

A few stories from my youth

With this I will try to recount a little from my youth in the community where I grew up. We have many experiences in a long life, and some of them ought perhaps to be remembered. I was born in 1936, and one of the first memories I can recall is when my maternal grandmother died in 1941. My mother had been at the funeral, and when she returned, I sat on the sawhorse outside the barn at Sjøgård. Grandmother was buried at Rødsandmoen, and my mother came ashore from the boat and walked past where I was sitting. It was always a little scary when someone died. I was only five years old when this took place and didn't fully understand the seriousness of what had happened. What probably was a little scary about this was that the dead person was talked about so much. In those days neighbors had more time to talk with each other when something like that happened. The thing we youngsters found a little exciting and spooky was when someone said they had seen or heard something. It was told that someone had observed a white shape outside a house and the same night someone in that house had died. Another recounting was that the sound of someone sawing wood had been heard, and at the same time someone in the community had died. This sawing sound was again heard when the casket was being made. In those days the casket was usually made by someone in the dead person's family.

I also have other memories from my early years. We youngsters had to make ourselves useful at an early age. We all had to learn to contribute in daily life by doing our chores, and in those days most of what was needed to get by, had to be made by people themselves.

At home we had two or three cows, goats and some sheep. After the war, we bought a horse the Germans had used. I cannot remember how old I was when I had to get up early in the morning to let the cows out to pasture, but I cannot have been more than six years old. We had the cows at pasture with the neighbor's cows so we had to make sure they were in the barn ready for milking in the evening. We took turns with the neighbor to do this.

It was always a lot of effort when it was our turn to fetch the cows. They could be at Hammeren or in Middagslia. Sometimes they were by Eiavatnet lake or all the way to Horndalsvatnet lake, and we had a long hike to go and fetch them home.

When we kids brought the cows in, there were usually two of us to do the job, and we had to start early in the afternoon because we usually didn't know where we would find them. It wasn't always pleasant. It was often cold, and it could be miserable and windy in the rain. We didn't have good shoes or boots, and it was especially difficult to get those things during the war, so we would often walk barefoot without shoes. Sometimes it was very cold, and I remember it was comfortable to stick our feet under the stream when the cow peed, that would warm our feet for a little while.

The roads were not paved in those days and it was a long way to walk barefoot on the gravel road the times we had to go to Eiavatnet or Horndalsvatnet lakes. We walked in the ruts on the road because that is where the surface was smooth.

We also had to help separate the cream from the milk. It was heavy work to turn the separator crank, but once it was going it was easy. The cream was used to make butter, and the butter was sold to bring in some money. The leftover milk was used to make cheese and gomme, and some was for drinking.

We also had to help with other work. It was all very strict and trying to get away was not tolerated. The first job in the spring was to plant the potatoes, then it was time for the haying, and that was hard work.

I do have many good memories from that time. During the haying, the parents always had to take an after dinner nap, and we children were allowed to swim in the sea. It didn't matter if it was rain or shine when we went for our swim. Sometimes we were in the water for so long we were blue when we came back on land and we were shivering, but we warmed up after a while. We were not used to being squeamish. We loved swimming in Skveirvika bay, but we were often on the rocks below our house.

A couple of weeks after the haying was done, we had to harvest the potatoes. By that time the school year had already started, so we had a couple of days off for potato holiday so we could help with the harvesting. Potatoes were used for animal feed in those days, so we had huge potato fields to hoe.

I also want to mention what we did with the boats and life on the sea in those days. Simply put, there was more fish in the ocean back then. My father's brother Erling had a processing plant for fish not too far from where we had our boathouse, and that was a great fishing spot. It was an exciting place because there were always a lot of fish in the ocean around that pier. Many fishingboats came to sell fish, and in the fall they also traded in herring and they had many people working there to prepare and salt the herring they bought. My mother worked there at times, too, and it must have been a nice little extra income.

When I was a little older, I went out in the herring boats. At times we used drift nets, where we put out several nets on the fjord, and then we stayed with the boat at the end of the chain of nets till daylight. Sometimes when we fished like that we used an open rowboat, and it could be very cold to stay in the boat overnight, but for the most part a motorboat with a cabin was used. We also fished for herring with a net that was closer to land and went all the way to the bottom. It was exciting to be a part of that, and sometimes we would bring in a very good catch. For me who was a youngster, it was good money. There were two seining boats on the fjord where I lived, and my father had a part in one of them. There was a lot of activity on the fjord when the seining took place, and at times there were boats from other places taking part.

