

MY MEMORIES

by

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THE SONG

Singing played a large role in my childhood home. I can clearly see my family gathered around the piano in the living room with the doors out to the garden, in winter, with the thick green drapes drawn and the fire in the wood stove, and in summer when the white lace curtains were on the windows and the patio door open.

Most of all, I remember Whitsunday mornings when we sang, "I al sin glans nu stråler solen". That festival, and the happiness there was in the living room in Thorning School impressed my childhood mind so that it seems like yesterday, even today when I am 70 years old. We sang that song twice on Whitsunday, first at home, later at church.

When Asta and I were small, we nearly always got to sit in the window niche by the organ at the church. There, we could follow at close range Teacher Kristiansen's rhythmical playing and Father's fervent song leading.

In the evening, we often sang "Fatherland" and other songs, and last an evening song. Learning to play and sing was just as natural in our home as learning to talk.

Father also had a song club, and several people from the district came one evening a week and practised harmony. It sounded good after they learned the songs and sang together. Best of all, I remember Photographer Jensen's and Finderup Jacobsen's handsome bass voices, and Groceryman Petersen's extraordinary tenor. Of the ladies, Miss Nielsen from Skrøe had the prettiest voice, a nice alto. By the way, Marie Jensen also had a nice alto voice, and Miss Holst from Gråskov sang a very shrilling soprano. I remember once somebody shouted, "Shut up Holst, the windows are rattling!" Father also gave violin lessons. I remember that Mother often had to take a walk in the garden when the beginners played shrieking false notes.

During the winter, Father held evening classes, assisted by Finderup Jacobsen. Finderup Jacobsen was a agriculture graduate, so he taught the nature subjects and read out loud, which he was good at.

We got great pleasure out of Finderup Jacobsen, whose fields surrounded three sides of the school property. If we had had a long dry spell, and then it began to rain, Jacobsen would walk around in his grainfields with an umbrella over his head and sing for all he was worth. When we visited them in the evenings, he always sang for us, accompanied by his pretty little wife who was from Copenhagen.

Groceryman Petersen and his wife were nice people that we often visited with. Petersens, Jacobsens and Photographer Jensens were the ones we visited with the most when I was a child.

PLAY

I don't think anybody played as much and had such a fine time as we did when we were children. We had caves, paths, a dollhouse and lots of dolls. Between the school and the parsonage there was a dike through which we had a hole. and we played Robinson Crusoe together with the pastor's daughter Agnes all summer.

Father was very good at playing with us. Mother looked after her house meticulously, and taught us to work. As soon as the snow fell, my father got out the sleigh and took us out on the hill. When the dam froze, he got out our skates, oiled them and took us out. He made large snow caves for us, and hollowed out and cut holes in a sugar beet, which made a nice lamp for the snow room. Father could make kites with long tails that could fly high. He played games with us, "Two men high" and "Two men in front of a widow". Often we played croquet. On many nice evenings together with Petersens, Jensens and Jacobsens, but mostly we played alone.

TRIPS WITH FATHER

We loved to walk with Father. As we walked down the road, my father always had a lot to tell about the flowers in the ditch, about the insects and the birds. When we walked on Trollmoor it got to be even more exciting. There were cowberries and swimming birds, and we had to be careful not to step on vipers.

When we walked in the woods, we heard about trees, leaves and flowers, picked lily of the valley, anemones, and globe-flowers. We always had to walk by the sports field and admire the big beech. But it was most beautiful when Father took us for a walk on a clear winter evening. Father knew all the stars and told us about them. I still remember how warm and soft my father's big hand was, when he held mine while the universe's immense width opened itself up in front of my astonished child's eyes. Afterwards, it was nice to come into Mother's cosy warm kitchen, where the apples steamed on the stove.

My father's ability to tell stories was also significant to his students. He could tell both biblical and historical stories, so that you felt you were right there. I remember how he had tears in his eyes when he told about Denmark's defeat in 1864.

My father taught woodwork once a week in the evenings. He had a faithful helper in farmer Jens Christian Jensen from Gråskov. He was a small, quick man who came walking in

his high boots, whether there was a snowstorm or sunshine. Gradually, the two even managed to build a house in which all the woodworking classes were held.

