooded and there were many trees to grab on the way up and down. John followed along to “help,” at the age of five or six. Bernie found a spring, connected the pipes to it and linked them all the way down the slope to our



“Shilingi Kumi”

Denomination printed in English, Arabic, and Gujarati (but not Swahili)



“Senti Tano” (5 cents)

People liked the hole in the middle so they could carry their money on a string.



Pare Mountain scene



Bernie & Phyllis

Hiking in the Pare Mountains



Camping

Bernie with assistant, John, and Phyllis on cot. This was often necessary on long trips over bumpy, unpaved roads.



Bernie with a fellow pastor



Bernie’s parents – John & Gerda
around 1952

house, so we could have fresh spring water on tap. He also built the brick fireplace in the living room, where we posed for Christmas pictures to send to our grandparents. (See photos below.) After all his years on the ranch, where you learn how to fix anything and make everything, Bernie was proud of his handyman abilities, though he would never have said so.

Bernie applied this “can do” attitude to everything in his mission work. Though he already knew English, Swedish, Latin, Greek, Hebrew (and maybe more) he learned not only Swahili, the national language, but also Chasu or Ki-Pare, the language of the Pare Mountain area, and used it for teaching and preaching. Much of his ministry, such as visiting parishioners or teaching in a country school, involved hiking along long mountain trails, since there were no drivable roads to most of these places. His missionary calling put him to the test, requiring him to be a teacher, writer, preacher, counselor, builder, mechanic, and much more. And always he was grateful for God’s help.

Other Americans were few and far between. From time to time missionaries made the difficult journeys between mission stations for conferences or other church business. When we lived in the Pare Mountains the wife of the British District Commissioner seemed to crave English-speaking company and came to visit us for tea.

Missionary terms normally lasted four years, with a one-year furlough between terms. The furlough gave us some time to reconnect with our families in Minnesota and Canada, and during the furlough in 1952 our brother Mark was born in Canada. We stayed with Doris’ family (Sam and Inga Furrer, and Cheryl) for a while on the east side of St. Paul, then we lived in St. Peter, Minnesota, in the home of Professor George Hall of Gustavus Adolphus College. Dr. Hall had been Bernie’s friend at seminary, and he and his family were away in Tanzania while we stayed there. We assume that Bernie did some teaching and/or studying at Gustavus, but naturally we kids were oblivious of that.

When we returned to Africa we lived at Mbagu, still in the Pare Mountains. John and Phyllis recall helping to get Ebba Anderson situated in a new brick cottage down the hill from our stone house. We vividly remember the brickmaking process since we got to watch and “help.” Bernie and the other men stomped water into the dirt right there on the site, added straw, dug up the clayey mud and plastered it into molds made of two-by-fours. The sun dried them, and, *voilà*, bricks!

Nasturtiums grew at Mbagu, in crevices of rocks on the mountainside, and John and Phyllis liked to eat them. There was an orange tree beside the house, and banana trees nearby. Phyllis and Mark came down with mumps or measles, and got to lay around on the main floor on 2 chairs put together. (“Sick abed on two chairs!” was one of Doris’ favorite catchphrases.) Meanwhile John wandered alone through the dense rain forest that covered the mountain. A guardian angel must have been watching over him since he never ran into a leopard or mamba snake.

A few times we got to go “on vacation” from missionary work and drive east down to the coast to Mombasa or Tanga, where we stayed in a little seaside cottage, watched the monkeys playing in the trees, and frolicked on the beach and in the salty water. At Tanga Phyllis and Mark sat in the tree with the monkeys, each eating half a passion fruit with spoons while the monkeys ate bananas. The tree had a rope swing, and we could swing into the sea water at high tide. These vacations were the first times we ate potato chips or saw people smoking cigarettes.

After a while we moved to Makumira, in the foothills of Mount Meru, the tenth largest mountain in Africa (14,977 ft.). This mountain is topped by periodic snow and small glaciers that



The day of Mark's baptism – Scandia 1952
Grandpa John, John, Bernie, Phyllis, Doris, Mark,
Grandma Gerda



Kilimanjaro from the southern foothills.¹⁵



Brickmaking



Church at Mbaga

Africans liked to wear white for church



African pastors

White man in left corner looks like Elmer Danielson

¹⁵ Since this photo was taken by Bernie or Doris in the 1950s, the glaciers have been reduced by about half. At the current rate, Kilimanjaro is expected to become ice-free sometime between 2022 and 2033. It

is disputed whether this is entirely due to global warming, or to some other factor, such as decreased precipitation.



Mbaga house
Front entrance



Christmas at Mbaga 1954?
Bernie built the fireplace



Bernie at Mbaga house



Birthday party at Mbaga
Mark in highchair, Phyllis & John at right

feed many streams, and, as on Kilimanjaro, the slopes are covered with lush rain forests and fertile farms. We lived next to a coffee plantation, and elsewhere on the mountain there was a European-style dairy farm. In September 1954 Bernie got the word that his mother, Gerda, had passed away. In those days there was no way to travel back to Canada in time for the funeral.

