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Det som kjem frå hjarta, det går til hjarta.

The young woman tucked her passport back into her bag as she waved good-bye to the customs officer. She didn't speak any Norwegian, but through gestures and pointing, she managed to figure out what the friendly man wanted and he seemed quite satisfied with her response. He pointed the way to her next destination and then turned his attention to the next visitor.

She then found her way to her accommodations which were warm and cozy. There was a fireplace in the living room and the bedrooms had beautiful handmade beds. She learned to introduce herself to those around her with "*Jeg heter Solveig.*" She was told she could exchange her American dollars for Norwegian crowns at the local bank, so she visited it once she had finished unpacking her suitcase into the large drawer under her bed.

Solveig was delighted with the helpful bank teller she met who introduced her to the Norwegian coins and bills and told her what they were worth.

Successfully loaded up on the local currency, Solveig stopped to taste the local chocolate at the nearby *kiosk*. The storekeeper was friendly and animated, highly recommending the *Melkesjokolade*. She bought it and found it delicious.

The next day, Solveig woke up to the radio, listening to a Norwegian broadcast with local weather, time and music performed by Norwegian artists. She went to the dining room to have breakfast and was served a delightful meal of Norwegian open-faced sandwiches. She was able to make her own compositions on the homemade bread using the myriad of toppings before her on the table. It was definitely the start of a great day and of a great two-week stay.

In the afternoons, Solveig attended Norwegian lessons to become more conversant with the locals. She enjoyed using her newfound knowledge to make purchases in the store, browse in the library, and participate in other local activities. Solveig liked to swim, so she was often at the beach, though she occasionally joined the some local artisans to rosemal and made a point of singing with the local choir which met every day.

Not long after breakfast one day, Solveig met a historian clad in a white coat and a funny hat. He invited her to join him and mysteriously led her to a Viking village from a thousand years ago. She noticed a maple tree at the entrance of the village with a sign that read "Det som kjem frå hjarta, det går til hjarta." She wondered what that could mean. She soon forgot it though as she was drawn into a local farm family to spin wool for yarn to be dyed later that day and play Viking games. Solveig quite enjoyed herself and got to know many others besides. Even though they only spoke Norwegian, she found herself understanding them more and more as time went by, and she even found herself speaking back to them in Norwegian, too.

Two days later, Solveig was met by a hiker who invited her to join him in a forest in Jotunheimen where he was building a cabin. She learned from him how to wield an axe and hew logs for stacking. All the while, he spoke Norwegian, telling her tales of the mountains and inviting her to start telling her own stories in her ever-expanding repertoire of Norwegian.

On yet another day, Solveig met a Sami woman who transported her from her village to a Sami *goahti*. Together with several others, she learned to play the *runebom* and to interpret the symbols painted on its leather drumhead.

Skogfjorden

Where in the world had Solveig landed you wonder? At Skogfjorden! Skogfjorden is a village in Northern Minnesota where youth (referred to as “villagers”) from 7 to 18 years of age connect with Norway daily by living in Norway’s past, present and future. It’s a place where young people come to master the Norwegian language and get to know Norway from the inside. It is a place that young people have been coming to since its inception in 1963.

Skogfjorden is sponsored by the Concordia Language Villages (CLV) of Concordia College, a program that specializes in language immersion in an experiential setting. At the language villages, we don’t *learn about* another people and cultures, we live in their shoes and come to *know them from the inside* as we spend our days acquiring their customs and language in a setting as much like the target culture as we can create in the north woods of Minnesota. Villagers come to learn another language, and in the process meaningfully move towards building bridges with others around the world. In so doing, the villages strive to prepare young people for responsible citizenship in our global community.

The ideas work, and the number of villagers who come has steadily grown from 72 pioneer German villagers that first fateful summer in 1961 to over 9,500 youth from North America and elsewhere. Besides Norwegian, villagers can come to a CLV village to learn French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Swedish, Danish, Finnish and English. Although Norwegian may seem like an insignificant language in this long list of world languages, enrolment is healthy, and villagers choose to return to Skogfjorden summer after summer – an elite few even come for as many as 10 years!

What brings them to the village... and then draws them back?

The staff at Skogfjorden make a promise to each other and the villagers before the villagers ever arrive. That promise is to build a vibrant village community where a strong foundation for learning is established and maintained every single day, and Norway and its people are the focus of everything we do. It is a promise that comes from the heart.

Community

The learning foundation is assured by creating a home for villagers where everyone (1) is and feels safe, (2) everyone belongs, and (3) every individual shares a responsibility for the success of our program.

