

From Thames to Tana

(1947 – 1952)



by

Bettine Palmstrøm



The author's husband, Finn Palmstrøm, played an important part in re-establishing law and order in Finnmark in the years immediately after World War II. As District Judge with a vast area to cover, he had to travel round in horse- or reindeer-drawn sleighs during the long winter using the frozen Tana river as a highway and as a waterway for boat-travel in summer.

Bettine, (nee Ridley), who grew up in Stoke Poges within sight of the church made famous in Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, newly-wed and new to Norway, went with him and acted as Clerk of the Court. It was all a tremendous adventure given the climate, the harsh living conditions, and her limited knowledge of Norwegian in the beginning, but being game for anything - even a wolf-hunt — she survived triumphantly thanks to her resilience, her sense of humour, her interest in the Sami/Lapps, and her devotion to Finn.

This account of their life and work together in the far, north of Norway is now a piece of history, but Bettine Palmstrøm's lively narrative makes it seem like yesterday.

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Glossary

of mostly Sami (Lappish) words

<i>kofte</i>	(homespun) jacket or knitted sweater in colourful patterns.
<i>komse</i>	cradle of a portable kind.
<i>kumager</i>	boots for summer use.
<i>pesk</i>	reindeer-skin tunic without front fastening.
<i>raid</i> (below)	organised procession of reindeer sledges under the direction of a <i>vappus</i> . (See below)
<i>sennegress</i>	a sedge (<i>carex vericaria</i>) which is dried and used for warmth as a lining in boots.
<i>skalle</i>	reindeer-skin boots.
<i>vappus</i>	a guide skilled in the handling of reindeer.
<i>vidda</i>	wide, open country, especially mountain plateaux above the tree line.

promille [driving] driving with alcohol content in the blood above the legal minimum, which in Norway is one half of 1%.



The author in Karasjok costume

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— Foreword —

Dear Reader:

The following account of a slice of my life - five out of 80- plus years - could perhaps have been given the title, "One-eyed in Tana" - or "How far a lazy eye can lead you!", because in fact it is most unlikely that I would have ended up in Norway - not to speak of the northernmost part of the country - if I had had equal sight in both eyes.

The war had lasted for two years and it looked as though it would continue for quite a while. I had been doing ambulance work in the evenings, after my work in the publicity department at Methuens, the publishers, but had decided to go in for full-time war work in the WRNS (Wrens). I had a sister in the WAAF and a brother a bomber pilot in the RAF, so the choice seemed fairly natural - and I liked the uniform cap!

I went up for an interview, but got no further than a corridor, where they were testing eyesight. My one-eyedness- that I was born with - had never before been any handicap, so it came as a shock when I was rejected on the spot. My disappointment was clearly visible as I went down to the Underground at Charing Cross. I have at any rate never forgotten the cockney ticket-collector's comment as he punched my ticket:

"Cheer up Laidy! it can't be all that bad!"

Well, it hasn't been all that bad.

That same evening I went to fence at the Salle Grave, and was obviously not looking much more cheerful, since my friends there wanted to know what was the matter. Well, said one of them, if I wanted to do some special war work, why didn't I try the Norwegians? She knew someone who knew someone in the (exile) Norwegian Government's Press and Information Office in London, and had heard that they were on the lookout for a secretary who was "strong in English". She thought I might fit the bill - though perhaps they might think me a bit young for the job. Well, I was by then 22. So next day I put my hair up, put my glasses on, and went for an interview. And I got the job- though I did hear afterwards (through the person who knew the person who knew my friend at the Salle Grave) that the Norwegian who interviewed me had got quite a surprise when he saw the credentials I handed in the day after the interview, and found I was a good deal younger than he had thought!

I certainly didn't regret taking the job. It was interesting work in a most intense atmosphere, where I really got the feeling of doing something worthwhile. And I got to know a new country and its countrywomen and its countrymen - including my late husband Finn!

Fate certainly moves in strange ways! In this case, and with the help of a 'lazy' eye, it led me, in 1946, to the northernmost arctic district of Norway, where my husband was appointed District Judge in Tana, in "*Sami* land"- where the court went on circuit by horse and sleigh and by reindeer- and where I even got mixed up in a wolf hunt!

In the following chapters I will try to give you some idea of how we lived - and worked - until 1952 in this "Land of the Midnight Sun" - a land that could just as truthfully be called: Land of the Long Winter!

Bettine Palmstrøm

The author's husband's jurisdiction lay in the far north-eastern corner of Norway, shown in greater detail on next pages



SCANDINAVIA and the Baltic states, plus the most northern parts of Germany and Poland



A map of Finnmark county and the location of Langnes

Today (2015), Langnes where Bettine and Finn lived, can hardly be found on the map. Vadsø and Alta have been the main centres in the Finnmark county.

From the map you may get an impression of the large distances Bettine and Finn had to travel to arrive at e.g. Karasjok and Kautokeino. Remember, in 1947 to 1952, there were very few roads in Finnmark; no road along the Tana river.

— One —

"Even the Romans had baths!"

These were the opening words of an article, my very first effort at journalism, written over fifty years ago, and they have given me a bad conscience for nearly as long. Because, after all, it was first of all the Romans who had baths, long before many other nations got around to it - including the Britons!

But I think you will understand the reason for my outburst if you read on.

In 1948 I was asked to write an article for Norway's leading daily newspaper, *Aftenposten*. It was to be printed in their Christmas number - a great honour! And one can ask why what I could write at that time - and from the part of Norway I was living in - should deserve such an honour?

The Editor's reasons were quite simply - if somewhat poetically - expressed: he wanted an account of how a young English woman was surviving the transition from, as he expressed it, "the banks of the Thames to the banks of the Tana river in northernmost Norway".

This could perhaps have been interesting enough in itself under normal conditions. But normal they most certainly were not in Tana in 1948. Three years earlier - during the last winter of the last war - the Germans had made use of merciless burnt-earth tactics during their retreat across Finnmark as the Russians entered Norway from the east. Whole villages were burnt and communications destroyed. Those of the inhabitants who had not managed to escape into the mountains or the forests, were forced into overfilled transport vessels and evacuated to overfilled villages further south. That my husband was appointed District Judge in Tana while in his early forties - a comparatively early age for such an appointment - was at least partly due to the fact that he had done some service in the Norwegian commandos during the war. As one representative of the Norwegian Ministry of Justice expressed it: a certain amount of toughness could come in useful for a judge in Tana under post-war conditions. (Nothing was said on that occasion about what qualifications might be advisable for the judge's wife.)

Fortunately we both knew (roughly, at any rate) what to expect.

Towards the end of the war, the Norwegian Government in London had found that an experienced lawyer could be more useful preparing legal action against the Germans than training in parachute jumping in Scotland, and the most important of the cases Finn Palmstrøm prepared for use at the Nürenburg tribunal included details of German atrocities in Finnmark.

For my part, I had for several years been working in the Norwegian Government's Press and Information Office in London, and was fully informed about all that had occurred in occupied Norway.

So when my (at that point) future husband was offered the appointment in the arctic, and asked me whether I could think of going with him, I thought I knew what we would be in for. And in fact I clearly remember saying that English wives had always followed their husbands to all corners of the earth, regardless of conditions, so why shouldn't I be able to cope with post-war Tana?

Well, we coped. Both of us. It would be untrue to say that there were not many problems - both professional and domestic - but we never regretted our decision. They were very special years we spent "up there" in the very far north. I wrote several articles while there, and have since had a book published in Norwegian, based on those articles. Now that I have celebrated my 80th birthday, and it is ten years since my husband died, I feel that I would like to leave a record also in English

of how that young Englishwoman experienced the rather drastic transition from the "banks of the Thames" to those of the Tana River. And what she experienced is history: the story of how a very large area of Norway had literally to be reconstructed after the war.

Now, if you are interested in reading any further, it would be a good idea to find an atlas and look at a map of Norway. There - right at the top, and over to the right, you will see where the Norwegian border, just beyond Kirkenes, is a border shared with Russia. If you then follow the coast westward - in and out the fjords - you will come to the Tana Fjord, and perhaps (if your atlas is well enough informed) you will find the name Langnes, just where the Tana river runs out into the fjord. The judge's "residence" (more about that - quite a lot more - later) was in Langnes - as the crow flies not so very far from Kirkenes, and so more or less on the same longitudinal as Constantinople. In fact, we were quite far East, as well as North!

If your atlas is a fairly old one (pre last war for example) that will make it easier for you to follow me on the journeys I will be describing. Several roads have been built since we left Finnmark forty-six years ago, so communications today are very different. If you have an up-to-date atlas you must just ignore all the red lines that show the new roads. However, the main outline of the district of Finnmark is the same. And it is roughly half of this district - an area half the size of Denmark (and much less accessible!), including small fishing villages round the coast from Berlevåg, including the North Cape, and inland following the Tana river southward for nearly eighty miles along the border between Finland and Norway, so covering the vast reindeer pastures - the *vidda* - around the Sami town, Karasjok, that came under my husband's jurisdiction. On some old maps this is still called "Lap Land". Today it is "Sami land" - corresponding to Sami districts in northernmost Finland and Russia.

Many of the cases that came up for the Court in Tana concerned, naturally enough, the Sami, and, very often, the theft of reindeer. This was one of the reasons why the Court often made long journeys across the *vidda*, travelling in winter by reindeer sleigh and in summer by river boat - or on foot. These journeys were the highlights of our years in Tana, naturally enough, and I look forward to sharing some of these experiences with you. But first: to Langnes, and the judge's "residence" - and to my début as journalist.

December 1948

It was dark - and cold - and very quiet.

As dark - nearly as cold - and absolutely as quiet inside as it was outside the small wooden prefab. that represented the official residence of the District Judge in Tana, and that had been rather hastily erected between the Tana river and the foothills of the local mountain, Algasvarre.

The darkness followed me through the room, retreated a little in front of me and closed in behind me, as I walked slowly across the floor towards my sewing table and the typewriter, a small paraffin lamp held carefully in one hand. With thick, knitted socks and felt bootees (known as "katanker") on my feet, I was not so much worried by the cold that lay like a thick carpet over the floor, but I knew very well that if - even for a very short time - I forgot to keep the fire going in the tall iron stove, this enemy too would be inside the house immediately in full strength. Our war against the cold had begun long before the sun disappeared for good in the middle of November, and it must continue for many weeks after the sun's return in February.

This was my second winter at Langnes in Tana, and I had learnt how necessary it was to keep the stove burning.

That quietness, too, could be felt as threatening may be difficult to understand today, also in Finnmark, where snowscooters now thunder across the *vidda*, and muzak-machines are not unknown. But fifty years ago there was still no electricity in Tana, travel by horse and reindeer sleigh was the most reliable form of transport, and few homes had so much as an old battery radio

to keep them in touch with the rest of the country. There were times, of course, when I could appreciate the quietness, after years of London's traffic and, not least, with fresh memories of air raid sirens and the even more nervewracking Doodle-bug's nighttime visits. But it can't be denied that, allied with the cold and the dark, also quietness acquired some of their quality.

I was alone in the house: a one-storied, wooden building that had none of the "mod. cons" normally taken for granted, but that was to serve as the residence of the District Judge for several years. And I was preparing to write my very first feature article for a national newspaper, describing my experiences.

I am suddenly fifty years back in time. It is as though I am standing behind my younger self, waiting for the first, hesitant taps on the typewriter. A weak light from the paraffin lamp falls on the paper in the machine. In the window behind the table I can just see the writer's eyes reflected against the darkness outside as she lifts her head and pauses to think before writing. Then the machine comes to life. The first words come quickly - the words you have already heard - and they are quite revealing:

"Even the Romans had baths!"

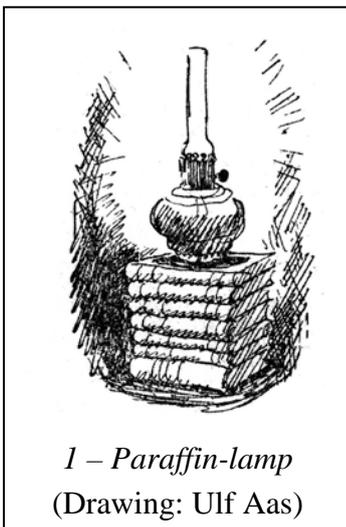
A remark not quite historically fair to the Romans, but that can perhaps be forgiven.

It was a sigh from the heart - and, of course, an opening that might attract the attention of some responsible authority in Oslo!

And now the sentences come more rapidly, though the writer asks her readers to be forbearing, as during the last year or so she has been fully occupied with learning to be a Norwegian housewife (more comment later). But now, she writes, she has replaced the sewing machine with her old portable typewriter, and has balanced the paraffin lamp on a pile of the larger of her husband's legal books. So now she can begin to write!

But here I must stop for a moment. Mention of the lamp brings back so many memories: the smell of paraffin - filling the lamps - learning to clean wicks and keep the glass "funnels" clear of soot - all quite pleasant (not to say nostalgic) duties when spending a holiday-week or so in a mountain hut in southern Norway in later years - but a much heavier responsibility, demanding much of one's time, through the long arctic winters. And I remember the huge metal paraffin tank that stood on its wooden supports outside the office building, and the pipette - just a length of rubber tubing - we used to siphon the paraffin up and get it into a can. Not such an easy job to do with thick woollen mittens on one's hands! I remember very well how paraffin tasted - and how a pair of mittens could smell strongly of paraffin through the whole winter.

Is it perhaps easier to understand now why it was so dark in the livingroom that day in December 1948?



1 - Paraffin-lamp
(Drawing: Ulf Aas)

And not only in the judge's livingroom. There was not more light to be seen in any of the windows in the few, provisional, one-storied wooden houses that lined the one road that followed the Tana river and ended in a cul-de-sac at Langnes. One could almost have believed that the war was not over, and that fear of an attack from the air was still a reality.

The explanation is simple. The only source of artificial light for homes in Tana, those first winters after the war, came from small and rather fragile paraffin lamps that the central authorities had imported from Czechoslovakia - but without spare parts. They were what was called "*flatbrennere*" - burning a narrow, "flat" wick. They had to be filled several times a day - a day being without daylight, and in effect just a 12-hour section of the 3 - 4-month-long winter night. And if a glass "funnel" should go to pieces - and that happened quite often in inexperienced hands, especially in the early weeks - then that was one

source of light less - unless one was lucky enough to find a new lamp in the local stores. But they were soon sold out. It is perhaps easy to understand, then, that after beginning with six or eight lamps in the livingroom, in an effort to achieve a minimum of light and cheerfulness, I ended up carrying one lamp round with me. I was certainly not alone in this, as the dark windows of Langnes showed!

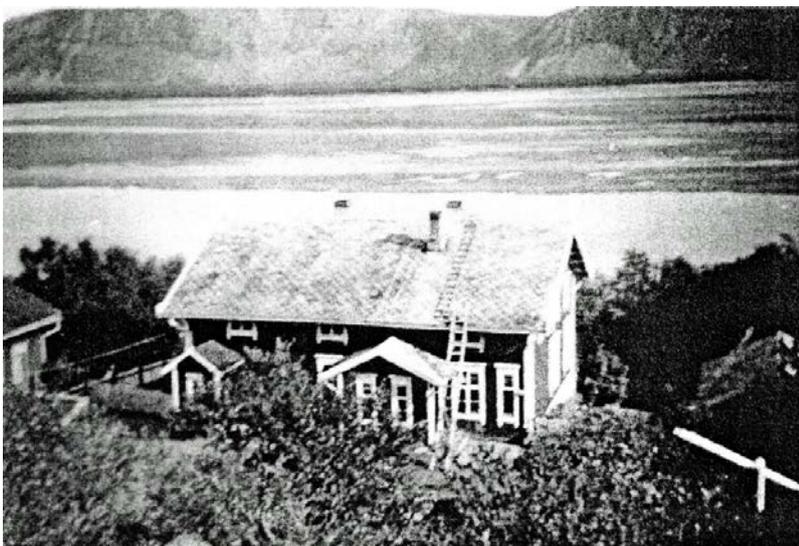
In fairness I must add that a very few examples of a more powerful light-source known as a Petromax had found their way to Tana, and that the Ministry of Justice had bought two of these for the use of my husband's office. On very special occasions I was allowed to borrow one of them for use in the kitchen. But I never really mastered the system with these lamps. They hissed, and smelled of oil, and they shone (once you got them going) with a greenish light that for some could bring on a sick feeling - almost migraine. For an inexperienced user they could, in addition, suddenly flare up, sending black clouds of smoke up to the ceiling. On one such occasion I was so frightened that I threw the whole lamp out through the kitchen window, into the snow. It survived. But it is perhaps not so surprising that I quite early decided that it was, after all, better to rely on our small, flat-wicked Czech friends. So filling paraffin, and cleaning wicks and glass funnels - almost an exotic ritual the first winter - became just a part of the daily routine.

Darkness and cold ... Light and warmth ...

These are elementary conceptions that really begin to mean something when you can no longer regulate them with the help of switches.

And it was not only our light-source, the paraffin tank, that decorated the ground outside the judge's residence in the years from 1946 onwards.

Every building connected with the residence had also been burnt down as the retreating Germans wiped out the small but important administrative centre at Langnes. A fairly solid, provisional building had been put up for the judge's office, but no-one had considered it necessary to put up a coal- or woodshed. So coal and wood just lay in mounds out of doors all year round, wherever the deliverers had seen fit to dump them. In summer this was of course not such a great problem as in winter - though I did often think that the sad remains of the old burnt-out residence that lay strewn around were depressing enough without having a mound of finely powdered coal - "Svalbard coal" - lying just outside the entrance to our home.



2 – The Judge's Residence in Tana, pre- 1945, before it was burnt by the retreating Germans

I need hardly say that winters can be severe in Norway - not least in the country's northernmost district. And it does snow there - quite often - and quite a lot. Add to this, that a district judge in

Tana in those years must expect to be travelling in his district for about 270 days of the year, and it will become clear that Finn couldn't always be on hand to help with the heavier chores. So I got plenty of practice in sawing and chopping wood and - the heaviest chore - using a pick to chop reasonably sized lumps of coal out of the frozen heap. It was quite useful in those days to have strong arms, and that I survived was perhaps at least partly due to good training in earlier years in tennis, swimming and fencing!

Our first visitor

Talking of the burnt-out remains of the former residence, reminds me of my first meeting with the vicar's wife.

Before I left London I had received plenty of advice - not to mention teasing - from my Norwegian colleagues. Among other warnings, they had stressed that I must be particular about dusting. If and when the local vicar's wife should come visiting, it was very likely that she would examine the top of the nearest light switch with a finger, to see if any dust was there!

Well - as we had no light switches I felt fairly safe on that point. But I did feel that a certain amount of order in one's surroundings would be a good thing also for one's own sake - and, not least, outside the house. The remains of what had been a solid and representative two-floored residence, still lay all over the ground round and between - and even under - our prefab and the office building, when I first arrived in Tana in May 1947. Entering or leaving the property - house or office - closely resembled an obstacle race - at slow speed. And when not covered by snow, the aspect was most depressing. If there was to be any hope of seeing green grass (not to call it a lawn) appearing in the Spring - the Spring that I hoped must come some time during the summer? - it was necessary to clear away as much as possible of the rusty pipes, pieces of iron and burnt wooden beams. With this in mind I got busy one day, and was dressed for the part, one can say, in jersey and old jeans, with my somewhat too-long hair (no hairdresser nearer than 16 miles away) in roughly twisted pigtails, and with a mixture of soot and rust on hands and face, when a formally dressed visitor came through the gate, presented herself as the vicar's wife and enquired how "Mrs. Judge" (*fru sorenskriver*) was getting on.



3 – A new Residence under construction in 1947. The Judge and author tidying up.

I remember looking round me in some confusion: unused as I was to the Norwegian third-person form of formal address, unused still to being "Mrs. Judge", and in any case very much

aware that I was not, on this occasion, dressed for the part.

Did I invite "Mrs. Vicar" in for coffee? I attribute it to Freudian forgetfulness that the rest of that morning visit is a complete blank in my memory. But don't misunderstand: my visitor came, I'm sure, with the best intentions. After all, we all had much the same difficulties to overcome in those years. But I had at least one handicap in comparison with most Norwegian housewives: I had no experience in cake baking - not even under more normal circumstances! At the same time it had been drummed into me (by my former Norwegian co-workers) how important this art was in their home country. The nearest bakers or *conditori* was also 16 miles away, so it is perhaps not so very surprising that any pleasure arising from a visit - especially an unexpected one - was strongly overshadowed, during those first years especially, by anxiety as to whether the honour of the house - not to mention the housewife - would survive the occasion. I had nearly written "ordeal" - which would often describe such visits better, I'm ashamed to say! But remember: we had no electricity, so no electric oven.

Dry biscuits (the only kind in the local stores) must have been the usual solution to this problem.

Shortly before we left Tana for an appointment in the south in 1952, one of the local housewives, born and bred in the district, mentioned the problems she felt I must have had in the beginning. She told me then that she had felt very sorry for me, and would very much have liked to give me both advice and help. She was the best cake-baker in Langnes, and could besides have given me the best advice both as how to get hold of food as well as of how to prepare it. Her excuse for having stayed away was that if she had gone visiting at the Judge's residence, her neighbours would have accused her of giving herself airs. She was very shy and unassuming, which meant that we were the losers, both of us.

If I had understood the situation earlier, many things could have been easier. But it is perhaps not so surprising that under existing conditions it was difficult to realise the quite special position on the social scale allotted to those in official positions: that a judge's wife, for example, was considered with such respect - and, in the case of most of her neighbours, from a distance! Clearing up the charred remains of the earlier residence, or hacking at the coal heap, I certainly didn't feel particularly privileged!

The coal heap: the "Svalbard coal" that the authorities had directed to Finnmark in this postwar period - more can be said about that! It was not far from being coal **dust**, and it was quite an art to get it to burn and, not least, to *keep* it burning in the tall iron stoves, or in the kitchen range, that were our only source of heating or possibility for cooking. Fortunately we found that some remnants of the old house that we collected from the ground outside, could be burnt in the kitchen stove. But otherwise we had to learn to calculate very carefully how best to regulate the combustion in the nearly six feet tall iron stoves in the livingroom and bedroom, where we had to use coal. If the regulator on the bottom door was opened too far, the stove would soon glow red and look as though it might begin to melt. Given too little air, gas would soon seep out round the upper stove door and from the top lid. A single spark then could send the heavy top lid flying. If one was quick enough to explode the gas oneself, by throwing a lighted match in through the upper door, one could, with luck, have a less frightening experience - a "controlled explosion". But controlled or not - we had a number of nerve-wracking experiences, and at least one damaged stove top in the house after the first winter.

