CHAPTER 1
ABOUT SAYING YES TO ADULTS

I understandably don't quite remember the details of that April evening in 1947 when I was delivered at the Deaconess Foundation on Peter Bangs Vej in Frederiksberg. I prefer the American word "deliver" because it immediately puts the main character in the center rather than the Jan Telovov-like "Grethe delivered a boy", as my grandfather relievedly expressed his delight that his only daughter had escaped the experiment unscathed - and that it wasn't a girl.

The event took place right across the street from the casket warehouse where, exactly 50 years later, I sat, slightly less elated, trying to get the undertaker to deliver my mother by closing the lid over her. Then again: The word deliver embodies a mutual human relationship with all the joy and pain that this entails.

My mother came from a proprietary farm in Marbjerg near Roskilde, where my grandfather, Niels Hansen, was a parliamentary candidate for the Liberal Party, sat on the Roskilde County Council and on the boards of the slaughterhouse, bank, health insurance company and more. He was therefore away from home a lot during my mother's childhood, where she was almost an only child with my grandmother, Oline. As her three brothers were between 9 and 14 years older, she was thoroughly spoiled and never made to participate in the work. She told my father how my grandmother would take her to ladies' coffee when the town's hat ladies got together. Then she had to sit neatly in her fine clothes.

My grandmother was a very good housewife, but she was unable to teach my mother how to do housework. Since she didn't want to go to secondary school, they tried to have her trained as a milliner, but after a short time at a milliner in Roskilde, my mother was bored with sewing, which is why in my own childhood it was always the vicarage maids who had to repair my socks on the fly agaric-colored darning egg. When my grandparents decided to train my mother as a maid at home, my grandmother did most of the work herself, letting my mother sleep in if she had been to a ball. Later, she was a young maid in the house in Copenhagen, but has said that she couldn't even peel a potato.

For the first three years of my life in Copenhagen, we lived at Øster Søgade 108 in the back of the house and then in a two-bedroom apartment at Skoleholdervej 41 in Bispebjerg. Some of the first experiences

Oline and Niels Hansen in 1913, before my mother was born in 1921. From left are my uncles Evald, Asger and Ebbe. I inherited my grandparents' photo albums with pictures of their own parents and siblings, which I found very useful when I did genealogical research on my children's ancestors many years after their deaths. But as they were of peasant stock - unfortunately without noble ancestry - I can only trace them back to the 1700-1800s in church and land registers (so far) on farms around Jyderup, which I of course
therefore visited to sniff the scent of my roots.

My parents' wedding on June 8, 1946, the day before Pentecost, when my father was ordained as a pastor in the Grundtvig Church. Unfortunately, I - and thus this book - was not conceived by the Holy Spirit in the dawn of the Pentecostal sun, but rather on their August cycling trip to Bornholm. This may have left its mark on my later life, as the honeymoon nights took place in open collective dormitories at the youth hostels.
The hostel in Svaneke even had bedbugs, my father wrote in his diary. So I think I was destined from the beginning to live in a slum with others.

I vaguely remember about my mother,was when we sat together playing on the striped carpet in the living room and the sun shone in. I felt a love flowing between us and that this bliss would continue forever. But suddenly the phone or doorbell would ring with a disturbing message for her. Maybe it was about illness, family problems or simply that my father didn't come home because he was called out as a priest to minister to a needy person in the parish. In any case, it was something I didn't understand as a child, and when she came back, she was suddenly deeply sad and upset. To me, it seemed unsafe when she, in her violent despair, verbally lashed out at me. I was happily expecting the wonderful play and idyll to continue.

In the photos from that time, my mother already seems less cheerful and more troubled than in the cheerful photos of her youth. Perhaps coincidentally, because it shouldn't be forgotten that outwardly

Probably the first picture of me taken just after my baptism on June 8, 1947 in The Grundtvig Church, where my father was the pastor until 1950. Since for me it embodies the original, but later damaged love In my photography later in life, I have often tried to recreate what was lost in such classic mother and child images in other families.

My mother, Åse Grethe Rigmor Hansen, when my father married her.

and, in the best moments, inwardly in the familyshe could be incredibly cheerful and jolly, with exuberantly flighty ideas and inventions. And with a silliness that I partly inherited. A large part of my later irritation with her was due to the fact that I looked a lot like her - also in appearance - and to my chagrin, I was often told so.

My first three years have probably been mostly bright. In Copenhagen, my mother took me for walks in a pram around the lakes and the Citadel. In a way, I've come full circle, because it's the same route I now run every morning - sometimes with a loving detour to my mother's grave in Holmens Cemetery. I only remember two minor rebellions from that period, and they were probably more emotionally directed towards my newly arrived little brother, who stole her fleeting attention from me. One day, while she was at the changing table with Niels Jørgen, I locked myself in the bathroom in protest and

Family celebrations do a wonderful job of uniting disparate families. Front left my grandmother and step-grandfather, to the right my mother's parents. Back left, Aunt Ida, Uncle Ebbe, Aunt Gerda and her husband, and with my Aunt Lis' sister, Karen Margrethe, with her husband, and Svend Åge, who had returned from the concentration camp two years earlier. My schizophrenic uncle Asger was hiding in the attic, and my four years older cousin Birgit and her parents didn't think I was important enough to celebrate.

Soon, the idyllic mother/child car on the wall in the small apartment on Øster Søgade drowned in ink. The picture, furniture and books have been with me and my brothers ever since. I also have a picture where I pushed Niels Jørgen out of the pram on a later occasion, and since it was taken by my father, he must have been a bit present that day.

pulled out the key. It took her half a day to persuade me to push it out to her under the door. And one day when Niels Jørgen and I were sitting in the stroller in the street while my mother was shopping at the grocery store, I remember how I started rocking so violently that the stroller tipped over and we were both crawling around in the street when my mother came out.

Rolls on the roof

Just as the archetype prescribes, my father was not present at my birth - which perhaps laid the foundation for my later father rebellion. Because as soon as my mother sensed my oppressive behavior, he "denied the son" - and thereby also his own role as a father. As he wrote in his memoirs: "On April 29, 1947, I was able to drive Grethe to the Deaconess Foundation. At that time, fathers were not present at births, so I went home and tried to read. At 7:30 pm, they called from the Deaconess Hospital and told me that a boy had been born. I went out there and stayed with Grethe for 15 minutes. I didn't see the boy until the next evening. The Deaconess Foundation had the fine offer that

In the garden at Marbjerggård with mom and dad. One year old.

I loved walking with my grandfather in the large garden at Marbjerg Farm in Marbjerg near Roskilde, where we spent our childhood vacations. Later, Uncle Ebbe took over the farm, and Niels and Oline moved to a smaller house on the other side of town, so we had two places to play. Many years after their deaths, my wife and I took over the house - for sentimental reasons and to store my stuff for the 30 years I spent lecturing in the US. However, we ended up giving the house to Valerie, an African-American friend of mine, which I think was the first time Marbjerg was "integrated".

An early sign of a desire for freedom.

On the four-long farm, there were wonderful play opportunities in the barn with the old horse-drawn carriages, in the grain loft with the sack lift, and in the fragrant horse stable next to the outdoor toilet and outdoor manure pit that could be smelled throughout the town.

After the birth of my brother Niels Jørgen in 1948, I got a good playmate in those first lonely years when there were no kindergartens, but instead stressed-out, stay-at-home housewives.

