

Asta (Nielsen) Lassen

MY CHILDHOOD



I am going to tell about my childhood. I'm going to start at Christmas in Thorning School. It was a wonderful time, something we really looked forward to.

It started with my mother baking cookies. She baked a lot, the portions were big. We always had 3 kinds: Brown cookies (brunekager) syrup cookies and vanilla cookies, also peppernuts. Later she baked layer cakes, both white and syrup, and large loaves of bread. They were wrapped and stored in the cellar.



Thorning School

A couple of days before Christmas, we got half a pig from the butcher in Thorning. My dad went down with the wheelbarrow to pick it up, first thing in the morning. We then made sausages, liver paste and headcheese. It was a big job in those days.



Aunt Andrea

Two days before Christmas, the fire was lit in the two guestrooms, to warm up the bedding for the guests. The guests were Aunt Andrea and Aage and either Alma or Dagny: they took turns staying at home as maids.

The first to arrive was Aunt Andrea. She was a widow and lived in Sjelle by Aarhus. Her husband was a house painter, but died from tuberculosis, as did their 21-year-old daughter. It was very sad. Auntie lived in a small house and went out helping people with the cooking, when they had guests and also when they had butchered. We always thought that when Aunt Andrea came then it was Christmas, she and Christmas belonged together. We also had been out in the woods to fetch a Christmas tree. Usually my dad and I went out to get it. We picked quite a big tree as we used it in the school afterwards. We decorated it the morning of



Christmas Eve. Then Alma or Dagny came, and then Aage from Copenhagen, and we really looked forward to that. It was very exciting, as he always brought nice presents for Signe and I. On Christmas Eve we went to church as my dad had to sing. If there was no room to sit in the church, then we went up by the organ, where my dad stood and sang, and we sat on the windowsill.

Mother didn't have time

to come to church. When we came home we ate: we had rice porridge, that was before it was style to eat ris à l'amande, so we had rice porridge with an almond and sweet beer and then we had sausage and pork roast.

After supper, we washed the dishes: it had to be done. Then my dad and Aage went in and lit the candles on the Christmas tree. My mother turned off the kerosene lamp and we sat in the dark until he opened the door to the Christmas tree. I remember those Christmas Eves with great joy. We then sang some Christmas hymns and got some presents, not too many, maybe three or four each. We thought that was just great. We also played games with peppernuts. Christmas Day and Second Christmas Day we stayed home and enjoyed each other. Aage left Second Christmas Day but Aunt Andrea stayed for three weeks to one month. It was so nice to have her, she was such a nice person. In the evenings we played cards. Auntie liked that.

Third Christmas day, we had to start planning the Christmas party for the schoolchildren. The Christmas tree was moved into the classroom. It got redecorated and baskets were made for each child to receive sweets in. Mother baked five coffee



Dagny & Alma



cakes to serve to the parents with their coffee. Sine from Gråe brought a pound cake or syrup cake, maybe cookies.

The 4th day after Christmas, we had the children's Christmas party. In the afternoon we set up tables for coffee in the house. We had a lady in the kitchen to make coffee: she had to make lots of coffee in big coffee pots.

Everybody arrived at 6:30. First we danced around the Christmas tree, usually three circles as the parents also joined in. At one of the Christmas parties, Frederik and I happened to hold hands as we walked around the tree, never realizing that someday we would again walk along holding hands. Frederik said later that it had been the happiest time in his life when he walked around the tree holding my hand.

After we finished with the tree, it was moved into the corner. We then played games. It was Dagny who was in charge of that. The adults went in for coffee, and the children ran back and forth snatching a piece of cake and drinking red juice.