So daily life in Tana cannot be said to have been without excitement - and some of the sources for such excitement we could have well done without! Digging out coal from under the snow, we could often feel was an unnecessary trial. Why, you may ask, did we not do something about getting wood and coal supplies under a roof?

Of course we did - or at least we tried, through the only avenue open to us. We were, after all, not living in our own, private home, but in an official residence. That meant that any improvements, however necessary - even urgently so - we may have thought them, must be sanctioned by the relevant Ministry - in our case, the Ministry of Justice - aided (and/or abetted) by

the Directorate for Official Buildings. It took time to get any answer to applications. We were certainly not the only civil servants at that time badgering the departments! And presumably not the only ones to receive a negative answer. In the margin of our own application - to have the cellar that remained after the former (also, of course, burnt down) cowshed, covered and made into a shed for wood and coal - were written by hand the words "Not necessary". Those words became permanently imprinted in my brain. I can still remember the sinking feeling they produced, and how my courage almost failed at the thought of yet another winter under the same conditions.

And we were to read the same words - the central authorities' reaction to yet another application for an improvement that would have made life easier. We applied for a new fence round the property - the old one having also been taken by the flames, or by passers-by with their own problems, who were tempted to pick up odd poles and planks that had survived. I have written that the vicar's wife came through the gate. She could just as easily have gone round it - as did countless sheep, cows and horses on their daily search for fodder on or near the roadside. Of course we did what we could to tempt them - though that was not our main object in sewing and planting what vegetables we could, once the earth unfroze in June. Thanks to the midnight sun, we could hope to harvest before the first snow came - often in August. But these short summer months were also the months when the afore-mentioned livestock were let loose on the road, and so easily could find their way into our vegetable patch. And this they did - night and day - there being no appreciable difference between the two. One memory that I particularly treasure from those days - and nights - is of Finn, in pyjamas, chasing a herd of cows several times round the house, before they chose to return to a more peaceful road. Or it could be a flock of horses that once, being chased, succeeded in upsetting the privy (about which more later). Such "happenings" could have drastic effects on our vegetable patch.

Of course we tried to make some kind of a fence at strategic points, with the bits of barbed wire and odd poles that still lay around. But anyone who is even slightly acquainted with the wiles and ways of cows and horses in search of sustenance, will know that only the strongest and most professionally raised fences can be of any use.

But officialdom had spoken: no fence was necessary.

In later years I could more easily accept that there were other things that were more necessary, in other parts of the country, and also for other official residences. We were not alone with such problems during the first postwar years.

But tackling such existential problems does at least sharpen the wits! And in another confrontation with the authorities, I was the winner!

Have I said that a large part of the remains of the former Residence were still in the cellar when the new pre-fab was put down on the old foundations? Well - they were. And that meant that we didn't have the use of the cellar, which - in the absence of electricity - should have done duty as both refrigerator and larder, being frost-free in winter and comparatively cool in summer. I became aware of its importance during my first summer in Tana, and decided that something must be done about it before the winter came. Finn being away on some case round the coast, there was no-one to write the required official application to the responsible authority in Oslo. So I phoned the nearest local office representing the Department for the Rehabilitation of Finnmark. It was this office that had been responsible for setting up our pre-fab, so they should understand the situation. They were sympathetic, but sorry: nothing could be done without written instructions from Oslo. This was discouraging. But I was getting desperate. Every other house that was being put up was given a cellar, and everyone agreed that this was an absolute necessity. So I tried a new attack. First I asked if the office had kept on their files the letter from Oslo that instructed them to set up a house for the District Judge. Yes, they had. Next I asked if, when given instructions to set up any of the houses they had been responsible for, they considered it necessary to provide them with a frost-free cellar? Yes, of course, was the answer - a cellar was absolutely necessary. Then, I said, they couldn't need any new letter from Oslo with particular instructions as to **our** cellar. I won. Of

course the job would have been easier if they had cleared the cellar before they put the house on top of it. But they did the job thoroughly, and just in time before the first snow came. Perhaps I should have asked them at the same time to provide us with a fence and a shed for wood and coal!

Finding Food

This, naturally enough, was also a problem - though one we were quite used to after food rationing, that had continued for some years after the war, both in England and in Norway. But at least we had learnt to really appreciate the big moments, when there was fresh meat or fish to be had. Such moments were seldom, also in Tana, during our first years there. But one red-letter day is described in my first article - and not only described in words. A young artist, new in *Aftenposten* then, was assigned to illustrate the article, and drew a proud housewife carrying the day's "catch" - an enormous fish! (see drawing on page)



4 – The author proudly carrying home her fish.
(Drawing: Ulf Aas)

I can still remember that day in June 1947 - in my first summer as a housewife. I had heard it rumoured that there was fresh fish to be bought at the one and only general store, and I rushed off, hoping to get the dinner problem solved for the next few days at least. "Is this enough?" asked the shopkeeper. Enough?! The fish she was offering me was quite the biggest I had ever seen! Not so strange, after all, as my knowledge of fish, prior to this, was almost entirely from London fishmongers' slabs - and in wartime.

Now, carrying this huge fish - quite a weight - in both arms, I set off proudly on the journey home: passing the long, ugly barrack that housed the post office and a schoolroom, passing a smaller barrack-like house on the opposite side of the road that was the local sheriff's home and office, passing the vicarage - also that a rather primitive wooden shack that the vicar was busy painting red and green - passing large heaps of stone and scrapmetal and rusty barbed wire that reminded us daily of the German occupation and retreat, passing what had been the local doctor's outhouse before the war, but was now both his living quarters and office - until I at last reached our own gateway - in triumph!

The sky was blue, and so was the Tana river down on my left. A small stream, dark green with melted snow, rushed under the road and down into the river. The birch trees looked as though they might at any moment spring into new life with a veil of pale green, opening leaves. The sun shone - it was good to be alive - and we had enough fish for dinner for several days to come! ... I thought.

I secretly hoped that what I was carrying was a salmon.

But the office staff - who came out of the office to admire my "catch" - could tell me that it was a cod! My face fell, I feel sure. But there and then I learnt that, for a Norwegian, fresh cod is quite as good as fresh salmon - and at times even more welcome!

On this occasion it was a house-painter, working in our livingroom, who took control. He was from the west coast, so considered himself the expert on fish.

"First you must clean it," he said sternly, obviously not impressed by my knowledge of the species. Seeing that I hesitated - not knowing where to start - he found a knife in the kitchen drawer, whetted it on the stove pipe, and took over. First he cut off the head. "We can give that to the cat", I said. (A white, longhaired "wild" cat - known as a "forest cat", had made its home with us soon after we came to Tana.) My new kitchen assistant showed signs of shock! And there and then I got a lecture on the status of a cod's head as a very special delicacy - eyes included. I asked

him please to keep it for his own dinner.

The rest of the fish, sliced and boiled, made only one dinner. It was such an event in our lives that it had to be shared, with one of the office staff who lodged with us, with the painter who had cleaned it and with the district nurse who lived in a room at the back of the office.

We could feel a little bitter, sometimes, when we heard - or read in the press - that people in the south of Norway envied us, as they believed that we lived a life of luxury, with fresh salmon and reindeer meat and grouse available all year round, and berries to pick in season, and to preserve, of course. (Another Norwegian housewifely art I had to learn the hard way!)

The facts were rather different.

My triumphant progress home with the cod described above, can seem somewhat exaggerated, but perhaps will be better understood when seen against a background of several days' with uninspired - and uninspiring - dinners, that had mostly consisted of tomato soup and pancakes - the soup coming from packets of a powder that was far less tasty than today's. Fresh eggs and milk we could buy, occasionally, from the shopowner's mother, who kept a cow and some hens. Flour we could always buy in the shop - and our rations of sugar and coffee. But not much else. One thing is certain. If a supply of tinned food came - as once, tins of coalfish¹ cakes (if you know what a coalfish is!) - then dinner for the local population of Langnes and its neighbourhood would be coalfish cakes for as long as the supply lasted, at any rate for all who were dependent on the shop for their dinner. It was a case of one thing at a time. Again, as in the case of the lamps, decisions had been taken centrally, for the whole country. Before leaving England, the Norwegian government had prepared lists, and ordered, what would seem to be most necessary for re-stocking all the districts of the country. One thing at least is certain: after we left Tana it was many years before I again bought a tin of fish cakes.

Finnmark's own products - such as salmon, reindeer meat, cloudbberries² and grouse - were to a very large extent sold to professional buyers from the south, who could pay the best prices. To the judge's residence there belonged a right to fish salmon in the Tana river, and also an exclusive right to harvest cloudbberries in a particular area. But neither "right" was of much help. Traditionally, the right to fish for salmon had for many years been leased out to the local (professional) fisherman, the rent to be paid in kind - i.e. in salmon. We quite often received more or less official visits from people we didn't know personally, but who came from far off to see the midnight sun and eat Tana salmon. Then, of course, there had to be salmon on the table - sometimes at two o'clock in the "night" - even though the fish must be bought in competition with buyers from the south who had their headquarters on the other side of the river - that is to say, as far as possible from the authority responsible for judging cases of illegal sales - who, of course, had to be Finn!

Needless to say, at the end of the salmon season it usually turned out that we had bought salmon for more than what was owed us for the fishing right.

As for the cloudbberries, they seldom got time to ripen - either because of weather conditions, or because eager pickers from the district were quicker off the mark than we were. I have in any case never really become keen on these berries: they have far too many and too big stones - or pips we would perhaps call them. The slightly smoky taste is fine - but best enjoyed, to my mind, in the cloudberry liqueur that is made in Finland!

But reindeer meat? There must have been enough of that to go round? When on our travels up the river and over the *vidda*, we were often served this meat, naturally enough. And once, when we were so fortunate as to be in the right place at the right time - that is, when a reindeer was being slaughtered - we were allowed to buy a piece of meat to take home. But it never came into the local

¹ Coley

² Cloudberry: a moorland plant, found in northern Europe and America, with an amber-coloured berry, similar to a large raspberry.

stores.

Then there were the grouse. They also existed - some years in greater quantities than others. But again there was the problem of being in the right place at the right time, and preferably not married to an Authority. The grouse were an important source of income for the *Sami*, who understandably set their snares where there were most birds to be found, which was as it happened also as far as possible from the local police and price authorities. One could, of course, go out and shoot them oneself - if one had time, and a weapon, and preferably also some experience of the sport. We had a weapon - a wedding present that had caused me a lot of last-minute worry with export licence forms before I could be allowed to take it out of England. It seemed a good idea then to let it make up for the trouble it had caused by getting us a few good dinners. We also had a bird dog - Tass - a lovely English setter, white with black and brown markings, given me as a puppy my first summer in Tana. More difficult to find were time (Finn's) and, it turned out, the necessary enthusiasm for the hunt. My suspicions were aroused quite soon.

It was a lovely autumn day - that is, late July or early August in those regions - when we could set out from our own front door, following a path behind the house that led us up into the foothills of our local mountain. Covered as they were with mountain and dwarf birch, they were good grouse territory. Tass was very young and had no training, but she seemed to have the right instincts, and we hadn't gone far before she stood - like a statue. We were so impressed that we also stood still for some moments in admiration. When we had pulled ourselves together I was much less impressed by Finn's surprisingly slow reaction. First he had to take off his hat so that he could get the strap over his head and the gun off his shoulder. Then he had to replace his hat, load - and sight. This took time - plenty of time for the bird that Tass had been marking to be up and away. Untrained as she was, Tass started off in full chase, and it took some time before we got her back under control. But after we had walked for some time, she stood again. And the story repeated itself. At first I was only surprised that Finn was not more efficient in handling his weapon. After all, he had plenty of wartime experience, not only in the Norwegian commandoes, the *Lingekompani*³, but even earlier, when he had been one of the Norwegian volunteers who helped the Finns in their attempt to resist the Russian invasion of their country in 1939/40 (the "Winter War"), and when he returned to Oslo with his Norwegian troop just in time to go into action against the German invaders of Norway. Now it seemed clear that all this soldiering had not made a soldier - or a huntsman - of the otherwise so peace-loving Oslo lawyer and barrister. And I began to think that it was perhaps precisely these war experiences that were taking Finn's thoughts far from Tana and from our (reasonably) peaceful expedition: that perhaps just carrying a weapon again, even a much lighter weapon, had brought back painful wartime memories? He had, for example, been one of the *Lingekompani* commandoes who took part in the raid on the Norwegian coast at Måløy, where their commanding officer, Captain Martin Linge, was killed. Remembering this, I asked him carefully if he would really prefer not to shoot any birds? I assured him that I would quite understand, if this was the case. Rather shamefacedly he admitted that it was - that the feeling had come unexpectedly, and had puzzled him. I didn't think it at all strange, and though we couldn't very well get rid of the gun on the spot, we left it unloaded and, together with Tass, enjoyed a peaceful walk. That we completely spoiled what could have been a good bird dog, didn't really matter, as it was clear that neither of us would ever need her in that capacity. She remained our good friend and companion for years to come, and so long as we stayed in Tana we had many good walks together in the foothills.

And here you must forgive me if I get a bit lyrical about Tana's - in fact, about Norway's birch trees!

³ Named after Martin Linge (1894 – 1941), who gave up his acting career to fight the German invaders of his country in 1940. After being wounded he was evacuated to England where he organised the Norwegian commando unit which bears his name. In 1941, Linge led the successful Lofoten raid, but lost his life in December of that year at Måløy in a second commando raid.

You may remember my boasting earlier about an English woman's ability to survive - not to mention thrive - anywhere in the world when duty called. (That is, of course, when and whence duty called her husband.) During the last days of the six days' journey north and west by coastal steamer, I had begun to wonder whether I perhaps, after all, was not a genuine pioneer type. In fact, my heart had sunk further and further down into my boots as we passed a most forbidding coastline - only bare, inhospitable cliffs with not a single tree in sight. I tried to envisage a life without trees - and found the thought quite frightening. Had I been too cocksure? Imagine my relief then, when we had left the coast and drove inland towards Tana, to find a landscape quite richly forested with birches - not such tall and stately trees as those in the south - or in England - but even more welcome since they were, in fact, the only trees in Tana. One can say that they came in three sizes, there in the far north. First those tall enough to be called trees, then those about knee- or sometimes waist-high, that covered the foothills, that perhaps are called mountain birch, and lastly the creeping, or dwarf birches, that together with reindeer moss covered the vast areas of the *vidda* and glowed with every shade of yellow and red in the short autumn weeks.

You may remember, too, that the trees were only just beginning to come into leaf when I marched triumphantly home with the codfish in June. Later, when we lived in southern Norway, we could hope that the birches would be in leaf in time to make a green background for the colourful processions on Norway's national day, the 17th May. In Tana, we were happy if they were green by St. Hans or midsummer day! But summer or winter they are always beautiful, with their silver trunks and delicate filigree of slender branches. And there are, thankfully, many of them in Norway, often lining the roads, so that one in spring can suddenly find oneself driving under a pale green canopy. No wonder a local blackbird each year chooses the very top branch of the tallest birch near my present home when he finds that the time has come to sing his first - strangely nostalgic - spring song!

But now I seem to have got rather a long way from Tana and its problems - in time as well as in distance!

Of course the housekeeping problems were legion, under the existing circumstances - language problems not least! I had learnt Norwegian fairly quickly - enough, anyway, to be able to help in the office and to teach in a school we got started! - but there were still unexpected complications when I became a housewife. Who, for example, could expect that a quite ordinary currant loaf in Norwegian is known as a Christmas cake? (Julekake). Or, even more confusing, that when someone tells you to "steke" some slices of salmon, they mean that you should *fry* them - in a frying pan - and not "steak" them in the oven. Oh yes. There were plenty of pitfalls, and I think I must have fallen into most of them.

Not surprising, then, that it was a tremendous relief sometimes to get away from the house and housekeeping for a couple of weeks. And this I could, at least twice a year, when I accompanied Finn on his routine trips into the interior, where there were court cases to be held (mostly concerning theft of reindeer) and where the local sheriffs needed help in reconstructing the registers of property, as well as of criminal and civil cases, that had been burnt during the German retreat. These weren't exactly holiday trips, even for me! Thanks to the shortage of office staff, I could travel as clerk of the court - writing (in longhand) Finn's judgements, and often long depositions from witnesses. But I enjoyed these trips tremendously - especially those in March - by horse and sleigh up the river, and by reindeer sleigh across the *vidda*.

And now I hope you will join me on one of those winter journeys!

— Two —

On circuit — by horse — and reindeersleigh

First we must take the local taxi - a prewar car of solid dimensions - to Skiipagurra.

So now you need to look at a map again. Skiipagurra may not be shown, but if you can find the Tana River you will see that it makes a turn due north shortly before it reaches the Tana Fjord. And slightly north of this point one can still find Skiipagurra, where our court interpreter-cum-driver, Per Pavelsen, would be waiting for us with his horses and sleighs. Modern maps will show a main road following the river's west bank (the Norwegian bank). But on our winter journeys inland fifty years ago we never saw a road from the time we left Skiipagurra until our return two or three weeks later. We could never be certain how long we would be away. It could take as much as six to eight days just to reach the place where court was to be held, depending on the weather and on driving conditions generally, not to mention other complications that you will hear about later!

First I must tell you that the sleighs that had for many years had been used for river traffic in winter on the Tana river bore no resemblance to the Russian troika with its three fiery steeds answering to the crack of the driver's whip in a wild flight *through* wolf-infested forests! Our sleighs were solidly built, broad and deep, and our horses - only one to each sleigh - were good, solid farm horses! And our driver, Per Pavelsen (pronounced *pahvelsen*), was just as dependable! I must tell you something about him before we go any further - he was such a good friend to us from the moment we arrived in Tana.

He was Sami, and spoke Finnish in addition to the Sami language and, of course, Norwegian. With the Tana River marking for many miles the boundary between Finland and Norway - and being the eastern boundary of Finn's district - all three languages could be used in court. Pavelsen had been official court interpreter for forty years before we came to Tana, and he knew all the ropes! The judge was "his" judge - and he included the judge's wife in his sphere of responsibility. He had a small farm not far from Langnes, and we could often go to him for advice on local matters - and also to use his *sauna*, which you of course know is a steam bath! Once - when it had been particularly difficult to find fresh food - he came suddenly into our kitchen with a large salmon, asked for a knife, cleaned the fish, salted half of it and chopped the rest into cutlets, before he hastened off with a final instruction to "steak" (*steke*) the cutlets for our dinner. (Yes, that was the occasion I mentioned earlier, and our dinner came out of the wood-fired oven very dry, but just edible).

Pavelsen also took responsibility for our winter clothing! Remember: this was long before the days of quilted nylon, and lying in sleighs for hours on end in twenty or thirty minus degrees - whether drawn by horse or reindeer - was no joking matter. It was also a matter of honour for our Sami friend that "his" judge - and, of course, the judge's wife - were correctly dressed according to Sami standards, when they came for the first time into the true Sami-land, where traditions are strong, and where the judge was very highly respected. In fact, the Sami word for judge is "*sondi*", meaning "power", while his wife is known as "*sondiemic*" - the "wife of power"!

So Pavelsen arranged for the sewing in Tana of two very fine *pesks* - reindeerskin tunics - for us, and he also supplied us with *skaller* - the reindeerskin boots. For Finn he managed to get a "star cap", as it is called: the man's headgear typical for the Karasjok district, with its four "horns" filled with down, and its headband of otter skin. For me he had a very special cap made, for some reason or other, in Finland - and I never saw another like it! It was also (of course!) made of reindeerskin,

and was beautifully warm!



A map of today (2015) Few of the roads (red lines) existed before 1952

Well-treated reindeer skins are very light, and the *pesk* doesn't hamper one's movements in any way, so it was always a pleasure to wear this winter costume, with its decorative trimmings of yellow and red and green felt, and we were quite in holiday mood when we came to Skiipagurra, correctly - and warmly - clad, and ready to start on the first stage of our journey to Karasjok.

Now we could climb into our sleigh, to lie on a thick mattress of hay covered by blankets, with big cushions stuffed with straw to rest against, and with large sheepskin rugs to cover us. With a reliable horse - and driver! - in front, and with all a housewife's problems far behind - I could lay back on my pillow and relax, soothed by the gentle swish of sleigh runners on the snow and the rhythmical (and musical) clinging of the bell on the horse's back. Small wonder that I sometimes wished that the journey would never end! Finn could, of course, relax too, though he carried *his* problems - his work - with him. But he loved his work, and our long journeys gave him a good opportunity to solve legal problems in his head!



5 – The Court interpreter, driver and good friend, Per Pavelsen, and friends outside one of the hostels up the Tana river.

Sometimes the whole court travelled together. Then there could be four or five sleighs, carrying the public prosecutor (the Chief of Police or his adjutant) and counsel for the defence (both of them with their wives), in addition to ourselves and at least one sleigh full of documents and baggage. On those occasions the journey up river became quite a social event, with plenty of gossip from the coastal towns where the other members of the court lived - including a good deal of who-had-been-seen-with-whom-and-where-and-when - that for obvious reasons could not interest Finn or me particularly! Also, truth to tell, it was quite a shock to be continually reminded of the "class-distinction" that was still strong between the ethnic Norwegians and the Sami in Finnmark, and that it has taken quite some years to remove!

But most often we had a good reason for travelling alone to Karasjok a couple of days in advance of the rest of the Court. There were so many office matters to be gone through with the sheriff in Karasjok before we had to meet in court, that this was a quite genuine excuse. Most of the "mountain Sami" - *fjellsamene* - as they are called, the owners of the great reindeer herds on the *vidda*, had managed to escape evacuation, taking their reindeer over the border to Finland and down into Sweden. But the two *Sami* villages - Kautokeino and Karasjok - had been burnt down, and in Karasjok only the church was left standing. The sheriff's office in Karasjok was completely burnt out, and all the official papers - including the registers of property and records of court cases - were lost. Some of the most important central registers in the Judge's office at Langnes had miraculously been saved from burning, and these we could take with us to Karasjok, to help in reconstructing the missing records. These registers were huge, heavy, metal-bound tomes, that took up most of the room in the baggage sleigh! In fact they almost needed a whole sleigh for themselves!