By the time my younger brother Niels Jørgen arrived, I had long since learned to take matters into my own hands at Bispebjerg.

This picture was taken in 1950 on Bogholdervej, just before we moved to West Jutland. The desk, which my father himself had designed and furnished very sensibly for his pastor's office, I still have today, as do all the things on it. On the radio, I later heard about the Hungarian uprising against the Soviets, before it was replaced by a more contemporary one.

young priest families could have their children born there for free. Of course, we would have taken advantage of that."

Yes, my father always tried to save money wherever he could - a trait I inherited, by the way. For a whole quarter of an hour, my mother was desperate for his spare time, but he showed no interest in seeing me. For 10 days, my father left me alone with my mother at the Deaconess, and that disappointment may have given my mother postpartum depression. As he goes on to say - without mentioning the experience of me in so much as a word - he was no longer present in the time after I came home:

"It wasn't until May 9 that I was able to bring Grethe and the boy home. But the very next day after a funeral and meeting time in the Marble Church, I went on a weekend trip with the TK boys to Uggeløse, with work on the cabin and the grounds and a bike ride home in a strong headwind, so I was not home until 7 pm. May I was off again to Uggeløse, Pentecost camp with 75 participants, however, I cycled home at 23, home at 1. For Pentecost I had a christening and had to write the sermon for Pentecost 2, where I had services both in Grundtvigskirken and in Marmorkirken. It was an incredible amount of work, and at the same time I was involved in a number of preparatory meetings regarding the trip to Prague. On June 8, I had high mass in Grundtvigskirken, and Jacob was baptized. But on June 21, Holger Søndergård and I and a group of boys started a bicycle trip to Southern Jutland, where we camped in tents in many places and did not return home until July 6. It was a summer with very nice and warm weather, which gave us the opportunity for many trips to Langelinie and to sit by the lake with the boy in a pram." Yes, during the summer vacation, I was able to set aside some time for myself at Langelinie - where, by the way, I'm still running around on the trail of lost time.

When we moved to three busy parishes in West Jutland in 1950, my father - unlike what he had been used to at Grundtvigskirken - actually had to be present at all the night-long wedding, silver wedding and birthday parties in the parish. So from then on, the memories of his increasing unavailability and how I reacted to it begin.

Expectant on the train on our way to West Jutland on March 23, 1950 - one of the most defining dates in my life. From a tiny Copenhagen apartment, we could now leave our suitcases in front of the gigantic freedom expansion of an old vicarage surrounded by gardens, forests, fields and bogs.

My great-great-grandfather Jacob Hansen Holdt, who was a priest in Løgumkloster, with my great-great-grandmother Anne Magdalene and between them their son Jacob Laurids Paul Holdt. Most of their furniture has since been passed on from vicarage to vicarage.

My newborn father with his real father, Pastor Jacob Chr. Holdt, who died before my father was one year old, after which my grandmother raised him alone as a teacher in Silkeborg. I have preserved my grandfather's grave at Dallerup Church, probably mostly because it felt strange to erase my own name. The congregation booked lectures, and it paid for the grave site for many years to come.

My father visiting the vicarage in Allerslev in 1928, before my grandmother married Pastor Even Marstrand the following year and he moved in. I continued to visit it after Martin A. Hansen's son took over after his father's death and built the first clay houses across the street. They were later expanded into the Lejre Experimental Center.

My great-grandfather Jacob Laurids Paul Holdt was the pastor of Køng church, where in 1982, together with my father and my son, Jacob Daniel, I gathered for a large family reunion in the vicarage with the many Holdt descendants. Great-grandmother Christiane Hedevig came from Norway, where I could trace the family back to 1550 in Tjomsaas. Apart from my grandfather, Jacob Chr. (number two at the back), who died early, I knew my father's aunt Hedvig, uncle Olav and uncle Johannes. When we inherited Uncle Olav's large stamp collection, I started collecting stamps for a while.

I'm sitting on my grandmother's lap on Christmas Eve in Allerslev 1947, while "grandpa" is holding my two cousins Ejvind and Per, whom I have continued to stay with throughout my life during my tours in Jutland. Ejvind took over his father's farm, while Per has taught at Aarhus School of Architecture. We often played together, especially in the vicarage in West Jutland.

In 1919, my grandfather and grandmother wrote an invitation to their engagement. As an engagement present, he gave her the sofa set that I still lounge on a hundred years later in my book room in Gernersgade, surrounded by the shelves with his and my other "grandfather's" books and sermons. My father, here on the right as pastor of Grundtvigskirken, is the last pastor in the family, which always disappointed my grandmother.

My mother loved the vibrant life in the West Jutland vicarage and especially all the social and festive events. So most of the time she was full of energy and industriousness and thrived on what she had gradually learned well, namely housekeeping. I knew nothing better than when she enjoyed our vacations in Marbjerg with her equally friendly and fun brothers and her father. In those moments, you could feel that she had regained her self-esteem as a newly minted pastor's wife. My father, on the other hand, would sit outside in silence with a furrowed brow and run away if things went too far. But he also enjoyed seeing her in the outgoing, infectious good mood she had when they got married.

My father used this kind of controlling dominance over her more and more throughout his life - except in private gatherings with our closest friends, when the facade wasn't so important to maintain. This trait of pleading or drumming with disapproving grunts or rolled eyes masked his attempts to not stir up trouble in the name of family, for the sake of the children and perhaps especially to uphold the priesthood's notions of honor. It was clearly something he had inherited from my honorable and traditional grandmother, but it certainly didn't diminish my mother's inner anger and lack of self-esteem over the years. My fondest memories and photographs of her were of her picking dahlias in the garden for indoor decoration. The huge vicarage garden, the farm buildings around it and the large forest and bog that belonged to the vicarage were otherwise the domain of my father and we children, where we retreated when it got too hot indoors. I, in particular, learned early on to go my own way. As a result, I didn't always perceive the underlying conflicts in my parents' marriage with their tacit agreement to stay on form.

In particular, I remember when we had important people over for dinner, such as Professor Hal Koch and formerly his wife, Church Minister Bodil Koch. He in particular made a deep impression on me as a young man, even though I was not yet familiar with his thinking, which would later inspire me so much. When such authorities came to visit, my mother sat completely still **a**devoutly listened as if she understood everything without once interrupting or derailing the conversation between my father and the guest. In this strange calmness, I also occasionally unfolded my

I am standing as a three-year-old in the garden in the summer of 1950 in front of the 100-year-old vicarage, which my father, with his great powers of persuasion, persuaded the parish council to demolish after five years. My and Niels Jørgen's nursery is the window right behind me.

The new vicarage built on top of the old one in two halves. My brother and I loved the construction phase, when we got to paint on my mother's finely wallpapered walls in the old half we lived in during construction. My room is the leftmost dormer above my father's office and right next to the nanny's room. It was these dormers that we did long jumps on when Dad and Mom went to church, and the ridge high above that we balanced on.

ears and formed an inner picture of parental harmony that I could draw on in for a long time. Without a doubt, this dreamy image of harmony and peace on the outside has shaped my later somewhat dreamy (and, in many people's opinion, unworldly) efforts to create peace between people in the firm belief that it can always be done.