I remember a seining team from farther out along the fjord who found a lot of herring at Mørsvika bay. On the seining team there was always one person responsible to oversee that everything was going as it should. He was the notbas (seining boss) and the rest of the crew were nothunder (seining hounds?) The seining boss on this particular team was an older man with many years experience in this kind of fishing. They were setting the seine around the herring shoal on Mørsvika bay. The seine came out (the back of the boat) **aft**, and one side of the seine is supposed to float on top of the sea and one side is supposed to go down to the bottom. The side that is supposed to stay on top is supposed to have floaters attached to it as it is let out on the water so that it stays on the ocean surface. What happened then was that the boy who fastened the floaters had put one on the side that was supposed to go to the bottom and the result was that **a part of** the seine was floating on top and the herring escaped back into the fjord. The seine boss sat quietly for a while when he saw what happened and then he says, "Boys, give me a board so I can beat you to death." Well, it wasn't so strange that he was angry a lot of money had escaped back into the ocean. One time I went out as seine crew on this boat I just

mentioned. We went to Brattfjord to try for a herring catch, but it was a miss, and we didn't catch any herring. The thing I remember most from this trip was after we were back home, then Marelius, that was the boss' name, came to our house and paid me five kroner even though we didn't catch any herring on that trip. I was very young at the time and five kroner was a lot of money.

Marelius was a very old and kind man, and I think he had many friends in Mørsvikbotn. He came from Stavnes and had family there. Herring fishing took place in the summer and the fall, and when that was over it was quiet until the beginning of January when most men went to Lofoten to fish for cod.

My first time in Lofoten was in 1952 when I was 15 years old. I was the youngest crewmember on Sverre Rosvoll's boat and we were six people in all. We also had a cook who was stationed ashore, and her additional duties were to do our laundry. For me, being so young, it was difficult at times. We had to get up early in the morning, and we could not go to bed until the fishery report was over on the radio at night and I seem to remember that was at 11pm. I was very sleepy sometimes, and when I finally got into bed I fell asleep right away. One time Arild Arntsen wanted to have a little fun with me. Arild was a practical joker. He decided to wake me and said I had to hurry up because the others were already out of bed. All seven of us slept in the same room. I was quick to get out of bed even though I had been asleep only 10-15 minutes. I went down to where we all used to hang out, and everybody was laughing. It took me some time before I realized what had happened, but I was relieved I could go back to bed.

We fished at Egga (the edge of the continental shelf, the edge of the deep in Vestfjorden) and we had to go out an hour from land to get to the nets. The incident I want to tell you about now happened when we were setting the nets. The wind came from the southwest, and we were setting the nets outside Ure. It could be scary out there with strong breaking waves – breakers, due to the strong current. We were setting the nets away from the southwester at a slow speed. My job when we did this was to make sure the net did not get stuck on something. I remember that one of the older men on board, Petter Sørensen, who stood behind the wheelhouse suddenly began to whistle at us who were on the front deck, and this was to get us to pay attention to what was about to happen. When I looked behind us I saw a wave coming at us, and it was much taller than the boat and had green tops. I lay down on the deck, and held on to the capstan. The boat rode the wave and picked up a violent speed. The wooden floats and the rocks attached to the nets banged against everything. It was an horrendous noise while it lasted.

I have been thinking about that episode many times. I think it was very dangerous, but Sverre who was in the wheelhouse managed to steer the boat straight away on the wave, and that is probably what saved us. The boat listed so much on its side that part of the wheelhouse was under water. The motor had ventilation valves mounted on the side of the crankcase in such a way that they were just threaded on bolts without anything to keep them in place. The bolts were mounted upwards so the valves could not possibly fall off, but when Reidar checked on them they were on the floor. This proves that the boat must have listed hard on its side.

I don't want to pretend to be an expert on these things, but I have often thought that this is what happens when a boat capsizes. I think we were extremely lucky that time. It was very close, but afterwards nobody wanted to talk about the incident. I mentioned earlier that I was only 15 years old on this Lofoten trip, but I turned 16 when we were there. I

remember the day. We were on our way from Stamsund to Reine, the weather was bad and I had to stand behind the wheelhouse for fresh air because I was so seasick I could not stay in the cabin. It occurred to me then that this was not a nice way to spend my 16th birthday, but that was just the way it was. That it was a birthday was not important, and there were never any celebrations on these trips.