That we on these occasions travelled alone also had other advantages. Whenever and wherever we stopped on our way, there was always someone who had their own special problem to lay before *Sondi*. Sometimes I could wonder if he didn't fill the rôle of priest as well as lawyer! Finn was a good listener, and always interested in people and their problems. That he was a judge, didn't seem to worry anybody. So we got to know the local people - and they got to know us! Finn, with

his wonderful sense of humour, got on particularly well with the Sami - as he did later, with the local population in Solør. And as I came from a foreign country that was further away than Finland, I came in for quite a bit of friendly attention - including once a present of reindeer tongues (a great delicacy) and another time a pint of full cream - in a bottle - that of course got churned to butter before we reached home.

The journey from Skiipagurra to Karasjok might take three days - or perhaps four, depending on the temperature. (30 degrees below zero Pavelsen considered too cold - for the horses!) Of course, if the journey lasted too long our mattress might not be so comfortable at the end as it had been in the beginning, as it was, in fact, our horse's larder! Once, I remember, when Pavelsen had left us "parked" - supplied, of course, with mugs of coffee - outside a house on the Finnish side of the river while he visited some friends or relations (he had cousins all the way, in Norway and Finland), we heard a quiet crunching noise under us, and looking down saw several sheep enjoying a meal from our mattress! The horse didn't seem to mind, and as it was his food that was being stolen we didn't protest either.

We never found the long hours in the sled boring. In the first place, Pavelsen was good company, with an unending supply of stories about the places we passed and the people who inhabited them.

One of these stories I remember particularly well. It was early in the day, still quite dark, and the little group of wooden houses we could just make out on the opposite bank of the river looked very desolate in the half light. It was easy to believe Pavelsen when he told us that a woman who lived there had the power to put a curse on people - to "*ganne*" as they call it in Finnmark. When her two sons had been accused of stealing reindeer, she had put a curse on the main witness, so that he was unable to meet in court. This she did, according to Pavelsen, by placing an evil spirit under the steps leading to the door of the house where the case was to be tried. This spirit then grabbed the witness by the ankle as he was going into the house, so that he fell to the ground - and began to froth at the mouth! In fact, the poor man did have a series of fits that puzzled the doctor who was called to attend him, and he only recovered, after some weeks, when a man was fetched from further up the river who knew how to remove a curse!

This must have been a "*noiade*", or sorcerer. (Though he was, in fact, at the same time chairman of the Council of a local authority, a "*kommune*"!) This may seem incredible today - perhaps even a little comic - as also the belief, quite widespread in Finnmark in our time, that certain persons had the power to stop bleeding, by reciting a special secret formula that was handed down from father to son. One of our local doctors really believed this was possible. And one must admit that this at least would be a good thing to believe in, when it could take several days, summer or winter, to reach the nearest doctor.

As for the *noiader*, they could be of influence for the good, as opposed to witches, anyway! And in the months-long winter night one could almost believe in anything! Pavelsen was in any case a master storyteller, and his stories were particularly effective when told in the half dark, with the muted tramp of the horse's hooves and the swish of the sleigh runners as only accompaniment. I remember that we felt greatly relieved when we had left that particular cluster of houses and its witch behind!

When Pavelsen got tired of sitting in a twisted position in order to talk to us - or when he had to concentrate on the river in front of the sleigh, so as not to drive us into a hole in the ice - Finn took over. He was a born teacher - and I had a lot to learn. When you come to a new country, the language is only the beginning. In England we don't learn much about Norway's literature (apart, of course, from Ibsen) and very little about her history. Finn had a very good memory and was especially interested in history. He also remembered quite a lot of poetry by heart. So one way and another I learnt a lot on these sleighrides. Time went quickly, and at the end of the day there was always some hostelry ready to receive us, with iron stoves burning and the coffee kettle on the hob! The wooden bunks may not have had luxury mattresses, and I could often wonder what the pillows

were stuffed with, but I remember with gratitude how one of our hosts would sneak into our room on his stockinged feet in the early hours of a morning to light the stove. It was good to hear the crackle of the birch bark, and to know that the room would be pleasantly warm when it was time to get up.

There were three hostelries on the Norwegian side of the river - at Sirma, Levajok and Valjok - and we always managed to reach one of them by evening. There were no boundary problems, and we drove often on the Finnish side, when necessary because of ice-conditions, but also when there was someone - a distant relation perhaps - that Pavelsen wanted to visit! There was also at least one small shop on the Finnish side, where I bought some kitchen knives - that I still have! - and some small coffee cups, that haven't lasted so long.

As I write this I can still feel the very special "atmosphere" of these winter journeys, and their quiet rhythm. The scenery we drove through was never of a startling nature! For miles on end the river banks formed a rather monotonous backcloth, having an unshaved appearance, where twigs of dwarf birches stuck through the snow! It was almost a relief to see some green as we neared Levajok, and we could begin to count the scotch firs that a day or so later quite outnumbered the birches!



6 – A young Sami family at Valjok.

The first time we reached Karasjok by horse and sleigh - it must have been quite late in March, 1948 - it didn't look too depressing, as the blackened remains of houses that were burnt down to the ground were hidden by a carpet of snow. A few prefabs, and other more or less provisional buildings had been raised, and we found beds on the second floor of a café. What I remember best about this lodging is the coffee kettle! Very large, and very black, it stood permanently on the range - a temptation that Finn simply could not resist!

Reindeer travel

Perhaps it was just as well for Finn's health that we had to leave Karasjok - and the coffee kettle - after a couple of days. By then, the rest of the Court's members had arrived, and we could start on a longer journey "into the interior". It may sound strange today, that the District Court, with all its members, had to travel so far to try cases connected with the Sami and their reindeer, but it was absolutely necessary, time and travel facilities taken into consideration, if these cases were ever to be tried at all. In fact, as it was, the Court was only meeting the Sami half way. All winter the "reindeer-Sami" (*reinsamene* - also known as *fjellsamer*, or mountain Sami) lay far out on the *vidda* with their herds, and in summer they moved with them out to summer pastures by the coast - where they would be outside our Court's jurisdiction. The reindeer still have a long trek between summer and winter pastures (those who are not moved by lorry!), but otherwise snowscooters, and to some extent also mobile telephones, have revolutionized legal processes, as all other official activity. When we fixed court meetings, they had to be held - as they had been for many years before the war - at one of the state-supported hostelries that were dotted about over the *vidda* for the use of travellers. These were quite primitive, as we shall see, but we came to be very grateful for their existence and to the Sami who ran them - and kept them warm! Just as we were grateful to the Sami guides and their reindeer who brought us safely out across the *vidda* - and back.

One such journey I described in a feature article in the newspaper Aftenposten's special New Year's Day edition in 1950. As I would need this article in any case, to prod my memory, I might just as well quote most of it here - in translation! Just a few explanations may however be

necessary first. To begin with: the hostelry at Sjusjavre, where we had been staying on this occasion, was on a hill, and so some way up from the river bed. This explains (to some extent, anyway) the somewhat chaotic start to the day's journey. Also, there are a few words that occur quite often, and that are difficult to translate. A *vappus*, for example, is more than just a guide, as he was responsible for the reindeer as well as for the passengers he escorted into the wilds. (I find it difficult to imagine a *vappus* on a snowscooter - but who knows?) A *pulk* (pronounced "poolk" - with the "oo" as in wool and not as in pool) is a small, boat-shaped, one-man sleigh, that must be in motion and on an even keel before the driver throws himself into it. That is something neither Finn nor I ever tried, out of respect, of course, for the dignity of the Court. Our sleighs had two runners, and we could, under normal conditions, get seated in them before the *raid* moved off. The Sami, naturally enough, almost always used a *pulk*, as it could be driven more easily also outside the beaten track. Last but not least, another important word is *raid* (pronounced "ride"). This is an ordered row of reindeer-drawn sleighs, travelling in single file. To get a *raid* in order was not always so easily done, as you will see, even for Johannes, the oldest *vappus*, who was responsible for us on all our inland journeys, and who had many years' experience of conveying the District Court with suitable dignity. Once ordered in a *raid* all the animals followed their leader, and it was not only unnecessary but impossible to "steer" them, the single leather rein connecting a bridle (for want of a better word) with the driver's right wrist, being useful mainly for keeping driver and reindeer connected in an emergency.



7 – From horse and sleigh to reindeer! The Judge and Clerk of the Court on the frozen river.

This last, naturally enough, was extremely important, and one of the first things we learnt was to bind the leather rein correctly round wrist and hand.

On the occasion I am writing about here, the Court was about to start on a two days' journey back to Karasjok, after judging a case of reindeer theft. It was a certainly a memorable start as I described it for Aftenposten's readers!

"Old Johannes suddenly shook his rein and threw himself into his pulk as the leading reindeer leapt into action. At full speed they shot down the hill towards the frozen river, and in the same second the remaining seventeen reindeer spread outside the hostelry sprang into life and attempted to follow. Sleigh collided with sleigh as the animals competed for first place after the leader. I was silly enough to try to steer my animal, with the result that it sprang into some bushes and in a very few seconds had turned the sleigh over - throwing me out. Fortunately I managed to

keep hold of my rein - and so of my reindeer - so I was saved from committing the worst sin: that of letting go of one's animal. Back on my feet, I saw to my relief that Johannes had made a halt down on the river bed and was looking up at us with a pitying expression on his face. It was at any rate good to know that so long as his reindeer - the leading animal - stood still, none of the others would move. This was just as well, as I could now see that most of the Court's members had shared my experience, and were now standing, sitting - or even lying - round about, but all desperately holding on to their reindeer. Some of our animals stood pointed in the right direction, while others had done a full turn and stood gazing down into the sleigh they were supposed to be pulling. All the animals were wild-eyed (reindeer often do look nervous anyway) and all had heaving flanks, as though they had already run several miles. My own heart was beating more quickly than usual as I took hold of my sleigh with my left hand and got it right way up, retrieved from the nearest bush the reindeer skin that was all we had to sit on these journeys, and then sat on the side of my sleigh to await developments.

Further away on the right - well outside our chaos - I saw a younger vappus drive past with a whole chain of baggage sleighs and reindeer at his back and arrive safely down on the river bed. It was a fine sight! A powerful dark grey animal with a white face and perfect antlers (seldom seen!) drew the guide's pulk. Behind him came two reindeer (reserves?), then two baggage sleighs and, bringing up the rear, a young, white reindeer without antlers. Shouts and what sounded like swearing in the Sami language from the top of the hill made me look in that direction. There I could see that the third vappus had also been taken unawares when Johannes started so suddenly. The baggage on his sleighs was fortunately strongly fastened, but sleighs and pulk, vappus and reindeer seemed all tied up in knots.

Meanwhile Johannes had fastened his animal to one of the baggage sleighs that had reached the river, and was patiently and silently sorting us all out. We seldom heard him speak - and never in Norwegian. Short and bow-legged, wearing a shabby old pesk and with an equally shabby fur-lined cap (not a "starcap") on his head, his appearance was in no way impressive. But his silence spoke more than words, and a look from him was enough to tell us when we had done anything wrong! One by one we were led down to the river and arranged in a raid: Judge, Counsel for the State and for the Defence with wives, the Clerk of the Court, and a few other interested parties: eighteen in all. I did often wonder why the sleighs were not arranged correctly in line from the start. We could, after all, have walked down the hill from the hostelry! But of course it would have been less dramatic - and a little drama is always welcome in such wide and silent spaces!

[I did in fact experience an orderly start to the daily trek by reindeer - once. That was when - as *Aftenposten's* correspondent, and only "non-Sami" - I was on my way back to Karasjok after covering an officially organised wolf hunt. But on that occasion the leader of the *raid* was a woman! And that is another story, that I will tell you later.]

After the rather wild start I have described, we were off on a two-day journey back to Karasjok. We had spent two nights at Sjousjavrrre, and the case that was being tried had gone on all the intervening day. The largest room in the house - that combined kitchen and sleeping accommodation for travellers - had been full to overflowing. Judge, jurymen, counsel and clerk of the court sat at the long, wooden, kitchen table. With its documents and heavy books, and its dry, down-to-earth questioning, the Court seemed somewhat unreal in these surroundings. Everyone, apart from judge and counsel, was in lapp costume - jury, interpreter, the accused and witnesses, and the numerous lookers-on, who were seated on the wooden bunks, the kitchen bench - and the floor. Some of them had a reason for being there - the rest had come for the entertainment. A court case was the best - not to say only form of theatre one could hope to see in those days on the vidda. And all followed intensely the questions and answers as they were interpreted from Norwegian to Sami and Sami to Norwegian. Our host kept the tall iron stove burning, struggling through the crowd with his sack of birchwood logs. The atmosphere was soon thick with the combined smells of reindeerskin clothing, sennegrass (the special straw used in skaller), sweat and tobacco. Each

time the door was opened to let in some air, a number of dogs rushed in and proceedings had to be stopped while they were caught and put outside.



8 – A pause on the way. My reindeer had only one antler! Prosecuting and Defence Council confer with the Judge beside the sleigh in the front.

Of course there were also pauses for coffee - and in one of these pauses I got a tremendous surprise. I had gone out to get some air when I saw two young women in Sami costume coming towards us. They were particularly noticeable because one of them wore the Swedish costume, which is very different in colour from the Norwegian, having a "kofte" in greyish-blue and quite a different cap. But as they got nearer the greatest surprise was to hear them talking English! It was the girl in the Norwegian Sami costume who turned out to be a student from Cambridge! They had both been travelling with a large family of mountain Sami who had been to the annual Market at Bossekop. The English student had been staying for some time with the nomadic family to study their language and way of life. This, she could tell me, had been a fascinating experience. Only, since the days in Bossekop - where a good deal of alcohol had been available - there had been no regular meals, and they were both extremely hungry, and very grateful for the little in the way of food we could offer them!

When the Court reassembled they were in the audience as the case was finally presented and judgement pronounced - and they stayed for dinner! Such as it was! The room was cleared of all but the Court's members, and became again our communal kitchen, where we made some kind of a meal before getting a night's sleep. The wooden bunks had only birch twigs for mattresses, but we had our sleeping bags and in any case, slept fully dressed, (except for pesks and skaller!) while the wind howled round the house and the water in the open tank by the stove - that was to be both for washing and for coffee-making in the morning - acquired a thick top layer of ice.

Every morning there was a very important routine that must be followed. If the Court's feet were to be kept from freezing during the long hours in the sleighs, their skaller - the reindeer skin boots - must be filled, and filled correctly, with specially prepared, dried straw of sennegress. This was quite an art, and one very few Norwegians have learnt. So an expert followed us on all our winter journeys. You can see him on page, carrying his sack of straw over his shoulder. The Sami just put their bare feet into the straw, but we (wisely or not) kept our socks on!

This particular morning I had hoped to meet the English student once more and to get to know more - and at least her name! But we were told that she had been swept away in the raid with her family before we were up, and I never met her again. But our Chief of Police could tell us that one of her Sami companions had come to him the evening before with a dramatic tale of this foreigner who had been staying with his family and who must certainly be a spy, as she was continually making notes in a little book! What was more obvious, however, was that the informer was far

from sober, and could be grateful for the fact that there was no law forbidding promille-driving by reindeer!

Altogether, we were quite happy to be "on the road" again. After the rather dramatic start that I have described, there were no further complications as we drove steadily along the frozen river bed in the direction of Karasjok. The sun shone, and shielded by the river banks, their trees and bushes, we didn't feel the wind so much. That we were travelling steadily downhill we saw particularly clearly whenever we had to leave the river bed in stretches where the ice had split open to allow a black rush of water to swirl down and round the larger stones exposed before disappearing again into the next green tunnel.

Whenever we left the river bed we had to be particularly careful to keep our balance. Even though our sleighs had two runners, it was sometimes necessary to throw our weight to one side or the other to prevent them from tipping over on uneven ground. We also had to make sure that our animal kept us at a safe distance from the animal behind, that might otherwise end up breathing down our neck! Apart from this, there was not much excitement.

As we came further down river there were no more rapids, and all around us the landscape was covered by a sheet of white, only relieved by the grey, frosted twigs of dwarf birch along the river banks, and by the birches, growing bigger as we got nearer Karasjok, and after them the fir trees. There was plenty of time to study our noble steeds as we patiently played follow-my-leader hour after hour! From my sleigh, quite far back in the raid, I could see how they varied, in colour - with all shades of grey and grey-brown - but most of all in the number and size of their antlers. We seldom saw a really fine head of antlers, probably because it was not the right season when we were travelling. And we never drove a white animal! These were quite rare, and the Sami understandably kept them for themselves. Even the "wife of power" was not honoured with a white pesk!



9 – The Judge ready for the start.

But it was not a good idea to start dreaming or philosophising in a sleigh drawn by a reindeer! Above all, it was necessary to keep moving, not only to keep one's own limbs from freezing stiff, but also to keep one's steed from falling asleep! Reindeer are quite lazy animals, and to keep them going at an even pace one had to wave an arm or even a leg at intervals to encourage them. They never seemed to respond to a voice. And towards the end of a long day's journey one might have to be particularly energetic, waving first one arm and then the other - right foot then left foot - then a combination of arm and foot! This at least kept us warm!

In this way we could drive for hours on end and at least two days running. We had to pause occasionally to rest our animals, and could then get out of our sleighs and stamp a bit to get our circulation going - if we kept a careful eye on Johannes in order to make sure we were back in our sleighs before he started off again. And at least once during the day's journey we had a longer pause, when our three vappus lit a campfire and made coffee [see illustration 10.] while we ate the sandwiches we had made at the breakfast table and that we had carried inside our pesks, so that they were not too hard frozen to eat!

On the journey up to Sjousavrra I had nearly caused a real scandal! It was at the end of a long day on our way up river, and almost completely dark. It must have been the first day of our journey, as I remember there were still fir trees along the river banks, that added to the darkness. I must have been half-asleep, and so must some others in our raid, as no-one had noticed that I had fallen behind. As it was, I suddenly realised that my animal was going at a walking pace, and that

I couldn't see the sleigh in front. In a panic, I got up on my knees, shaking my rein and shouting at my animal, at the same time waving desperately with both arms. The result was dramatic! Fortunately the river was fairly broad, and there were no holes in the ice as my reindeer set off at a speed I had never before experienced! In just a few seconds it not only reached the sleigh in front of me, but passed it and all the other members of the raid - including our guide and leader, Johannes! Confusion threatened, as some of the other animals saw a chance to set off in various directions. I looked anxiously at Johannes as I passed him. His face was as expressionless as ever, but in a flash he had passed me, and miraculously we all fell in line again behind him. But I was no longer at the end of the raid - which was just as well!



10 – A pause for coffee and the chance to thaw a little.

I remember that it was especially welcome that evening to glimpse a distant light through the trees and to know that we were nearing our night's lodging. By then it had been dark for quite some time, and now the stars shone with ice-cold clearness, while the fir trees along the river banks had melted into walls of black shadow. The dogs at the hostelry began to bark and our dogs answered. There were always several small dogs owned by our vappus that followed the raid. Soon we came to a halt. Johannes got out of his pulk, and turned his animal round so that it pointed straight up the river bank. Then, one by one, we followed him up to the door of the small hostelry, where the tenants were expecting us, and where beech logs were crackling in the iron stoves! What a lovely sound that was! And how good it was to be able to stretch, and move around. All the members of the Court were again quartered in one room - in the attic! We climbed up a ladder-like stair to get there. And then, as always at the end of a day's journey, there was a very special "pantomime" - if you can call it that. It was the sight of six or more headless, fur clad bodies waving arms or, rather, empty sleeves in the air, as we all strove to get our pesks off, over our heads - which we could only do by pushing them up from the inside, as they have no front openings!

Meanwhile our guides had unharnessed the reindeer and driven them out to the pastures reserved for travellers' animals, where enough reindeer moss was to be found under the snow. This might be as much as an hour's run on skis, especially at the end of the winter, and had to be repeated in the morning, when the animals were brought back. The vappus certainly worked long hours, but I never heard them complain!



11 – The faithful follower, carrying the sack of special straw that filled our reindeer skin 'skaller' and kept out feet warm.

All we had to think about, once we had got out of our pesks, was food, coffee and bed! Sometimes we had managed to get hold of some reindeer meat, and could make a stew. But that was not often. Mostly we just ate bread, and whatever we had managed to buy in packets or tubes in Karasjok, and that had survived our travels. Again, the bunks may have been hard and mattresses practically non-existing, but again - we slept well.

Next day, we reached Karasjok."

All this I could tell Aftenposten's readers. And I find that even now, so many years later, I can still remember the fascination of travelling in this way. The days we spent in our one-man sleighs could be both long and monotonous. But even so we felt that something very special was lost when, in the last winter of our years in Tana, the court travelled by car, lorry or caterpillar tractor. The hours of complete silence, the peacefulness that made it possible to *feel* the vastness of the *vidda* - they were already history before we left Finnmark.

"Can't get away"

At the end of the journey I have described above, we could return to Karasjok with a case completed. The situation was rather different on another occasion, that was also in its way quite typical.

We were already lined up with our reindeer and sleds, down on the river ice at Karasjok, and clear to start on yet another two-day journey, this time to a place called, where a particularly serious case of reindeer theft was to be tried. All parties and witnesses had been summoned to meet there. The Judge had come from Tana and counsel from Vadsø, and we were about to start on the last stage of our journey, when a semi-official letter-writer presented a message to the court from the accused, saying that he regretted that he couldn't come to Bæivasgiedde. His excuse was that there was an even higher authority than the Court that he must obey: the authority that told him he must **earn his bread in the sweat of his brow!** As a reindeer-owner and guide, he had been engaged by another authority (a third, that would be!) to take him on a two-day journey in the opposite direction to Bæivasgiedde. The style of the letter clearly indicated the writer who, when sober, was interpreter for the priest in church. He had come personally to present the letter to the judge and other members of the court as they were preparing to get into their sleds, and could inform them that the accused was already at least one whole day's journey away.