Makumira was the location of the Lutheran Seminary devoted to training African pastors. Bernie taught Bible and theology, along with our Swedish friend Herbert Uhlin, who was the dean. Herbert and Greta's son, Bo (pronounced *boo*), played with us in our tree house, just a platform, but then with the help of the campus *fundi* (handyman) he built the dandiest tree house, with walls and roof. The Uhlins also had a small swimming pool (see photo). By and by John and Phyllis, along with Bo, were sent to boarding school at Kiomboi, far away down on the arid plains. Paul was born (1955) at the mission hospital at Nkoaranga, located nearby farther up the slope of Mount Meru. Our home at Makumira was ranch-style of concrete blocks, quite "modern" compared to our earlier mountain homes. There was actually electricity there for part of the day, from the main campus generator.

Other friends in the Makumira area were the Nelson family, Anton ("Ax") and Caroline, Quakers from California, and their children Jeanie, Chris, and Lorraine. Fifty-six years after the Germans Ovir and Segebrock were speared, a Meru man, Ngura Kirilo Japhet, traveled to California and eventually convinced Ax, an experienced businessman, to come to Africa to help organize and later manage a native coffee-growers cooperative. It was successful and within four years coffee production, and the incomes of members, had doubled. Ax and family were also avid mountain climbers and climbed Kilimanjaro several times. Chris played organ at our seminary chapel.

Bernie was a keen hunter when he needed to be. Back in Canada on the ranch he got to know guns well and apply them handily to the local game. In Africa he hunted only occasionally, and then only for meat. We have a photo of him on top of a huge eland. When we lived at Makumira he was called on by local Africans to help them stop the marauding elephants who were devouring and trampling their crops. He left the elephant meat for the villagers, and all he brought home was a piece of an elephant's ear. (This was the 1950s, when there was no consciousness yet that elephants were endangered. It was common among white hunters, settlers, and even some missionaries, to keep souvenir elephant tusks and make their feet into wastebaskets and such.) Another time at Makumira he took out his rifle, and using our attic window as a sniper's nest, he dispatched a feral dog that had been bothering our German Shepherd, Trivi.

Late in 1957 we left Africa for what was to be the second furlough. Shortly before we left fellow missionary Elder Jackson invited us to see Ngorongoro crater. This caldera was once a huge volcano almost as high as Kilimanjaro that collapsed long ago. After an arduous trip by Landrover up the 2000-foot rim we could peer down on the vast crater floor, about 100 square miles, teeming with thousands of animals, from elephants and rhinos to buffalo, zebras, lions, leopards, and even flamingos. We also took a trip to Tsavo National Park in Kenya, where hippos lazed in warm ponds and we vividly remember our vehicle being chased by a rhino. Bernie had friends of all colors and creeds, and one of our last visits was in the home of an East Indian, where we enjoyed a sumptuous curry dinner that was exotic and memorable to us who had only known bland food..

We left by ship from Mombasa, sailing south around the Cape of Good Hope, stopping along the way at Capetown and a trip up Table Mountain. Our ship was a freighter and our family made up half of the twelve passengers, but the passenger quarters were comfortable, with a formal dining room and a respectable library. While on the ship Bernie took us to the library every day



Vacation cottage at Mombasa
Shanzu Beach Hotel, July 1951



Arusha, Tanzania 1962
Naranjan Singh's grocery store
From the movie *Hatari*



Christmas at Makumira 1956



Bo Uhlin (center) in his swimming pool at Makumira,
with Kathy and Dan Karvonen.



Bernie & Leland & families Spring 1958

l-r: Paul, John, Bernie, Neal,
Carol, Phyllis, Mark, Mae

and made sure we kept up on our book learning and math. At Thanksgiving time we were going through rough seas, and none of us could eat a bite because we were all seasick.

We arrived back in America for what we thought would be a year's furlough. However, after physical examinations the mission board refused to allow Bernie to go back to Africa because of the condition of his heart. Bernie was not happy with this decision, since he dearly loved his missionary work and the African people. Nevertheless, it could not be helped. We lived awhile in south Minneapolis, during which time we kids attended Miles Standish School, and in July 1958, our sister Delores ("Dede") was born at Swedish Hospital. Next Bernie pursued post-graduate studies at Augustana Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois, where we lived from fall 1958 to spring 1959. This continued a family tradition – his uncles Andrew and Berndt Emil had attended Augustana College many decades earlier, in the 1870s, though the lads were only 13 and 11 years old, respectively, when they started.

Bernie accepted his first call as an American parish pastor, to St. John's Lutheran Church in Essex, near Shenandoah in southwestern Iowa, where we lived from summer 1959 to summer 1962. Essex is tiny, with a population of a few hundred, and surrounded by prosperous farms on all sides. Most of the people were of Swedish and Scots-Irish descent, so besides our church there was a Mission Covenant church and a Presbyterian. We lived in a huge white house next to the church, and on the other side of the church was the public school (K-12).

We remember in Essex how nice it was to be so close to Bernie during his work hours. Because we lived just a few yards from the church, we could go over and see him in his office. Doris said we shouldn't bother him too much, because he had so much studying to do!

