2026 TALKING HEADSTONES

Diane Markham, Sacajawea Chapter, DAR, presenting "Julieann Rassmuson Debris Narrative" Union Pioneer Calvary Cemetery. Tumwater, WA

Hello, I am pleased to meet all of you. Thank you for your interest in my life. I am Julieann Drebis, but I was born Julieann Rassmuson in Denmark in October of 1848. I grew up in a rural farming community. Not much excitement there—until a young man named Johan Drebis came to call. Then, it became quite exciting indeed.

I should say that our families knew each other, as families do in rural areas. Johan was from there, but he had left six years before with a group of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saint missionaries to go to America.

It was very exciting when he returned for a visit in 1871, spending the Winter and Spring there. He was so handsome! And it wasn't long before he made his intentions known that he was going to return to America and wanted to take me as his bride!

Of course, this meant that I would never again see my family and friends—but things were different then. That was not uncommon.

We were married on May 7, 1872—and we left for America the following morning. Johan and I settled in Pottawattamie County, Iowa. There we became farmers and parents of nine children, including one set of twins.

The children were all blessings, and we were a good family. But we also suffered great loss. We had to say goodbye to four of our children in those early years, two in infanthood and two as small children. These were anguishing times. But again, things were different then. It was a rare family that had all of their children live to adulthood.

In 1893, John, as he was by then known, and I with our five remaining children moved clear across the United States, from Iowa to Washington State. We purchased a 40-acre farm for $800 in the area known

as South Union, here in Thurston County. If you haven't heard of South Union, it's because the community never grew. But it was home to us.

Life was good on our little farm. With us were our two sons Peter and Freddy and our daughters Emma, Maggie, and Agnes.

Tragedy did strike our family once more, though. Our precious Agnes, just 15 years old, was killed in an accident. She had been riding horses since she was small, but on March 22, 1903, a Sunday as it was, Agnes was thrown from a horse and died from her injuries.

We were devastated. She was the youngest of our family, our pride and joy. That's why when you look at the family tombstone the side bearing her name is labeled "Our baby." Granted, she wasn't a baby by the definition of the word, but she was very much the baby of our family.

But, we had good times too. One of the highlights was when we hosted a double wedding ceremony on New Year's Day in 1908 for our son Freddy and our daughter Emma. I decorated the house with festive greens and prepared a mid-day meal for everyone in attendance. It really turned out beautifully. There was even a writeup about it in the Tacoma Daily Ledger.

Freddy married Julia Hartshorn and Emma married Edward Slimp, an evangelical preacher from Tenino. Freddy and his wife made their home in Eastern Washington but Emma and Edward lived for several years in Napavine.

It was there in Emma's home I went to after I had a stroke in January of 1913. It was too much for John to take care of my needs, him being a man and all. I remained there until my death on June 6, 1913.

John laid me to rest here with our sweet Agnes. That fall, he made a trip back to Iowa to visit old friends and also spent time in South Dakota. While there, he met the woman who was to be his 2nd wife, Elsie Jensen, also a Danish immigrant who was widowed.

I'm glad he had a partner to go through life with. They were married until December 1932 when Elsie died. John laid her to rest here in our family plot with Agnes and myself.

"Julieann Rassmuson Debris"
Talking Headstones - Union Pioneer Calvary Cemetery.
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We were people of faith. We changed denominations a few times, but we always kept our faith in God. For that reason, John did not dread the time of his death, which occurred in February 1937 at 91 years old. He was always levelheaded, a man who planned ahead. In fact, he wrote his own obituary with the instructions, "Give this to the Preacher."

In it, he gave the details of our lives together and his years with Elsie. He ended it with "My love and best wishes I leave to my dear friends who sure have been kind to me."

And I leave you with the same, my love and best wishes.

Narrative written by Diane Markham