I must admit that I, for one, saw the comic side of this situation. I could even hear in my head a certain, catchy music hall tune that many of you, I'm sure, will remember, though not many of my companions on the ice that day could understand what there was to sing about! [You **do** remember? "There I was, waiting at the church" and the perfect final: "Can't get away to marry you today. My wife won't let me!"]



12 – "Can't we get away!"
Defending and Prosecuting
Counsel, with the Judge between
them, receive the message that
the accused is unable to attend
court.

Be that as it may. We were quite definitely "left in the lurch". There were no mobile telephones - not even stationary ones - on the *vidda*, and we never heard of any bush telegraph either. So we had to travel to Bæivasgiedde to meet all the other parties, knowing that all we could do there would be to record what the witnesses had to say for use later. This meant particularly tiring work for the clerk of the court, as every word must then be written down - by hand. Finn's office didn't own a portable typewriter, and I dared not risk taking my old but precious machine on such perilous journeys! At least I got plenty of practise in writing Norwegian!

It only remains to say that the authority who had gone off with our suspected thief, was the special Bailiff for the Sami - the *Lappfogd*, as he was called then - who was off on his rounds registering reindeer herds - and who should have known better!

However, I, for one, was very glad that we came to Bæivasgiedde, where I got to know the hostess at the guesthouse quite well. Later I was to stay there again - but without Finn and the Court's members - when on my way to and from the wolf hunt that I have already mentioned. But that, as I have said, is another story!

— Three —

Life at an Outpost

Now we are back in Langnes, where I think we can stay for a while, and get to know a little more about who lived there, and what kept us busy when we were not on our travels.

But first it might be interesting to find out why we were there - that is to say, why where we were was at just that point on the map! Does that sound confusing? Let me explain.

In 1947-52 I did not need to look at a map to see where I was. I just was there.

Now, more than fifty years later, I look at a map - and wonder why.

Not, of course, why I, particularly, was there. I was, as we know, just following my Norwegian husband in the best English tradition - to an outpost.

But look at your map! You must have a good one by you by now. Or perhaps the publishers have supplied one? You should in any case have got some idea of the extent of Tana's District Judge's jurisdiction, and where it lay.

Would you - or anyone - have found it logical or in any way practical to establish the judge's office and residence in this far corner of his district?

Of course we must not forget that a large part of Finnmark's coastline also came under his jurisdiction. That immediately makes Langnes appear more central. But only on paper!

We could never take a boat from Langnes to visit any of the fishing villages that I will be describing for you in a later chapter. There was no harbour and no quay at Langnes, and there were no boats other than the narrow, flat-bottomed ones used by local fishermen (professional or otherwise) for fishing salmon that could land comfortably on the beach. When the court travelled "on circuit" round the coast, it must first travel out of its district to the nearest coastal town, Vadsø, ten Norwegian miles or a hundred kilometres away, in order to board a coastal steamer.

So why had Langnes become an administration centre?

From my description earlier of my triumphant walk through Langnes with what I thought was a salmon, you may remember that of the houses I passed, three were inhabited by other "authorities" - by the police, the parson and the district doctor. So it is clear that it had been considered practical to have these important offices collected in one place. But still there is the question: why at Langnes?

Now the word "Langnes" can be translated as "long nose". And in fact, as you can see from the map, Langnes is on the longest and biggest of three promontories that stretch out into the Tana Fiord. And I wonder now if this, possibly, can explain why we - the authorities - came to be established just here.

There had been a church in Langnes before the Germans burnt it down.

Now one can often find churches in Norway built on promontories along the fiords, where they can be seen both from the land (often highlands) behind them and from homesteads on the far side of the fiord. The church bell can be heard over the water, in good time for parishioners to row over to services. This has been a good tradition, and has been a popular subject for artists and at least one major poet.

Was it perhaps this tradition that inspired the building of a church at Langnes?

And where there's a church there's a parson, and it seems reasonable to suppose that he would appreciate the company of a doctor - and so why not also of the district judge? Though the size and extent of the latter's district being so much larger than that of the other two, did make his placing in Langnes by far the least practical. But it was quite practical to have the police established within easy reach of the Court. And the sheriff at least had his own boat.

Today most of this is changed. The church was not rebuilt in Langnes, but ten kilometres nearer Vadsø, while the doctor and all the health institutions moved to Tanabru, thirty kilometres from Langnes. And there is no longer a district judge in Tana, as with improved communications the district can be administered from Vadsø.

But Langnes can still be found on the map, though the last ten kilometres of the road that leads to it, as shown on my current road map, is I think the thinnest red line I have ever seen on a map! It is almost like a warning: *cul de sac!*

And that, in truth, is what Langnes both was and is: **the end of the road** - of the road that towards its end follows a fairly narrow shelf between the Tana River and the mountain Algasvarre. When you look at your map you will see why it doesn't go any further. Where *could* it go from Langnes? - Only out into the Tana fiord, and so into the North Sea.

In truth, Langnes was most indisputably an **outpost!**

I try to remember now who lived there, apart from our little band of administrators.

The leading citizen, we can say, was a woman - Signe Rødli. She owned and managed the general stores; to begin with in one of the wooden barrack buildings left by the Germans, but later in a two-story cement monster of a building, both shop and home, that she had raised at the end of the road, bringing this to a very definite full-stop! She had a mother who kept a cow and some hens.

In a room in the barrack behind the shop there was a post office, where all post had to be fetched, so there must have been a postman. There was also a fisherman (the one who rented our salmon-fishing right), and his mother, who had a smallholding and the one house at Langnes that had escaped burning, being well hidden down in a cleft between the road and the river. There was an old, retired pedlar! He had a kind of shop in a room at the end of the long barrack that housed the primary school, and from him I bought a German military blanket (that made a coat) and, of all things, a scythe, that later went with us to southern Norway, where it was extremely useful! There was a taxi-driver, who was not always willing to drive, and there was dear frøken Brørs, who took in washing occasionally, and who did the office cleaning.

These lived in Langnes. Of course there must have been other families in the neighbourhood. There was the primary school, and when we started our secondary school we had fourteen pupils (ages 14 to 21), so there must have been some parents, presumably living on smallholdings spread out along the road, and most of them with salmon fishing as an extra source of income.

Behind the shop there was a cart track leading to a couple of smallholdings and to a good spot for sports fishing, where we actually succeeded in landing a good sized trout on the one occasion - in the course of our five years there - that Finn took some time off for fishing! Still further along there is a path that leads to the top of a rather stern-looking promontory from the top of which there is nothing to hinder a view to the North Pole - if one could see so far. Usually the horizon one sees here is a wall of fog - *Ishavståken* - the Polar Sea Fog. Homes along the coast that can be seen from this viewpoint, are very few and far between, and totally dependent on the sea for communication.

You can check all this on your maps - or school atlases!

Return of the sun!

And you can see that the opposite bank of the Tana river is quite a distance away from Langnes,

as it is here the river widens out and meets the Tana fiord. The mountains on the far side of the water could begin to glow rust-red when the sun slowly returned after its long winter absence and reached a point on the horizon from where it could shine into our fiord. This was, of course, something we watched for very eagerly each year, knowing that after a few days the glow would spread to the whole mountain wall on the eastern side of the river that we saw from our livingroom windows, and that soon day and night would for some weeks be more evenly divided until, finally, this would really become the "land of the midnight sun".

The return of the sun was accompanied by a very special ritual. One of Finn's office staff was particularly careful to mark the exact point on the office door first reached by a ray! Then she came quickly to the kitchen to get some butter! Rationed or not - this had to be spread on the exact spot on which the sun had shone if we were to have a good summer!

Well - I believe we did have at least one good summer while in Tana - though I must also admit that about the only Sami words I can remember to have learnt during those years were "*heito giesi*" - meaning "bad summer"!

End of an epoch

When the shop-owner, Signe Rødli, built her concrete eyesore so demonstratively at the end of the road, she hoped that she would be followed by the authorities, and that church and parsonage, homes and offices for district doctor, district police and judge, would all be raised again at Langnes. But, as I have already mentioned, this was not to be. There were years of heated discussion as to where the centre for Tana's administration and health services should be situated. The chairman of one of the local councils along the route was quoted in the local press as declaring that if his community didn't win, they would show that they had Finnish blood in their veins, and "blood would flow in Tana River"! There was - and is - a good deal of Finnish blood in the veins of many of Finnmark's inhabitants, but no war has raged along the road to Langnes since the Germans left, and it does seem that the most logical solution was finally found when the new administration centre was built (some years after we left Tana) where the main roads from the northern coast and from the south can meet and cross the river at Tanabru.

Logical, yes - and yet, perhaps a little sad. In all the years before we came to Tana - years without electricity and without most forms of reasonably modern communication administration had worked! Doctors had managed to reach their patients, or patients their doctor - though perhaps it must be admitted, not always in time! The legal authorities - police and judicial - had exercised a reasonable degree of control over their widespread districts. Neither had there been any noticeable lack of spiritual guidance in the district, where there were always divers missionaries on their rounds, in addition to the Langnes-based parson, who could reach or be reached by his far-flung parishioners. This had of course necessitated a good deal of time-demanding travel, such as I have already described. But then, in those days one didn't expect to arrive anywhere so quickly in Finnmark!

No six-shooters

For the moment, anyway, we are still in the "old" Langnes - "we" being the "authorities" - and the year is 1947 the year I arrived there in May. What are we doing - policeman and parson, doctor and judge - apart from clearing up our physical surroundings? Are we managing to re-establish law and order and normal health services for body and soul?

To begin with the local police - what in Norway is called a "lensmann". I seem to remember that I have, earlier on, called this representative for law and order a sheriff. That, I'm afraid, may have given you quite the wrong impression, as one can easily associate sheriffs with six-shooters and Stetson hats. Our local police representative had no such ensignia of office and wore no

uniform, but his position was certainly higher than that of a village constable in England, and he had at least one deputy under him. Apart from arresting lawbreakers, one of his jobs would be registering - and when necessary enforcing - decisions made by the courts. But in many other ways the "lensmenn" in the country districts in Norway have had a very central position, also in the social sphere, so a lensmann's wife would also have a central position. Our lensmann's wife however kept herself very much to herself, mainly, I understood, because she had a sister who had married rather higher up on the social scale in another part of the county, and therefore, sad to say, had a bit of a complex. I remember that she was said to be very house-proud, but I never saw the inside of her home. She was, as I remember, invited into mine, on one memorable occasion. This was when the County Governor had announced that he was coming on an official visit, and bringing his wife with him. As though this wasn't frightening enough for an inexperienced housewife under prevailing conditions, I discovered just in time that the Governor's wife was a sister of the above mentioned policeman's wife. and was able to invite her, with her husband, to join us for coffee. What no one had found it necessary to tell me beforehand was that the hired help I had in the kitchen for the occasion was yet another sister of the two in the livingroom! When one of Finn's office staff came and whispered this in my ear, I hurried into the kitchen in great embarrassment and tried to persuade the third sister to join us - but in vain. She was the very shy and retiring cake expert I have mentioned earlier, who would have liked to give me help and advice when I first came to Tana, if she hadn't been so afraid of what her neighbours would say!

As you will realise, there is more to be learnt when coming to a new country - or even a new part of a country - than just the language!

Let there be light

Well, that was more about the policeman's wife than about the policeman - and I rather suspect that also the parson's wife will get pride of place, for reasons that you will see!

I have, of course, already mentioned that the local parson was painting his prefab on the day that I bought the codfish. Otherwise he was busy with all a parson's more usual professional responsibilities, including of course church services, which were held in a schoolroom. Mentioning these services does bring back some memories.

Neither Finn nor I were what you could call church-goers - not, at any rate, since school days. But I was given to understand that it was expected that "authorities" should attend church services. In fact, there was even some law about this. Of course that same law said nothing about it being the particular duty of *wives* to represent the various authorities - but this, it seemed to me, was taken for granted.

So, trying as far as I could to do what was expected of me, I went to "church" a few Sundays. Today I remember nothing at all of the services or the sermons. But I do remember the psalm-singing.

I have said that services were held in a schoolroom. This was the one schoolroom available to the primary school, in a barrack that the Germans had put up for their own use when they burnt down all the houses in Langnes. And in that room was an old and asthmatic harmonium. My memories of the beautiful chapel at St. Bernard's Convent, where we sang mostly plainsong in Latin, or were accompanied on a very real organ by one of the nuns (who could play it beautifully), was no preparation for the psalm-singing in Tana. Not even my few visits to anglican services in Gray's Church in Stoke Poges, where I grew up, could prepare me for this. Only "Lead kindly light" had, apparently, found its way, in translation of course, into the Norwegian psalm book and so to the far north, but was, even so, hardly recognisable.

For the most part, both words and tunes were new to me. But here the general slowness of the singing - that was partly, but *only* partly, excusable because of the necessity of pumping air into the

harmonium - came to my aid. When words and tune were, as quite often happened, on different pages, I found that I could manage to learn a line at a time by heart and turn back to the page with the music in time to join in with the rest of the congregation!

Altogether, I received early on a very clear impression that religion was not precisely a source of joy in this region of Norway. For example, there was very much that was considered "tabu". When a few of us once were bold enough to perform a play - with a strongly educative message and to support a good cause - it only survived one performance. After that the word was passed round. Theatre was **sinful!** Even when it was concerned with preaching good and clean living habits - such as not putting the dinner plates on the floor for the dog to lick clean!

To dance was also sinful - or at least could lead young people into temptation. When I protested, on one occasion, that in England it was quite acceptable to have a dance in a church hall right by the church, with the local priest or clergyman present, I was very firmly told that because we did such things in England, that did not mean we could do the same in Tana! Fortunately I didn't mention whist drives in the same connection. That would have put me outside all hope. A young teacher and his wife were once asked to be baby-watchers for the parson and his wife while they were out one evening. While the children slept, the young couple played some card game. They were never asked again. In fact, one was left with the impression that they were thrown out of the house by the horrified parents - and their cards after them!

It was the parson's wife who was the most strict of the two. It was, for example, her word that went out to all parishioners and effectively stopped our play-acting. But also the parson - as chairman of the local school authorities - refused to allow folk dancing in a school outside school hours. This was a great shame, as we had a secretary in Finn's office who was from one of the big valleys further south, where folk dancing is a living tradition. She could have organised folk-dancing groups for the young and for the slightly older! But it was as though the pious feared that rhythm and the joy of dancing would infect the very floorboards!

Only once during our years in Tana was a dance organised by Signe Rødli in support of the national Life Saving Organisation - for the building of lifeboats. She was chairman of the local branch. As in the case of our play, there was no repeat performance. Otherwise, the only source of income for the various local clubs or associations was to hold some kind of bazaar, sale of work and sale of raffle tickets! For the young there was no form of entertainment.

However - to return to the parson: in quite another respect, he did make at least one very great effort to bring light to Langnes! I even wrote some lines about this, that we (a very few of us) sang to the tune of a popular children's song.

Here is a fairly rough translation of my first (and last) song text:

"Let there be light in Langnes"
we heard the parson say.
He'd read that Someone Higher Up
had said the same one day.
He called us to a meeting
and all were soon agreed:
a power-plant, wire and solid poles
might help to fill our need.

I'm sorry that you can't hear the tune, as I hear it while writing - but perhaps you can find your own tune to fit it. Needless to say, Finn forbade me to sing the verse outside our four walls!

Be that as it may - some artificial light *did* come to Langnes while we were there. To be exact - it came and went - and came and went: the reason for this intermittency being easily explained.

We - the "authorities", together with a local nursing home - had to apply to our respective Departments for permission to make such an improvement in our living conditions, and, of course, for the necessary financial support. Permission was given willingly enough, but the financial support granted was only just enough to enable the parson (whose baby this was) to buy a second-hand "aggregate" - a kind of mini-power station I suppose one could call it. This was erected in a shed in the grounds of the nursing home. Poles were put up, wires stretched, and the five houses connected could move as it were into a new era. A Co-operative stores some kilometres along the road to Vadsø had been foresighted enough to lay in a few lamps and light bulbs, and I took a longer trip to Kirkenes to buy an electric iron.

But this kind of installation doesn't run itself. Not permanently, at any rate. There was no money for paying an electrician to look after things, even if we could have found one in the neighbourhood. So we agreed that the "authorities" themselves should take turns at servicing the plant. Not all of them were qualified for the job. Finn, fortunately, didn't even pretend to be, and wisely left his turn to one of the office staff. Perhaps the matron at the nursing home should have done the same, as at least one longer break in our electricity supply came when she put soft soap into the machine instead of oil.

So I still in periods had use for the two flat irons that some friends gave me as a parting present before I left England. Heavy as they were I nearly abandoned them at several stages of my journey north, but once in Tana they really came into their own! My main problem with them then was that I have always instinctively felt that anything that is *black* cannot be hot - an unfortunate attitude to have when using flat irons.

A friend in need

Having electricity - even intermittently - meant that I could at last use my electric sewing machine as it was meant to be used. The first year or so in Tana, when there was most that had to be sewn, including curtains and divan covers and the like, this had been a particularly heavy job. A "handyman" (not Finn - who had twelve thumbs, as they say in Norway!) disconnected the motor on my new electric Singer machine and put a knob on its main wheel so that I could turn this by hand. Of course the wheel was never intended for this kind of usage, and was not weighted like the wheels on the old, hand-driven machines, that more or less went round of themselves. So my right arm was kept working, and the seams could seem *very* long! Nevertheless, I was very grateful to this handyman - for this and for other small jobs. I still remember him with gratitude and affection, and often wish I could have found out what became of him later.

His name was Kristoffersen. Like many other of the - I suppose we could call them "casual workers" - anyway, the very motley collection of odd-job men who found their way to Finnmark immediately after the war - one might suspect that he had been glad of an excuse for getting away from the south of the country for a while. (Some of these workers were even said to have been "sent" north, instead of to prison - but that we never had confirmed!)

Kristoffersen must have been something over 50 years old, but was still a "kraftkar" - which my dictionary translates as a "great strong hulk of a fellow"! I don't much like the word "hulk" (isn't that part of a sinking ship?) - but anyway, he was tall and broad and was good to have around when there was heavy work to be done, while it was quite a sight to see him bent over the sewing machine and handling a small screwdriver and screws with his large fists! He worked mostly as a mason - making foundations for the many new houses that had to be raised. Somehow or other he came to make his home for some months in a room in Finn's office building, so we got to know him quite well. Like many large and strong men, he was very kind hearted. His problem had been - and still was, at times - alcohol. Sometimes he just disappeared for a few days. We never asked him why, and we never saw him drunk. He became very fond of my dog Tass, and we were happy to let him look after her at least a couple of times while we were away on longer journeys. This we

could do quite safely, as we knew that he wouldn't touch a drop so long as Tass was with him!

Once, when Kristoffersen had been for some days in the nearest town (Vadsø), he came back with a very special present to me: a small rose bush in a pot! What that meant in that place and at that time you can just try to imagine. To have something flowering in the house! It had quite small, rather pale pink flowers - very delicate - and seeming even more so in the large workman's fists handing it to me so ceremoniously! I managed to keep that rose bush alive during at least one winter, so it could flower again the next summer. But by that time our friend Kristoffersen had left Tana. We missed him. And so did Tass.

But to get back to the sewing machine - as I had to quite often in the first year or so!

That we had material to make into covers and curtains - even some clothes - at a time when food and all other supplies were so short, may surprise you. But here we were very lucky. One of Finn's sisters lived in America, and she and her husband had a haberdashery store. They were very generous, and quick to send us yards of colourful curtain material that were a joy to work with, and made a cheerful improvement to our surroundings!

I think you will have gathered by now that, what with one thing and another, we did learn (the hard way) to appreciate the meaning of "all mod. cons."

And - as though the powers-that-be were saying: "Now you have learnt your lesson, so now at least one mod. con. can come to Tana on a permanent basis" - on the day we left Tana in May 1952, we could see piles of telegraph poles laid by the wayside. Electricity from a larger - and slightly more reliable - power station was on its way from the coast!

A Doctor's and other dilemmas

Talking of the parson - and of his wife - seems to have led me quite far afield.

Another "authority" living in Langnes in those days was the District Doctor. The doctors, and perhaps even more important for me, their wives, were our nearest neighbours. That I mention them in the plural does not mean that there were so many of them at any one time, but that they did come and go quite often. In fact, at least five doctors took over the practice and four left it during our five years in Tana. One reason for this instability was that the doctor who held the post when we came north, was given leave to study official health administration - including a year or two in America - so that his responsibilities in Tana had to be taken over by locums who stayed for fairly short periods.

However there was one couple who stayed long enough for us to really get to know each other and become good friends. To begin with, we gave a party for their wedding! And that is something I will never forget: the two scraggy chickens that I had managed to get hold of and put into a mould with aspic - well, I had boiled them first, but that didn't help very much. And of course the parson's wife had to be the guest who found a black cotton stocking in the rocking chair she sat in - a chair borrowed from our housemaid's room.

Mentioning a housemaid brings back another memory, and one that quite clearly shows how impossible it was for anyone in England to imagine what conditions - what life style, in fact - prevailed in Tana at that time. When she heard that we had a maid, my mother hastened to send me a cap and apron that would be the correct uniform for her to wear when opening the door of the judge's Residence to afternoon visitors. Cap and apron were most elegant, in écru, and would still have looked quite right in those days, I imagine, in England, at the front door of a more or less stately home. But in Tana - around 1950? I hid cap and apron away as quickly as possible - and have never seen them since. But the episode did make me feel very strongly the wide, wide gap between us. On the whole I found it best not to make comparisons - but just to live the life I had somehow got involved in as whole-heartedly as I could! For the same reason, I didn't take any fencing equipment with me to Norway, and I exchanged my jodphurs (which in any case were too

tight round the knees for skiing) for proper skiing trousers as soon as a pair could be bought! Also, I stopped subscribing to the Observer. I just did not want to feel drawn between two worlds.