The location of Essex was good for Bernie in the sense that he was now much closer to his cousins in Nebraska, and there were several visits in both directions. One of the cousins, Dan Lindquist, knocked on our door, said his family was moving to the area, and was related to Bernie. He was wondering if we knew of a house for them to move into. Thus began our friendship with Dan and Phyllis, and their kids Greg, Genice, and Paul. Dan was a soil conservationist – "second cousin, twice-removed," he would always say. His mother was Bernie's Cousin Ruby, the ninth of his uncle Berndt Emil's eleven children.

What we remember about Bernie's ministry in Essex was that his mission experience, erudition, good preaching, and diligent, conscientious ministry style were greatly appreciated by the members of the congregation, and that they were very generous to him and his family. They took pity on our old beat-up car and bought us a new Rambler station wagon.¹⁶ Another time they held a food drive for us, and so much came in that there was not enough room in the pantry and we had to store food packages and cans in the huge unfinished basement.

After about three years at Essex Bernie accepted another call, to Swea City, in northern Iowa, very similar in size and economy to Essex. We lived there from fall 1962 to summer 1965. This was especially good for Doris since we were again closer to her parents and other kinfolk in Minnesota. The church, Immanuel Lutheran, had a newer building on the eastern edge of town, the public school was on the western edge, and our parsonage was about halfway between them. As in Essex, you could get to everyplace in town with an easy walk. But it was farther to go to see Bernie during the day, three or four blocks, than it was in Essex. Phyllis was in confirmation class then, and she learned a lot from him.

In the early 60s Bernie worked on his Master's thesis. It was based on thought patterns and turns of phrase he had heard among the Bantu people in Tanzania and how they often reminded

¹⁶ Phyllis thinks we drove from Rock Island to Essex in a '48 Ford. The old car was a dingy beige and the new Rambler was light blue with darker blue trim.



Bernie, Grandpa John, Clarence
Summer 1960

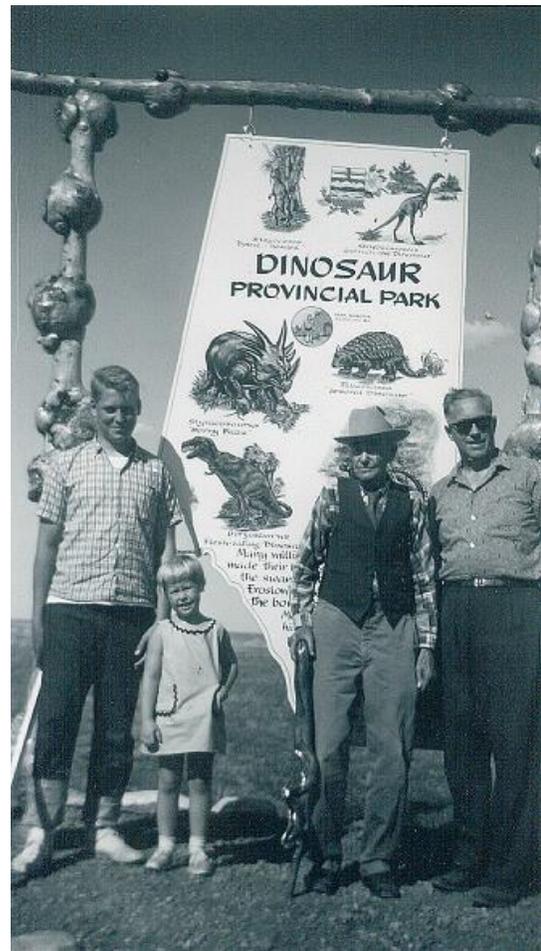


Essex, Iowa

West of the Missouri River is Nebraska, South of the green line (near Hamburg) is Missouri



FROM THE BENGTSONS
Advent photo – Essex, Iowa parsonage – 1962
Thanks to Elaine (Anderson) Murphy



Alberta Badlands summer 1963
John, Dede, Grandpa John, Bernie

him of Hebrew expressions and maxims that he knew from the Bible. In 1964 he completed the thesis, titled “A Comparative Study of Hebrew and Bantu Thought-forms: Their Relation to African Contributions to Old Testament Exegesis,” and received the degree of Master of Divinity from Luther Seminary in St. Paul.¹⁷

In Swea City we kids heard about the assassination of President Kennedy in the Methodist church. (In those days the public school sponsored chapel visits that rotated between the churches in town.) The following Monday a community memorial service for the President was held in the Swea City school, and Bernie preached his “Tents and Buildings” sermon (2 Corinthians 5:1):

Friends, on this national day of mourning, when we sorrow for our president cut down suddenly and violently in the years of his strength, let us not sorrow as those without hope. Let us note two contrasting thoughts in our text here. We live in an earthly tent, this body which we live in for a few or many years. It is capable of being destroyed. This we know because of the many times in which it becomes close to destruction, in sickness, danger, and accidents. It is not our permanent home, but our tent. The second thought is that there is a building from God, indestructible. We are souls who live in the tent of our earthly bodies for a certain time, till we move up into our building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ...

Strangely, a few weeks later the Methodist church burned to the ground. John worked as a “printer’s devil” for the *Swea City Herald* (his first steady job, often with long hours), and one early morning coming home he passed the Methodist church, just before the church burned. (The *Herald* office, Methodist church, and our parsonage were all on the same street, the “main drag.”) Some of his loved ones kidded him about setting the fire. But while we otherwise enjoyed our time in Swea City, after about three years it was again time to move on.