THE GARDEN

We had a nice big garden, and it constituted an essential part of my home. I just want to mention a few things, so you can see everything in front of you. The veranda, the arbour, and the red hawthorne bush under which we so often sat during a nice summer evening and ate strawberries or drank coffee. The stone knoll, the hazel path, the lime hedge, and maple hedge, the tulip path and the hollow yew, where Asta and I crawled into when we were hiding, and last but not least the flagpole, where many a festive morning we helped my father hoist our beautiful flag.

WAR AND PEACE

When the first world War broke out, I was four years old. I still remember it clearly, obviously because it made a deep impression on Mother and Father.

There were no cars in Thorning yet, but the painter, Gadegård, had a motorbike with a sidecar, and he drove the young people who had been drafted to Kjellerup. I can still hear how it sounded when he started it up. Then my mother and father would say, "So, now he is driving off with another pair."

Mother and Father talked a lot about the war, and my father had maps of the different battlefields on which he moved stickpins according to how the fronts moved. But apart from the rations coupons and that we ate barley porridge for supper, I don't remember much about the war.

There was a prisoner of war camp at Hald. Sometimes my brother Aage, who studied in Viborg, brought one of the captives home for the weekend. It was very interesting.

I also remember the reindeer in Kongenshus. A few kilometres from my home, a man bought a big area of the heath and brought down some reindeer from Lapland. Reindeer moss grows on the heather, and he had found out that reindeer could live there. A Lap man and woman came with the reindeer to look after them. These two fun people in their stylish Lap outfits were guests at our home one Sunday. It was very

exciting. But when things started to go badly for the Germans, all the reindeer were slaughtered and the meat sent down there, their owner was German-minded.

We had a small girl from southern Jutland staying with us during the war. She also was very German-minded. Her sister, who stayed in the neighboring town, was Danish-minded.

When my parents were travelling in southern Jutland after the War, they visited their home, and they told us upon their return that the father was very German-minded and the mother was Danish-minded.

Then I remember when the war ended. Asta and I were walking by the hill across from the blacksmith when the church bells started to peal. We ran home and helped my father raise the flag. Father cried, he did that when one half of southern Jutland had to stay under German rule after voting, too.

A lecturer that we often talked about in my home was polar explorer Mylins-Ericksen. He had been to Thorning and stayed at our place just before he went to Greenland with the Denmark expedition and perished in 1907. We always felt quite solemn when we sang his song, "Christmas Snow and Skate Ice."

THE COMMUNITY HALL

Thorning Community Hall played a big role in my childhood and youth years. Early in life I went there for lectures, plays and gym activities, and our lively and pleasant pastor's wife, Mrs. Larson, arranged children's parties and many other activities. She always had something going. I liked to sit on her kitchen table and talk.

Once, after I was grown, she absolutely wanted me to marry the pastor from Sjørslev. He was a bachelor. She arranged for us to be together and played all kinds of monkey tricks, but he was not for me. And some years later when I found my nice husband, I remember she said in her wedding speech,

"Yes, Signe, I can see you were better at finding a man for yourself than I was at finding you one."

This was a little side-track, back to the community hall.

During the winter there was one lecture after another. I heard many good people speak in Thorning Community Hall. Some of the lecturers who came from far away stayed with us for the night. I remember tall, dashing Peter Freuchen, who walked with a bit of a limp because one of his feet had frozen on the Thule expedition. I remember the old, sour folk memorial collector, Evald Tang Kristensen, who had a temper tantrum and spluttered because we could not get his medal put on satisfactorily before he had to lecture at the community hall.

We had gymnastics, folk dancing and amateur theatre. Oh, how we had fun when we practiced for a play. Then there were the young people's meetings, and not to forget the dances. I can still hear when Bugge tuned in with "Beautiful Maiden, Would You Like to Go to the Woods?" Dance teacher Wissing from Viborg also held dancing classes in the community hall over a couple of winters. We got a lot of amusement from that.