But to get back to the doctor's wife - who we have just married to her doctor! Julie was her name, and she was the one who had the idea of staging the play that, as I have already told you, was frowned upon by the parson's wife, in spite of its educational content. She was originally to have played the female lead - a young woman threatened by consumption - while I would just have a few easily learnt lines as a district nurse - lines that Finn rehearsed with me over and over again, he was so afraid that I would forget them. However, preparations took so long that by the time we were nearing a performance, Julie was visibly pregnant. This, we feared, could give our audience an unfortunate impression, as our heroine only became engaged at the end of the play, though otherwise quite suitably to the play's doctor.

Anyway, the end of it was that I had to take over the leading role. This wasn't so impossible as it sounds. We had staged plays at St. Bernard's Convent at least twice a year - greatly encouraged by the nuns - and I had played quite a wide variety of parts, beginning with Peaseblossom (or was it Cobweb, or Moth, or Mustardseed? - anyway, one of Titania's small attendants) at the age of eight or nine, and ending up as Maria Magdalene in the last Easter play before I left school, and as Shakespeare's Shrew, who was duly tamed at the end of the summer term. I had therefore some training in learning a longer part, though this time of course it would be in Norwegian. To spare Finn's nerves, I let him continue to hear me in the district nurse's responses - which he did right up to the moment when I had to go back stage to dress. A pity I couldn't be among the audience to see his face when the play began and I came on stage in the leading part!

Strange to think how a convent school education could so often be a definite advantage when coping with life under such very different conditions - physical as well as mental!

Now I was grateful to remember one important rule for the Convent school's playactors - a rule that I impressed also on my fellow actors in Tana: Speak your first lines strongly! That gives selfconfidence, and the rest will be easier. It worked - though some quite unimportant remarks may have come out rather unnecessarily loud.

The scene for our play was a farm kitchen, where an elderly woman was clearing up after a meal - putting plates on the floor, for the family's dog to lick clean when it came in - which it fortunately didn't. Instead, the play's doctor came in. Horrified, he gave the woman a lecture on the danger she was causing to the family's health, and informed her that her granddaughter (who he hoped to marry) had consumption and would have to go to hospital. In the second act, the granddaughter comes home completely cured, and at the final curtain falls into the arms of the doctor with the words that I have never forgotten: "Now I can't find any further excuses". (She has earlier refused to marry him, when told of her illness.) Of course we couldn't allow the young people to actually fall into each others arms - that would have been to ask for trouble. So the teacher and I stood one on each side of the kitchen table, and just stretched out our hands to each other. - Curtain!

But for years afterwards Finn used to tease me with that final sentence!

Now, why do I remember so much of this not particularly important occasion? And why do I think it worth telling you about so long afterwards?

It is perhaps the aftermath that has any significance.

Our play was a great success - on the night! All the tickets were sold for this first performance, and representatives of various organisations and from various parts of Tana were eager to have us perform again, in support of their special interests. The profits from our first performance went to the local Sanitetsforening, a national women's organisation that supports the health services, and who were responsible for the script.

Then, suddenly, all interest vanished. When we asked when and where we should plan new performances, we were met with blank stares. It was as though no-one had seen or enjoyed the play.

The word had gone out: playacting was sinful - however well-meaning.

The parson's wife had spoken - and it was really distressing to experience how many of her husband's parishioners were eager to give the impression that they had never been to the performance - or at least (and *of course*) had not enjoyed it.

Today, - not least as a result of television - such attitudes must have changed, among ordinary people, even in that "Land of the Midnight Sun" that is also the land of complete winter darkness?

But in later years I was to experience much of the same attitude in certain quarters when we came to the south east of Norway, to Finnskogen: a forest area along the Norwegian-Swedish border. In Solør what in Norway is called the "Inner Mission" (*Indremisjonen*) was - and I'm sure still is - a very strong influence. To give one example: I had managed to get together a few people who could play or sing, or at least were interested in meeting regularly to enjoy music. A former forestry worker was a really good, self-taught violinist! The head of the local telephone exchange (yes, this was still "in the old days"!) had a good soprano voice. The wife of Finn's assistant judge played the flute. There were two of us who could play the piano. And the local parson had a very fine baritone! He only came to one meeting. After that he was advised (by his wife, it was said) that certain members of his congregation thought such activity "unsuitable". The same section of the community refused on one occasion to meet their own bishop because he had publicly opposed a colleague who had preached damnation and hell fire over the radio, scaring the wits out of many of the elderly who were the most faithful listeners to the particular programme on which he was guest.

Eight years at a convent school had certainly not prepared me for this extreme form of religion: this dark view of life - or at least of the spiritual life - which seems to thrive best where the mountains are high and keep out the sun, and where the forests are deep and dark.

Now I seem to be getting rather far away from Langnes and our life there. But before

I leave the subject, I must just say that I have had a very strong impression that this strict and (from my point of view depressing) form of religion, was something that came from the south, from the west coast, with its high mountains and deep fjords. The Sami always seem to be a happy race of people. They have had, in the past, their own form for religion, and a good deal of superstition has survived (not surprising in the long dark winters!), but they have lived very close to nature - and been dependent on it for their living. They only really got into trouble, it seems to me, when (to put it briefly) salesmen from the south came with cheap alcohol, and the missionaries followed, to save their souls!

One particular belief in Finnmark that can hardly be called a superstition, as one was continually given examples for its having worked, was the belief that it was possible to stop bleeding by reciting a special formula. This formula was handed down in certain families where they had "the gift". I can remember that our local doctor was on one occasion called out to a difficult birth in Austre Tana, and at the same time to a man who had cut himself in the leg while chopping wood some distance up the Tana river, and in quite the opposite direction. When the doctor protested that he could not be in two places so far apart at the same time, the wounded man said that if he didn't get priority his death would be the doctor's responsibility! In exasperation, the doctor told the man to get hold of someone who could stop the bleeding by incantation - something they otherwise were so ready to believe in.

I don't remember hearing that this story had a tragic outcome.

But talking of Austre Tana reminds me of the occasion on which I assisted the district doctor on one of his routine visits over on the other side of the river. His wife - Julie - had gone south to have her baby and the district nurse was busy quite a day's journey away, inoculating people against TB. We could cross the river on the ice, as it was winter, and were driven by horse and sled to a small collection of houses where the doctor established his office-surgery in someone's fairly large kitchen. My job was to keep the kitchen range burning and water boiling, so that I could sterilise

any instruments needed. This was a fairly easy job, and I could always close my eyes when handing over the instruments if I felt squeamish. But closing my eyes was not such a good idea when I was asked to hold a torch and shine it into a patient's mouth, where there was a tooth that must be pulled out. An impatient command from the doctor and a howl from the patient meant that I must direct the torch more accurately, and so had to look into the mouth of the patient - an elderly man who had probably never seen a dentist, and hadn't much left to chew with, while what he had could certainly not be used to advertise any make of toothpaste.

As you will have gathered, dentists were not easily found in the remoter parts of Finnmark. In fact they kept to the coastal towns. All a doctor could do was pull out badly infected teeth - and there were plenty of those.

Law and justice - and a good bit more

So far I have commented - with a few digressions - on the activities of representatives of the police, the church and the health authorities, and we have seen how I occasionally got involved with the two last named. Now perhaps it can be interesting to hear something about how law was administered, how criminals received judgement, properties got registered and, not least in this period, how claims for compensation for lost property were dealt with. As you will realise, there were no leisure problems for any of us in the district judge's vicinity!.

But who were "we"?

We could, I think, be called a "collective", at least for the first year or so.

I had better explain here why living conditions were so cramped to begin with. Of course we know that the Germans had done a thorough job of burning all existing accommodation. But the Norwegian Government had been fully informed, and plans had been made, already in London, for "rebuilding" the devastated areas as quickly as possible. A special office was created - *Gjenreisningskontoret* (Reconstruction Office) - and its representatives were quickly on the spot. (Yes, this is the office that, you may remember, had forgotten to give us a cellar!). Immediately after the war, their first job was to put up temporary accommodation for the many workers necessary for the more permanent rebuilding. This they did very quickly, helped partly by materials and barracks that the Germans had left behind. But no-one had reckoned with the very strong homing instinct that brought the district's original inhabitants back from their forced evacuation much earlier than planned. This meant that no sooner was any accommodation raised than it was full to overflowing, with a mixture of carpenters, stonemasons and painters from the south - and the people whose houses they were to build!

When I came - I suppose I can say as a bride - to our first home, the prefab, it was already occupied by the male secretary from Finn's office, and a friend of his who was a bricklayer and painter. When we entered the house for the first time, the painter was busy putting last touches to some decorative dashes and squiggles that he thought would make the cement surround of the open fireplace in the livingroom look more cheerful. (This, by the way, was the man who, as I have told you earlier, taught me to clean a cod.)

I soon realised that there was not going to be much private life!

The prefab. was an oblong. Two rooms at the one end could be entered directly from the entrance hall, and it was these rooms that, naturally enough, were already occupied when we arrived. A third door from the hall opened into the living room, and from this there were doors to a small kitchen and an even smaller bedroom, where there were two bunks against one wall.

This was the one bedroom left for us, where Finn, as a trained parachutist, got the upper bunk.

Not much in the way of furniture had reached Finnmark at that stage, but wooden frames on four legs, strung together with wire, made locally, and with lumpy mattresses on top, did service as beds or got turned into a corner sofa in the livingroom.

But things got gradually better. After some months a new pre-fab was put up further down the road for the office staff - which by then had been increased with the woman secretary from the south who was an expert on folk dancing and who became a very good friend. The painter-stonemason also found other accommodation, and at last Finn and I could have a better bedroom - furnished, this too, with the multi-useful wood-and-wire frame beds, but made cheerful by curtains and covers made from the materials from America.

A bed-sitter at one end of the office building, that had its own outside staircase, was for the first months after my arrival, occupied by the district nurse, Sister Berit. This was a great advantage, as, apart from being a most likeable person, she had the right instruments and was expert at removing all the splinters that got into my hands while I was tidying up our surroundings, as described in an earlier chapter.

When she moved to, for her, more practical accommodation, she was succeeded by our good friend Kristoffersen, and after him by a series of Finn's "assistant judges" - young lawyers who came mostly direct from their law studies, and only for at most one year. Being a judge's assistant could be an important addition to their training. So there continued to be a good deal of communal living - especially at mealtimes! There was, after all only one kitchen on the premises!

There was also, when I arrived, only one wash basin, its enamel much chipped, for all to take turns with morning and evening.

I think it was this wash basin that spurred me into action quicker than anything else! And fortunately I had already learnt who I could turn to in an emergency. Finn's former secretary, Jenne, had met me in Oslo when I first arrived there, and had helped me to get a few necessities, such as duvets - that were otherwise almost impossible to find - a carpet, and the electric sewing machine I have mentioned earlier. Now I wrote to ask if she could possibly find at least a couple of hand basins (unchipped) and a large kettle for heating water.

Was there ever any problem Jenne couldn't solve? Over the many years, until she so sadly died two years ago, I never knew of one. Only her own health problems, resulting from her work for the Resistance during the war, that had necessitated lying in hiding in the forests round Oslo day and night in all weathers, took toll in the end. Just writing her name here, I can still hear her rather deep laughter - and see her open arms and welcoming smile, as I saw them for the first time on my arrival in Oslo in 1947. She had shared many dangerous situations with Finn during the first months of the war, when they used his office as a distribution centre for illegal newspapers. Now she was a tremendous support to me, even at long distance!

Needless to say, the washbasins, aluminium, and a huge aluminium kettle, arrived as quickly as was possible in those times - and other necessities, as and when I discovered what was most needed.

One thing I must say here. Finn was not to be blamed for not having things in better order before I came from London. He had more than enough to do, with his own work.

And before you (possibly) begin to feel too sorry for us, let me remind you again that neither of us came direct to Tana from a normal, civilised existence - but from wartime London: from nights of bombing and blackout, from food rationing, and from the constant anxiety for family and friends. In fact, life hadn't been all that easy under wartime conditions for some years!

Finn had also lived in tents (in Finland) and in barracks (in Scotland), so could feel quite at home in the abandoned German barrack that he was billeted in before I arrived in Langnes, and that was said to be haunted not only by mice, but also by the ghost of a former judge's wife! (Though what she might have had to do there was never explained.) As for me, I had spent many nights in cellars and had worn a steel helmet and chased incendiary bombs, so he could expect that I would be able to cope.

Of course the tremendous amount of work that lay ahead could have tried anyone's courage, but Finn was never afraid of work, and his wonderful sense of humour was also a great asset! It was an

important office that had to be reconstructed, as it were, from the bottom up. Not only had most of the documents relating to property ownership as well as to criminal and civil cases gone up in flames, but life - criminal as well as civil - had understandably continued in the district since the Germans left, more or less uncontrolled. New cases could arrive daily, requiring attention or even trial, while the office staff - severely undermanned - was trying to recover as much as possible of the information that was lost. There were periods when extra office staff was so badly needed that I got called in to help! When their homes were burnt down, people had also lost all their papers. A few of the oldest (and heaviest) registers had been kept in a cellar and so had survived the war. From these I could make new copies of missing documents. Some of the registers were so old that the handwriting in them was what in Norway is called "gothic" style, and this was at times difficult to decipher. Also the language was much closer to Danish than the modern Norwegian, so it is doubtful if this work did my Norwegian much good. But it was at least a challenge - and made me feel useful!

I have told you before that my "usefulness" for Finn's office increased as my Norwegian improved and I could be clerk of the court. This, on one occasion, even led to my sharing a car with a murderer. In those days, murder and other criminal cases, were tried first in the district courts in Finnmark - so also in Tana.

To begin at the beginning: I had broken an ankle attempting to ski, alone, down the hill above our home. From our kitchen window I had so often seen members of the office staff come down it at full speed and swing round in a dramatic stop outside the office door. I felt that I must achieve the same at least once before leaving Tana. And it was our last winter there.

Finn was away on some case round the coast, but I had heard on the radio that morning that he had been appointed to a district in the south (Solør), and I decided that it must be now or never!

It wasn't a straight run, as there were a number of bushes to avoid, quite a large tree at the bottom and behind the tree an opening in the fence that also had to be negotiated. At my seventh try, I got as far as the tree, but, courage failing at sight of the fence, I tried to brake, and went head over heels. I heard a crack! - and did the rest of the run on my backside.

This explains why I was in hospital in Vadsø with a newly plastered leg, when a case was to be tried half way between Vadsø and Langnes. All were agreed that a leg in plaster was no hindrance to my being clerk of the court also on this occasion. On the contrary, it would be most practical, as I could drive with the Counsel for the Prosecution (the Deputy Police Chief) from Vadsø, and then drive home with the Judge (Finn) after the case was over. (State-paid official transport the whole way meant quite a noticeable saving on an otherwise rather narrow private budget.) So I was duly fetched at the hospital by the police car (a quite ordinary four-seater, with no blue light), driven by Counsel and with a police officer in civilian clothes, who I recognized from earlier cases, on the back seat, together with a third man who wasn't introduced.

On the outskirts of the town, Counsel stopped the car outside a watchmakers' and went in to fetch a wristwatch he had had repaired. While he was gone, the police officer suddenly remembered that he needed to buy cigarettes. So also he disappeared - in the nearest tobacconists. I tried to pass the time of day - to be polite - with the remaining passenger, but got no response. The police officer came back quite soon, and after him came Counsel, and we drove off.

The third man and I hadn't been alone in the car for very many minutes, but that this was more than long enough I felt later, when I sat in court and heard that my companion was being tried for attempted murder! He had, it was said, jumped out from behind a pile of logs and attacked a man with a knife - a "finnekniv", of the kind nearly all Sami, or for that matter most men in Finnmark, wore in their belts. I couldn't but think how easy it would have been for him to knock me over the head (he was sitting behind me and was not handcuffed or bound in any way). And from where we had stopped it would not have been difficult for him to hide, and later reach the Finnish border. But he stayed with us - and ended in prison.

On another, earlier, occasion I had also had occasion to feel that "luck was better than understanding" - as they say in Norway. Distances being so great, and transport problematic, it was quite often necessary for the Court and the accused to travel together, so I was not particularly surprised when I found myself sitting with Finn beside the driver in a specially large police car, with a policeman and two newly condemned criminals on the back seat. We had been in Karasjok to deal with a rather ugly case of rape, in which four men were involved. Judgement having been pronounced, it was then necessary to get the condemned to Vadsø as quickly as possible, to be put safely in the county prison. Now the police had on this occasion been able to reach Karasjok by car, as the Tana river was frozen so solidly and evenly that it had been possible to clear a reasonably safe road, which meant that the journey between Skiipagurra and Karasjok could be done in a few hours instead of days. But the police only had two cars. This meant that Court and condemned had to share the available transport on the journey down river. The Chief of Police (always a lawyer in Norway - as I may have told you before) had been Counsel for the Prosecution, and he drove off first, with one police officer as driver and another in the back seat with two of the condemned. The second car was fortunately a large one - a six-seater, anyway - and Finn and I were able to squeeze into the front seat beside the driver. Behind us sat the remaining two condemned persons, and one police officer. We were so used to communal travelling - and, on this occasion, were so glad of the opportunity to get back to Langnes in just a few hours instead of three or four days - that we didn't question the arrangement. We only began to wonder how safe we were, when the car got stuck in a snowdrift and our police guard ordered the two prisoners to dig us out. This they did - with the large spades the police gave them. We couldn't but think that they might have used the spades as weapons and escaped into Finland. You will of course remember - or you can see on your maps - that the river for most of its way from Karasjok to Langnes forms the border between Norway and Finland.

Writing about these two experiences of close contact with criminals in Tana, it seems to me that they must have been quite peaceable types under normal conditions - not exactly thugs!

Just as most of the cases we dealt with - even including the theft of reindeer - concerned quite normal citizens!

A particular type of case that we had a great number of, naturally enough, concerned claims for war damages - for homes and outbuildings that were burnt, and for household goods that were lost or damaged. And here one could often suspect that the general attitude was that "there's no harm in trying"! Even certain of Finnmark's population who before evacuation had lived in quite small (but solid) houses built of turf, could send in claims for whole bedroom and drawingroom suites!

Odd Jobs

But of course the majority of claims were well justified, with the result that many of Tana's inhabitants had for a time at least more money in their pockets than usual, which was perhaps the reason why it was often difficult to find anyone to do odd jobs. Two examples of this spring immediately to mind.

The first concerns the district doctor - the one who later went to America. One day when patients arrived at his surgery at the nursing home, they found a notice on the door explaining that it would be some time before the doctor could come, as he was busy emptying his privy!

Another time it can perhaps be said that I was a victim, though the job I got let in for (or let myself in for?) was far pleasanter. Finn was away round the coast somewhere, and there were no more logs for the open fireplace. That is, there were logs, but they had been unloaded, for some reason, about a quarter of an hour's walk away, down the road towards Vadsø. The problem was how to get them nearer home! What was needed, I felt, was a horse and cart, and preferably someone to drive it, and to load (and unload) the logs. None of the office staff feeling qualified, I need hardly tell you who that someone turned out to be!

Before the war there had been a small agricultural school in Tana, a mile or so further down the road from the spot where our logs had landed, and although no new school buildings had yet been built, an agriculturist had been appointed to get things going - and he had a horse! To begin with he was a bit doubtful about lending me the horse, but I managed to convince him that I could both harness and drive one. The horse was in any case elderly, and solid, and no problem. I was less certain about the only available cart, that was not much more than a shallow box mounted on two huge, iron-shod wheels. However, I had no choice but to be grateful for the loan, and promising to bring back the whole *equipage* in the condition in which I borrowed it, I started off up the road. There being nothing in the cart to sit on, I tried sitting on the left-hand shaft, but soon found this too bone-shaking, so walked beside the horse. Fortunately we had the road to ourselves, as the noise we made on the hard gravel with our iron-shod wheels was indescribable, and we would hardly have heard a car toot - unless it was right on top of us.

Anyway, I reached our pile of logs and got them loaded on the cart, and we rumbled off on the journey home. Rumbled, I think, is the right word. We made such a noise that we were halfway home before I discovered that the tailboard had fallen off the cart, and that we had left a trail of logs for some distance behind us. I had made the mistake of walking in front of the cart. After re-loading I walked behind, and kept the tailboard in place!

The first house that we passed when we neared home was the nursing home, and here both patients and nurses came to the windows to see what all the noise was about, and they seemed to enjoy the rather unusual form of entertainment! Later I heard that they had been greatly impressed by my initiative. Not only was I one of the "authorities", I was also from the South - a *southerner* - and *English!*

On many occasions I could have a suspicion that it was enough that we were "southerners" to make the locals interested to see how we would cope with life in their district: that this could be at least part of the explanation for our finding it difficult to get help for odd jobs. It could quite often feel as though we were "on trial". As though someone was wondering: "Will he (or she) be able to cope?" On the whole, however, I feel, still, that this curiosity was mostly good-humoured! And it certainly gave us a chance to find out what we could cope with!

A face-lift

It is hardly necessary to say that the "reconstruction" of Finnmark after the war did not mean that everything - including homes and furnishings - was restored exactly as before! What was aimed at was, in effect, a complete face-lift! The houses that were put up - though they would not have won any competition for their architecture - were in almost every case larger and more solid than those that were burnt - barns and other outhouses, too. Electricity came. Only the coastal town, Hammerfest - "the civilised world's northernmost town" according to my encyclopedia - had had electricity before the war, and had even been the first town in Norway to have electric lighting in the streets! But it was not until after the war that a power station was built that brought electricity further along the coast and then slowly inland. And new roads came where they had never been before - including one along the Norwegian bank of the Tana River, reaching from Skiipagurra to Karasjok, so further to Kautokeino, meeting also the road that follows the Alta River to Alta.

I have, in later years, travelled along these roads - by bus and also by car. I can only say that the experience, in both cases, was nostalgic! Of course it was! But how much further one could travel - and how much more one could get done - in the time that it took us just to get from one state hostelry to another in the old days!

Laundry!

Something I most definitely have **not** been nostalgic about in the years after Tana, is the way we coped with the laundry. Putting garments and sheets and the like into the electric washing machine today, I often wonder how we managed before - and not least when, in Tana, we didn't even have water laid in - or anywhere to let it out!