I still remember other things that took place in my early years, even though they happened more than 60 years ago. One time it was Fritz and I who were part of what I am going to talk about. I think it was the winter of 1947, and Fritz' and my father were fishing in Lofoten. It so happened that it was a lot of cod in Mørsvikfjorden, and many of the men were in Lofoten to fish there. There were still some at home, and some were too old to go to Lofoten. A lot of nets were set out in the entire fjord and there was a lot of fish brought ashore. Fritz and I were off from school and we were used to being in a boat. We talked about the possibility that we could participate and go fishing. We planned carefully how to go about this. Fritz's father and my father had a lot of fishing nets in their boathouses. I can't remember if we asked our mothers, but in the end we agreed to take part in the abundant fishing. To put together a chain of nets so that the nets catch fish when they are on the bottom is not that easy for someone who is not knowledgeable, but we managed. We were kids, Fritz was ten years old and I was eleven, and I think the hardest part for us was to get the boats in and out of the boathouse. It was winter and the rocks and cliffs were covered in ice and snow, but we managed without problems. Now we had reached the point where the nets had to be set, but where? Most places were already taken and we could not go too far out. We knew the cod could go in towards Sildhopen, so we took a chance on that. We set the nets from Aksel's boathouse and straight towards the point of Stiodden.

The next morning we anxiously checked the nets, and we had reason to be excited. When we pulled on the nets we could see the silvery shine of fish flicker down through the sea. We caught a lot of cod without me being able today to tell you how many kilo and we got one cod that was so big we had a hard time getting it into the boat. I seem to remember it weighed in at 13 kilo when it was cleaned, so it must have been about 20 kilo when we pulled it in. We sold the fish to Erling and it was a nice bit of money for that catch. We had to go to school the next day so we only did it that one time.

When I look back on what we did, I think we were very able boys. We were very young, and we were not very big for our age. It is fun to think back on how everyday life was 60 years ago.

Another experience I want to mention took place in 1954. That winter I was in Lofoten with Jørgen Gabrielsen, and we had a fisherman's cabin in Stamsund. We went to Lofoten in the beginning of January, and it was over at the end of March. During that trip I decided to go directly to Finnmark without going home first. Spring had started and the snow had melted in Stamsund, and we would have winter again when we arrived in Finnmark. I made the decision on my own. I was signed on to a boat from Risøyhavn and was to travel north on Hurtigruta, the express coastal steamer. I remember it was late in the evening when Hurtigruta set off from Stamsund, It was "Salten", a ship that was a little small to be in this service. It was only used when the regular boats were in for an overhaul, and it was the end of the seasonal fishing in Lofoten so the ship was full of passengers. The ship was very crowded when I came on board and all seats were taken. A broad staircase led up from the lounge to the next deck, and I sat down on the top step.

A lot of people were sitting there, and that was no problem since no other options were available, and I fell asleep after a while. It was night and it was good to sleep but suddenly I am on the move, and when I wake up I am in the lap of two ladies sitting on the step below me. It was embarrassing, the ladies thought I was intoxicated and I don't remember if I apologized. I was not drunk, for sure, but it could probably seem like I was. At the age I was then I was very careful about drinking alcohol (18). What I remember was that I sneaked off to find another stairway to sit on. I stayed awake the entire time I was onboard.

I came ashore in Risøyhamn, and the boat I had signed on to go to Finnmark was there to pick me up. I am not going to mention much about the fishing itself that we took part in up there. I do remember we were facing snow and gale storm on our way eastward from Honningsvåg, and we had to seek safe harbor in Berlevåg. We had a competent and skilful skipper so we were not in danger. After Berlevåg we continued east and ended in Vardø. We fished the waters there for a while before we started the return trip for home. It was now the middle of May, and winter was almost over up here as well, but to leave when spring had arrived in Lofoten and then go to Finnmark was to experience winter all over again.

I haven't mentioned the name of the boat or that of the owner, so I will mention a funny incident from my time on board. The skipper brought along two sons, and one of them was our cook. The father and the two sons shared a cabin in the back of the boat, and the rest of us crew dogs lived in the front of the boat. One member of the crew was from the same community as the skipper and his sons. This must have been on a Sunday, because the cook had prepared rice soup that we were going to have after dinner. I remember the soup was good, but it had a special taste to it and I could not make out what it was. But the skipper's neighbor knew. The soup tasted of prunes, so he decided that the cook had given the prunes to his father, brother and himself, and that is how we could only taste the prunes.

The man made a commotion of that as it was taken from our communal provisions on board. Personally I thought it was laughable, and indeed it was, but it says something about how little money people had 55 years ago compared to the riches we have today. The cook should not have done this, but I have to forgive him because he was very young, and the father and the brother didn't know if the crew in the front of the boat had prunes in their soup or not.