All of Mother and Father's good friends from "the south parish" also came to the community hall, J.C. Nielsen and Ane, J.P. Lassen and Sine, Hans Toft and Auntie, Thomas Nielsen and Hanne, Søren Lysday and Kirstine, Søren Bogedal and Karoline, Jens Jensen and Ane, Jens Andersen and Sine, P. Laursen and his good wife Marie, who I noticed very early because she was very smart beside the other farm wives. They all came for visits in my home, where we had many cosy and pleasant evenings together.

FRIENDS

The wise and clever Ingeborg from Grågård was for many years Asta's and my best friend. On many Sunday afternoons and evenings we walked or bicycled to Grågård, and Ingeborg came to our place before we went to something at the community hall. I think she was allowed to go to quite a few more things on account of Asta and I, "Gråbonden" (*Gråbonden. The name of the farm was Grågård; "bonden" means farmer. This was her father.) always said, "What teacher Nielsen can let his daughters go to, I can also let my daughter go to." But Ingeborg had to do so much work. If, for example, we were going to a party on a Sunday night, she always had to milk two long rows of cows first. Ingeborg's cousins on the other Grågård belonged to our regular "staff" of calling suitors.*

Asta also married one of them. On summer evenings, a flock of young people always gathered down by the school, Clemmen, Peter, Frederik, Carl, Peder, Paul, Christian and many others. We had a lot of fun with them, and all in innocence. Ingeborg unfortunately died very young, and it was very sad. Later I found some good friends in P. Laursen's three girls. We had known each other all along, but grew closer when I attended Danebod Summer School, first one summer together with Esther and the next with Henne. Henne later became my very dear sister-in-law. She and her husband first met at my wedding.

It was enjoyable to visit Per Laursen's because Marie was always so happy and lively and understood the young people, and Per was pleasant and very quick-witted.

CHRISTMAS

Christmas was my favourite childhood celebration. Mother had a busy time before Christmas. There was butchering, baking, housecleaning, and decorating the whole house to do. In the evenings when we little ones were in bed, Mother sat and made Christmas presents for us. Always sensible gifts, but oh, how exciting it was.

The day before Christmas Eve, Aunt Andrea arrived. She "belonged" to us at Christmas, and she was fun. Even though she had lost both her husband and only daughter, Auntie knew how to have fun with us like nobody else. We could speak to Auntie about everything, and when

we got older we confided everything about our small romances to her, and discussed them with her.

When it started to get dark on Christmas Eve, we listened to the church bells chiming, and then we walked to church and listened to the Christmas Gospel. The church was always full on Christmas Eve, and decorated with lots of candles and evergreen branches. After the service, we went home to a delicious Christmas meal. We had rice porridge and pork roast. It tasted a lot better that evening than at any other time, and there was always excitement about who was going to get the nut and the gift that was all gift-wrapped on the table. I can still see my father's expression when he sat with the nut hidden in one cheek.

After supper and dishwashing, the Christmas tree was lit. My father looked after that. He very carefully closed the doors between the rooms and shut the light off in the room where we were sitting, while he lit the tree. It was very exciting while we sat and waited, and finally Father opened the door. There stood the radiant tree in all its splendor. That tree is the biggest joy I remember from my childhood. When we walked around the tree holding hands, and always started with singing, "Velkommen igen Guds engle små" ("Welcome Again God's Little Angels"), and later all the other beautiful Christmas hymns. Then came the distribution of gifts. They were small, modest gifts compared to today's standards, but at the time we were delighted with them.

I can never be thankful enough for my fine childhood home, where I had so solid an anchor in the Christian outlook on life, so that it has become a light and a shield for me until the end of my days. Today, many people have left their childhood faith, and that is probably why the world has become as mixed up as it is. Many children only hear swearing and dissatisfaction in their homes.

MY MOTHER

My mother was very good at keeping house. Everything was shining clean around her. She was also a fine cook. I still remember her pastry and her cauliflower casserole dish, and many other delicacies. When my mother finished up after lunch, she changed clothes and put on a snow white apron. Then she sat by her sewing table and knitted, crocheted, and mended most of the afternoon.

Mother was not only clean, she was also knowledgeable about bacteriology. All that we ate and ate with had to be scalded, and the cat was not allowed to touch the dishes. We were not allowed to visit friends whose mother was dirty, and we were not really allowed to borrow books from the young people's association, because the lady that managed it licked her fingers when she turned the pages.