In Tana, my washing tub was the sawn-off half of a paraffin tank - that had fortunately been used for quite a while before it came to me, so at least it didn't smell of paraffin. It was quite a good size - but not all that easy to lug around, and must have taken up nearly the whole of the kitchen floor. I don't remember now how I coped - "freudian forgetfulness" presumably. But one particular washing "expedition" I do remember very clearly. I had decided that I must wash - of all things - two blankets! This probably came of reading a book on what a housewife ought to do (and how she ought to do it), that *Aftenposten's* editor in chief, of all people, had sent me! Here I learnt that blankets could be washed in cold water with a few spoonfuls of ammonia. If this was the case, at least it would not be necessary to carry pails of water up from the river and heat them on the kitchen stove - doing this several times if the blankets were to be properly rinsed. I could instead take the blankets nearer the water source. So I trundled the washing tub noisily down the drive, over the road, and down the river bank - filled it with a few buckets full straight from the river - put in the blankets and the ammonia - then stepped barefoot into the tub and began to tramp! This, our office secretary had assured me, would be much easier than using a washboard, and probably more effective.

It was certainly much more fun. The sun was shining, the river was blue and the birches green. I tramped and sang - I forget what, but almost certainly some refrain from one of the good musical comedies that we used to sing at home. And I felt myself suddenly as one with the peasants in more southern countries who have so often been the subject matter for artists - only they, of course, are usually tramping on grapes.

Rinsing was no great problem, either, when I could just tip the water out on the bank.

Quite so triumphant, however, I was not, when it came to getting the wet and heavy blankets back up the bank and to the house without collecting a good deal of sand, etc. on the way. I seem to remember that we had to give them a really good beating after they were dry.

Talking of drying, brings back to mind another memorable occasion - memorable perhaps especially because it got me nearly a half-page illustration to an article in *Aftenposten*, but also got me into disfavour with the Ministry of Justice, who read the article!

It must have been either too wet or too cold to hang the washing out of doors, and I had decided that it could be hung in the office, if I put up a couple of clotheslines. After office hours, of course. There would still be some heat in the office stoves, to help it dry quickly, so that I could get it down before the staff came in the morning. Unfortunately I just happened to mention this in an article for *Aftenposten*, where, as I have told you earlier, I had been asked to describe some of an English-born housewife's problems in Tana - unfortunately, because one of the newspaper's more imaginative artists was inspired to illustrate the article with a really dramatic drawing, showing the Tana Court in full session, with judge and police chief, lawyers and accused and witnesses, all seated round a long table, with sheets and shirts and what have you hanging wetly round their heads and shoulders.

When a representative of the Ministry visited us on some official business shortly afterwards, he told me, quite seriously, that I should be more careful about what I wrote in the newspaper. The Ministry - to quote Queen Victoria - were "not amused" by this story, and had been even more shocked at my using the word "privy", in the same article. (The Norwegian word for a privy is "do", which perhaps doesn't sound so refined?)

(I wonder how many of you remember that wonderful little book, "The Specialist", by Charles Sale, with illustrations by William Kermode? It came out in twenty-four "impressions" between

1930 and 1944, and was all about privies - the specialist concerned being a privy-builder - and 'author' of the book. It would have been quite a useful handbook in Tana in those days!)

What caused the Ministry to become so - "offended" I think must be the right word - was that not only had our particular privy been mentioned in my article in *Aftenposten*, but it had thereafter featured in a debate in the Norwegian parliament, and subsequently been drawn by Norway's most popular cartoonist. And of course it was all my fault!

This is how it came about.

Our privy had been out in hard weather. It had, in fact, blown into the potato patch during a gale. Finn had then commented that instead of becoming renowned for his brilliant judgements, he feared he might only be remembered as being the first district judge to die while on the privy, if it should get blown out over the Tana river with him inside. This I quoted in my article.

Shortly after the article appeared, there was a debate in parliament about what sums the state was - or should be - granting to official buildings, including judges' residences. One member was of the opinion that far too much money had been spent on our particular official buildings, bringing them up to a very high standard, he said, and this in spite of the fact that the Tana office, he had heard, might soon be moved to Vadsø. To this a leading politician from the Conservative Party replied that standards at the Tana Residence were not all that high, adding that, on the contrary, the local judge, "a former parachutist", had recently expressed anxiety that he might meet with his death while on a visit to the privy.

This, of course, was God's own gift to a cartoonist, and I have the drawing still. It shows Finn (presumably) hanging in his braces under a privy that is sailing out over (presumably) the Tana river, and was printed in a very popular daily paper, *Dagbladet*, with a quote from the Conservative member explaining the situation.

Finn - being Finn - took all this with great good humour. The Ministry, as we have heard, did not!

Schoolteacher

Does it sound as though a judge's wife - or at any rate *this* judge's wife, at this particular time - had quite enough to do to keep her busy? Looking back, I certainly get that impression myself.

But almost immediately after I arrived at Langnes in May 1947, I was told that I was also being relied on to start a secondary school!

There had been no secondary school in or near Langnes before the war. Now it seemed that Finn, together with the local doctor and the parson, had decided that it was time one was started. Also, they had decided that this would be something interesting for me to do - just in case I might otherwise get bored!

To say that I was qualified for the job would be an exaggeration. I have, it is true, taken several university exams - including an M.A. in Shakespeare studies - in more recent years, but this I could only do after Finn reached retiring age, which was nearly thirty years after my first day as school mistress! On the day that I first entered a senior school class, my only qualification was an Oxford School Certificate - though I must add, in fairness to myself, one good enough to give matriculation exemption!

Fortunately the parson did all the necessary paper work and negotiated with the Department of Education in Oslo, and by the time we could open the school, in the autumn, a student had turned up who could teach all subjects except Religion - and English.

So I entered a classroom as teacher for the first time in my life, in September 1947, to teach English at a salary of 3 kroner (then about 3 shillings) an hour. This may not sound very much (and it wasn't!) - but then Finn, as District Judge, was only earning 9,000 kroner a year at the time! This could work out at approximately *one* krone an hour, taking into consideration the amount of work

he had to get through, and all the necessary travelling, most of which had to be done outside normal office hours, so that he could hardly be said to have any time off. (Today, Norway's judges are saying that kr.350,000 a year is not enough to tempt lawyers to leave their much more lucrative private practises.)

Times have certainly changed, in quite a number of ways!

The classroom I entered in 1947 would quite definitely not be approved by any school authority today. It was a fairly large room, behind the general stores and the post office - both at that time still in the same primitive, unpainted wooden building we called a "tyskerbrakke", or German barrack. In one corner of the school's only room there was a tall iron stove, and if the pupil responsible remembered to throw in a log or two occasionally, it became warm enough for those who sat nearest. The teacher's desk was, however, nearest the door, and between door and window where the draft was most noticeable, so she\he could share discomfort with those pupils who were farthest from the stove.

The school started with one class of fourteen pupils aged from fourteen to twentyone, the twenty-one-year-old being our shopkeeper's son. About half of the others were sami, while some can have been partly Finnish, some of them speaking a Norwegian that was not much better than mine. As I was to concentrate on teaching English, any weakness in my Norwegian language didn't matter all that much - except on one occasion, that I remember very well.

I was, to begin with, quite unused to the degree of informality usual in a Norwegian school, and behaved as I would have done in my own old school. I expected the pupils to stand up when I came in, to answer politely "Good morning" to my own morning greeting, and only to sit down when told to. They found all this quite amusing, but were willing to humour me, I felt. Imagine then their delight when I, quite unconsciously, used a powerful swearword in my morning greeting, saying, in effect, "Good morning all of you! It's hellishly cold today!" (The crucial word in Norwegian is "jævlig" - the "æ" sounding like a long-drawn-out "a" as in cat, so that the word sounds much worse than "hellishly"!)

I, of course, didn't realise that I had said anything particularly unsuitable. It was just a word I had heard used by a number of Norwegians, on many occasions, to describe a situation, and it seemed to fit this occasion. But my suspicions were aroused soon enough, as the pupils were soon calling everything "jævlig", and quite obviously enjoying their freedom to do so.

When I came home and asked Finn what it was I had said, he was quite horrified!

Well, the school survived and the teacher was not any less popular, naturally enough. In fact we got on surprisingly well all things considered. English language lessons had not been compulsory in all Norwegian schools before the war, so we were not the only pioneers in this respect. But choosing a curriculum for a class where ages varied so greatly as in ours, did naturally pose some problems at first. The books we had received were, of course, written for new-beginners a good deal younger than our youngest pupils. They were of the "Fred where are you? Here is an apple" style, and not likely to awake any tremendous interest for their subject matter. But I had some books that Finn had used to improve his English while in London, and found that they could be used to make the lessons more interesting. We have to remember that there was no cinema in Tana - while Television was still a dream (if that) - so the school had no outside help to wake the pupils' interest for the language!

In one respect, teaching English also improved my Norwegian! Grammar, I soon found, was something my pupils had either not been taught or had conveniently forgotten. So one of the first things I had to do was to get a Norwegian grammar and study that. It was at that time the rule, for example, to use Norwegian words and not the Latin-based more international "perfectum" and "imperfectum" and the like, so there was plenty for me to learn too.

When we reached a second school year, in 1948, and there were two classes, the school was moved to a larger building further down the road, and a qualified head teacher joined the student.

After that an unqualified teacher could only be called in the case of emergencies - but when these occurred (quite often in fact), I found myself teaching not only English but also, on at least one occasion, Norwegian - in addition to drawing and (always my worst subject at school) Geography!

This is something that I was to experience also in later years, after we moved to the south, to Solør. In fact I have had a feeling sometimes that local school authorities have thought that "if she can teach English, she can teach anything". Which has, indeed, often made life quite interesting, and even, at one period in Solør, led to my learning (while teaching) the recorder!

But now a last look at my very first class, in Tana.

I try to see their faces. The 21-year-old, the shopkeeper's son, I have met since. He is now a very good photographer, working in the south, but still with a summer home up north. He has, naturally enough, taken some wonderful photographs in Tana! The only other face I remember - and will never forget - is that of one of the Sami pupils who sat in the first row of desks and who had the widest and happiest smile I have ever seen: a smile that could bring light into the gloomiest room on the darkest of days. Laughing brown eyes he had too, was keen to learn and worked hard. I heard later that he got a scholarship to study at a university in southern England, but that he died while quite young, after returning to Norway. So this is at the same time both a good and a sad memory.

However, not to end on a sad note, I must say that most of my memories from Tana, of people and of events - "happenings" they might be called today! - are happy ones. Or would it perhaps be more true to say that I was - and am - in some cases most happy at having survived them?! This would at least be true of some of the experiences I will be telling you about in my next chapter, when I go off on a wolf hunt.

Of course, what helped all of us in and around Finn's office to survive, was the feeling we had that we were all members of a "team", working together. Finn never had the "I alone know" or "I alone give the orders" attitude. He always worked *with* his staff, and he did have an incredible capacity for work that could even be catching! Also, the sense of humour that I have already mentioned, could be a great help at times! We were a good deal together with the staff also outside office hours. I especially remember some evenings in the staff prefab., when the chief clerk played his guitar and we would all sing. One song we often sang is what I would call a typical "homesickness" song, and used to remind me of Englishmen singing "Danny Boy", with a lump in their throats, even if they have never even *been* in Ireland, let alone been born there! The song we sang is one in which a Norwegian is longing for his home *in the North!*. We were so far north, that the place longed for was, for us, farther *south*. However, this song expressed something that I suppose we all needed to express in some way or other, as is also the case, many times I'm sure, with *Danny Boy*.

— Four —

Cry Wolf !

The call to arms!

In March 1949 large notices were posted up outside police headquarters in Karasjok and Kautokeino, the two main administration centres on Finnmark's *vidda*, announcing an officially organised wolf-hunt.

The reindeer-Sami had had their weapons confiscated during the war, and as a result the number of wolves had increased considerably while the reindeer herds had become correspondingly smaller. Now the Department for Agriculture had decided to do something about this, with the assistance of the Army and the Air Force.

The notices proclaimed that the hunt would be on from the 10th to the 20th March, during which time the huntsmen would have the support of military caterpillar trucks and Storch scouting planes from the Air Force. Those wishing to take part could register at police headquarters, and if chosen would receive kr. 15.- (about 15 shillings) a day minus any reward that might become due to them if they shot a wolf or a glutton! They must be self-supplied with "a weapon, ammunition and all necessary food and equipment (such as skis)."

This was the prelude to the great "war on wolves" - *ulvekrigen* - as the Sami called it, not without a touch of irony that became steadily more noticeable as time went on, for reasons that will soon become clear.

That the wolf hunt had from the start a distinctly military look about it wasn't so very surprising, since both Army and Air Force were taking part. The Storch planes came from the Air Force base at Bardufoss, and the caterpillar trucks were American "weasels", newly acquired by the Norwegian Army's South Varanger Battalion, with its headquarters in Kirkenes. The weasels would, of course, have military crews, who would have a welcome opportunity to test the new vehicles under quite hard conditions - which of course explained why the Army was being so co-operative.

But one had to be a bit careful! In Finnmark we were never very far from a very big neighbour who tended to be suspicious of anything resembling a military manoeuvre: Russia!

With this in mind, it was the local Chiefs of Police in Karasjok and Kautokeino who were to organise the hunt, while the huntsmen were to be local volunteers. (Even so, we heard later that some question had been raised through diplomatic circles after one of the illustrated weeklies printed a picture of a "British-born reporter" - guess who! - interviewing the two police chiefs! But by that time the hunt was over, so there were no serious diplomatic complications.)

The aim of the hunt was declared to be total extermination of the wolves on Finnmark's *vidda*! Who would dare propose anything of the sort today? But we can relax. When the hunt was called off on the 25th March, only eight wolves had been killed and two injured. And it was my job to explain to *Aftenposten*'s readers why the hunt had not been more successful.

"Few wolves but useful experience" was the heading the desk editor gave a longer article I sent from Karasjok after the hunt was called off. It was kind of him, I felt, not to make the headline "Many words about few wolves". I had sent several reports from the "front", but in none of them had I been able to write exciting accounts of contact with the enemy. There were several reasons

for this.

Front line reporter!

But first you may wonder what on earth I was doing there, on the wolf hunt? It doesn't seem quite a natural occupation for a judge's wife, under normal conditions. Of course, conditions were never quite normal in those days in Finnmark, but even so I must confess that I sometimes felt (and still do!) that on this occasion I was tempting fate rather more dangerously than was necessary!

This is how it came about.

When the great wolf hunt was announced in the press and on the radio, Aftenposten 'phoned me to ask if I knew of any journalist in Finnmark who at short notice could represent them on the hunt. I could only answer that I didn't know any journalists in Finnmark, as we only met lawyers and such like when we were outside our own district. And in Tana I knew of no unless...? And here, suddenly, I heard myself asking if they would consider sending *me* on the assignment! From their alacrity in answering in the positive I got the impression that this was, in fact, a solution they had already considered. I, on the other hand, was quite appalled at my own audaciousness, and hurried off to tell Finn what I had let myself in for, hoping (partly, anyway!) that he would forbid my doing anything so crazy. I was, after all, not a professional journalist - having only had one feature article published to date. After rather less than two years in Norway, my Norwegian couldn't be said to be perfect. And - what would turn out to be most dangerous - I was far from being a good skier!

But was Finn appalled at the idea?

Far from it! Apart from anything else, his attitude was always that if one has taken on a job one just sees it through! And of course the fact that he didn't seem in the least worried as to whether I was capable of seeing this particular job through improved my own selfconfidence. Later - when he turned up in Karasjok just before the Great Hunt began and was asked how he could allow his wife to go off across the *vidda* with twenty wolf-hunters, his answer was simply: "Rather with twenty than with one!"

Have I told you earlier that Finn's title - Judge - in the Sami language was *Sondi*, meaning "Power", while I was *Sondieamik*, or "Wife of Power"? The question the sami asked was therefore how "Power" dared allow "Wife of Power" to go off in this way. This all sounds like something from a story of cowboys and Indians, doesn't it? But the sami have a great sense of humour - and they loved Finn's answer, and never tired of quoting it!

In any case, it was with Sondi's full support and encouragement that I left Langnes, not, as we were accustomed to, in a dignified manner, with horses and sleds and the prospect of a three to four day journey up the river with Per Pavelsen in the driver's seat, but in a tearing hurry, sitting beside the driver of a somewhat dilapidated lorry, hired by Aftenposten, and hoping to cover the 250 kilometres to Karasjok before evening, if the ice on the river held.

The War against Wolves was declared and the Great Hunt was being organised with full publicity! Press and Broadcasting had got the message! For the first time in Norwegian history military caterpillar trucks and planes were to cooperate with civilian hunters in a War on Wolves. Aftenposten must be there!

Aftenposten's correspondent had an exhausting journey to start with. The "road" that had been cleared on the frozen Tana River resembled a washboard. Alternating thaw and frost through several months of winter had made the river most picturesque - a joy to look at, but a particularly uncomfortable roadway, especially when some degree of speed was essential. However I arrived in Karasjok late in the evening of the 9th March, "breathless and keen for the fray", as I wrote in my first report, and in time to start off on the hunt on the 10th.

Ten days later - on the day it was programmed to end - the hunt could at last begin.

It can't be denied that the whole "project" (one would call it today) began to seem slightly comical. "A lot of shouting - but few wolves" as the local Sami said.

The plans for the hunt seemed good enough. One plane was to be stationed in Karasjok and one in Kautokeino. Two weasels in each district were to stand by at strategic points out on the *vidda* somewhere near the reindeer herds - which, it was taken for granted, was where the wolves would be found. At the same strategic points groups of hunters would be stationed in readiness. The airforce planes would then find the wolf packs and bring information to the huntsmen. These would then immediately, helped by the weasels, station themselves at points where the scout planes could drive the wolf packs towards them. They would then make a ring round the wolves, move in and - wipe them out!

The greatest weakness with this plan was that it relied on three important factors that all turned out to be most unreliable: good weather for flying, good tracking possibilities (snow conditions) and mobility of the weasels.

To take the last factor first: it was the weasels that most noticeably came to play the role of clown in our comedy.

The name "weasel" had obviously been given these tractors in the belief that they would prove as flexible and as swift in cross-country manoeuvres as their living namesakes. Now they would have an opportunity to prove this true.

Of the four weasels promised to the hunt, the first two arrived in Karasjok on their way to Kautokeino several days after the hunt should have begun. That they came late, surprised us less and less as we got to know them. A little later still, the two intended to support Karasjok's huntsmen came trundling up the Tana river. We grew more optimistic, until a message came that one of the first tractors had stranded about half way to Kautokeino, and the first of Karasjok's tractors to arrive had to return to a workshop 140 kilometres down river to fetch a new tractor-belt for the one that was disabled. These tractor-belts were too large and too heavy to be carried around as reserves - a fact that we were to appreciate also at a later stage of the proceedings.

As for the support from the air: the pilots needed not only good weather, but also the possibility of finding tracks in the snow that would lead them to the wolf packs. But it had been blowing hard for some weeks across Finnmark's highgrounds, and all tracks were erased. The airmen's only hope was to find the wolves where they were hunting, and that they presumed would be where there were reindeer.

But here another condition for a successful hunt turned out to be nonexistent. Early in March wolves are no longer interested in hunting as a pack: they hunt alone, looking for a mate. This the Sami knew, of course, and for every day that passed before the combined operation was clear to start, their confidence in a successful result became less - and their ironical comments more numerous.

But at last, on Monday, 20th March 1949, all four weasels could set off from their starting points, while the weather improved sufficiently to allow the air support to take off.

Our contingent set off from Karasjok, under the eyes of a sceptical public: two weasels with their military crews, twenty huntsmen dressed and equipped like the partisans we have so often seen on TV, and three press representatives. I had been joined by a journalist and a photographer from one of the more serious illustrated weeklies, who had arrived on March 14th in the belief that the hunt would then be at its height. Instead, they were in it from the start. Which was a good thing for me, as they were most kind and helpful to this amateur in their profession.

One of our weasels dragged a large sled loaded with fuel supplies and baggage, with two huntsmen towed on ropes behind the sled. (This reminded me quite a bit of the system when we were travelling by reindeer sled, when the chains of baggage sleds always had a reindeer or two fastened last in the chain, so that they could act as a form of brake when driving downhill!)

The second of our weasels towed the rest of our huntsmen and the two male journalists, in two long rows. Aftenposten's representative was privileged to sit beside the driver of this weasel on the first stage of the journey to Bæivasgiedde. You may remember the name Bæivasgiedde from my earlier account of one of the Court's winter journeys by reindeer, when it took us two long days to get there from Karasjok. By weasel, the journey would have taken only a few hours, if one of our two had not gone through the ice on the Karasjokka river, after which a sami scout had to walk in front on more problematic stretches of the river to show where it was safest to drive.

However, we were in Bæivasgiedde by the evening - both weasels and all the huntsmen and journalists. We were received by the hostess, Marit Ravnastue, who had received me on earlier occasions as Sondiaemik, and a member of the Court, and was quite shocked by my unceremonious arrival, without Sondi himself, but instead with a rough crowd of huntsmen, military - and journalists! She did what she could to persuade me to return to Karasjok in her horse-sled later in the week, when she would be driving herself there.

However, it was not I but one of the weasels that got left behind when we continued our journey the next morning. It was, of course, a tractor belt that had suffered damage on the river ice. Now, after the one day's journey, we had our transport facilities drastically halved.

Some of our baggage had to be left behind, and there was only room inside the remaining weasel for the driver, the rest of the military support contingent (who hadn't brought skis with them) and a Sami guide. Most of the Sami huntsmen went off on their skis together with my journalist friends, and well before evening they reached the small, isolated hostelry that was to be our headquarters while the hunt lasted. There were now only six of us on skis on the ropes behind the weasel.

That six was one too many I soon began to suspect.

Our weasel now left the river, climbing the bank and continuing over vast areas of frozen marshes and small lakes, over open stretches where the thin layers of snow blew in all directions and were quite inadequate to cover ice and stones to give a good skiing surface while more than adequate to keep up a stinging attack on our faces. This was my first - and was thankfully to be my last - experience of this form of travel. I had been given the rear place on one of the ropes.

Perhaps I had better explain what this involved, as I am fairly sure it is an experience that few, if any of you have had? Some of you may possibly have at some time been towed on water skis behind a motorboat, but that would at least have been on a much softer surface!

