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## Editorial Statement

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## Editorial Statement

As the name of the Danish American Heritage Society suggests, one of the main interests of DAHS is the stories of Danish Americans and their intellectual, spiritual, and cultural legacies to their families and society. The American author Alex Haley, whose novel *Roots* launched a wave of heritage consciousness in America, wrote, “In all of us there is a hunger, marrow-deep, to know our heritage—to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning. No matter what our attainments in life, there is still a vacuum, an emptiness, and the most disquieting loneliness.” DAHS was founded in part to fill that vacuum with regard to Danish American history and culture, but no homogenous narrative could do justice to the diversity of experiences that category encompasses, since Danish American heritage consists of millions of individual stories. In this issue of *The Bridge*, we get the chance to learn about six different Danish American families and the ways in which each of the authors has sated the “marrow-deep” hunger of which Haley speaks by finding “enriching knowledge” about how their family history has affected their own lives and the world beyond their families.

The first article in this issue is Karen Lassen’s account of her family’s discovery of her mysterious grandfather’s story, many years after his death, thanks to a long-forgotten diary. This story of pride, heartbreak, errors, silence, and, finally, closure, illustrates Haley’s point about the “hollow yearning” that we experience when we lack knowledge about the people who contributed to our gene pool and shaped our family histories and even our individual characters through their choices, good and bad.

The second article contains a condensed excerpt from *The Christmas Doctor* (AuthorHouse, 2013), a biography of Dr. John Peter Weber by his son Tom, whose admiration for his father prompted him to document the many ways his father had a positive impact not just on his own family, but also on the lives of his patients and neighbors. Although not fortunate enough to be born a Dane, Dr. Weber benefitted from the grace and kindness of a Danish American nurse named Nancy Jacobsen at a pivotal moment in his life that ultimately motivated him to become a doctor in rural Idaho for more than half a century.

The third article is the product of an Edith and Arnold Bodtker Grant, which allowed the author, Kelsi Vanada, to research her family history in Denmark as part of her master's thesis project in creative writing. For Kelsi, the chance to interview her grandfather's relatives was also a chance to seek inspiration for her poetry and convert other people's memories into her own word pictures, a few of which she shares with us here.

In the fourth article, Fred Delcomyn reflects on his own immigrant childhood in mid-twentieth century Detroit, wondering what drove his parents to abandon their Danish homeland and face the risks and challenges of emigration. His memories of trying to fit in and make sense of his schoolmates' strange ways reminds us of the tremendous impact that parents' decisions can have on the course of their children's lives. In a similar vein, the fifth article, written by Lois Eagleton, is a memoir of her childhood and youth after her parents decided to leave California and settle in a Danish community in Junction City, Oregon.

Last but by no means least, the sixth and longest article in this issue is Jim Iversen's translation of his cousin Mikkel Rasmus (M.R.) Mikkelsen's memoir of teaching in a Danish school in a small town on the German border just after the 1920 plebiscite. This book, which was originally transcribed and compiled from M.R.'s handwritten notes by Mikkel's brother Christian and published in Danish in 1987 by the District Archives for Them Municipality in Denmark, is more than just a record of Mikkel's own experiences or even a historical document about a tumultuous time in a contested border region. It is also a record of Jim's Danish relatives and the paths they followed after Jim's Danish ancestors came to the United States, as well as an account of Jim's rediscovery of his Danish heritage while spending a sabbatical in Denmark in the early 1980s.

In assembling this diverse collection of memoirs and memorials, it is our goal to help our readers understand how discovering and remembering the connections between families, across time and space, can alleviate the "disquieting loneliness" Haley describes. It doesn't matter how great or small the events of our own or our ancestors' lives may be; the power and significance of families lies, as Haley reminds us, in their dual function as a "link to our past [and] bridge to our future."