Afterwards a man, Otto Johansson from Thorning, came with his violin. First he played a march and all young and old walked around the room with my mother and father in the front. After the marching, he started to play waltzes and polkas, and how those parents danced and enjoyed themselves! I can still see them having fun. We girls danced with each other, as none of the boys wanted to dance with girls. They were outside playing, but we didn't care, we managed without them. At 11 o'clock we all sang an evening song and I think everybody had a good evening. Then they all put on their winter coats; some had hurricane lanterns along. They were all walking. They walked out in the dark with their lanterns and it had been a good Christmas tree party at Thorning School.

SCHOOL DAYS

My father was the only teacher in the big school; at that time there were two pre-schools, one in Gråe and one by Thorning woods, and the children attended these from ages seven to ten. Those schools had women teachers. When I was ready to start school, the teachers told my dad that I might as well start school with him, so I started school with him when I was seven. All the other children were ten and older, so I sat at a desk in the back of the classroom, with my stylus, that was what we wrote with on the slate. The stylus had nice paper at the top, so you always tried to get one with pretty paper.



Teacher N.P. Nielsen



Signe & Asta with the Neighbour's Children

My father wrote letters on my slate that I could sit and practice on. I still have my slate: I thought it would be fun to keep it.

So I sat down there in the back and wrote and at the same time listened to my father teaching Bible history, Danish history and singing. I was very happy going to school, and I never thought that it wasn't good enough.

I don't think we got exercise books before I was twelve years old. We then got exercise books and pencils that you had to sharpen. Far (Frederik) always sharpened the pencils. He had a sharp knife, so they got a very fine point. Well, I sat there and learned to both read and write. I remember the other girls, they were older than me, thought it was fun to have that little one sitting there by herself.

We started school at eight in the morning. At ten we had little recess for 15 minutes. Some children ate part of their lunch and my father had just enough time to come into the kitchen for a cup of coffee. We then continued school until 12 o'clock, when we had the big recess, which was one hour. The children from Thorning had time to run home to eat; the ones from further away stayed and ate their lunch in the classroom.

My father also had time for a half-hour rest on the sofa. He was busy as he was the only teacher to maybe 20 children.

There was Big Class and Little Class. The children that were 10-12 years old went to school Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The ones that were 12-14 years old went Monday, Wednesday and Friday.



Asta (age 11) and her friend Ella (12)



Asta's School Class 1919-1920 (Asta is on the far right)

At one o'clock we all came back for two more hours. In those days everything was peaceful, never any trouble. It was a nice time to go to school. In those days the children didn't have rubber boots to wear in the snow, only wooden shoes with a thick pair of homeknit socks, so when they got to school their wooden shoes were full of snow. So on those winter mornings, after my father got everybody started on their schoolwork, he went out and found the wooden shoes that were full of snow. He brought them into the classroom and

scraped the snow off in a pail. He then hung them up on the wood heater. We had a big wood heater with a rack on top, where the wooden shoes were hung. How I still remember those wooden shoes hanging up there. They were then nice and dry when it was time to go home. It was nice to stick your feet into warm, dry wooden shoes.



