

**“Å vokse opp som Norsk i America”**

**“Growing up Norwegian” in America**

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**“Å vokse opp som Norsk i America”**

In Minnesota, It didn't seem that way to us. It was just part of who we were.

I'm sure it is different today in more diverse communities, but maybe that diversity is one reason why descendants of immigrant groups focus on their heritage. People seem to be looking for a connection and perhaps heritage provides some of that.

Today in communities with concentrations of those with Norwegian heritage, especially smaller communities, you find people learning the Norwegian language, working on genealogy, preparing traditional Norwegian food and learning Norwegian folk songs and dances. While you might find Norwegian folk dance groups for young people in larger cities, they would be more common in smaller cities or towns. In 2005 I discovered that you could have rømmegrøt for lunch at the Sons of Norway lodge in Fargo, North Dakota.

The connection Americans have to their Norwegian Heritage depends greatly on where they live and in small towns in Goodhue, County, Minnesota, the Norwegian influence was all around us. It seemed perfectly normal that our friends had last names that we later discovered were the names of farms in Trøndelag, or that we ate krumkaker, sandkaker, fattigman, klubb, blod pølse, søtsuppe, lefse, etc. during holiday times. Sometimes supper was cream and bread.

In 1931 my grandparent's church was still recording the church records in Norwegian and while not as common today, you still hear the sounds of Norwegian accents on a Sunday morning. In 1920 my parents were confirmed using the Norwegian language in their Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, a church whose members had names like "Torkelson", "Tollefsrud", "Everson", "Moe", and "Mostrom" and where today, each day, the Norwegian flag still flies in the church cemetery. In the 1960's and 1970's in some small cafes you could see men drinking coffee, playing cards and hear them speaking Norwegian.

Unfortunately, all of my grandparents had died by the time I was 3 years old so I did not get to know them. Still, with 11 children in my mother's family and 13 in my father's, I was surrounded by many "Norwegian" aunts and uncles, their large families and the sounds and rhythms of their voices. All of my grandparents were farmers in America, continuing on with their occupation from Norway and while some of their children also became farmers, many had different jobs.

In my father's family it was a requirement that all the "children" (now grown adults and their families) came to the farm for Sunday dinner even if they had to drive 60 miles from Minneapolis. The meal was often a chicken dinner and in the summer was more like a picnic with adults and children playing games like croquet on the lawn.

Some Norwegian traditions continued in our family, especially during Christmas, although we did not walk around the Christmas tree and sing.

And all the good food at Christmas! The table was full with søtsuppe, lutefisk with melted butter (we were not the bacon fat or cream sauce kind of people), potatoes, meatballs, rolls and butter, flat bread,

lefse (tynnlefse), and deserts. My father would put his lutefisk on lefse, but the children wanted butter and sugar. While my father's twin sister, Hannah, made Hardanger lefse, children preferred the potato lefse. But with enough butter and sugar I think any lefse is good. Two of my mother's sisters would make the søtuppe and when my aunt Lena, who did not approve of alcohol, looked the other way, my aunt Bernice would sneak some wine into the soup. I have always suspected that Lena knew what was going on but didn't say anything.

Since many families brought food, the table would be overflowing with different deserts. There were many plates of krumkaker, pepperkaker, sandbakkels, fattigmand, rosettes, strul, tartre, sugar cookies, and more. My aunts were very good cooks and also brought deserts of other nationalities as well.

My father continued with Norwegian baking and cooking after my mother died at the age of 51. When he made lefse there was flour everywhere. And his "klubb", instead of dumplings was more like blood sausage without the blood. He would put the mixture of potatoes, flour, salt, pepper, and salt pork in sewn bags and boil it. We would cut it in slices and eat it like a potato with meat, as a meal by itself fried in bacon grease, or with butter and syrup. We never had vafler and when we had rømmegrøt it was served on a plate with a pat of butter in the middle, instead of in a bowl. We also had riskrem as a desert but it was served more at "regular" meals than at holidays.

#### **Learning the Norwegian Language:**

My parents did not speak Norwegian in our home unless they did not want my brother or me to know what they were talking about. In my family, they spoke little of the "old country" and there was little knowledge of family history and where members came from. Most of my current knowledge about my family history comes from my genealogy research and family interviews.

