

# A Monumental Save

By Sharon Soames

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In 2010 my daughter, Alicia Hardt, and I began a gentle journey into researching many branches of the Piper-Soames and Johnson-Newquist (my ancestors) families.

Alicia made lots of headway and discoveries on Ancestry.com and I had boxes and bins of pictures and tapes and documents to help steer us along different paths. Several years later, Gary Newquist, a cousin in Southern California with lots of family connections started his own research and we began sharing stories, the pictures for identification of the relatives, discoveries we made, and worked on the family tree. We really gained ground with the group effort.

Knowing that my grandparents, Arvid Nathaneal Nyqvist and Hannah Kristina Olsson (Olsdatter) both lived in Varmland, Sweden and were registered in the Sunne Lutheran Church, Alicia contacted the church in 2011. Lena responded back with a wealth of information. As part of the state church, birth and other vital records were gathered and stored there.

As part of Lena's gracious, helpful service, she went out into the church cemetery and took a picture and also did a hand drawing of my great grandparents, Jan Nyqvist and Maria Nyqvist's (Nilsson), headstone. The monument had darkened and was covered with lichen from years of weathering having been placed in 1909 when Maria died at 51 years of age. Jan was buried with her in 1938.

My parents had been back to Sweden to visit in the 1980s and found the Nyqvist and Olson's homesteads. In 2015, my cousin, Deb Newquist, journeyed from So. California to Sunne, met up with some relatives still living in the area, and found the headstone in the cemetery and the same house that Jan and Maria and my grandfather, Arvid, and five siblings lived in. Jan remarried and Kristen Jansson lived there, too.

Several months ago, my son Dylan and his wife Jen, went to Sweden on a business trip. Dylan works for Jeff Bezos at Blue Origin where he is an engineer designing and creating the engines for the rocket ships under development and testing to transport passengers into space. Dylan was in Sweden looking at a very specialized machine the company needed for production. I gave Dylan the information he needed to contact our relative there and also to find the church. The relative was sick so was unable to take Dylan to his great, great grandfather's house, but he did find the church and the headstone of Jan and Maria Nyqvist.

Dylan noticed the green marker in the ground in front of the monument. He inquired as to the meaning of the marker and learned that after 75+ years, if there is little visitation or interest in the deceased buried there, it gets marked for reassignment for the interment of others.

Dylan informed me of the intent to remove the headstone and extricate from our family's history the visual memory of a man whose legacy to his descendants included the belief that "To live is Christ, to die is gain," inscribed in the headstone. To actually stand where a family member is buried and to see a name and date on a monument is such a spiritual connection. That headstone says to those descendants who seek it out: "Because I lived, so do you." Headstones matter in that way, and some who scatter their loved one's ashes later have remorse that they have no specific place to tangibly go to honor their loved one and remember. It matters greatly to many of us researching our family origins and legacies to see the headstone, a monument to a life to whom we are connected. It matters a great deal to our family even though few of us have ever had the opportunity to visit the gravesite with frequency. In fact, we were a bit shocked that once a person is buried and a headstone placed, at least in Sweden, it does not remain in perpetuity.



I rallied some of the extended Newquist (Nyqvist) clan and a few of us emailed the church of our desire to keep the headstone in place. It was not an elaborate, difficult, insurmountable effort to achieve. We had to assign new owners to the gravesite and headstone that would remain for the next 25 years. No charge. After that, the ownership needs to be renewed every 15 years for 500SEK or about \$52. Dylan and Alicia became the new co-owners chosen because they have a chance at greater longevity than me. Maybe I'll hit 95. Not sure. I'll probably have my own headstone by then.

Dylan's business trip to Sweden was serendipitous or more in our family's line of thinking, a divine, providential appointment. In any case it was a huge, monumental save!