My father's orderly and organizational personality had an (even) greater influence on my career as a systematizing slum photographer than my mother's fluttering mind. First and foremost by being a dominant and powerful role model, and despite the fact that he didn't represent an easily accessible presence for me. His own feelings and thoughts were not something he shared much with us. In many ways, I know his overriding importance to me best from a distance. Partly from the endless letters we wrote to each other during my long battle with my father in the US, and partly from the analyses others have made of my life without having known him.

My father's family comes from a farm outside Løgumkloster, which I still use as a place to stay during lectures. Here, all the pre-born boys were called Jacob Holdt and were priests. But when my grandfather died of a heart attack in Vænge vicarage near Silkeborg, even before my father was a year old, his later beloved stepfather, the electoral

church pastor, became the pastor, author and economist Even Marstrand, his real father. Pastor Marstrand was himself an extremely absent academic, and my father's practical skills were clearly inherited from my grandmother, the dominant figure in his childhood home in Allerslev. But these may be memories that have been kept alive by my grandmother and people in Allerslev retelling the story ever since. As recently as 2011, at a lecture in his church, I had the pleasure of having several elderly listeners who enthusiastically told me about coming to my grandmother and "grandfather's" singing and Bible lessons as children. Until Pastor Marstrand died when I was two years old, I still remember with great joy trudging with "grandpa" along the chicken farms in Allerslev. But these are possibly memories that have been kept alive by people in Allerslev who have since retold the story. And I remember when my grandmother served oatmeal with grated apple (which I still eat in the morning) in the thatched vicarage, which Martin A. Hansen later took over and wrote many of the stories about. Hansen later took over and wrote many of his best books in.

Well, my father, like his stepfather, could probably muster up the courage to occasionally go for a walk with me (although I don't

remember it), but after that they both quickly disappeared into the study (just as I myself disappeared from my children). So there is no doubt that this lack of a warm and supportive relationship with my father left me with a deep sense of rejection, which could seem all the greater when I also experienced and admired his loving commitment to other people. My father visited all the sick in the parish, and for the 37 years he was pastor there, everyone got used to the fact that this was the priest's job.

I'll never forget in high school when I would come home tired and take a nap in my room, how he would come in and, with a furrowed brow, tell me that it was wrong to sleep because there was lots of homework and yard work to do. (To this day, I feel guilty about taking a ten-minute nap and jump up immediately if my wife walks in). For my brothers and I, it became a lifelong tradition as social speakers at our father's parties to complain about all the pointless gardening he had set us to do. Because even if there was nothing that needed to be done, he would always take us on a long walk around the enormous vicarage garden to forcibly invent something that was "imperative" to be done - whether it was moving

Niels Jørgen and I with one of the tenant farmer's cats in the courtyard. Circa 1952.

My mother in the garden by my father's dahlias, which followed him from the vicarage in Allerslev to his retirement home in Agerbæk. It was Niels Jørgen's and my job to dig up the roots in the winter and put them down in the frost-free cellar. Behind the dahlia bed were the long, hard-trodden paths that we hated to disappoint.

the brambles in the large orchard just to see them stand as tall the next day. We especially hated disappointing the badly trampled garden paths, which were also removed and replaced by flower beds as soon as we left home. And when it rained from the pastor, it dripped between us boys in arguments about who (of us) had taken a meter too little at the agreed places on the lawn and paths where we had to change mowers and shovels. Dad always knew how to drill into the guilt. "What a bunch of wimps you are. You should be happy that you don't have to do as much field work as your friends on the farms!" He was right, of course. The difference, in our eyes, was that for them it was a necessary and real job that we were happy to go out and help with, while at home it was just to "learn that there are duties in life".

Back then, I didn't know how to integrate the contradictory sides of my father. On the one hand, his social work, which to me was absent and outgoing, and on the other hand, his more rare, intellectual encouragement of us boys. For example, he would drive us all the way to Odense Theater to see Nordahl Grieg's *The Defeat*, which was about whether evil should be fought with evil. Or getting us deeply involved in his production of Kjeld Abell's *Anne Sophie Hedvig* with its similar theme, which was very close to his heart.

Combined with my father's critical attitude and lack of emotional support, I was definitely expressing my hidden hurt in the form of a slowly accumulating anger towards him, not unlike that of my mother. I remember some of the times it exploded. Most notably, one Sunday when Dad drove from his first service in his one parish, Årre, to pick up Niels Jørgen and me for his next service in one of the other towns. But that day we had had enough and shouted and screamed and refused to come along. In the fight in the hallway, we kicked him so hard across the shin that he ended up giving up the fight and limped off to church alone. We were tired of being the priest's good children and having to sit dutifully in church every Sunday, which was divided equally between his three parish churches. Even though we had been allowed to bring Donald Duck magazines in the early years, it was and remained an endless, boring session to sit there, solely to demonstrate the nice facade of the pastor's family, which was just as important to maintain outwardly as garden paths and mahogany furniture inwardly.

But we learned here that rebellion sometimes succeeds, because after that rebellion we only had to go to church every other Sunday and even fewer times after that. Intoxicated by the freedom we had fought so hard for, I remember how we enjoyed our ticket of freedom issued by the authorities when my mother was also dutifully forced to go to church. Then Niels Jørgen and I would spread the crispy rolls we were only ever served on Sundays with a thick layer of apple jelly from the country apple tree and climb up on the twigs on the roof to eat them, gloating loudly in the sun. Afterwards, we jumped from twig to twig - the beginning of our later athletic careers - and finally did a tightrope walk along the roof ridge. It was so high up that a fall onto the cobbled courtyard would have caused serious injuries. So when the tenant discovered it one day and tattled, this blatant act of freedom was put to an emphatic end. But I can see that our little revolution has meant something to me when, today, as a lecturer, I'm constantly driving around Jutland's bakeries to see if they can still make the old Danish poppy seed rolls as crispy and rich as the ones I remember from my life's first taste of freedom. I can personally attest to the fact that they can't.

Another landmark event has also often been interpreted as a rebellion against my father, although I myself see it as ordinary pranks. Together with my friends Erik and Hans, I had stolen some of my father's town cigars and some communion wine from his locked church book filing cabinet in the office. With the stolen goods, we cycled out into the large plantation belonging to the vicarage, to smoke them over an innocent little fire in the small clearing we called the "church square". But we had overlooked the fact that the surrounding grass was dry, and before long the fire was catching on all sides. We first tried to pee on it, but soon had to flee in wild terror to neighboring fields where the farmer was harrowing. He rushed home to call the fire brigade, but I didn't dare drive home myself for fear of all the trouble that awaited. Instead, I cycled around to friends in town and shouted: "The forest is burning!" In no time at all, many of the town's men headed out to "æ præstplantage" to put out the fire with shovels, along with firefighters from many of the surrounding towns.

What I remember most is that the schoolboys in the days that followed were amused that even the huge dairy manager, who normally shoveled butter in beech wood churns for the English boats in his always white suit and boots, had stood with his butter shovel in the forest as if he had suddenly "got fire in his ass". My father was called home to his beloved plantation in the middle of a funeral at Årre cemetary, and the police came home afterwards and admonished my mother not to leave matches within reach of children again. She used them to clean my ears with cotton wool and American oil. Perhaps the only good thing that came out of it is that ever since, when asked "do you smoke?" I've answered: "No thanks, I quit at 13 - thanks to my parents' wise parenting."