Bernie accepted a call to teach at the Lutheran Bible Institute, now relocated in suburban Golden Valley from the older downtown Minneapolis building where Doris had been a student. In September 1965 Bernie and Dr. Christopher Tang, a pastor from China, were installed as new teachers at LBI, and Bernie bought us a ranch-style house in Golden Valley. Presumably this position was of economic benefit to our family, we were again closer to Doris’ family as well as all the cultural benefits of the Twin Cities area, and Doris said it was such a blessing for Bernie, because he did not enjoy the administrative duties of a parish – like all the congregational politics! Now Bernie could devote his energies more fully to teaching the subjects he loved, the Old Testament, and especially the Psalms. Bernie had a poetic soul, he knew the cadences of the Psalms in the original Hebrew, and he understood the great divine power of the songs in that book to encourage and inspire all believers.

Besides his teaching duties on the LBI campus Bernie went on Bible teaching missions to parishes in the region. On these trips he would be housed by a parishioner and teach in the church for one or more sessions. In the early spring of 1967 he set out on one of these trips in Radcliffe, Iowa, another tiny town like Swea City or Essex. That terrible day of April 6, 1967 we all heard in various ways and places that Bernie had passed away. Police officers came to the door of our Golden Valley home to notify Doris. It’s hard for us to remember any details of our life at that time, and everyone else who loved him would say the same. There was a well attended memorial

¹⁷ See Google Books:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=i9CIMwEACAAJ&dq=inauthor:%22Hilding+Bernhard+Bengtson%22&hl=en&sa=X&ei=x6kzUZaAGMj2iQLoyIGoDQ&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA>



**Bernie with Olivia and Clarence
and their Father (age 94)**
Thanks to Elaine (Anderson) Murphy



**The last photo of the whole family
Advent 1966**



**Memorial Plaque
At Lutheran Bible Institute**

service at Calvary Lutheran in Golden Valley and his earthly shell was laid to rest at Fort Snelling Cemetery, thanks to Doris' status as a veteran.

Doris told Phyllis, Sarah, and Rachel that Bernie "appeared" to her one night as she was sleeping, a couple weeks after he died. He told her calmly that everything was going to be all right, and not to worry. She said it was as if he was right in the room with her. She said it was so comforting, and she was much better afterward.

Years later a lady came up to Phyllis at Mount Carmel¹⁸ and told her she was in the church where Bernie did his last Preaching/Teaching mission in Radcliffe, Iowa. She and everyone really enjoyed the teaching and were all shocked to hear that he had passed away.

When Phyllis lived in downtown Minneapolis in 2003-2004, she often drove by the spot where Bernie died: on the corner of Glenwood Avenue and 12th Street, right in front of Lee's Liquor Bar. Lots of things had been torn down, but the bar was still there. She often drove by there even when she lived in the suburbs, on homeschool trips, etc.



Some late notes from Bernie's nephew, Donald Bengtson

My father [Clarence] was born in 1916. That would have made him starting school maybe in 1922. He quit school in grade 11. That would have been about 1933. The depression was on then. The family never lacked for food. They raised cattle, pigs, chickens, bees and vegetables on the farm. However there was little market for what they grew. They once shipped pigs to market and the freight charges were greater than the proceeds of the sale. Sig I think had his own farm then, and now I am speculating a bit. I think Bernie had been working the farm. He would have been about 20 at the time and was perhaps a bit restless in 1933 or maybe felt there wasn't room for two sons. So at some point after that left (years?) for greener pastures. In 1943 my parents were married and our grandparents moved into Scandia. My father moved out of the barn with his wife into their newly constructed home. Bernie for sure had left by then. Hope this helps. If I can do more let me know. My father keep detailed diaries throughout his years but I cannot locate them right now. We are still recovering from a flood and many things are packed away in piles of boxes. I will send you some old document copies as they are found.



Bernie loved music. Since his youth he had a four-stringed guitar, like a big ukulele, that he played for the amusement of friends. With or without the guitar he liked to sing the old hit songs from the 30s and 40s like this:

*Just around the corner,
there's a rainbow in the sky,
so let's have another cup of coffee,
and let's have another piece of pie.*

Sometimes he liked to sing "I'm a Methodist (till I die ...)," even long before the incident with the Methodist church in Swea City. When Bernie was a parish pastor in Iowa he always sang the liturgy clearly and melodiously in his tenor voice, which the congregation appreciated.

He also had a poetic soul, as seen in his fondness for the Psalms, and fancied poetry and wordplay of all kinds. At bedtime he read poetry to us: Longfellow's "Hiawatha," poems of Eugene Field, and many others. Another favorite was "Abou ben Adhem" by J.H. Leigh Hunt ("...