Big Snowfall in Thorning - 1923

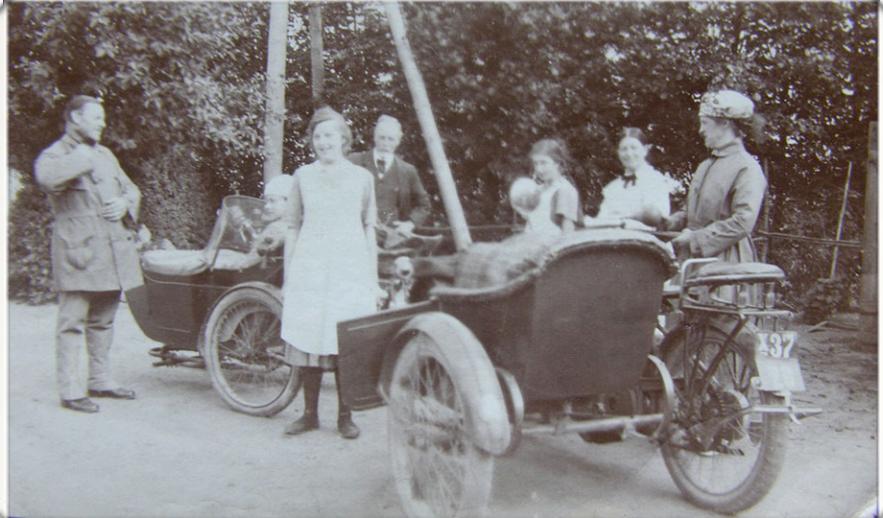


Summer returned again and I was able to go to the grocery store; my father always went during the winter. So I walked along with the basket on my arm down to Grocer Pedersen. I don't know if the basket was too heavy or what, but when I was ready to go back home I asked Grocer Pedersen, "Do you want to walk with me part of the way?" and he agreed. Then Lone, his wife, had to mind the store by herself while he walked with me. After we had walked awhile he said to me, "Now I think you can carry the basket the rest of the way." How I laughed about it later and how I heard about it later when I grew up from Grocer Pedersen, how he had to carry my basket part way home. I must have been very forward, since I dared ask him, but of course we knew him very well.

My mother told me at one time when we had house painters paint the outside of the house, I went out to talk to them. They then asked me to sing a song and I sang very boldly, "Jens Vymand," but I sang, "si fymand" instead, which means "your broomsman." My mother stood in the kitchen and had a good laugh and I am sure the painters did too.

The school children got holidays August 1st. We then had holidays for the entire month of August, where we did some travelling, Father, Mother, Signe and I.

First we travelled to Aarhus and then up to Father's family in Hesselballe and Hjortshøj. So Mother packed the small round suitcase and a bag: that was our luggage. We drove with the mail coach up to Kjellerup. From there we took the train to Aarhus. We really looked forward to visit Rasmus and Kristine Kold (Fat and Gugger: that is what Hanne called them when she was little, and soon we all called them that.) They lived in Bakkehuset and it was beautiful there. When we sat on the terrace and had morning coffee, we had the view of Aarhus Bay. That was something my father missed: he was used to looking at the ocean every day, so he really enjoyed being able to look out over the ocean.



We took the tram downtown. That was a great experience in those days. We looked in the stores and we always had to go down a small side-street behind the cathedral. There was an ice cream store where we could get ice cream cones. That was also something new: nobody in Thorning knew ice cream cones in those days. Nice homemade cones with ice cream that was a bit gritty. There were two girls in Aarhus, Lis and Ingeborg, but they were quite a bit younger than us.



**Asta's Grandparents
Niels & Kirsten Marie Nielsen
from Hesselballe**

After we had been in Aarhus two or three days, we went out to Hjortshøj. There we visited Father's brother Anton and Aunt Marie. They had a small place by a forest. The forest belonged to a big farm, "Hjortshøjlund," where Anton had been a coachman. We really liked to visit them; they were so lively. Anton always had fun with Signe and I. He smoked his long pipe in bed and my mother thought that was filthy.

We walked to the churchyard and by the little house where my father spent his childhood. His father and also his mother were weavers. People came to have material made for sheets and clothing; they were always busy.

After a couple of days there, we went to Sjelle to visit Aunt Andrea for a couple of days. That was also a place we liked to be. Auntie was so lively and it was so cosy in her small house. After we visited them all, we took the train from Aarhus. We had to get home to pick red currants and black currants.

That friendship with Fat and Gugger started when my parents were young and came to Mygind as a teacher and his wife. Fat and Gugger both lived on the farms of their parents. My mother and Gugger went together to gymnastics class and my father and Fat belonged to a rifle club. They were very good friends and Gugger became maid for my parents in Mygind. When they moved to Thorning she came along, so that



*Niels & Sine Snede Jensen
Asta's Grandparents from Sinding*

was an old friendship that has lasted through generations.