Romantic poet

Mealtimes were sacred in a parsonage and woe betide anyone who was late for grace or, more often, the table song "We all thank him with song", two different melodies of which will stay with me for the rest of my life. It was also where we read the barometer of mom's mood for the day. Often it was good, and she eagerly followed my father's stories about people in the parish.

I think he probably saved the best stories involving great suffering or sudden happiness in a family as a lightning rod for the bad days when my mother herself was in too much pain. Because with her strong instinctive nature, she was just as easily derailed as the rest of us were constantly derailed by her when she quickly lost interest in what we were saying due to her lack of concentration.

Although we came from a so-called bookish home, it caused us huge problems socially that my mother would cut off any conversation when it approached an intellectual or abstract level. She was impossible to have such a conversation with. When the conversation started to bore her, she would immediately become distracted with a wandering eye, not remembering what people had said five minutes earlier and blurting out irrelevant ideas. Because of her impulsive and touchy mind, everyone lacked the courage to interrupt her. Very early on, we children learned to be silent as the grave at mealtimes and let mom's grind go over our heads.

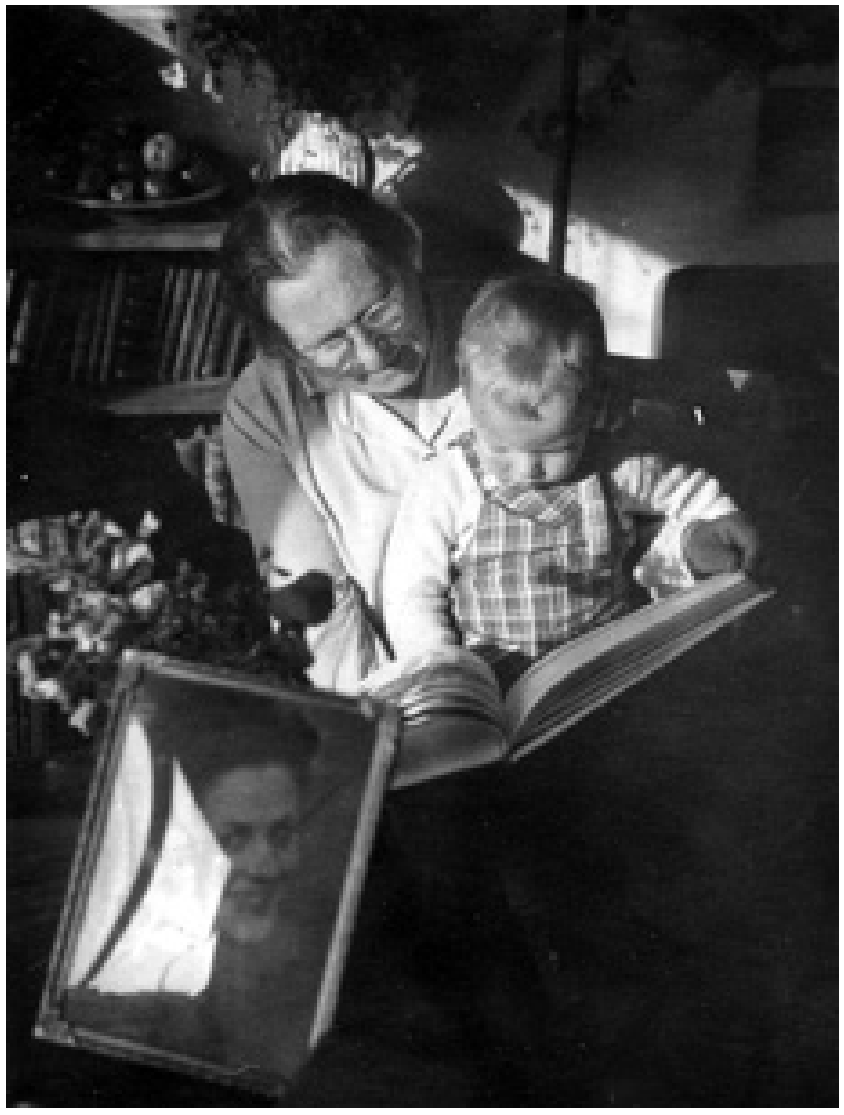
I often sat by the window and looked out at the big tree that the coachman drove around when he dropped off the milk chicks for the tenant farm. Here I daydreamed my way out into the garden and the vicarage plantation - and later in my youth further out into the world - but the more I escaped, the less prepared I became for the adult world. Because my brothers and I were as clumsily mute to the adult world as Kasper Hauser, who grew up locked up in total darkness with no stimulating contact with people. Therefore, we also lacked the ability to communicate intellectually, except for grumbling, grunting and grunting statements like "yes", "no" and "nothing".

As chairman of the Youth Association, my father was the first in the village to get a large reel-to-reel tape recorder, from which I have some audio recordings of my voice from those years. The night my mother gave birth to my 13-year younger brother at home, there was naturally great joy, and my father interviewed the midwife, the doctor and the tenant farmer about the event, after which he happily approached me: "Well, Mads, what do you think of your new little brother?" (Mads was my nickname, which my parents called me around the time of my birth, to let the family think they were breaking the long priestly tradition of calling the firstborn Jacob and train him as a priest).

But my scathing response to the event revealed no future priest in speaking skills: "Nothing!" "But don't you think he's handsome?" my father tried. "No!"

With the long periods of normality and even happiness we also enjoyed growing up, when my mother's mood was exuberant, infectious and even ecstatic, I have often wondered whether I actually perceived her as sick in childhood, even though she was constantly talking about her bad nerves. However, I remember from grade 1 my reaction when the Danish teacher told me that "the common denominator for all the great poets of Danish Romanticism was that they had a father who was a priest and a mother who was insane". I can't say that I often had my finger up in school, but that day it spontaneously shot up: "Then I'll be a great Romantic poet," I exclaimed. Was this simply an expression of my usual clowning around for a cheap laugh? Or did I really think of my mother as "insane" - the taboo word we kids used as a term of abuse, and which in any case was only something *other* people were? The truth was, however, that at that point in time, after the most horrible, heartbreaking breakdowns I can remember, my mother had already been hospitalized several times for extended periods at the psychiatric hospitals in Dianalund near Sorø and Hviding near Esbjerg. Of course, this *was* not something we in polite circles referred to as either "insanity" or even "mental illness". It was simply called "bad nerves", and we children did not mention it at school, but simply enjoyed the increased freedom her absence gave us. And yet the sudden, unfamiliar calm of the vicarage also seemed a little frightening in all its strangeness.

Similarly, they always explained to us children why Asger, my mother's oldest and very clever brother, lived the life of a hermit in his attic room. "Because Asger was hit in the head by a sack lift when he was very young." I was really scared when I heard that explanation, because I myself was hit and beaten bloody in the head by the handle of that sack lift when I was about 14 years old, when we were playing in the barn in Marbjerg with our two cousins Anne and Birgit, who were the daughters of my mother's other brother, the "completely normal" Evald. I always felt that they were evasive when they came up with that explanation about Asger, who at times did reasonably well as a farmhand. It wasn't until I was 36 years old that I I went to Asger's house



Grandma reads to me in the shadow of mom.