I was fortunately fairly suitably dressed for this part of the journey in the padded lining from an airman's uniform, bought at an Army Surplus Store before leaving London "just in case". With a leather belt round the waist it was both warm and windproof, and fairly easy to move around in, while I wore my (far too fine for the occasion) reindeerskin cap and ditto mittens. The reindeerskin mittens would not have been good for ordinary skiing, being far too stiff for manipulating the poles, but all I had to do with my poles on this occasion was to thread them into a loop in one of the ropes hanging behind the weasel and then fold my arms round them to be pulled along. So my hands, at least, were warm - but not my feet!

I soon began to envy the Sami on the ropes in front of me and beside me. They wore their reindeerskin skaller, lined with the sennegress I have told you about earlier, and they had a single strap on each ski that they simply pushed the toes of their skaller through, whereafter they were in full control. Control was something I definitely did not have. I was wearing the hand-down boots that a friend in Oslo had given me, and that were intended for mountain walks rather than for skiing. As for my skis - also hand-down - they were old and well used, and totally lacked any edges that might have helped me to brake. As it was, when our weasel came to a halt unexpectedly, on a patch of particularly hard ice, there was no way I could stop. Fortunately, I fell before I collided with the man in front of me. What was less fortunate was that in falling I got one of my skis caught up in a coil in the rope. No one had thought of telling me how important it was to keep the rope off the ground - but this I learned the hard way as the weasel started off again, without warning, and

before I had got back on my feet, so that I was dragged along for quite some meters before my companions on the ropes managed to contact the driver. After I was picked up, I was given a safer place on the rope, nearest the weasel, with two strong Sami hunters behind me, who could hold me up if necessary!

We managed to reach our destination, Hestanjargge, without further halts. But here our weasel got stuck in loose snow at the top of a small hill behind the one small wooden house in which we - huntsmen, military and journalists - were to be stationed. We were therefore released from the ropes, and left to find our own ways down to our quarters. In my report in *Aftenposten* I can still read that "we sailed down on our skis to Samuel Per Bittis smallholding by the Bautajokka river". "Sailed" is hardly an honest description of the way I climbed sideways down the slope in safe stages, and partly in a sitting position - though still with my skis on - a most inelegant performance. Tired as I was, I felt as though beaten black and blue, in mind as well as body, and I was in any case quite fed up with weasels and ski and wolf-hunt.

But once down the hill we were joined by the other huntsmen and journalists, and we all received a warm welcome from Per Bittis wife.

Perhaps you think she was expecting us?



13 – On the way to the wolf-hunt, with modern transport – and the author on the end of the nearest rope.

Far from it! But these small, isolated, semi-official hostelries that were to be found dotted about the *vidda*, must always be prepared to house occasional travellers. That we on this occasion were an unusually large party - and planning to stay rather longer than the usual one night - didn't seem to alarm our hostess. So we just moved in. The Sami huntsmen and military rolled out their sleeping bags on the kitchen floor and hung their weapons on the walls. Of the Sami, each man had brought his own food and his own coffee kettle. I forget how the military had organised things. I must also have brought my own supply of food, but of what it consisted I have no recollection, except for one item: a small packet of processed cheese, which was to follow me through the whole expedition.

I was given the attic for my quarters for the duration of the hunt - and shared it with my journalist friends when they needed a little peace and quiet to get their work done.

We were to have plenty of time to write - but little to write about!



14 – *Waiting for the wolves. Three Sami from Kautokeino and one (in the "star cap") from Karasjok.*

Bird of passage?

"Poor little bird of passage!"

The words - uttered with tremendous feeling - made me look up in some surprise from the floor, where I was struggling with my skiing boots. We - that is, the senior of my two journalist colleagues and myself - were back in Baeivasgiedde. We had made the journey from Hestanjargga the day before on skis in the hope of getting at least some material off to our respective employers. We had remembered that Marit Ravnastuen would be driving her sled to Karasjok one day that week, and this we had found would be a more reliable way of establishing contact than either weasel or plane. Our last weasel now had a damaged fan belt, and was stuck at the top of the hill where it had unloaded us. As for the plane that was supposed to keep us informed about the wolves' movements, and to keep us in contact with other hunters - *and* with the hunt's organisers - we had neither seen nor heard anything of it in the few days we had already spent at Hestanjargga: not so surprising, perhaps, as it had been blowing full storm since we arrived there. Some of "our" hunters had left headquarters the day after we arrived, to station themselves nearer the reindeer flocks - that is, where the Sami owners lived in their tents. Here they felt they would have more chance of seeing a wolf or two, and of getting at shooting range without the aid of any weasel.

We - the Press - had salved our consciences by writing reports that we hoped at least would convince our editors that we were at our post, and that it was not *our* fault that daily reports of exciting skirmishes and dead wolves were not reaching their pages. But what then? We found ourselves sitting with our handwritten masterpieces 90 kilometres from the nearest telephone and with no other means of communication open to us, except what might be achieved by the use of our own legs - and skis! So, without any noticeable enthusiasm, I again took on those unmanageable, long and narrow planks - and set out to tempt fate once more! This time, however, there was someone on my side, and at my side! My journalist colleague turned out to be a good skier and a patient teacher. Our path followed the small tributary rivers Bautasjokka and Karasjokka quite evenly and gradually downwards, and when I had learnt to synchronise movements of arms and legs - to find the right *rhythm* - the whole business of skiing began to seem more natural. The 14 kilometres down to Baeivasgieddi were completed without accident, though not, I would say, at record speed.

We were made welcome by Marit Ravnastue, but once again I had the impression that she was somewhat sceptical as to my behaviour. This time I was, it is true, not accompanied by twenty wolf-hunters, but by one man - who was not Sondi. For the night I was at any rate safely quartered in the attic, where I shared a room with Marit's two daughters, while my travelling companion camped on the kitchen floor.

And it was on the kitchen floor that I sat next morning, pulling on my skiing boots in preparation for our journey back to Hestanjargga, when Marit stood over me and sighed so deeply! When I looked up, and she saw that she had my attention, she lifted her hands in a most expressive gesture, then let them fall across her expansive waist, while she shook her head sorrowfully and repeated the words: "*Stakkars lille trekkfugl*" ("Poor little bird of passage!") After which she tried once again to persuade me to accompany her to Karasjok that same day.

But I was stubborn. I had to return to Hestanjargga to find out if anything had happened there - if there was any wolf hunt going on that I could write about. So we left Bæivasgiedde in opposite directions.

But those few words have stayed in my memory all these years. Why? Could I recognize myself in Marit's description? "Poor" I certainly was, as regards any experience that could help me to survive on Finnmark's *vidda*, at least according to Sami criteria. But otherwise the description was perhaps rather too poetic - especially when I remember the airman's costume I was still wearing. I certainly didn't look - or feel - particularly birdlike! And yet, that was a rather special moment - a moment of deeper contact between the Sami housewife and the younger Englishwoman. I can feel - even after all these years - that Marit understood more than I would admit to myself of the uncertainty that I felt then - the anxiety. The mountain Sami are themselves "birds of passage" - moving with their herds across the *vidda* in winter, and to the coastal districts in summer - continually striking camp. They must always have known, better than most, the anxiety inherent in the vast distances, the uncertainties of weather - and wolves! Marit was not, when I knew her, a nomadic Sami, but her life had always been closely associated with the nomads, and her home was in the centre of their country. Perhaps she knew instinctively that I was far from feeling so selfconfident as I hoped to convince others - and myself - and, not least, Aftenposten's readers - that I was?!

When we arrived back at Hestanjargga our scout plane had at last been there with a message - but not about wolf packs. It was a message from the military that the last weasel (that in any case was of no use to us) must return to battalion headquarters in Kirkenes. The grant of three thousand kroner that had been allocated to support for the wolf hunt had been used up.

So there we were - journalists and those of the Sami who hadn't gone off to the reindeer camps - without transport facilities - other than our own legs and skis - and only a most unreliable airborne contact with the outside world. That "our" plane so seldom sought to contact us was not only due to weather conditions, we were to learn later. The way the famous hunt had developed, it was not so surprising that the young airmen fell for the temptation to do some hunting themselves, on the few occasions when they actually did see some lone wolf. They had little hope of being able to contact the huntsmen in time, and in any case they only had enough petrol to last for four hours on the wing. So the pilots became hunters, diving down as low as they dared, and shooting from the cockpit. Four wolves were shot in this way in the Kautokeino area, and one in ours, while pilots were responsible for injuring two more. Three wolves were shot by Sami huntsmen in the Kautokeino area.

On the 25th March the planes were ordered to return to Bardufoss. Before leaving, they did just manage to inform the hunt headquarters out on the *vidda* that the hunt was over. Those huntsmen who were still at Hestanjargga and my two press colleagues could set off on their skis to cover the 90 kilometres to Karasjok. Those hunters from our group who had left headquarters to be nearer the reindeer, would hear sooner or later that the hunt was over. This was no problem for them.

But what about me? How was I to get back to Karasjok?

The journey back

Now luck was on my side!

On the very day that the hunt was declared to be over, a *raid* of Sami from Kautokeino arrived at Hestanjarga on their way to Karasjok. (You remember, of course, that a *raid* - pronounced "ride" - is a chain of reindeer-drawn sleds, and from now on I will write the word without the italics.) The big question was if these travellers could be persuaded to take me with them. A long discussion in the Sami language, in which our hosts and several other guests at the hostelry took part, was greek to me, but I got the distinct impression that the newcomers were not particularly enthusiastic about the idea, in spite of the fact that I heard the one word I could understand - *sondiaemik* (Wife of Power) - repeated quite often.

As I anxiously studied the newcomers, I began to understand their lack of enthusiasm. There were ten of them - all members of the Sara family, as I learned later. All were wearing what were obviously their very finest costumes, both reindeerskin and cloth tunics, as was understandable, when they were making their annual descent on the rival "town". Even pesks of the quite rare white reindeer skin were worn by several members of the family, including a young couple who had with them their baby daughter in a "komse" - a kind of portable cradle. As they had swung up in front of the hostelry we had seen that the reindeer the family were driving were carefully selected animals, and both reindeer and sleds were decorated with strips of coloured felt. Their leader, quite evidently the head of the family, was a strongly built and most authoritative matriarch, Ellen Mikkelsen Sara, who would, I felt, not stand much nonsense! She looked me over, as I stood there in my airman's costume, and obviously found little that encouraged her to let me join her family. It must after all have seemed fairly obvious that I would spoil the effect of their arrival in Karasjok!



15 – The young family from Kautokeino with their baby in a "komse" – a Sami "baby-bag" lined with the same straw as our "skaller".

What arguments were used on my behalf I never knew. But the Sara family did at last agree to take me with them.

I have told you earlier how particular Per Pavelsen was when he chose our travelling costumes, and now I could be proud to put on my pesk. I had fortunately managed to get this with me to Hestanjarga, and it did, I felt, hide a good deal of my more questionable attire when I joined the Sara family outside the hostelry as they prepared to continue their journey. But I was still not impressive enough it seemed to be allowed to drive my own reindeer! Instead, I was put on a baggage sled, like any sack of provisions or merchandise, and my sled was fastened (for safety's sake presumably) directly behind that of the leader, Ellen Mikkelsen Sara herself.

Was it because there was a woman in control, that this *raid* got off to an orderly start - with all the sleds and *pulks* and their drivers in one long line on the river ice before the signal was given? This was, in any case, a very different start to that I have described earlier!

There was not much left of the short winter day when we set off, and I was glad that the first

stage of our journey would be a fairly short one, ending at Bæivasgiedde. A baggage sled is not built to carry a passenger, and the only support I had for my back was a large sack of potatoes. (At least, that is what it felt like.) There were no side supports either, so I had to be very careful not to lose my balance. Fortunately it was a fairly even ride down the river, where I had gone on skis not so many days earlier.

When we arrived at Bæivasgiedde, Marit Ravnastuen had come back from Karasjok and was there to greet us. She now received me with open arms! At last I was arriving in suitable company! Company that she could accept! And she set out to make sure that this company would accept me!

I had left most of my "respectable" travelling costume at Bæivasgiedde when the first of our weasels capitulated, and now, after another night in the attic, in the company of her two daughters, Marit herself supervised my dressing for the new day's journey. Now it was particularly important that I should be correctly dressed. Not only must I do honour to the Karasjok costume (Marit herself was from the Karasjok area), but I would be wearing it in the company of Kautokeino Sami! Just to take one small example: it was most important that the tassels at the end of the ankle-bands joining the skaller to the reindeerskin leggings should come precisely over the outside ankle!

One item of clothing that Marit could not make better than it was, was my shawl. This she had been very critical of on the very first occasion on which we met - when I came in company with Sondi and the rest of the Court. While we were at Baivassgiedde on that occasion a service was held in the small wooden church there - a very rare occasion, in fact. Of course we were all to be present at the service, and I dressed carefully for the event. But Marit was not pleased with my appearance. The fringes on my shawl were too short! Now shawls were not to be bought anywhere at that time, just after the war, and they were quite often items to be fought over by family members when an estate was wound up! So I had solved my problem by getting a silk shawl - with fringe - sent over from England!

Marit took one look at it on that earlier occasion, went to her room and came back with a lovely shawl, with a fringe many inches longer! Sondi's wife could not be seen in church with anything less correct! Sadly enough it was only a loan! So now we had to make do with my own shawl!

However, Marit was at last satisfied, and allowed me to go down the stairs (more like a cross between a staircase and a ladder) that led directly into the kitchen.

The next few moments I am always happy to remember!

Because I made quite an entry!

As I appeared at the top of the stairs the whole Sara family looked up from their places on the floor, where they were busy filling their skaller with fresh senne grass. There was a moment's silence - and then what sounded like a great sigh of relief! They would, after all, not be disgraced by my appearance when they entered Karasjok!

For the final two days of the journey, I was allowed to drive my own reindeer. I still had to make do with a baggage sled - though one with slightly less baggage in it! - but I was only glad that I was not given a *pulk* to carry me! You do remember that a "pulk" is a small, boat-like sled, on a single keel, that must be drawn at quite a speed and be on an even keel before the driver can throw him- or her-self into it? This needs training. In fact it is an art one should be born to. It was always fascinating to see how elegantly the mountain Sami could manoeuvre these small sleds - and how fast they could travel with them also in very uneven terrain.

But I was more than contented with my baggage sled, knowing that it would carry me safely to Karasjok.



16 – The author – now acceptably dressed for the return journey to Karasjok together with the Sami family from Kautokeino. (Photo: Sv. A. Børretzen)

When we left Bæivasgiedde the sun was shining, and as we proceeded at an even pace down the river I felt my selfconfidence and optimism growing! Far away now were all wolves and weasels, not to mention airborne contact that didn't contact, and all the uncertainties of the last week or so. It was a great relief to know that our present form of transport would get us safely to Karasjok, just as reindeer had for generations drawn the ancestors of the family I was travelling with. The air we breathed was clean and fresh. There was no sound, apart from the soft padding of the animals and the slight swish of the sleigh runners. The quietness was like a blessing.

And there and then, suddenly, I just had to sing!

That must have been the first and only time in its life that my reindeer heard the best-known arias from Madame Butterfly and Samson and Delila, and ballads and songs from the world of operetta, all remembered from my childhood in a singing family with an opera-singing grandmother. I have seldom felt so *free*!

But that my voice had carried further than to my reindeer's ears I realised some time later. When we stopped for a short rest on the river after an hour or so, and our leader was talking to two of her brothers, she pointed in my direction and I heard the word "joik".

That is a new word for most of you. You can pronounce it "yoik", and I had better explain that it is a very special form of Sami song - more like a chant really. I don't think it is ever written down, but is created on the spot to fit a special person or a special occasion. Many Sami have their own joik, and they perhaps didn't find it unnatural for me to be singing my own - English - joik!

So we travelled peacefully on, hour after hour. When we met other travellers on the river - which was very seldom - we stopped for a chat and to exchange information about ice-conditions and such like. Meanwhile, all the problems and frustrations of the past week or so faded further and further into the past. Only one last "test" still awaited me. My reindeer stopped suddenly, although the leader had not called a halt, and I saw that some part of the very primitive harness had loosened. I thought it was something I could cope with, but before I could get out of my sled, our leader's two brothers drove quickly up on either side of me in their *pulks*, obviously intending to help. Their sister had however also seen what had happened, and had stopped the whole raid. Now she waved her brothers back! I didn't understand what she shouted to them, but could only believe that she wanted to see if I could cope with the situation on my own, and it was with some trepidity I left my place on the sled and went up to my animal's head, where the bridle was falling apart. Fortunately the repair was easily made, though I wasn't given much time to do it in, and had to throw myself rather quickly back on to my sled as the *raid* started off again at full speed!

When we stopped that evening and had found our places on the kitchen floor of yet another hostelry, I felt that my travelling companions - and not least, their leader - were beginning to accept my presence among them. Not that I had much conversation with any of them! They could most certainly both speak and understand Norwegian, but I never heard anything but Sami spoken during the whole journey. I would have been particularly interested to have had some conversation with the young mother, but got only smiles and nods in answer to my questions. However I did see how easily they solved the problem of nappies, as these were quite simply non-existent! Instead, the cradle-like *komse* had a thick layer of the indispensable senne-grass as "mattress". This was absorbent - and easy to replace! As for the child's food, that seemed to consist mainly of condensed milk - the unsweetened kind - served straight from the tin! (I seem to remember that it was Libby's).

One clear sign that I could now feel accepted came at the evening meal. While I sat (on the floor still!) and scraped the last crumbs out of the package of processed cheese that had been my faithful follower since I left Karasjok, one of the Sara brothers took his *finnekniv* - a heavy sheath knife - and cut a good slice of dried reindeer meat from his own travelling provisions and gave it to me. I don't think anything has ever tasted better! After surviving on stale bread and sardines - and processed cheese - for at least a week, it was pure heaven! And this time Big Sister didn't protest!

Of course I should have provisioned better! But as I had not known how long I was to be out on the *vidda* - or how and where I would have to travel - and as food, in any case, was still rationed - perhaps the most surprising thing is that I didn't starve! But I did get to learn just how long one can make one large loaf of bread last! It was never possible to buy food at the smaller state-owned but Sami-run hostelrys that were to be found at strategic points along the most trafficated routes. Sami travellers often had with them a chunk of meat that they just threw into a large communal pot that could stand simmering on the kitchen stove. And they brought their own coffee kettle, that they put on the stove. So all the hosts had to do was to keep the fire burning!

While we were still at Hestanjargga, my journalist friends had begun to long for a good hot dinner, with meat! Their provisioning hadn't been much better than mine, so we made enquiries as to the possibility of getting hold of some reindeer meat. After all, we were in the heart of the reindeer district! We were told that we must find our way to the nearest reindeer herd, and ask one of the herdsman to sell us a joint! So we set off on our skis, the three of us. One of my companions had a rifle over his shoulder, so we were prepared it seemed for all emergencies. We found the reindeer - but no herdsman. We looked around for a time, but soon had to give up the search. To ski in an area where reindeer have been making great holes in the snow - one could call them craters - to find the moss that is their natural food, is not a comfortable experience - and not very safe for amateur skiers. Even experienced skiers like my companions did not feel tempted to continue the search, and we returned to Hestanjargga, to be told, on our meatless return, that we should have fired off a shot - into the air, of course! This would have brought at least one herdsman very quickly to the spot, expecting to find a poacher! Well, there were quite a number of things that I had to learn the hard way, as I think I have mentioned before - probably more than once! And of course some experiences were more useful than others. I can't, for example, say that I have ever since needed to go seeking my dinner in a reindeer herd.

Though I may have been slightly hungry that last night on the way to Karasjok, I feel sure that I slept well, in the bed that had been allotted to me - yes - in the attic! I got quite used to climbing up and down those steep "staircases" from kitchen to loft - and in all cases was grateful not to have to sleep on the kitchen floor!

Next morning there was a distinct air of expectancy over our preparations for the day's journey. In a few hours we would be arriving in Karasjok! It certainly seemed that I was not alone in looking forward to this event.

And now I was to experience something that made me especially happy. I was -yet again - sitting on the floor, preparing to pull on my reindeer skin boots - my skaller - when Ellen Mikkelsen Sara, who I had until then thought rather formidable, took them from me, without a word but with a smile and a shake of the head, and herself filled them, more expertly than I could ever manage, with a fresh lining of the indispensable dried senne-grass. I have told you before how important this was if we were not to have frozen toes at the end of a day's journey, but the art of arranging this lining to our boots was not quickly learnt, so there could be degrees of comfort! On this great day, however, I was to experience yet again how wonderfully comfortable - and warm - this footgear could be, when prepared by an expert!

And a memorable day it really was to be!

When we reached the outskirts of Karasjok our leader, to my surprise, stopped, so that the whole raid stood still. But it was only a short pause. As soon as she saw that all were in place Ellen Mikkelsen Sara made a sign and gave a great shout as she set off at top speed! And we followed after! With shouts and the barking of dogs, with the coloured streamers on the sleds and harness flying, with arms waving furiously to get even more speed from our reindeer, we swept into Karasjok, with a noise to awaken the dead - or at least all Karasjok's own dogs! It was an experience I shall never forget!

I was driving in what had become my usual place, second in the raid, so I was right behind our leader when she came to a sudden halt outside the local police headquarters. This, I thought, was

where she considered it safest to deliver me.

And she was right! For who came storming out of the door together with the police chief? None other than Sondi himself - Finn - newly arrived from Langnes, and planning together with the police, to send out an expeditionary force to find me!

And, later that day, I at last saw a wolf!

It lay in the snow outside the post office, and was a sad sight: shot by one of the pilots and brought in to Karasjok in triumph a few days earlier. Seeing the big teeth and powerful jaws, I had to confess - as I admitted to Aftenposten's readers at the end of my last report - that it was perhaps just as well I had not met, personally, the great wolf packs - or even one lone living wolf.

* * * * *

When I visited Karasjok alone in the summer of 1987, the year Finn died, I hoped to visit Bævasgiedde again, and perhaps still find Marit Ravnastua there. But I was told that it would be easier in winter. There was still no road in that direction, so it would have taken me several days there and back, by river boat and Shanks' pony! In winter there would be no problem in getting there - by snowscooter, of course!