While language continues to change in a home country, for people who emigrate, their language is frozen in time. What my parents learned was a "Goodhue County, Trøndhjem dialect". When my father travelled to Norway at the age of 60 he wanted to speak Norwegian with "real" Norwegians only to have them say, "You talk like an "old timer".

My father would say he was a "Trøndhjemer", and when he said it you could hear the rolling of the "r's" and all of the sounds of each letter. With any word or name starting with "hj" you could hear both letters, so we would hear "hjem", not "yem", "hjelp" not "yelp" and the family name of Hjermstad would be said as "Hjermstad" not "Yermstad".

While little Norwegian was spoken in our homes, when large groups of the family gathered together for a meal, especially at Christmas and Thanksgiving, the prayer said before the meal was always "I Jesu Navn". And although my father died in 1988, to this day several of the families still say this table prayer in Norwegian, in his honor when we gather together.

When I started learning Norwegian at the age of 61 it started with genealogy. My first words were column headings: fornavn, etternavn, født, død, gift, etc. I started to learn more to help me read documents and finally started to learn a little of the language itself, although today I only know about 2,000 Norwegian words. By continuing to study and practice, I am told that the few words I know are somewhat understandable when I speak them. I think I am helped by growing up surrounded by people using "æ", "ø" and "å" on a daily basis. I own several Norwegian language books including the one belonging to my mother's sister and several Norwegian CD, book and PC language courses. Helping me are several dictionaries including a Engelsk Blå Ordbok for college students.

## **A little about me:**

In English

I worked my entire adult life for a technology company, retiring at the age of 56 giving me extra time to concentrate on my Norwegian Heritage and other personal interests including travel, languages, photography and video. My travels connecting me to Norway have even taken me to Maui, Hawaii, where I met 19 members of Nordmanns Forbundet who had come there to attend a ceremony at a bautastein honoring the Norwegians who sailed there in 1881. I also maintain several of my own personal web sites, one of which is dedicated to my Norwegian grandparents. Today, on my portable media player you will find a wide variety of titles including Norwegian music ranging from Edvard Grieg to Sissel Kyrkjebø and Espen Lind as well as my Norwegian language courses.

In our home we have many items from my parent's families, the oldest being the trunk of my great grandfather Peter Satrum (Petter Olesen Trætstykket and his wife Sigrid Bårdsdatter Sætran) who came to America from Norway on a sailing ship in 1865. Sigrid's brother, Peter Bårdson Sætran fought in the American Civil War. We have many books connected to Norway including old ones like my uncle Arthur's Norwegian bible from 1897 and new ones like "Norway - The Portrait of a Nation", with an introduction by Crown Prince Haakon. Other books range from bunads and Vikings to Norwegian immigration. In our home you will find Hardanger embroidery created by my mother's sister, paintings of Norway by my father, and even a lefse turning stick. We have the school bell my mother used to tell the children to come back into the 1-room school where she taught. Education was important to immigrant families and my mother going to college was an example of how important.

I belong to Sons of Norway, Nordmanns Forbundet, and am on the board of directors of Trønderlag of America. I am the Editor of a Sons of Norway lodge newsletter and the webmaster of that lodge's web site. Each year I drive my convertible in Chicago's Syttende Mai parade. In the Chicago area there are several Sons of Norway lodges and multiple Norwegian based organizations ranging from the Torske Klub to the Norge Ski Club and including Norwegian folk singing/dancing groups, rosemaling, and more.

At each Sons of Norway meeting with the Norwegian flag at the front of the room, members sing "Ja vi elsker" and at the annual stevne of Trønderlag of America we never fail to sing "Nidelven".

Trønderlag of America is an organization serving descendants of emigrants from Trøndelag and has one of America's largest collections of bygdeboks and other historical books related to Trøndelag. Each year's 4-day stevne allows people to attend Norwegian heritage seminars, work in genealogy research rooms, learn Norwegian dances and songs, participate in tours and eat lots of good food (yes, lefse is served).