Staff receive extensive training in health, safety and counselling before the summer begins, and their training in these areas continues after the villagers arrive, right through the last day.

Staff are also trained in the philosophy of the Language Villages where our core values include understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, expressing empathy for neighbors in the global village, and promoting peace, justice and sustainability for all. As a result, every villager is welcomed, and skills in building community with a diverse population are practiced from the day the villagers arrive.

A large number of our villagers are blonde and blue-eyed, and many of them have names like Stavig, Pettersen and Dahle. Yet there are many others with other roots who come to Skogfjorden as well. Whatever differentiates villagers' motivation to come is secondary to their interest in Norway when they meet. At this village, everyone is welcome.

These inclusive values are underscored by our belief that everyone comes to the village to have a good time, and the only way to assure that is to assert one bottom line for all we do: respect. As fellow villagers, we all share a responsibility for checking our actions against the standard of whether they are respectful of those around us, the program and the village itself.

In a recent interview, Ambassador Knut Vollebæk summarized the Norwegian rules of engagement as a peacemaker. They involve being honest and open about the purpose of your interactions and allowing ample opportunities to build trust. You don't need conflict to use these skills. They are just as useful in establishing a peaceful community from the start.

Just like at Skogfjorden.

Ambassador Knut Vollebæk visited Skogfjorden this summer. In a program where one of our villagers wanted to help the ambassador understand why kids come here and then keep returning, 15 year old Rolf said "I ... return each year because Skogfjorden is my home. The connection of community is made that first night of the session, when we sing *Lev vel* holding hands in a circle. The connection continues throughout the session... The sense of belonging and community is at the heart of Skogfjorden. As a non-Norwegian-American this is quite apparent throughout each session. I have been adopted into the Skogfjorden community without any second thoughts. I may be Honduran. I may be Jewish, and I may be from New England. But this does not segregate me from every other single person at this village. The connection has been established. It was established 4 summers ago. And the connection will continue to last for all eternity."

The message seemed to come right from his heart.

Norway

Skogfjorden's focus on Norway is assured by creating a place where (1) Norwegian is at the heart of everything we do, and (5) connections to Norway are affirmed, refreshed and extended.

Our ultimate goal is to help villagers figure out what it is that they find interesting or exciting about Norway, Norwegians and/or the Norwegian language. We do that first by giving them ample opportunities to discover and begin their pursuit of them here. We follow up on that by helping them acquire the knowledge and skill they then need to continue pursuing them even after they leave Skogfjorden.

Our villager Rolf explained that to Ambassador Vollebæk this way: "For us, the villagers of Skogfjorden, the point of Skogfjorden is establishing connections. Connections can be made in many different ways which can be found throughout the entire village. It can be found in our *hytter* when we play cards and have discussions *på norsk*. It can be found when we hum a Skogfjorden tune as we watch the sunset at the *badestrand*. And it can be found when we dance the Huckleberry Hound at the *bygdedans*. Skogfjorden provides us with the connections to Norway and Norwegian-America in so many magical ways. That is why I continue to return each year."

That is also why Rolf has since inspired his family to spend vacations in Norway to experience first hand what he was first introduced to here at Skogfjorden.

Is it any wonder, then, that Skogfjorden has a sculpture of a paper clip that serves as a central meeting point for the village? It may very well be the largest in North America! Being the ingenious Norwegian invention that it is, it symbolizes our connections to each other – within the village and beyond.

The connections start when we affirm what villagers already know about Norway through their heritage, Norwegian-America, or from what they have learned in school or through other media. How cool that some of them eat *risengrynsgrøt* at Christmas or that they know about Norway's king and queen.

It continues as we help them place their knowledge into a greater context and use that experience to construct a deeper understanding of what they already know. We eat *risengrynsgrøt* every Saturday before a heartier meal in the evening – just like Norwegians who choose to make *grøt* as their midday meal on Christmas Eve so as to free up time and energy for preparing their more elaborate evening meal. We also do programming about Kong Harald V, Dronning Sonja, Kronprins Håkon Magnus and his growing family and Prinsesse Märthe Louise and hers. Of course, no *17. mai* is ever celebrated at Skogfjorden without the *kongefamilie* standing on the balcony of the make-shift Skogfjorden *slott* as the rest of us march by calling out *Hurra for 17. mai!*

Finally, it takes off when we introduce them to things about Norway they know nothing about before they came to us. For this, we have a responsibility to connect them to contemporary Norway as well as to important experiences from Norway's history that shaped who and where we are today. With that, it is possible to imagine Norway's future and how villagers can figure into it when they leave us.