Then there were my mother's parents. They lived in Sinding by Silkeborg. When we were small we drove with horse and wagon to visit them. My father borrowed a wagon and a horse called Puddle from a neighbor. After we got older we bicycled over to visit them. They also lived in a small house. He was a grave digger and bell ringer at the church, and grandmother did cooking for people when they had guests. Their house was very cosy. We liked to go there, and grandmother always had some delicious baking.

The other grandparents in Hesselballe had passed away before I was born, but Alma and Dagny remember Grandmother. But I remember the ones from Sinding. I always thought that they were ancient and that their clothes were very old-fashioned. I don't remember my grandfather ever

spoke to us, but my grandmother did speak to us. We visited them a couple of times every summer. We always bicycled over there when Dagny and Aage came home for the holidays, and also at Easter.

Easter Saturday we bicycled to Sinding. Aage always brought half a pound of coffee at a grocery store we passed by: I think it was at Mausing. Grandmother made some good, strong coffee and she always put chicory in it.

I also lived through the First World War. I was eight or nine years old, so I don't remember too much, but I remember we were not able to get too much rye bread, so we often got barley porridge with syrup for supper, and Father fetched grain at the mill. Mother also baked bread with barley, it was very heavy and didn't taste too good.

During the summer we had many guests, some came bicycling. The ones from Aarhus always came: Fat, Gugger, Lis and Ingeborg. Also from Viborg came Musse and Helen: they stayed for a week, then their parents came for a visit. *Musse and Helen Sørensen were daughters of Theodor and Ane Sørensen.*

Theodor was Niels Peder Nielsen's cousin. Also a few old students came and my father was always happy to see them. A couple of times every summer a wagon with gypsies came to town. It was always very exciting. We could see them coming up on the highway and ran down to the plaza by the church where they usually stopped. They always had so many children who walked around and sold wooden spoons and whisks. It was so exciting when they came, people who lived in a wagon.

Once in awhile a carousel came to Thorning. They also came by horse and wagon and set up by the front of the church. They started to set up right away so they would be ready by evening, when people came to get a ride. We thought it was fun to watch. I don't think I ever got a ride, but there was always full house.



*Asta (centre) with her Father and Signe
Asta is sitting on Meinert Sørensen's Lap (Alma's husband)
The girl on the left is Meinert's Sister*



Ane (Sned Jensen) Nielsen

I remember that my father and I took many nice walks in the woods and down through the meadow. My father knew the names of all the flowers so I really got to know them well. It was nice to go for those walks, both summer and winter. My father always had to get out and go for a walk, especially in the winter when he couldn't get out and work in the garden.

I often thought about what a good cook my mother was, what tasty food she made, and always vegetables. She was actually ahead of her time when it came to fresh food. I remember her making leek gratin, usually for Sunday dinner. It was served with creamed butter where a bit of SOMETHING had been added. She also baked beautiful puff pastry.

Easter was always a nice time. There was a long holiday. Aage came home from Copenhagen and when Dagny was away studying she also came home. They came Tuesday or Wednesday. On Saturday we bicycled to Sinding to visit our grandparents.

Easter Sunday we had eggs, and what beautiful eggs Dagny painted. It was a work of art: we hated to break them! If the weather was fine we raked the playground and set up the croquet set.

Before Whitsun we had usually finished spring cleaning. That was a big job, as everything had to go outside for airing, and we hung up the lace summer curtains. They were fastened with stickpins: there weren't any rods. I always thought it was so festive when the summer curtains were hung, so light and nice. Whitsun Saturday, we walked down in the meadow to pick globe-flowers: they were blooming then. The meadow was behind the woods by Kærsholm. It was a ritual that we had to go down and pick globe flowers every Saturday at Whitsun.

One day every summer we went on a school picnic. It was held in Bøgild Woods by Bøgildgård, close to Kjellerup. It was a big day for us as we travelled by horse and wagon. We had small flags along. Every family had their food basket along. We left after lunch, then we played in the woods and ate our food. I remember we were able to buy red soda-water, it was a big thing in those days to get red soda-water. It was six to seven kilometers over there. It was a lovely afternoon.