When people ask me who I am related to in Goodhue County, I just say, "everyone". As I study my Norwegian heritage and travel in Trøndelag, especially in Skatval and Hegra, I am starting to believe the same thing is true there as well.

In the following section, "Litt om meg", I attempt to write a little in Norwegian so you can see how well an American does with "self learning". It is very difficult for me use Norwegian. I find it easiest to write, when I have time to think about the correct word to use. Next is to speak a few words in Norwegian and finally it is most difficult for me to understand someone who is speaking Norwegian to me. Actually I understand people from Stavanger better than people from Trøndelag. I do very poorly in a

conversation ( You speak, I translate what you said, I think about it, then create a sentence in my head in English, translate it into Norwegian and then I speak). At the end of a day I am very tired from the effort, but I enjoy doing it. I find that Norwegians are very kind when a person attempts to speak Norwegian. Some will just change to English, but many are kind enough to help with the correct pronunciation or phrase. And yes, it is much more difficult when you are older.

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**This note, bounded in asterisks, was not part of the original submission, but is included here to help the non-Norwegian reader understand the intent of the «litt om meg» section. The section above was written in English and translated for the book into Norwegian by native Norwegian speakers. The section below was written by me in Norwegian.**

**For the book, I was required to write this entire section in Norwegian with no help from others using only my existing knowledge of the Norwegian language without using other tools such as English/Norwegian dictionaries, Google translate, etc. The goal was for the Norwegian reader to see what could be accomplished by an American attempting to learn Norwegian. Therefore, mistakes in grammar and spelling were acceptable.**

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### **Litt om meg:**

På norsk

Jon Loar Fiskvik gi meg reglene. Jeg må skrive litt på norsk men jeg kunne bruke ikke norsk ordbok eller andre tingene å hjelpe meg.

Er jeg "helle norsk"? Kanskje det. Familie min komme fra Trøndelag med  $\frac{3}{4}$  fra Skatval og  $\frac{1}{4}$  fra Hegra. Navn til dem i Norge var Svebukta, Røkke, Vinge, og Sætran. Min farfar og far til ham seiler til Amerika på skip "Bergen" fra Trondheim til Quebec, Kanada, i 1865. De reiste fra Quebec til Goodhue, County, Minnesota og kjøpte gård nær byen heter "Zumbrot". Prest til kirke deres skriver til kirkebok på norsk til 1931.

Min foreldre var født i 1906 i Amerika, og var komfirmet på norsk i evangelisk luthersk kirke, men de snakke ikke norsk til huset. Jeg begynne lærer litt norsk da jeg er 61 år. Det er vanskelig for meg å lære nye språk da jeg er mer gammel. Jeg har ikke lærer å hjelpe meg med min norsk språk, så jeg har lært med bøker, og CD spiller, og på Internet. Venner til meg, Inger Johanne og Harald Vinge fra Stjørdal, korrekt min dårlig norsk. Det er snilt av dem å hjelpe meg. Ikke med norsk lærer, min grammatisk er ikke god og min uttale er dårlig, men jeg snakker litt norsk allikevel. Jeg vet å sier "til høst" og "om sommeren". Idag snakke jeg 1500, kanskje 2000, enkel norsk ordene. Jeg snakke også litt Tysk språk. Min kone, Carolyn, sier at jeg snakke "NorTyskElsk" språk – alle blanded opp. Jeg har mye å lære.

På kjøkkene: Jeg har lagt lefse, kjøtboller, fattigmann, krumkaker, sandkaker, rosettes, kransekake (tårnkake), sitron krem og andre norsk mat. Min grønne ertersuppe er veldig god. Min rømmegrøt er fra TORO.

Carolyn og jeg har vært i Norge 3 ganger (Trøndelag 2 ganger). Vi besøker slektninger og dro til gård til familie min. Vi også dro til kirkegård og søk for graver. I 2008 vi seiler fra Bergen til Kirkenes på Hurtigruten og med fly fra Kirkenes til Trondheim. Vi er også til Danmark og Sverige i 2001.

Jeg er medlemmer til Sonner av Norge, Trønderlag of America, Nordmanns Forbundet, og mange historielag in Amerika.

Håper deg forstår litt av hva jeg skriver.

Beste Hilsen

Jon Satrum