We do these introductions through time and space travel like Solveig's trip to the Viking family, the forests of Jotunheimen and Sameland. We also do it through activities like *allsang, kunst, musikk, isbjørnklubb, fotball, håndball, treskjæring, dans* and *norske barneleker*. In our activities that are geared for kids with the same level of language experience, we prepare them to first navigate Skogfjorden *på norsk*. With a little more language training they eventually simulate trips to Norway as tourists, exchange students and finally residents, all the while mastering the language and skills that they will need when they really go for it.

In the evenings, we do whole-village activities such as *Nobel fredsprisutdeling, a trolljakt, a night with skalders and sagas, a filmfestival* capped with the *Amanda prisutdeling*, or a festival with *banebrytende nordmenn* of all generations. No matter what we do, it ties us back to Norway or Norwegian-America in an interesting way.

We also do this by inviting young people from Norway to join our program to learn English. We offer the natives from Norway instruction in English language and culture for two hours a day. Then they and the North American villagers meet during all the other activities, informally serving as resources for each other as they master each other's language and culture. We have been doing this since 1983, and we have seen wonderful things happen when villagers get to know someone from another culture. They stay in touch during the

year, they visit each other during their vacations, and some have even spent a year in a new Skogfjorden friend's home as an exchange student.

Finally, we have villagers who are with us for four weeks to earn one year of high school language credit. They culminate their intensive experience with a *sporprosjekt* – a project that connects them to others through their Norwegian interests. It can be leading activities in the program, preparing presentations for groups beyond the program, corresponding with interesting Norwegians or planning activities for a Norwegian club.

Is this worth it?

We think so.

Skogfjorden involves much more than teaching Norwegian. It involves preparing young people to look at the world through another culture's eyes. In so doing, villagers inevitably gain perspective on their own. As a nation that plays an important role in peacemaking around the world, the Norwegian perspective is an important one, and we are thrilled to share it with young people every summer. Watching how they incorporate their new perspective in their evolving identity as decent people and true global citizens, inspires us to take our work seriously.

That's why Ambassador Vollebæk helped us plant that maple tree out at Fagertun – the beautiful farm in the village to which villagers travel back in time to relive the lives of Norwegian emigrants. The place where Solveig met her Viking family.

The tree, as it grows, will remind us to take what we learn and use it to guide us in our own growth. Sincerely. When what we do comes from the heart, it goes to the heart. Just like the plaque says: *Det som kjem frå hjarta, det går til hjarta.*

In a letter Ambassador Vollebæk wrote to Skogfjorden after his visit, he commented that “It takes a special kind of commitment to dedicate so much... to the noble task of educating young people to be responsible global citizens. In today's world, nothing could be more important than instilling in young people a sense of global community through learning other cultures and languages. As you know, the Norwegian Government works to promote peace in conflicts around the world. Through your work, you assist in laying the foundation for a more stable world....”

It all starts when we meet you at the border and welcome you to our little village in the woods.

About the author

Tove I. Dahl, Ph.D., has been involved with Skogfjorden for over 30 years – 25 years on staff (21 years as its director), 4 years as a villager, and 2 years as the babysitter for an earlier dean's children. Tove was born in Bergen, Norway, and grew up in Minnesota. In Norway, Tove has attended *Svanvik folkehøgskole* (1979-80), *Statens lærerhøgskole i forming* and the University of Oslo (1984-85). She is a graduate of Augsburg College, and after completing her Ph.D. at the University of Texas in 1991, she moved back to Norway. There she has been ever since. Tove worked as a research associate for two years at *Norsk voksenpedagogisk forskningsinstitutt* (now *VOX*) in Trondheim before moving to Tromsø to work as an associate professor at The University of Tromsø teaching educational psychology in the psychology department. Tove lives in Tromsø with her husband Curt Rice and their 9-year old son Espen Sindre.

A little inserted box of information:

What do Nordmannsforbundet and Skogfjorden have in common?

His Majesty King Harald V is our patron

We seek to strengthen ties between Norway and Norwegians abroad (primarily in North America, but also beyond)

Our “program” is open to all persons

Our “members” live throughout the world

We build bridges / connect people (binders)

Our purpose is to unite friends of Norway with its people, places and culture

We recognize the need to convey information about Norway

We stay in touch through the web (check out www.ConcordiaLanguageVillages.org .)