In 1949, grandmother and parish priest Even Marstrand had planned to retire to Askov, where he had previously been a folk high school teacher. But just before that, he dropped dead at the Royal Library, where he was researching, why his grandmother instead moved with his father and mother to the vicarage in West Jutland, 30 kilometers from Askov.

and had a longer conversation with him. Having met many similar people in the US, I suddenly found it easy to talk to him and had no doubt that he was suffering from schizophrenia. When my wife and I took over his small house in Marbjerg a few years later, and the blacksmith next door told us how often he had seen Asger, at the age of almost 80, running around naked in the garden, my last fear of the sack-lift operation disappeared. I may have become a warped existence myself, but I had never been accused of suffering from schizophrenia.

My grandmother

When my father's stepfather died, my grandmother had to move out of the vicarage in Allerslev. It's safe to say that right from the engagement, there had been a chill in the air between my grandmother - the strong-willed former seminary teacher, Ane Sofie Marstrand - and my mother, the uneducated farm girl with low self-esteem. But my father and grandmother managed to get my grandmother to move into the rectory, where she settled in the guest room, but soon took command of the entire house. People in the parish later told me that they never saw my mother out and about, as my 65-year-old grandmother always drove around in the car with my father and sat at the table at weddings and parties as if she were the "vicar's wife". What else happened in the vicarage that year, I did not perceive much of, as I quickly closed myself in a shell to protect myself from the arguments.

Oddly enough, Grandma - although outwardly perceived as angry and stern - became a saving grace for us two boys. She had an amazing ability to tell stories, which my father was too busy to do. I don't ever recall Mom, with her confused mind, reading aloud to us - let alone reading any of the books Dad gave her in those first few years in the vague hope of correcting the ignorance he had married into. The books with his loving inscriptions to her, as proof of his early Grundtvigian idealism, are now hidden in the basement. My grandmother taking over reinforced my mother's feelings of inadequacy and of being a bad mother - in addition to being told daily in one way or another that she was no good as a housewife, pastor's wife, or whatever.

So after my mother fled to her parents' home in Zealand, they agreed, after Uncle Evald's intervention, that it was best for my grandmother to build her own house in the village. But my mother's doctor demanded that she move all the way to Askov, 35 kilometers away, where Pastor Marstrand, a former teacher at the folk high school, had planned their retirement - if death had not thwarted it just before. My brother and I always loved it when grandma came to visit on Sundays and Christmas Eve. In the early years, we didn't fully understand the costs and saw grandma as a shield against mom's short-tempered and impulsive dominance. But we don't forget how often my father would suddenly have to drive Grandma home at an inopportune moment, often in the middle of dinner, and for long periods of our childhood she was completely banished from the vicarage. Grandma may have been wise beyond her years by then to not say the wrong thing in my mother's presence, but her sheer charisma and demeaning killer glare was enough to send my mother screaming to bed, where she would remain for days. Due to my father's weakness for his mother and her own loss of the parsonage environment, my grandmother's divisive effect on the family continued throughout her life.

When I returned from America, my grandmother came to my first slide show at Askov Folk High School, which was right across the street from her house on Maltvej. Afterwards she stood up and said: "So you became a priest after all, my boy." Shortly afterwards, she suffered a stroke and went into a nursing home, and it was only now that she became a unifying element for the family. Because now, when she couldn't keep herself and her demented sentences together and was spilling her food all over the place, my mother quite frankly blossomed. Now she had suddenly gained power over grandma and laughed and joked as we knew her from the best moments of childhood. She had finally gotten the better of her mother-in-law!

The village of Fåborg

"It takes a village to raise a child," is an African proverb that describes the importance of individuals and groups outside the family, for better or worse, to a child's well-being. I loved the village, which we children used early on as an escape from mother's anger - even if that anger was so much bigger when we stayed out too long or came home too messy. I started sleeping out early on and we would go in and out of our friends' homes. They could feel like safe nests, but at the same time, they also made me put things into perspective.

Erik, for example, was frequently physically punished by his nervous father, the outwardly friendly and smiling shopkeeper. The carpenter's son, Niels Christian, had a mother who everyone agreed was downright insane. We could often hear her terror when we cycled past the carpenter on our way to school. She ruined the only children's birthday party he managed to throw for us, and he suffered for many years afterwards from his upbringing. I remember counting my blessings that at least my mother wasn't "really crazy" when I saw his mother. One of the girls in my class bore the pain of everyone knowing she was the daughter of the town whore. The butcher's son, Vagn Henrik, held popular birthdays with all the red sausages we could eat from the shop. His father seemed nice when we came and typically bought a slice of liver pate, which he stood and weighed while we talked. But when I tried to gather my school class for a reunion 30 years later, Vagn Henrik - like half of the class - refused to come if it was to be held in town. He never wanted to see his childhood home again.

The doctor's son, Jørgen, was for a long time my best friend and the only one who read books. But even he was deeply affected at the age of 13 when his parents suddenly swapped spouses with the second teacher couple, and all four of them still continued the close social interaction - despite the village's indignation. Divorce was unheard of in these parts, and wife-swapping was an outright scandal. The previously outgoing Jørgen then shut himself away for many years and never finished his studies. I'm ashamed today that I didn't do more to support him through a continued friendship, but I simply didn't feel at home with him after that. None of us dared to visit the slightly retarded and neglected Karen Sofie. She was the daughter of "Trofast" - the town's poor lunatic - and was found murdered many years later. And so I could continue to list all the visible skeletons I saw in my best friends' closets early on. The less visible ones, such as incest and hidden psychological violence, I and most

The lame Magnus on the tractor with Jens and behind him Kristian Uldtot. To the right of our maid, Grethe, sits the tenant farmer's son, Kresten.

others were, of course, blind to that time - many years later, one of them actually asked for my help with a case of incest. But at the same time, we children experienced happiness and normality. After all, it was the greatest and most optimistic period of prosperity in the last 100 years of Danish history.

One of the first terrifyingly evil acts I was subjected to, even before school, happened when I, Niels Jørgen and our playmate Jens were locked up for hours in a dark potato cellar on the neighboring farm. It was Jens' father, Magnus, who wanted to punish us for something we didn't even know we had done wrong, and in the darkness we imagined worms, mice and rats. At the same time, I remember the shock of seeing some mistreated or dead animals on his farm. He could look truly evil as he limped around with his wide-brimmed hat and threatened us with his fearsome cane. So we cried and screamed in our black captivity, not knowing if we would ever get out again. Of course, we did eventually, but it was cruel to scare such small children. Not least Jens, who we knew had been caned quite a lot. As children, we naturally felt guilty and never told anyone at home.

Shortly afterwards, my parents and Morten and Stinne, who was Magnus's brother, started talking worriedly about a disease he had contracted that we didn't know the name of. It was, of course, multiple sclerosis, which for a farmer like Magnus was a disaster, and therefore it made him "evil" in his mind. As he learned to live with his unfortunate fate and the rapidly worsening disease and could only get around sitting on his tractor, I remember him incredibly as one of the most loving and happy people before he finally disintegrated completely. He and his wife, Klara, who to this day at 95 years old is still an ever-smiling bundle of energy and who for many years took over Magnus' work in the stables, therefore became another set of "saving angels" for Niels Jørgen and me. Magnus became one of the first examples of the love I later learned existed in all those we at first glance consider "evil".