Back in Oslo I saw, some years later, a television programme from Bævasgiedde, showing the arrival of a Sami wedding party at the church there. It was winter, and all were dressed in their finest reindeerskin tunics - many of them white - with their colourful headgear and the women's silk shawls (with very long fringes!) making splashes of colour against the snow. They came in a long *raid* up the river and into the forest clearing by the church - on their snowscooters.

And I realised, even more strongly than before, how lucky I am to have my memories of reindeer travelling - and a quieter Finnmark!

— Five —

By Land and Sea

Now we will be off on our travels again!

The journeys that I want to share with you now may not seem so exotic as the winter journeys - not to mention the wolf hunt! - that I have described earlier, but they are typical examples of what problems could be met by the Court - and so by a judge and his wife - during our years up there at the top of the map. And they can, I think, help to fill in the background for our work - and other people's lives as well as ours - in that very special part of Norway in those very special years of "rebuilding" after the devastations of the war's last year.

On the first journey we will again be travelling across the *vidda*, but this time in summer - and most of the way on foot!

After that, we will be travelling round the coast, and I will tell you of one especially memorable visit to one of the larger fishing villages, where we happened to be on official business when it became the centre for quite a dramatic rescue operation, and when it received a most welcome sign of the changing times!

Keeping track of time

It was autumn - the autumn that comes so much earlier up there, where spring comes so much later. And it must have been in 1951 or 52.

Autumns were short seasons in Finnmark - but incredibly beautiful when there had been sun enough to bring colour to the dwarf or creeping birches that could then cover wide expanses of the *vidda* like great carpets of flame. And it was across just such a thousand-and-one-nights magic carpet we seemed to be walking one autumn day, on our way to get statements, needed - urgently, of course - for use in another court further south. The witnesses we were to examine were two mountain Sami, living in tents far out on the *vidda* where their reindeer herd wandered and grazed all summer. We were on our way to meet them about half way, at Ravnastua - one of the semi-official hostels that I have told you about earlier, and that so often saved us from having to camp out of doors on our official journeys, or, in my case, when on the wolf hunt.

Before starting on our walk we had already travelled quite a number of miles by taxi and bus, via Lakselv (you can find it on the map, by the coast). It had taken us eleven hours to reach Karasjok, but this was quicker than travelling by boat up the Tana river, that would have taken us three or four days. After a night in Karasjok, the next stage of our journey had been by police boat, with outboard motor, up the Karasjokka river. This took one hour, the boat being manoeuvred expertly by the Chief of the Karasjok police himself - hereafter to be called "sheriff", in spite of the lack of six-shooters and Stetson! The sheriff was now walking with us towards Ravnastua. We were happy to have him with us as guide, and he was glad of an opportunity to inspect the official hostelry and to get the latest news from these more distant areas of his large district.

We kept an even pace along a well-worn path that wound steadily upward, through occasional clusters of silver birch trees that became less tall and more thinly spread as we neared our goal. A four-hour walk was no great challenge in those days, even for me, and Finn and I, at any rate, felt we were making very good time - until another walker passed us. This was an elderly Sami

woman, quite short and broad and rather bow-legged. She was warmly dressed in her Karasjok tunic and cap and had the hairless reindeerskin summer boots - known as *kumager* - on her feet. These booties have no hard sole, and are filled, like the skaller, with sennegrass. She didn't seem to hurry in the least, but as we stood aside she passed by with the barest nod for greeting, and was soon well ahead of us.

Finn and I decided that we would certainly catch up with her, as, walking at that speed, she would soon have to rest - perhaps under the next group of trees! But our good friend the sheriff laughed at us! He knew his people better, and could tell us that the Sami would walk for many hours on end, at the same even pace and, with their slightly rocking movement from hip to hip, seemingly without effort. Once they get into their stride, he explained, it is important not to stop unnecessarily. This would be the reason for her passing us by without stopping for a chat, and not lack of politeness. He assured us that we would not see the same woman again - unless she was staying at Ravnastua, in which case she would be there long before us! We never saw her again!

We, for once, were in no hurry. Though days were already considerably shorter than in the summer, we had time to boil our coffee kettle by a small lake, and eat our sandwiches, and still reach Ravnastua before dark.

The two witnesses who were to be examined, and whose tents lay rather more than a six hour's walk from Ravnastua, had been summoned to meet in court at ten o'clock next morning. A few minutes before ten we could see two figures in the distance, a black dog at their heels, approaching us with that same slightly rolling gait that I have already described. As they got nearer we could see that they were dressed in the traditional mountain costume, with colourful tunica, thigh-length leather leggings and *kumager*. They had lassos over their shoulders and dangerous-looking sheath knives in their belts. In fact they looked like a couple of brigands - though the star-caps they both wore showed that they were from Karasjok!

I had my little folding Kodak camera with me, and hurried out, hoping to get a good picture of their arrival. Great was my disappointment when they just marched straight by me, not stopping before they reached the hostelry steps, where judge and police were waiting. I noticed that our sheriff had a stop-watch in his hand, and later he explained why. He had had similar experiences before. These witnesses were summoned to meet at 10 o'clock, and they arrived *on the stroke of ten!* What made this particularly imposing, the sheriff said, was that neither of the witnesses wore a watch and there were no clocks in their tents! But they made it a point of honour to arrive precisely on the hour, so had no time to stop and be photographed!

I think it is only fair to tell you this story of two Sami witnesses who really made an effort to meet in Court, since I have told you earlier of a reindeer owner who left the Court very much in the lurch! On this occasion we were able to conclude our business reasonably quickly, so that we could start the same day on our journey back to Karasjok, on foot and by river boat, arriving there in late evening.

The river boats used on the Tana and its larger tributaries cannot have been as uncomfortable as one might think, narrow as they were - and shallow, to avoid getting stuck on the many sandbanks, especially in the main river. I have at least no specially painful memories from our summer journeys up and down the Tana river from Skiippagurra to Karasjok and back!

Needless to say, on these summer journeys we were as completely dependent on the local boatmen as we were on the reindeer owners who were our guides over the *vidda* in winter. With a district the size of half Denmark, and communications as they were in those days, we had every reason to be grateful to all those faithful helpers! Finn would certainly not have been able to execute his high office without them!

* * * * *

Round the coast

If I remember rightly, we have, so far, - travelled by bus and taxi, by tractor, by horse and sled, by reindeer, by river boat and on foot. That we have never travelled by train is easy to explain: there was - and still is - no railway in Finnmark.

All this travelling has been inland. But if you look at your maps again, you will see that Finnmark has a long and quite complicated coastline. It is a coastline that we got to know well, as much of it was also a part of Finn's district - including the North Cape, though we never held any court session there! Lebesby, Kjøllefjord, Mehamn, Gamvik and Berlevåg are names you will find on your maps, and in all these fishing villages there were cases to be settled and documents to be restored. For here, too, the Germans had burnt and levelled to the ground - homes and churches, offices and factories, everything connected with the fishing industries. Where there before had been larger or smaller fishing villages, each with their own identity, with a variety of houses, offices and factories, we now came to identical centres, where rows of tarred wooden buildings, hastily raised, mostly prefab and crowded together, did duty as housing for all forms of activity. So soon after the war there had only been time to give the population here what was most necessary: a roof over their heads, and somewhere to land their fish!

There was only one way to get to these villages - by boat! - and what this could imply you can easily imagine when you look at the rather forbidding coastline, and remember that, though there have been many big changes for the better in communications since the war, no one has yet found a way to change the weather! The transport we used could be one of the larger coastal steamers that link the whole of Norway together - the *Hurtigrute*, or "express coastal service" (that could take a week from Kirkenes to Trondheim!) - or it could be a smaller, local steamer, the "Tanahorn". In both cases we would go on board in Vadsø.

The *Hurtigrute* could never go into the small harbours we had to visit, and even the "Tanahorn" would often have to cast anchor some way outside. I often thought that this was at least one of the Ministry's reasons for choosing Finn - a former parachute jumper, as you will remember - for this particular office. To get from the coastal steamer to the quay, one must either jump down into the flat-bottomed boat or barge that came out to fetch passengers and post and, occasionally, livestock - or be lifted over in a kind of canvas sail. The latter was the system most used for disembarking cattle and old ladies! Fifty years ago I couldn't be said to come into the last category, though I may sometimes have wished that I could join the cattle! I remember at least one occasion when I made the jump at the wrong moment and was well on the way to continue out and over the far side of the barge. Strong arms - the bargeman's - caught me at the last moment. Finn could thank his own strong arms, quick reaction, light weight and parachute jumper's training, that on one occasion at least saved him from having his legs crushed. He had started to climb the rope ladder to return on board the local steamer, when a wave threw the barge that had brought us out from the quay suddenly, and with great force, against the side of the ship.

Our journeys round the coast were often quite demanding also in other respects. There were so many cases that had mounted up, and especially when the whole Court was collected, with counsel for the State and for the defence, we found it practical to deal with new cases at a new port each day, using nights on the local or larger steamer for writing judgements and perhaps even getting a little sleep! Travelling was expensive - for the State - so we made the most of the time we had! I can distinctly remember making the discovery that my fingers could continue to write on the typewriter after I had fallen asleep, at least until the bell rang that started a new line! *What* they wrote was, of course, not of much use!

Sometimes Finn was called to serve on a higher court when it had meetings, for example in Kirkenes. His older brother, Alf, had been chief surgeon and director of the hospital there for many years before the war, and had had to evacuate hospital and patients into the local mines to escape

the bombing. He had moved to a hospital in the south after the war, but had still many friends in Kirkenes (where he was, in fact, looked on as quite a hero!) and we always enjoyed our visits there.

There could also be cases of a disciplinary nature connected with military service that Finn had to judge, and that took him outside his own district. It always amused me that as military Judge Finn wore a colonel's uniform (with pistol), as Defender at court martials in England he had worn a major's uniform, while the uniform he was most proud of was his battledress with a corporal's stripes, earned in the Linge Company - the Norwegian commandos! This corporal's battledress he continued to wear while judging cases of reindeer theft on the *vidda*. It was both warm and practical under his skin tunic on our journeys by sled, and the parachute on the shoulder that showed when he was in Court, was greatly respected - probably more so than the more formal, black judge's cloak would have been if we had found it practical to take it with us!

But now, back to the coast and –

A complicated rescue job

In May, 1949, we were, in the course of duty, in Mehamn - one of the larger of the fishing villages I have been talking about - when its inhabitants experienced a couple of particularly dramatic days. I was able to describe what happened for *Aftenposten*, who gave me a four-column spread, illustrated by a young artist who has since become quite famous for his many drawings in *Aftenposten*, particularly those from theatre first nights, and has this year received the Order of St. Olav from the king!

I have that article from Mehamn still, so will not have to depend only on my memory for what happened over fifty years ago!

But first I should perhaps explain how it was that we became so involved. Although we lived such miles away, we only had to disembark on the quayside at any of these coastal villages to be immediately absorbed into the local community, and in a very short time we would hear all the local news, and be able to - in fact, be expected to - share in whatever was currently of greatest interest in the district! This would, of course, be a part of Finn's district as judge, but it was by no means only legal questions - problematic or otherwise - that it was taken for granted would interest us! We were made to feel that we "belonged" - a good feeling!

On the occasion that I want to tell you about here, tension was caused by a case that quite definitely needed a doctor rather than a judge!

The district's medical officer and practitioner had his home and office in Mehamn, but was temporarily acting as stand-in for the senior surgeon and administrator of Finnmark's biggest hospital, in Kirkenes. This, as you can see on your maps, was quite a long way away. Holding the fort in Mehamn was the doctor's wife, who was a trained nurse and often assisted her husband on his visits to patients round the coast.

This was the situation when news reached Mehamn that a 60 year old fisherman, in the furthest outskirts of the district, had somehow managed to damage both eyes while shooting seagulls! The situation was critical. One eye was definitely lost, and sight in the other threatened. But it took a long time before the doctor's office got the news and could begin to take action.

From the scene of the accident it took (some neighbour?) an hour to row over to the nearest telephone exchange. This was closed. It then took more time before the operator could be found, and when she tried to get in touch with an exchange that could put her in touch with Mehamn, this was also closed. It was two o'clock in the morning the next day before contact was at last established with the doctor's wife in Mehamn, who could then contact Finnmark's senior District Nurse, who, by a stroke of luck, was not far away from the scene of the accident, on a regular control of schoolchildren.

It was now imperative to get the patient to Mehamn as quickly as possible, and from there, it was hoped, by seaplane to Bodø - a good way further south on Norway's west coast - to the nearest eye specialist.

A fishing boat was sent to fetch the District Nurse and a stretcher, whereafter they picked up the patient and reached Mehamn with him in the afternoon, the day after the accident had occurred. Meanwhile there had been some hectic activity from Mehamn to get the promise of an air ambulance, a seaplane, from Tromsø. The aerodrome authorities had taken some persuading, as Finnmark's harbours were not popular landing places. Fortunately, however, weather reports were fairly good just in the critical period, and Mehamn could promise that there would not be too much swell. So the plane came, and the patient was flown off at midnight, while there was still some hope of saving one eye.

Needless to say, the whole of Mehamn - visitors included - were on the quay to see the patient off, and all certainly heaved sighs of relief as the plane lifted safely from the harbour.

This was the story I told Aftenposten's readers - but, in fact, only as a background for a much more cheerful news-story: about the arrival of a very special boat!

Ship a'hoy!

On the Sunday afternoon, the 22nd May, 1949, after all the excitement was over and the patient safely flown off to Bodø, I was walking along the quay alone. Finn was most probably preparing for next day in court.

It was a dark, depressing afternoon. Sleet, blown I felt all the way from the North Pole, rattled against the sheds and houses along the quay. Everything was either grey or a dirty brown, and cold, and wet, including the old and well-used fishing boats lined up along the quay. There was no colour to be seen anywhere, in the sky, on land or on sea. The whole world might have been enveloped in one large grey blanket that deadened all sound when, suddenly, I thought I heard the faint throbbing of an engine. The sound came nearer, and through the mist came, slowly, something white and shining - a boat! But what a vision of a boat!

It lay to at the end of the sad row of fishing vessels, making them look even sadder!

I hurried to see what kind of millionaire was visiting Mehamn! But when I saw the boat's name - *Doktor Skogsholm* - on the hull, I knew at once that this was no luxury yacht, but the long-awaited "doctor boat", that was to make such a difference to the lives of the district's doctor and nurse, and, not least, to their patients.

This boat - named after a much loved doctor, who was still head surgeon at Vadsø Hospital, where he had stayed at his post all through the war - was the last of three such boats built in the south for money collected by fellow citizens who wanted to show solidarity with those in the far north who had suffered so much. The boats had had a terrific send-off by public and press in southern Norway when they were clear to start on their respective journeys northward. They were fetched by the crews that would be sailing them in Finnmark, and the journey home along the coast, taking a week, was their test run. So quite a few days had gone by since they had been frontline news, which is why Mehamn district's own doctor boat could come gliding through the mist into the harbour with no reception committee on the quay!

But it was not long before the news had gone round: "Doctor Skogsholm is here!", and the quay was soon full of excited citizens. Needless to say, the doctor's wife was among the most interested. She would be travelling many times on this boat, assisting her husband who had taken a skipper's certificate. Finn and I were invited to go on board with her, and the resulting quite ecstatic description of the boat's perfection that I wrote for Aftenposten can make me smile today! It was the contrasts that made such a tremendous impression, the perfection of everything, and my reaction was - is, in fact - an admission of how strong we all felt daily the lack of such elementary

things as well-planned cupboard space, of cheerful colours and the feeling of everything around us being well planned, and finished, and meant to last! As I wrote then: we all lived in grey-brown prefabs, and saw the same prefabs wherever we went. Their often primitive interiors could become quite depressing while everything on the boat was so well planned, with every consideration for patients, doctor and nurse and crew.

But if this boat, in all its newness and perfection, was a sight for sore eyes for the population of Mehamn, it is not difficult to think what it would come to mean for the district's patients, and for the doctor and nurse who must spend so much of their time at sea! Arriving as it did so soon after two days of anxiety on one particular patient's behalf, it was received as a token of a better future.

It was not only round the coast that sick transport had been something to dread in Finnmark, even before the Germans came. To reach one of the hospitals along the coast, a patient from the *vidda* would have to be brought by river boat in summer, by reindeer or by horse and sled in winter, down to the nearest road or harbour - often a journey taking several days. The mere fact that a patient had now been fetched by plane from Mehamn, was a sign that times were changing. Soon helicopters would be fetching the injured and the sick from Finnmark's *vidda*.

This, of course, is something to remember when I begin to be nostalgic for the older and quieter forms of travel!

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Epilogue

Now we have covered most of that "far flung" territory where Finn and I lived for the first five years of our marriage, and I think you will agree that it would not after all be easy to compare it with the "far flung" territories of the (former) British Empire - or our lives there with the lives of British empire builders! (You remember, of course, how I answered Finn when he wondered whether I would be able to live there!) Post-war Finnmark was certainly a unique experience. But we neither of us ever regretted that we accepted the challenge, and if I have done my job properly I think you who have read this book will understand why!

The years we lived in Finnmark so soon after the war were both an end and a beginning: an end, for Tana, of much that had been tradition for centuries - but the beginning of a new era in which everyday life would be much easier for all who lived there.

For us, of course, these years were a beginning: Finn's first five years as a judge, and the first five years of a marriage that lasted for forty. From Finnmark we came to Solør - strangely enough to what is known as "Finnskogen", the forest district bordering on Sweden, where many Finns had made their homes in former times, when driven out of their own country by wars or by poverty. In Solør we stayed for twenty years, until Finn retired, and also in this district I could often help him as clerk of the court, acting also as his chauffeur. And again in Solør I was on many occasions asked to fill in gaps in the local teaching staff temporarily, and found myself teaching not only English but, for example, geography, drawing, singing, and even (one term) Norwegian! When music was, after some years, introduced as a subject in the primary schools, I even got cajoled into teaching the recorder - an instrument rather different from that I have otherwise played - the piano!

What I learnt, myself, from all this teaching was that if you can keep just one lesson ahead of your pupils you are *fairly* safe! Of course I had always hoped to have a family of my own, but as this was not to be, at least there were plenty of young people in my life, and in fact I enjoyed teaching - most of the time!

When Finn retired and we moved to Oslo, I immediately entered Oslo University in order to acquire the necessary credentials and a good conscience for having taught for so many years without them! Well, rather more than that. I had from my own earliest school days dreamt of studying at a university, so when this at last became possible I also studied for a year at Birmingham University, where I could take a Master of Arts degree in Shakespeare. This I did in

1957-8, getting my degree just before my 60th birthday. Perhaps this can be an encouragement to any of you who have for any reason been putting off studying!

I have been back in Tana twice. The last time was three years ago, in connection with the sale of my Norwegian book, and was mostly a business trip, with visits to bookshops, in Vadsø, Tana, Karasjok, Kautokeino and Alta. I hired a car in Vadsø, and had time to visit the Pavelsen family in Tana, and also one of my pupils from the school in Langnes who now has a summer cabin there. Travelling in Finnmark was now sheer luxury, with hotels and *en suite* accommodation at every stop! It all felt very different.

It was otherwise in 1987, the year Finn died, when I went back alone on what I suppose I must call a sentimental journey. There was no hotel in Tana then, but as it was holiday time I was allowed to hire a room at the agricultural school: a very fine school, built on the site where, so many years before, I had borrowed a horse and cart in order to fetch some logs and keep our home fire burning! The prefab we had lived in was still there at Langnes, but empty. It had been a home for problem boys in recent years, but this institution, like everything else, had been moved to Tanabru. What had been the garden where we had competed with the local livestock over the produce of our vegetable patch, had become just a wilderness. The road from Vadsø still came to a halt in front of Signe Rødli's general stores, that was now boarded up and looking very much the worse for wear, but the path that had continued behind the shop was now broader, so that it was just possible to drive a little further along the coast - to a caravan site.

After Langnes it was a relief to get to Karasjok - by bus on the new road following the Tana river. Karasjok had developed into a really thriving centre, with administration buildings, schools and shops - and petrol stations! But there was no dead wolf outside the post office and - as I have mentioned earlier - I was told to come back in winter if I wanted to visit Bævasgiedde, by snowscooter.

Somehow I don't think I will see Bævasgiedde again! Better on the whole to keep the good memories, of the court's travels and the wolf hunt and all the rest - memories that have become very much alive again as I have shared them now with you!

Bettine Palmstrøm

Afterthought, 2003

The biggest choice I have had to make in my life was shortly after the war ended, when I was offered an interesting job in the Norwegian office at FN headquarters in America. Finn had gone ahead to Finnmark, and had written to say that he now had four walls and a roof to offer me (see p. 8 - 9), and did I still think I could face the arctic climate with him? Well, you know the choice I made – a choice I have not regretted.

Now I am 84 years old and there will not, I imagine, be so many more important choices to make. Sensible friends have persuaded me to make a will, so now my much loved books and pictures know where they will find a new home, while the few lines (overleaf), written some ten or fifteen years ago, seemed fated to get thrown out with the rubbish. But I would like them to have some chance of life after me. They came "out of the blue". I had been reading a small, beautifully illustrated book about wild orchids before going to sleep, and woke next morning with the opening line in my head. And this line haunted me until I could provide it with company. The result: my one and only poem, if I may call it that.

Anyway, here it is. And perhaps one day it will have a special meaning for one of you. There are so many choices we have to make.

Goodbye! And

"Takk for følge" - as we say in Norway.

Thank-you for keeping me company!

CHOICE

Orchids could grow from my hands – wild orchids –
if I gave them time
and a little earth to grow in

and stillness.

Hands cupped to hold earth,
breath held to feel growth:
the opening seed,
roots thickening,
seeking the life-source in the dark-
pale shoots reaching for light,
green shoots opening, releasing colour,
and the miracle
of winged shapes dancing on spider-thin stems:
Cypripedium calceolus – Our Lady's Slipper
Orchis moria – the green-winged orchid.

Violets could grow from my hands –
Wild violets
or bitter aloes.
The choice is in the seed.
The choice is mine.

Bettine Palmstrøm, (nee Ridley).