¹⁸ Mount Carmel Ministries, with a family camp on Lake Carlos, near Alexandria, Minn.
<http://www.mountcarmelministries.com/>

An angel writing in a book of gold ...”). He explained that “ben Adhem” – ‘son of Adam’, *i.e.*, ‘everyman’ – was also used in Swahili as *bin-adamu* ‘human being’ (and this was mentioned in his Master’s thesis). He also liked the understated Canadian humor of Stephen Leacock, and had several of his books. On road trips he liked to work on crossword puzzles. Doris also loved reading, poetry and wordplay (like Spoonerisms: “Mardon me padam, this pie is occupewed ...”), which helped make them such a compatible couple.

Bernie liked sports, but especially baseball. In Canada he had played in “town ball,” in which the small Scandia team played teams from other communities nearby. The Scandia crew in 1930 included three Bengtson brothers, Sigfrid, Leland, and Hilding (Bernie), along with their brother-in-law Fred Anderson (Olivia’s husband).¹⁹ Both Leland and Bernie were pitchers. More than 60 years later Leland told us this anecdote about Bernie’s crafty pitching style:

We were playing “town ball” and in the late innings Bernie was called in as a relief pitcher. The umpire allowed him a few warm-up throws, but Bernie felt he needed some more. There happened to be a runner on first base, so Bernie took advantage of that fact to fire a few throws to the first baseman to “hold the runner on,” until he felt sufficiently warmed up.

Doris shared his enjoyment of baseball, and we remember them frequently listening to the Twins’ radio broadcasts with Halsey Hall and Herb Carneal announcing. Bernie was excited to tell us about a chance meeting in Minneapolis with Twins’ shortstop Zoilo Versalles, who was the American League MVP in 1965.

We can’t forget *humor*, not the raucous or hilarious kind but a quieter, subtler, wittier, and “drier” kind of humor. This inclination had a long pedigree in the Bengtson family, as Bernie’s sister Olivia related,

One day, being in a jovial mood, Dad [Grandpa John] thought he would surprise my two oldest brothers [Sigfrid and Leland]. So he shaved off his mustache, and then putting on a long coat and an old hat, he walked down towards the barn, where the boys were playing. Then disguising his voice, he asked them, “Is your father at home, boys?” I was standing a little ways off and heard one of them reply, “No, he isn’t.” Well, they had not recognized their dad at all, and you can imagine how smart he felt when he had “put one over” on his own sons.

Bernie told us that sometimes in school, to liven things up, he would feign falling asleep with his elbow on the edge of his desk, and his elbow would “slip” off the desk, to the amusement of his classmates. He showed us his method of cracking walnuts, which was to place the nut on a table, cover it with his hand and raise his elbow so it was perpendicular to the table, and strike the elbow with his other hand until the nut was cracked. (We have tried this and it does require some dexterity!)

Bernie was a *critical thinker*. Clearly he was a serious scholar, not only in theology but many other subjects. He had great intellectual curiosity and liked to repeat the maxim “there are no boring subjects, only bored people.” A fellow teacher at LBI, Herb Loddigs, told us “I liked your father. He was always walking around in a kind of daze – always thinking about some intellectual problem.” The critical thinking came through even watching television. Unlike most

¹⁹ There is a photo of the 1930 team in the book *Scandia since Seventeen*, page 167.

people, who watch TV passively, he commented on the programs and commercials, never letting them get away with unsubstantiated claims.



Science Fiction

Bernie was a science fiction writer! Well, at least once, for high school writing class.

“A Trip to Mars”

At midnight our ship, with all supplies and equipment, was ready. We had dressed in special cold-resisting clothing, to provide protection against low temperatures in our journey thru space. We made our last farewells, and entered the ship, closing the opening after us with turn-screws. Captain Rogers signalled to the pilot in the tug-plane, which was to start us off. When we had been given enough momentum, the plane left us, and the rocket motor caught on. Had this system of take-off not been used, the sudden start at such tremendous speed would have rendered us all unconscious.

This worked out perfectly. We were soon cruising along at the pleasant speed of six to seven thousand miles per minute. At this rate, Captain Rogers had estimated, we would be near Mars in slightly less than four “Earth” days. So we settled down to our various jobs, with mingled feelings of unhurried calm and feverish expectation.

Our greatest inconvenience was the intense cold. In spite of having the heaters turned on full blast, and being dressed in warm flying suits, we felt the chill all about us. This proved that we were far out into space, where the rays of sunlight have little warming power.

It was interesting to look through the rear window at intervals, and see how old Mother Earth was falling behind. Smaller and smaller, until now after a few hours, the blanket of air no longer obscured the outlines of the continents, and we saw them plainly. Two hours later, however, we could with difficulty make out the coastlines of China and Japan. Looking against the sun as we were, all of Asia was in shadow.

But if it was interesting to look backward to Earth, what were our feelings as we looked ahead to Mars? The mystery of the unknown had come upon us, so that we found ourselves many times talking in whispers. Mars was much clearer now, and brighter. And yet we could make out nothing of its general outline. How slow we seemed to be going! We must have patience.

Every few hours we changed crews at the controls. This gave us time to satisfy our hunger, and to sleep if we could. This was impossible at first, due to the general excitement and expectation. However we soon fell into the routine of working and resting, really enjoying it.

Now we could see Mars. How big it was, to our eyes, though evidently smaller than Earth. We could make out continents and oceans, and later on, islands and mountains and lakes. Only one of Mars’ moons was in view at the time.