My mother could also be very funny. I remember once, we were going on a picnic together with Grocer Petersen's and Finderup Jacobsen's, but when the day arrived, it just poured. Mother, however, was not to be shaken. She and my father moved all the furniture out of the garden room. There was a green rug on the floor, and Mother put a palm and other large green plants around the room. Then word was sent to the guests to come for a picnic at our house. When they came, we enjoyed the picnic on the rug and had an unusually pleasant picnic.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

There were five children in my family. My oldest sister Alma was just about 18 years old when I was born. She was a lively and happy girl, and had many friends. She married Meinert Sorensen and had two boys.

My second oldest sister, Dagny, was more quiet. She fell in love with Johannes Nielsen. He had been very sick with tuberculosis, so my parents got her to take her teacher's training before she married him. She did that, and they got married and had quite a few happy years together, even if he did die at a young age. They had two girls.

My only brother Aage inherited my father's loving and soft disposition. He was also lively and happy. As a child, I only remember him from the weekends. He had moved to Viborg to attend school. After he finished school, he moved to Copenhagen to study to be a doctor. There are two episodes I remember especially well from his student days in Copenhagen. The first one was as a seven year-old, when I was very sick. First I lay at home for six weeks, then I was admitted to the hospital at Kjellerup, where I was operated on twice in one lung. I lay there with a drainage tube in my lung for seven months, but I was allowed to come home for Christmas, since Aage was there and could change the drain. At the hospital, it always stabbed when they took one out and put another in, but Aage did it so softly and cautiously that I hardly felt anything. The other thing I remember was a couple of years later, when Mother, Father, Asta and I visited him in Copenhagen, and all the exciting and (for us) grand things we experienced there.

Aage finished his education and practiced at several hospitals in Copenhagen. Then the Spanish Fever came, and people died like flies. Aage had to sit night after night and hold the fever-sick people until they died and their faces turned black. That was too much for his soft disposition and it broke him, something that he never overcame. He said farewell to his profession as a doctor, and got a job as a division manager for "Kraks Vejviser," working for dear old Mr. Krak, who unfortunately died the next year.

After I finished High School, Aage got me in at Kraks Vejviser, not working for him, but for Karlberg, the department manager. We had some nice years together in Copenhagen. Aage showed me around the town and explained everything to me. Off and on, we went to "Lorry" together with good friends, or to the theatre or concerts. During the summer, we made trips to

Furesøen, Øyrehaven, Galophaven, Travehaven, Søndermarken, Kongelunden and many other places.

Aage died young, after first marrying Lis Kold. They had a little girl. We always got together a lot with Lis' parents. Her father was a criminal assistant in Aarhus.

During my last year in Copenhagen, I worked for Mrs. Juul-Nyholm keeping house. Mrs. Nyholm was originally from Copenhagen. Her husband had been a minister in Tårs, way up by Hjørring. When he died, she moved back to Copenhagen so that two of her boys could live with her while they finished their education. Her oldest son became a doctor, and her only daughter married a minister. Of the two that lived at home, one studied to become a minister, the other an engineer. A lot of young people came to their home. They always helped me so that I could be with them. It was a nice place to be, The families Juul-Nyholm and Terkelsen from Dambod were very fine people, who I will always remember and admire.

Now I shall tell you about my third sister Asta, who was just a little older than I, and because the other three were some years older, we felt almost like twins. Asta laughed a lot and was full of fun. We played unbelievably well together, and had lots of fun. We also had the luck of being at home at the same time during the first of our teenage years, because I continued my schooling at Kjellerup High School. At the high school, I found two very good friends, Karen Breinholt, whose father was a doctor in Hvam, and Eli Christensen, whose father had a clothing store in Kjellerup. We visited a lot in each other's homes during the years we went to school together. Later, Asta went to home economics school, after which she married Frederik Lassen. They had four girls and one boy.

I myself had the joy of becoming a farmer's wife, and that is perhaps the healthiest and best life one can imagine, in close contact with nature and animals. I got a good and happy husband and a couple of nice children, a boy and a girl. What else can one wish for in life? Thank-you.