The trip was now over and I had arrived in Bodø. I stopped in at Alfred and Kristine who lived in Kvalvika. Kristine was my mother's sister. I was well received and I was given food and they took care of me. As the evening went by I had to ask if I could spend the night. Kristine immediately said that I could, I could sleep in Sonja's room. She could make a bed for me on the floor, and Sonja had her own bed. That was fine with me, but I wasn't sure if Sonja had even been asked if it was OK with her. Later on that evening I went to bed, and I was alone because Sonja was out with friends. I was a little shy because this was a new situation for me. I had to try to sleep, but I couldn't. After a while Sonja came home, and I tried my hardest to look like I was sleeping. She didn't see that I sneaked a peek with half an eye. She was 17 and very pretty, and I was 18. I remember that I slept well on the floor that night, and it was a good memory from the end of that trip. People made things very easy and uncomplicated back then, and it was good to visit Kristine and Alfred.

I am now going back in time a few years.

I grew up when there was a war in Norway, but I was too young to understand the seriousness of this, and I still remember many episodes from that time, and maybe some of the things I remember have serious undertones. One episode was when a German officer came to our house and wanted my father to work for them. He wanted no part in that, and the German got furious and put his hand on the pistol in his belt. My father immediately understood what that meant, and he had no choice. I can't remember what kind of work he was supposed to do for the Germans, but he struck a deal with the man that he was to fish with nets, and then give them the fish. I am not certain how long that lasted, but I think it was for a short while in the winter of 1943.

The five years were difficult times, but we didn't starve. The difficulty presented itself in the availability of the goods we had been issued ration cards for. We were given quotas for sugar, margarine, coffee and other goods, but when it came to buy what we were allowed to buy it just wasn't enough available in the shops for everybody. We had bread, and sometimes we put liver on it in place of butter, maybe with a little sugar on top. It didn't taste good to us kids, but we had no choice. I am not sure if other households in the community did the same, but that is how it was at our house. The Germans probably didn't have much food either at the end of the war. I want to mention something I remember from that time, I think it was the fall of 1944 and a truck loaded with bread was on its way south. This car had backed up past the barn at Ytterskveiren and was parked there for the night. The evenings were dark and that was exciting for us boys. I remember we stole a few loaves of bread, but they were not the kind of bread we were used to eating. They were very sour. It wasn't very nice of us to steal, but it was acceptable to steal from the Germans.

I also want to recount another event just the way it happened, and that was when Sigmund went through the ice and almost drowned. I don't remember the year exactly, but it was probably 1953. Sigmund and I were in a boat close to our boathouse. We were preparing fishnets. There was ice on the fjord from our boathouse and inward, and that is when we see a seal on the ice in front of Gammelstøa (the old landing place for the boats). Sigmund was immediately ready to go get the gun. He hurried home to get it, and at the same time he put his skis on because the ice was not safe. I continued working the nets in the boat, but I watched him when he was on the ice. The seal was quick to dive through the hole in the ice when he noticed Sigmund, and I saw Sigmund sitting on the ice waiting to see if the seal would resurface. After a while he is gone, but I see a head sticking up through the hole in the ice. Initially I thought it was the seal, but it was Sigmund who had gone through the ice. He was very calm, and called out to me that I had to go to the boathouse at Innerskveiren and get a boat from there. When I got there, Søren, Ole and Johan were already there so there were many of us to get the boat on the ice. It all went well for a while, but then the boat went through the ice and that was not good. Sigmund was also not visible to us at times, and that was when he lost the grip on the ice. He had to try to get a new grip on the ice and he had the gun strapped to his back. We had to hurry to get the boat to where Sigmund was. We tied a rope to Ole and he was supposed to walk closer to Sigmund. That worked for a short distance before he fell through the ice. We then tried to pull the boat with the rope, and we came a little closer. Søren was big and had strong arms, and he managed to throw a coil of rope all the way to the hole where Sigurd was, but he had no more strength to do anything and he had

lost a lot of body heat. He was so exhausted that he couldn't use his hands to grab hold of the rope we had thrown to the hole, but he managed to bite down on it. In that fashion he could get it around his arm and we could carefully pull him up on the ice and to the boat.

I think I remember that Viljar also took part in rescuing Sigmund. He was to walk with a rope directly from land and out to where he was, but the rope was too short and he had to walk back on land again.

We got Sigmund on land very quickly, and there was no time to bring him to Ytterskveiren, so that is why we had to get him in bed at our house and try to get him warmed up.

Looking back, it is hard to say how long he was in the water, but I think it was about 30 minutes. He recovered quickly and one of the neighbors even brought a drop of 60% spirit, which we poured down his throat to get him warm. Sigmund was young and probably in good physical shape, and he didn't even catch a cold from the incident.

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(Translated by Schweig Dreyer)