One summer holiday we travelled to Copenhagen to visit Aage: Father, Mother, Signe and I. That was also a big experience for us. We sailed from Aarhus at night and slept in berths. We stayed with Aage's landlady. She must have had a couple of empty rooms. We went to Tivoli and the theatre to see "Around the World in 80 Days," and that I never will forget. We also went to the Doll Theatre and Zoological Garden and Bakken. We also walked around in the big stores. Aage was good at showing us around. I think we took the train home.



Signe & Asta

When I look back, then I think that I had a nice childhood at home in the school. I remember some winter evenings, my father was binding books by the dining room table. He stood there with his big book press. It was very interesting to look at.

Signe and I had a small corner behind the buffet, where we had our toys, dollhouse and doll stroller. That is where we sat and played in the evenings. Mother knitted and Dagny crocheted. Sometimes in the evening we might get warm elderberry drink or apples cooked on the stove, in a pie plate with sugar on top. It smelled so nice when they were cooking and they tasted very good. Father also had to read his newspaper.



Once in awhile my father said, "Come, girls, you have to learn how to dance." That was Signe and I. Then I danced with my father and Signe with my mother, and my father counted one-two-three, so that was how we learned to dance. My father thought we should know how to dance. There were often weddings in the church, and if we knew the people we liked to go and look. So Signe and I often went with my father who had to sing. He stood by the organ and sang, and Signe and I walked up to "Heaven," a balcony above the organ. We could sit up there without anybody seeing us.

Now I will tell about what Alma once told me. It was down from the old school, where Alma, Dagny and Aage grew up. The old school is still there, situated between the church and the parsonage. They really liked living there and were very sad when they had to move to the new school. Anyway, one winter, in the old school, Gugger was the maid. At Christmas Fat came to visit Gugger. Just outside the school, where there now



Signe & Asta

is a parking lot, there was a pond that was frozen over in the winter and people skated on it. Fat was a very good skater and Alma also had a pair of skates, so he was showing Alma how to skate. Alma said it was lots of fun. They crossed arms in the front and she felt very proud as they skated by all the other children. Alma had a couple of good days and really learned how to skate.



Alma, Dagny & Aage

Then in 1904 or 1905 they moved to the new school, and they thought it was very sad. It probably was: there wasn't a tree and no landscaping: my father did that himself. It was so bare compared to where they came from, where they had fruit trees and huge chestnut trees. I understand why Alma was sorry to move up there. I was born there in 1906, so I have not known the old school.

Frederik's grandfather bought the old school and lived there after retiring. Later his son "Morbror" (Frederik's mother's brother Bertel) lived there, and now Frederik's cousin lives there. It is so cosy and nice down there.

The day of examinations was a big day. The pastor and the people that sat on the school board were there. We did Bible history and Denmark history. We also had to write and do math on our slate boards. Then we had to go up front to the teacher's desk: the pastor sat there. We had to show him our math and anything we had written. On mine he wrote UG; that was the highest mark you could get. Afterward they all came in for lunch.

That day, the children wore their nice clothes and their slate boards and pencil boxes had to be clean. I remember scrubbing my slate board around the edges.

When I was 12-13 years old, we got exercise books that had nice pictures on the cover. We wrote in them with pencils that were sharpened by Frederik. We started at eight in the morning. Later in the afternoon we had Danish and Bible history and then we sang songs that had to do with what the lessons were about. My father accompanied the singers on his violin. I really like Danish history and writing essays.