Was there a connection between the terrifying experience in Magnus' potato cellar and the invisible evil we ourselves practiced in his attic? Maybe, because here lived one of the social losers of the area, Kristian Uldtot, whom Magnus and Klara had taken in, just as my father had let Kristian Sømand build his little shack in the fence behind our tenant house, whose pungent smell and cardboard box walls were the reason that later in life I felt naturally and almost wistfully at home in the poor black shacks in the United States. Previously, they had both lived in old train cars out on the moors, and although we children loved Kristian Seaman in particular, we quickly learned that the two of them belonged at the bottom of the village pecking order.

Therefore, we were constantly picking on them in one way or another, for example, viciously teasing Kristian Sømand by hiding his bike when he was drunk. I'll never forget when we could hear him staggering home drunk through the alley from our bed, while loudly swearing loudly about the missing bike. Although they were both good to us children and frequently gave us quarters, Jens, Niels Jørgen and I often started going into Kristian Uldtot's unlocked attic room on our own stealing both dimes and nickels from his wallet to buy sweets. One day it was discovered, and we got a severe beating with Magnus' cane. I don't remember if it was that particular day, but one of the times when Magnus came limping after us with his terrifying cane, he fled

Kristian Seaman's shack behind the vicarage photographed by me in pure Walker Evans style.
I feel it inspired me to go on to photograph the largest collection of the poorest shacks ever created in the United States.

I looked quickly out through the barn past the chicken shed and ran into a tightly spun barbed wire, which tore a large "woolen paw" out of my head and threw it hard backwards into a rock. I got such a big bleeding hole in my head that I had to have medical treatment. In any case, the two incidents have become so entangled in my pierced head that ever since then I have both felt a deeper sense of guilt towards such poor "scum" as Kristian Uldtot - and have never, ever stolen money again.

But that was not the end of my evil acts against the weakest. In first grade, we went to school with the slightly retarded Viggo. He couldn't really keep up in class and was later moved down a grade. But due to a teacher shortage, we went with him for seven years, where he was quietly allowed to mind his own business as the most peaceful and harmless person I have ever met. But since he was a bit odd, Erik, Hans and I hid on the hill by Granly one day and beat him up on the way home from school. As the ugly duckling in the class, he had to be "keyed", as it is written. Why did we do it? Why is that?

Why do you beat up someone who is weak and different and can't make it? There is no doubt that this event has shaped me more than any other. For the next seven years in elementary school, I had a terrible guilt complex towards Viggo and did everything I could to help him. When I met him at the cemetery in Fåborg at the age of 51, I had a good chat with him. At an advanced age, he had now moved into sheltered housing and was receiving adult education, as he had not done very well in life. At one point, when he expressed some kind of thanks to me that I was the only one who had never hurt him, I told him straight out what I had never really been able to bring myself to say before: "No, I really have to apologize. I was the one who hurt you first and started the whole avalanche." But he had absolutely no recollection of that.

Without a doubt, this first "bullying", as it is too mildly referred to today, had a far greater impact on me, the executioner, than on the victim. The intense guilt I developed towards him was probably the only reason why I never participated in the cruelty towards him afterwards. And to some extent, I became one of his guardian angels in later school years.

I also experienced that there are many sides to evil when it rained on the same school road. With my slalom driving, I always came far behind the others for fear of running over the many crawling earthworms. The others often teased me at school by bragging that they would bite the earthworms in front of me, as I have never been able to kill an animal. I could drive the maids crazy with the animals I collected in my room at home. Once I accidentally pushed aside the cover glass over the aquarium where I kept an entire anthill to study and film them, with the result that thousands of ants poured into the room. I couldn't bring myself to push the glass back into place as it would smother a lot of them in their flight. As a result, my room was soon filled with ants that threatened to spill out into the entire rectory. To avoid Mom's wrath, I had to gently suck them the vacuum cleaner and then set them free in the wild from the bag. In doing so, I lost lost the entire collection, but I didn't kill a single one, even though I for a long time afterwards had the creeps of my new bedfellows.

Almost the same thing happened to my maggots when, at dusk, they would take off from the aquarium and fly out of the room if I had forgotten to close the door. The problem was that they weren't quite as diligent about cleaning as the ants, living off the fresh, wafer-thin cow dung I collected in the barn, which the whole room smelled like. So my mother was going out of her mind, yelling and screaming that she didn't want them to put their coconut box feet on the mahogany furniture, and finally got the maid to throw them out while I was at school. The viper that Niels Jørgen, Jens and I caught in the plantation was not allowed in my room at all. We took it to school, where it lived happily in the classroom for a long time in its terrarium together with a mouse, and it wriggled musically up the glass every time teacher Teglgård played the violin. I think that was my first successful attempt to get imaginary enemies to live together harmoniously like the lion and the lamb.

Downsizing

But I was also bullied myself - in reverse, from the bottom up. Being a priest's son was something very special in the countryside back then. The doctor and the priest were the only ones with a high level of education, and the priest in particular had a high status. I can't quite decide whether this was just because of the somewhat enigmatically exalted role of the priest, or whether it was because my father was particularly revered. It wasn't a particularly religious town. No more than 15-20 people went to church regularly. But it did have an effect on us children, that we were a bit "better" by virtue of being the priest's sons. I could feel it everywhere we went to parties and celebrations. You could see in people's eyes that they looked up to us or somehow felt that we had a higher status. We got a little less loud scolding in the village than the other kids for the same misdemeanors. If I've ever had an *inferiority* complex - even later in life with a sense of having to save the world - I think it can be traced back to that feeling.

Coupled with the reverent reactions of the parishioners towards my father, which we read in their different treatment of us "pastor's sons", he acquired an almost mythical status in my early mind. As a priest

Being the son of the authorities was both stressful and deeply formative. Here is my father's appointment as dean of the entire Esbjerg area.

and later a deacon, this "love of the people, my strength" gave him an unearned power that he unwittingly used to keep the people he worked with in a kind of dependency relationship. With his charisma and control of the environment, these leadership qualities were important when, as president of the youth association, he directed amateur plays and had to inspire people to go the extra mile. I think he could even praise people in a joking way - an important component of manipulation that I'm not good at when working with people.

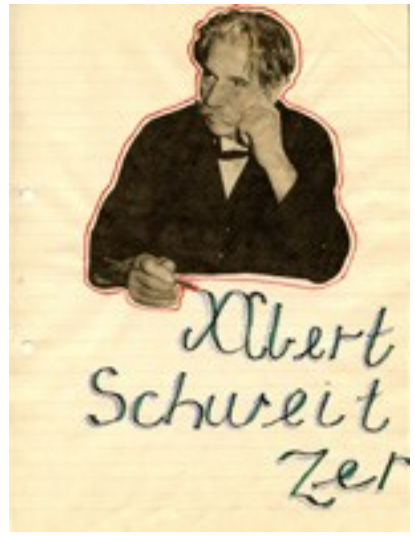
It took a *certain* amount of charismatic manipulation and cynicism for the outgoing, bright Grundtvigian to convert or at least loosen up even the darkest missionaries in the parish and get them dancing and drinking alcohol. No matter how critically they listened to his sermons in church, he could always convince them with his knowledge of the Bible. But the more successful he was, the less he actually tolerated contradictions. I can clearly see this trait in myself as a speaker on topics where I "know I'm right" with my expertise.