As we came closer and closer, our time was taken up with making tests of the outside atmosphere. This was in order to determine its composition, and whether it would be safe for us without our oxygen tanks. The rocket motor had long since been shut off, and we were descending by the pull of gravitation.

Captain Rogers now ordered the parachutes, opened one by one, so as to break our speed gradually. He had already determined upon a landing place, in a plain between two mountains. So it was that, ninety-seven hours after leaving Earth, we landed, with a slight bump, the first Earthmen to reach Mars.

Bernie wrote this in 1940. We wonder if “Captain Rogers” was inspired by “Buck Rogers,” an early science fiction hero Bernie might have known from comics, radio, or movies.²⁰ Nevertheless, the story clearly bears the stamp of his own thinking and imagination.



Bernie left us some of his sermon books. Most of them are neatly typed, often with some penciled notes. On each one he noted the date and place of the sermon, often several of them, and they were often titled with a memorable catch-phrase. For example, here is one from Swea City, Iowa, Feb. 27 1963:

“ ‘HELLO – GOODBYE’ HILL”

We begin the Lenten series this Ash Wednesday, not by placing dabs of ashes on our foreheads, but by allowing the Savior of the Cross to burn his image upon our hearts. We shall find that the question which should be within our hearts, as these different voices speak to the Cross, is the question of the disciples at the last supper, “Lord, is it I?”

Some years ago, while traveling in the mountainous region of East Africa, we came upon a strange road called “Hello-Goodbye”. The road made a sharp loop at a certain point, doubled back and came within a few feet of itself again, a giant hairpin curve. It got its name from the fact that little children living in the village surrounded by the loop could say Hello to you on your way out, and then turn just a few feet away and say Goodbye to you on your return. It was Hello-Goodbye Hill!

The thought came to me time and again that so much of our life is like that, a Hello-Goodbye Hill. Is the Hill of the Cross like that? Is it a place where we say Hello and then right away say Goodbye? Is our experience with Sunday school like that, confirmation class, Bible class, even our morning worship, just a Hello-Goodbye? Is it that way with our morning devotions, a Hello-Goodbye? Is communion like that? What of the Hill of the Cross this Lenten season? Is our experience with Jesus Christ a Hello-Goodbye?

*Do we pass that Cross unheeding,
Breathing no repentant vow?
When we see thee wounded, bleeding,
See thy thorn-encircled brow?
Yet thy sinless death has brought us
Life eternal, peace, and rest.
Only what thy grace has taught us,
Calms the sinner's stormy breast.*

²⁰ “On January 7, 1929, *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century A.D.*, the first science fiction comic strip, debuted. ... In 1932, the *Buck Rogers* radio program, notable as the first science fiction program on radio, hit the airwaves. ... A ten-minute *Buck Rogers* film premiered at the 1933–1934 World's Fair in Chicago.” [Wikipedia]

What shall we do for an eternity in heaven, when we don't know what to do with a few lonely hours on Sunday afternoon?

Linger, Friend!

Fill the minute with much, with intense devotion, concentrated worship, keen discipline. If you have only a moment, fill that moment to the brim. Just as the six hours on the Cross availed for our salvation though for the salvation of all men past and present and future, so a moment filled with devotion can transform Hello-Goodbye Hill into a holy place, can transform Communion into a meeting with God, can mean eternal salvation for you, and many more.



Bernie's Master's Thesis:

“A Comparative Study of Hebrew and Bantu²¹ Thought-forms:
Their Relation to African Contributions to Old Testament Exegesis”

Bernie and his fellow missionaries were well aware of the differences between African and Western thinking, as articulated by Martin Olson: Africans “reasoned out things entirely different from our conceptions of logic, in fact in many cases directly opposite from our way of thinking. To ‘think Black’ is difficult for us.” Bernie became so fascinated with this that he devoted his Master's thesis to the concept. As an example cited this difference between ‘temporal’ versus ‘spatial’ thinking:

Those who have had an opportunity to come face to face with African thinking, have been puzzled by their entirely different idea of “position.” For example, a European housewife may tell her kitchen helper to put a dish or pitcher “in the back of the refrigerator” (or the cupboard), and is amazed to see that it has been put in the “front” (as she thinks). The same confusion occurs in regard to the “front” or “back” of the house or car.

In attempting to understand these two entirely different ways of thinking, we might consider the following: We Europeans unconsciously consider ourselves as the center of things, so everything is thought of as facing us, or in the case of a house, as facing the one passing by on the road. The African, however, considers himself as in a group that is, as it were, on a journey. Everything then is going is going along beside him, in the same direction he is going. This would help to understand why the European thinks one side is “front,” while the African thinks another one is. ... This same difference in thought patterns has been noted between Hebrew and Greek ...