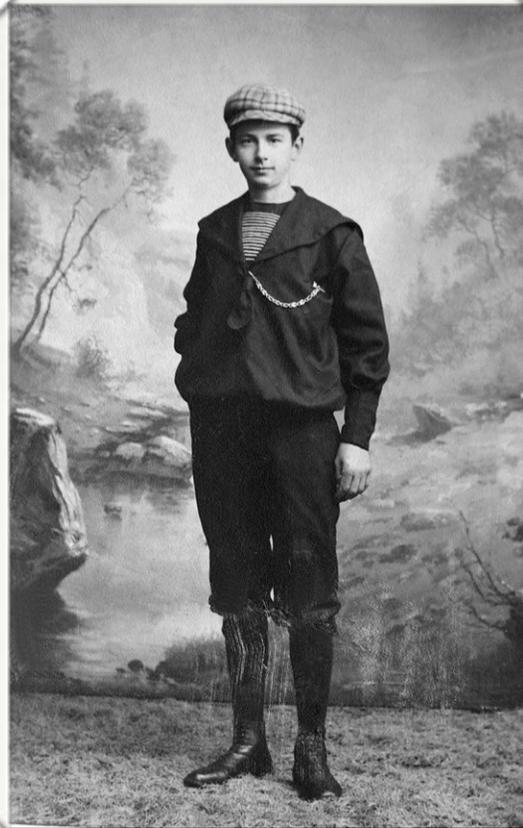
Signe, Ane, Niels Peder, Asta & Ingeborg

Then we had the beautiful holidays where we always had a guest that stayed overnight. I thought it was wonderful, but I can see it must have been a lot of work for my mother, but we all helped out. The ones from Aarhus and Viborg always came, then Aage came with some of his friends and Dagny also. We always had guests during the summer. My father was always busy out in the yard. We had a nice yard; there was a big vegetable garden and berry bushes. My mother had a flower garden that was very neat. There was a path we called the Tulip Path: it had tulips on either side. How beautiful it looked when they were in bloom. Then there was a hazelnut path at the far end. I thought it was a huge garden, but I am sure it wasn't really that big. My father was a good gardener. We always had potatoes early in the season and of course they had planted the whole yard. There was nothing when they moved there, so I can see why they really liked it.

But what I really looked forward to in summer was when Aage came home. He was a nice big brother to have. He usually came for three weeks. Sometimes one of his friends came: his name was Hegård. His father had a factory where they made pots and pans. When he came, we always went fishing in Nippgård Lake, my father and I and Hegård and Aage. I don't think we ever caught anything.

Aage was studying medicine in Copenhagen, but he gave it up, didn't think he was strong enough. He then started at Kraks (Vejviser) Directory; he really liked it there.

It was fun when Aage came home: then we went on bicycle trips. Dagny also came along. We bicycled to Daugbjerg and Mønsted, Finderup and Viborg. We bicycled just about every day. Sometimes my father came along, but my mother never learned to ride a bike: she tried but never made it. We took our lunch with us to eat along the way.



Aage

Every summer we drove out to Kongenshus. It was far out in the heather. They had some reindeer there that they were trying to see if they could thrive in Denmark, but they didn't succeed. It was very interesting out there: a Lapland family lived out there in a tent and they walked around in their national costumes. It was really something for Signe and I to look at, and also those reindeer. The people that came along were Jakobsen's from Kobergård, Jens Beck's and Grocer Pedersen. We drove in two horsedrawn wagons. We had hot chocolate along. My mother had made one pailful and Mrs. Jakobsen the other. The pails were wrapped in blankets to keep warm. My mother also baked a coffee cake to take along. I remember those trips – how exciting they were! – and I remember the Lapland family. They had blonde hair with braids and small caps on.

During the summer we also had picnics to the woods with our food basket; Grocer Pedersen's and Jakobsen's came along. If our family from Viborg happened to be visiting, then they also came. We didn't go on long trips in those days, but they were nice and a lot of fun.



*Outing to Bækkeslund 1917 (NP & Ane's 25th Anniversary)
Asta & Signe in Front – Ane behind Asta's right shoulder – NP, Dagny, Meinert & Alma behind Signe*



Signe, Dagny, Aage & Asta