Throughout my childhood, I watched my father try to distinguish between his exalted priestly role and the need to be human in a safe and confidential circle. We were by no means seen as royalty, but the comparison probably held true for a while along the dirt roads before they were paved during class equalization in the 60s.

Later, in my workshops in the US, I learned how much the privileged students suffered from having to live up to the expectations of their upper-class families. Here I could clearly see the parallel to the psychologically oppressive universe when, as a child priest, I had to feel like a representative of authority. I think of a day when I told my parents that Niels Jørgen had started swearing like everyone else at school. In this his first healthy rebellion against oppression, I became his Judas and tattled at home. After all, I had long since learned that this was not how to behave in my exalted, royal role as a priest's son. One of the most important corrective factors in my upbringing - or rather "downbringing" from the pedestal - was when Niels, Bent, Lille-Kaj and a couple of others mowed me down in the snow on the way home from school and beat me up. They were in the class above me, and I think it was Lille-Kaj who led the way. "Do ska fame et tro, do er så fin ... Do ska et tro å do är noed selom do æ præstsøn," I remember them shouting. It was, of course, in reverse, a confirmation of the specialness I had come to feel by being the priest's son. I had to get down on my neck and have my entire back stuffed with cold ice and snow because I appeared a little better than the others, among other things by not swearing. The thing that made the biggest impression on me that day was that I was told that I was too "nice" by, among other things, wearing too nice pants. This was long before children started psychologically ostracizing those in the class that can't afford "fancy" branded clothing as we see it today.

I have no idea what kind of pants I wore - the priests of the time were not financially rich - although they may have been "finer" plus-four knee-length pants than, for example, Little-Kaj's. In any case, it meant that I would never wear nice clothes again. I always preferred to wear shabby clothes, and still do to this day, just as I later lowered myself in people's social consciousness by growing a silly, braided beard. Apart from the obligatory confirmation clothes, I was over 60 years before my wife convinced me to have a suit made on a trip to India. With the argument of supporting the poor Indian tailors - "and so you can look a little nicer for all the Muslim weddings you're invited to" - my wife had long since learned to appeal to my "reverse class snobbery".

From my school assignment on Albert Schweitzer, who became a huge inspiration to me early on with his work for the poorest in Africa. In that sense, he became a moving angel of salvation for me, not least with his philosophy on the importance of being that for others:
"Sometimes our own light goes out, but is then reignited by a spark from the encounter with another human being. Each of us has reason to think with deep gratitude to those who have kindled the flame within us and restored the inner spirit."



Saving angels

Very early on, I became fascinated by a story I had read about the doctor, philosopher and Nobel laureate Albert Schweitzer and wrote a huge paper about him in 6th grade. He became my idol, which made it easier for me to live with being a little different because I identified with his childhood, where there were so many parallels. He, too, was a minister's son and had had a similar experience of being molested by the poorer children - and had since reacted by refusing to wear nice clothes. Through his early verbal rebellion against, for example, colonialism, and since his example of actively showing that it is not enough just to *preach* against injustice, my first vague dreams of going out into the world and doing something for the oppressed probably arose.

That I one day, like Schweitzer, actually ending up helping to build a jungle hospital in Africa is one of life's strange coincidences.

But all my life I have been very aware of who I am indebted to. Lille-Kaj, Bent, Niels and the others were just the first of my many later "attackers" with whom I have kept the connection alive. Few people shape your life as much as those who attack it. The rough, foul-mouthed boys who used to torment me are now among the city's most prejudiced against immigrants. Even now that I've become good friends with Lille-Kaj, he often says this to me: "I'm a damn racist, but they shouldn't blame us, you know!" Of course, I didn't need to travel to the US to experience the insight into the pain behind all racism. I had already experienced it in his childhood.

Kaj's younger brother, Finn, had been my younger brother Niels Jørgen's best friend. They had always played soccer together, and Finn often came to play in the vicarage. But Finn did better in school than Kaj and behaved "nicer". He was therefore the favorite son of their father, the workman Vagn Sørensen, and Kaj naturally felt burdened by this obvious favoritism, just like his biblical namesake, Cain. Then the tragic thing happened: in the middle of a soccer match, Finn dropped dead of a heart defect in front of my brother, who was the goalkeeper, and half the town. "His heart was too big," it was said. For Kaj, it was almost as if Cain's murder of Abel had come true. He felt eternally guilty that the accident had happened to the wrong person, whom his father favored, and Vagn Sørensen's world came crashing down. For the rest of his life, we saw him wandering the streets in grief, and Kaj naturally reacted in a pattern of violent anger, drinking and verbal violence. After all, he himself had not been "nice enough" as his little brother to be accepted by his own father or in the parsonage.

When I returned from the US with my slide show, almost everyone came to see it at the inn, but Kaj and the other guys from the taproom refused. "I can't believe you've suddenly become something," they said. So I set up all the equipment in Kaj's living room and called the guys together for an evening of beer and a show - and the miracle happened that I managed to shut them all up for five hours. All people are reachable,and ever since Little Jaws stopped speaking to me in angry

sentences and verbal abuse. Fortunately, there were a number of good people who took care of me and helped me along the way. The most important in the early formative years were without a doubt the tenant farmers, Morten and Stinne, who lived in the red wooden and thatched farm building on the other side of the courtyard. Whenever there was a storm from my mother, even in the eye of a hurricane, we could go there and find warmth for our souls. I still remember the heat from the peat stove in the kitchen before they got an oil stove in the utility room. Here we were seated on the long side of the table, while the quiet Stinne served us everything we weren't allowed to have at home, as my mother was quite health-conscious compared to the local farmers. Her tyranny over us included force-feeding us with spoonfuls the size of ladles filled with foul-tasting cod liver oil. In contrast, Stinne's sugar and syrup sandwiches - with so much syrup that we had to build ramparts of butter to keep it inside the home-baked round bread - were a visible symbol of the embracing care we received from the tenant couple. When we stayed overnight, we didn't consider that the sweet life might be a reason why they had to take out their dentures every night and put them in water next to the bed.

But far more important was their quiet, uplifting comfort, which they always miraculously provided, never being unaware of when mom was on the warpath. Her all-pervasive, loud war cries could be heard all over the courtyard through the open kitchen windows during her unreasonable reprimands of us or the kitchen maids when she was unwell. Then Morten and Stinne knew that we were wounded like casualties of war, and like Florence Nightingale, they stood by with smothering and quiet reassurance. Just the calm, broken only by the tick-tock of the kukur, was soothing to us like the meditative silence of a church. The most that was said at mealtimes was probably Morten's initial pious prayer with his hands clasped over his closed eyes and balding forehead. Their indremissionary fervor stood in stark contrast to my father's habitual Christian Grundtvigianism and my mother, who was completely devoid of any religiosity or capacity for self-absorption. But to me, they were just "Morten and Stinne" who took care of us, even when they had Bible meetings and readings with their equally fundamentalist friends,

Morten, Stinne and their daughter, Erna, and son-in-law for afternoon coffee in the garden, and Niels Jørgen and me in our caps. What I loved most was when we worked in the fields and Stinne would come out in the afternoon with baskets of coffee and freshly baked buns with raisins and tooth butter.

and we had to piously sit and listen in. I was deaf to their rhetoric, but I am sure that today I owe Morten and Stinne my great empathy for similar fundamentalist groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir.