A chapter of the thesis was devoted to “Evidence from vocabulary.” He mentioned for example Hebrew *כף* *kaf* ‘palm, hollow of the hand’, also ‘sole of the foot’, and Swahili *kofi* ‘flat of the hand, palm upturned’ and *ukufi* ‘handful’. It turns out that this word was not transmitted recently from the Middle East to Africa, or vice versa, but occurs in all parts of the world and must have been inherited from the original human language.²² Other similarities, like Swahili *kanisa* ‘church’ and

²¹ Bantu: As Bernie defined it, “the term ‘Bantu’ is at present used to refer to ‘all the present-day natives of Africa who live south of the latitude 5 degrees north (with the exception of the Bushmen and Hottentots of South Africa, and Masai, Nandi, Luo, and kindred [Nilotic] tribes of East Africa).” There are more than 300 Bantu languages, including Swahili, Kikuyu, Luganda, Kongo, Xhosa, and Zulu.

²² Estonian *kapp* ‘hand, paw, claw’, Finnish *käppä*, *käpäli* ‘hand, paw’; in some Polynesian languages, such as Maori, Rarotongan, Mangareva, both meanings ‘hollow of the hand, sole of the foot’ (as in Hebrew) are preserved

Hebrew *K'nesset* 'assembly, legislature', *beit k'nesset* 'synagogue' are the result of the Arabic influence on East Africa, which had gone on for centuries and contributed many Semitic words to the Swahili language (Palestinian Arabic *k'anīse* 'church', *kānīs* 'synagogue'). Similarly with Hebrew *b'rākhāh* 'blessing, prosperity, gift' and Swahili *baraka* (same meanings),²³ and many more.

With a large number of such observations, based on his extensive knowledge of Western and Middle Eastern languages and cultures, and experiences in Africa on the mission field, he formulated his assessment that the Hebrew culture of the Bible and the Bantu cultures of Africa share a number of common themes or attitudes, such as a preference for *hearing* the Divine ("Hear O Israel") rather than *seeing* it. (Contrast the great visual emphasis – magnificent paintings and elaborate cathedrals – of European culture.)

Another example is the expression used in Amos 4: 6, "cleanness of teeth," נקיין שנים *niqyon shinaim* in Hebrew, meaning great hunger, and the equivalent idiom in Swahili, *usafi wa meno*, with the same meaning.

When asked if he has had anything to eat recently, an African will answer with one word "Hata!" ("not a bit!") as he at the same time inserts his thumb nail inside his upper incisors and snaps it outward. This graphically illustrates that he has had nothing to eat, not even a little bit, and as evidence he challenges you to examine his teeth, "clean" from any trace of food!

These instances should serve to indicate, in various ways, how the African thinks and expresses himself along the same lines as did the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

Bernie concludes his thesis:

"... let it be understood that whatever differences there appear to be between Hebrew and African thought (and assuredly differences do exist), they are in the periphery and not in the center. The hope of Africa lies in recognizing these differences as peripheral and to base its hope firmly on the God of the Old and New Testaments. Its God-given destiny then calls it to return and re-clothe these peripheral differences of custom and tradition to serve the God thus revealed. And this the genius of Bantu life is well able to do, if it is true to itself."

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as *kapu* or *kapukapu*; in Central American Mayan languages *kop*, *k'ab* is the general word for 'hand', in Maipuran languages of South America *kapi* has the same meaning. In some places the meaning 'palm, hand' has been lost and only 'sole, foot, hoof' remains: English *hoof* (from reconstructed Proto-Indo-European **kāp-o-*), Korean *kup* 'hoof', Japanese *kūbisu*, *kibisu* 'heel', etc.

²³ Now also the first name of the President of the United States.

Mt. 16:24

Ninafurahi sana kufika hapa leo siku ya Bwana na kuabudu pamoja nanyi kanisani mwa Yesu Kristo. Napenda kusikiliza sauti nzuri za kumshukuru Mungu, na masomo ya leo na mahubiri juu yake. Najua kwamba sifa inampendeza Bwana Mungu. Tum-
Yeye utukufu wote na heshima yote, tunapomw-
udu.

Sisi tufikiri pamoja juu ya ~~masomo~~ ^{ya} leo. Ndiyo maneno haya ni maneno ya Yesu Kristo Mwo-kozi wetu. Anatuambia jinsi inavyotupasa kumfu-ata. Anasema habari ya mambo mawili, kama alivyo-waambia wanafunzi wake samani vilevile.

1. "Mtu atakaye kuandama nyuma yangu, ajikane nafsi wake". Yesu anasema kwamba mtumishi ham-piti bwana wake. Mama Mfalme atasulubishwa, basi wafuasi wake hawana budi kujikana na kujitwika msalaba. Kujikana si maana ya kujikana vitu ful-ani tu, lakini zaidi kujikataa nafsi yako na moyo wako. Ni kukataa na kutoa choyo, na kuweka mahali pake upendo wa Mungu nao wenzako. Ni kumpa Kristo moyo wako wote mahali pa kujipenda nafsi yako. Mungu atupe rehema na huruma yake ili ajikane nafsi zetu!

2. "Mtu atakaye kuandama nyuma yangu, ajitwike msalaba wake." Yesu mwenyewe alituonyesha jinsi alivyotwika msalaba wake, kwa uvumilivu na bila nung'uniko. Kujitwika msalaba si maana ya kuvu-milia shida au taabu ndogo, uliyojiletea kwa maisha mavu. Maana yake ni kuteswa kwa ajili ya Kristo, yaani, kuteswa kwa sababu wewe u Mkristo kwa kweli. Maana yake ni kusulubisha tamaa ya mwili, kufunga choyo zote na uovu wote juu ya msalaba. Mungu atupe nguvu na ushujaa, ajitwike msalaba wetu siku kwa siku!

