

A CONVERSATION WITH JOY K. LINTELMAN

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I had been researching Swedish immigrant women's lives for a number of years when I discovered Mina Anderson's handwritten memoir in the collection of Vilhelm Moberg at an archive in Sweden. Though Mina wrote the memoir for Moberg, he did not present Swedish immigrant women as independent, determined, and forward-looking as was described in Mina's life story and which resonated in the experiences of the many other women that I had studied.

What research did you undertake in writing *I Go to America*?

The book is the result of years of research, both in Sweden and the U.S. Filling in all of the pieces of Mina's life that weren't covered in the memoir led me to the farm where she lived, to the places she worked in Norway, to her birthplace in Sweden. It involved work with the state and federal census, reading through years of Swedish American newspapers on microfilm, searching public records and church records, and interviewing Mina's descendants.

How long did it take to complete the book?

I researched, while teaching full-time and raising my own family, off and on for over a decade. In this way I could

really identify with how Mina must have struggled to find time to read and write. The actual writing of the book took two to three summers. With my teaching and professional responsibilities during the academic year, it is very difficult to research and write except in the summer or when on sabbatical leave.

What do you hope your readers take away from *I Go to America*?

I hope that readers with Swedish heritage will gain knowledge and respect for their Swedish American foremothers, and that through the intimate account of Mina's life provided in the book, they are able to imagine and even identify with some of her feelings and experiences. I also hope readers will be motivated to investigate their own heritage a bit further—to not only research the names of their ancestors and where they were born and lived, but how they lived, the choices they made, and how they were shaped by, as well as shaped, the world around them.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Finding the time to research and write while balancing the responsibilities of family and job was the biggest challenge. Trying to find details of Mina's life was at times like looking for a needle in a haystack—

painstaking and time-consuming, but also incredibly rewarding, if—and when—information was found. For example, Mina wrote in a Swedish American newspaper under the pen name Cecilia. I looked through about twenty years of microfilm of this weekly newspaper searching for letters, stories, and poems she had written, and trying to understand this community of readers and writers that played an important part in her life. It was slow going as Swedish is not my native language, and I only began studying it in graduate school.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

Living in Minnesota has had a significant impact on my writing. It influenced my choice of undergraduate institution, Gustavus Adolphus College, which resulted in my discovery of Swedish American history. Many of my research resources are located in Minnesota, so living and working in the state continually influence my research and teaching.



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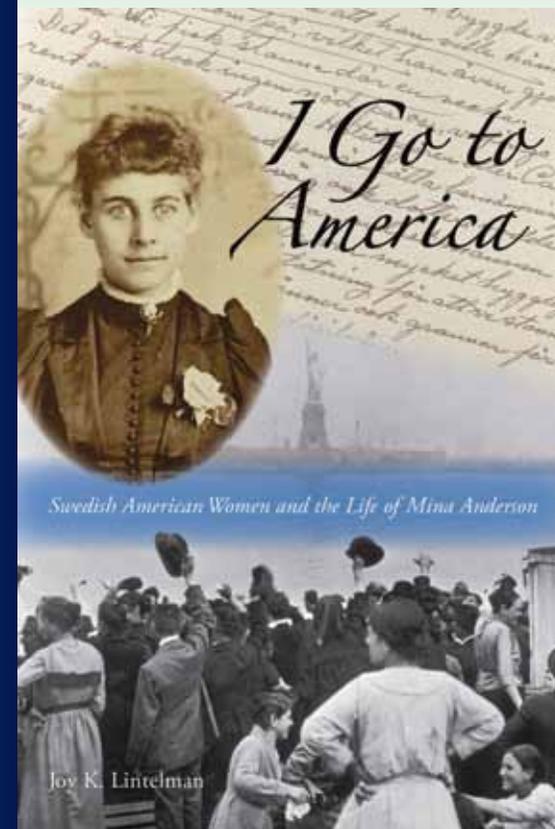
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

General Nonfiction Winner

Category sponsored by Minnesota AFL-CIO



I Go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson

by Joy K. Lintelman

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS

I Go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson



SUMMARY:

I Go to America showcases the previously untranslated memoir written by Mina Anderson, tracing her trip across the Atlantic Ocean from Sweden to make a new life in America. The book explores Mina's life as a domestic servant in the Twin Cities and her family life in rural Mille Lacs County where she and her husband worked a farm and raised seven children. She contributed widely to rural Swedish community life through her poetry, fiction, and letters to Swedish American newspapers. Joy Lintelman offers readers both an intimate portrait of Mina Anderson's life and a window into the lives of nearly 250,000 young, single Swedish women who immigrated to America from 1881 to 1920.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways do you think the immigration to America of Swedish women like Mina Anderson has shaped the Midwest?
2. Given the circumstances that women like Mina faced in 19th century Sweden, do you think you would have opted to stay in Sweden or immigrate?
3. How did the author's use of excerpts from Mina Anderson's memoir to open each chapter shape your reaction to the book?
4. How was reading this book similar to or different from reading a historical novel?
5. How are the experiences of the women written about in *I Go to America* both like and unlike that of immigrant women in contemporary America? What are the most significant differences, and in what ways does the present mirror the era written about in the book?
6. To what extent do you think Mina's gender, social class, ethnicity, and race shaped her options and experiences?
7. To what degree have gender, social class, ethnicity, and race shaped your own education, employment, and the way you view the world?
8. From what sources did Mina Anderson draw her strength over the eight decades of her life?
9. To what extent do you think Mina incorporated aspects of her cultural heritage into her new identity as an American?
10. What advantages or opportunities do you have that were not available to your grandmother or great-grandmother?

About Joy K. Lintelman:

Joy K. Lintelman is a professor of history at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Her areas of research include Swedish immigration history and women's history. A Fulbright Scholar, Joy has lived and traveled in Sweden.



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