Baba fulani alitombwa na mwana wake mchanga kumwonyesha jinsi msalaba unavyofanywa. Alishika ubao moja akainua juu ili uelekee mbinguni. Akasema "Ubao huu ni kama mapenzi ya Mungu, kwani uelekea juu". Halafu akashika ubao mwengine alialala sawasawa ya nchi, akasema "Ubao huu ni kama mapenzi ya wanadamu, kwani hauelekei juu. Mapenzi ya wanadamu ni mabaya, yanaitwa dhambi. Na dhambi hiyo inamsulubisha Kristo msalabani. Basi msalaba unafanywa kila mara na mapenzi ya wanadamu yanapokinga mapenzi ya Mungu."

Some of Bernie's sermon notes in Swahili – text Matthew 16:24. The first few words translate as “I rejoice greatly to arrive here today on the day of the Lord and to worship together with you in the church of Jesus Christ. I love to listen to the lovely sounds of thanksgiving to God, and to the scripture reading today and its message. We know that praise pleases the Lord God. ...”

Arlington Hills, St Paul 1952

mt 22:1-10

"HE SENT FORTH SERVANTS"

PERSONAL JOY

CONGRATULATION -- "Be steadfast, immovable"

THANKS - GREETINGS FROM AFRICA!

Our theme comes out of text. Servants figure prominently (6 times). Simple interpretation = God + His people, marriage feast = salvation, life eternal. Symbolic of work of Xian church in all ages + all lands (whenever + wherever Gospel is taught in truth + purity, + Sacraments given in acc. with Christ's command).

Two necessities: ① The Master speaks
② The servant hears + obeys. Must ever be these two, -- in O.T. (Elijah, Jonah), in N.T. (John Bap., Paul). Down thru ages, Church renewed and strengthened only as God continues to send out servants. Even today in Arl. Hills L. Ch. + Youth Center, many servants needed (Ch. School, week-day School, offices, boards, organizations, interest groups). Consider yourselves servants of Him who Himself came not to be served but to serve.

Consider theme "He Sent Forth Servants" not in special ref. to home church but in ref. to Foreign Missions. Have a right to get a report on how God sends forth servants.

I. The Gospel Must be Preached! How long ago? In our Area 50 yrs. ago. ① In evangelistic work ② In educational work ③ In medical work. (This servant privileged to hold 40 weeks Bible Conf.)

Bernie's elegant pencraft!

Notes for a sermon preached at a church in St. Paul during 1952 furlough from Africa.

Descendants of **Bernie Bengtson &
Doris Mae Furrer** (November 20, 1921 - March 23, 2002)

First Generation	Second Generation	Third Generation
John Donald Bengtson ²⁴ March 26, 1948	Erik Lukas Bengtson May 29, 1972	
	Brita Maia Bengtson May 4, 1975	
	Samantha Disa Bengtson November 6, 1983	Madison Lucille Valerie Lila Rose Daisy Valentina January 24, 2009 August 7, 2011 February 4, 2013
	Daniel John Bengtson July 2, 1986	
Phyllis Diane Bengtson (Melgaard, Twedt) ²⁵ November 20, 1949	Rachel Diane Melgaard January 16, 1981	
	Sarah Joy Melgaard (Oldre) ²⁶ January 24, 1983	Brannon Michael July 30, 2009
Mark Leslie Bengtson ²⁷ May 15, 1952 - December 19, 1999	Joseph Rhys Bengtson September 22, 1972	Ronja Joy July 18, 2011
	Andrea Grace Bengtson March 20, 1974	
	Jesse Andrew Bengtson ²⁸ March 25, 1976	Benjamin Andrew Olivia Marie Thomas March 1, 2005 April 27, 2006 January 10, 2008
	Marta Leslie Bengtson March 21, 1980	Mark Grace Mangwi Maddalyn Leslie July 18, 2001 May 4, 2008
Paul Delbert Bengtson ²⁹ June 1, 1955	Amanda Mae Bengtson (Otto) ³⁰ July 22, 1986	
Delores Mae Bengtson (Lemmon) ³¹ July 17, 1958	Laura Mae Lemmon (Kuhl) ³² April 25, 1981	
	Sondra Dee Lemmon (Rockvam) ³³ November 7, 1983	
	Aaron David Lemmon May 2, 1991	

²⁴ Married Ellen Loretta Reiten August 1971; Married Patricia Ann Dziuk September 1983; Married April Lynn Rankin October 2003

²⁵ Married Richard Melgaard October 1971; Married Paul Twedt July 2008

²⁶ Married Timothy Oldre August 2005

²⁷ Married Mary Tweet June 1972

²⁸ Married Natalie Marie Skeie November 2001

²⁹ Married Julie Collen

³⁰ Married Robert Otto November 2008

³¹ Married David Lemmon June 1980

³² Married Michael Kuhl May 2009

³³ Married Jason Rockvam April 2013