When they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary shortly after my return from the US in 1976, I spontaneously stood up at the party at the inn and gave a tearful thank-you speech. It came from the heart (and from the wine, which Morten had now begun to appreciate), so unfortunately I didn't get to write it down. But there was one thing I remember that I particularly emphasized. Namely, the example Morten and Stinne had set for stray poor vagabonds. Despite their thatched roof and the fire hazard they exposed themselves to, they had never hesitated to give shelter to the vagrants in the barn, unlike most others in the area. Typically, the wandering vagabonds sought out parsonages, where they could always play the "Good Samaritan", but I never saw my parents invite them into a warm bed or offer them a much-needed bath. They left this to the tenant farmer, while they themselves only extended their hospitality to a morning coffee followed by morning singing in the living room.

Morten and Stinne took us under their wings from day one. Here we are in the field with Mom a few days after our arrival in 1950. And above is Mom with Morten and Stinne out riding in the horse-drawn carriage in 1952 with one of the turnip wives. I learned to stack the nails meters high in these old, narrow box wagons and reach them up to the attic in the barn behind before they were replaced with the wide wagons on rubber wheels that belonged to the new Ferguson tractors of the 50s.

I peel potatoes with Anna Lise in front of my children's room, where she would put Niels Jørgen and me to sleep every afternoon, much to our protests.

We are with Morten in the vicarage bog to dig peat. Before we arrived, it was the tenant farmer's duty - almost as if he was a tenant farmer - to supply the priest with 10 cubic meters of wood and whatever peat was needed from the 200 acres of land that belonged to the vicarage.
But Morten continued to supply us with heat out of habit. On the other hand, Dad and I used to collect Christmas trees from the forest every year for all the neighbors.

It was only a 1.5 kilometer walk to Thomas Sørensen's farm, but I remember it as one of my most terrifying experiences. Because just before the farm on Avtrupvej 1, the entire gravel road was blocked by his peacocks, which stood with their tail feathers pointed towards us - a sight we had never seen before. But as soon as we entered the warmth of Anna Lise's seven siblings, I learned the importance of overcoming their anxiety.

Anna Lise's wedding at the inn with my classmate, the innkeeper's son "Niels Kro" opposite. I loved our maids' big weddings at the long tables and have continued to return to their birthdays and funerals throughout my life.

At home on the farm with our nanny Ingrid Asp, I learned to drive the new Ferguson tractors of the time. Her brother Arne was my gym teacher for a while and at the age of 82 still argues with me on Face-
book about my relationship with immigrants.

Old love never rusts. With Annette by the Limfjord in 2018. Now that she has become an artist in retirement (she painted the picture behind us, among other things), I continue my loving teasing. "You paint faithful copies of grandma's flower pictures that you always had to dust off on the walls." If anyone, Annette learned my mother's swear word, "faaaarmor"("Graaaanma")

For Asta Østergård's 90th birthday on November 28, 2017. Asta welcomed us as a 17-year-old in the rectory in 1950 and made the coffee for my father's funeral 50 years later. My brothers also visit her again and again on the farm, where she, with her incredible memory, is my source of all knowledge about who is who in my scanned collection of people in my childhood village, when they got married and so on. Today, her daughter runs the Faaborg City History Archive. But since she is not so keen on my involvement in "those foreigners", she always emphasizes like my old nanny: "I disclaim any responsibility for how Mads bled this morning!"

Throughout my life I have been incredibly close to my old nannies - and vice versa. Here four of them showed up in 2008 for one of my photo exhibitions, just as they continue to come to my lectures all over the country. From left Ingrid Asp and the three sisters, Solveig, Asta and Anna Lise.

And this despite the fact that we lived in the relative luxury of having maids who could have easily done an extra load of laundry.

The maids, to varying degrees of ability, also played a significant role as saving angels for me. One of my first memories of the maids was from the age of three or four, when I was alone with Vera, Marie or Anna Lise in the kitchen in the morning before my mother got up. I stood in the window and always sang "Bamse's birthday" while trying to melt the ice flowers on the windows to see them dragging baskets full of peat across the courtyard from the red woodshed at the end of the old vicarage. Then I could also see and hear the tenant farmer clattering his clogs across the cobblestones to go to their outdoor privy (while we were lucky enough to have an indoor one). Or watch the man come tumbling out of his little sleeping chamber at the end of the horse stable with my two beloved horses. The tenant farmer was obliged to deliver the peat to the vicar, and we children loved to watch them dig "clusters", as they called them, out in the vicarage bog. When the maid would bring in the peat, I loved to see her remove the many iron rings over the stove and laboriously light the fire, and only later in the day did the rest of the long house begin to warm up. I'll never forget how freezing cold the blankets were to crawl under at bedtime.

But all that changed when my father got the bishop's permission to demolish the 100-year-old rotten rectory in 1955. Then we were suddenly brought into the modern age with oil-fired boilers, central heating, insulated double-glazed windows and hot running water.

Asta Østergaard had served with the former pastor and welcomed us when we arrived from Copenhagen in 1950, and she continued to make coffee for the parties for 50 years - even the grave coffee for my father's funeral in 2000. Her sister, Anna Lise, soon followed and was the first person I really bonded with, which is why - when I started writing this book - I returned once again to interview her on tape about how she had experienced my mother. Now that both my mother and father were died, she could safely speak out.

As most of the farm girls who came out to serve back then were only 14-15 years old, they were probably too young to pick up on the deeper

tensions in the vicarage. Anna Lise could only remember a few of my mother's unreasonableness, such as when she fell ill just before the Christmas preparations, and mother demanded compensation, after which her older sister Magna came and looked after us. As one of our later maids, Solveig, was also their sister, the same farmer's family, Søren Thomsen Sørensensens, had a total of four of my childhood maids, who even came along on our vacations. Naturally, this meant that their family out in Autrup became a natural part of our family and yet another kind of saving angel for us.

Søren Thomsen Sørensen was always the speaker at our family celebrations in the vicarage with his special singing dialect, and as retirees, he and his wife Esther ended up getting special permission to build a house in the lower part of the vicarage garden. As they had eight children and we attended all their big weddings, christening parties, silver weddings - and eventually a number of funerals - I associate the Thomsen Sørensen family with most of the happy celebrations of my childhood. Since then, I have scanned both Asta's, Anna Lise's and Solveig's wedding albums and posted them on my websites, as virtually all the residents of my childhood village are depicted in them. Throughout my life, I have continued to return to their parties, just as I hitchhiked to Grindsted in 2008 to say goodbye to Solveig on her deathbed and thank her for her importance to me. But it was also a family with a lot of grief. Their brother Erling, who I went to gymnastics with, later took over the farm. During an attempt to rescue his son from a deep well, both Erling and his son died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

We also became close to some of the other maids' families. When we lived at Sørine's farm in Vrenderup, I don't forget how scared I was because the bed was right up against the board wall, which the bull in the stable on the other side was shaking throughout the night. A pure nightmare in the midst of the happiness of being away from my mother's rumbling through all the walls. We also attended Sørine's wedding and her son Hans' christening and confirmation - before Hans hanged himself in the stable just a couple of years after his confirmation, and I have since seen his parents' grief-stricken faces when they came to the vicarage as members of the parish council.

Night after night every May, I was lulled to sleep as the actors - like Ivar Hansen with a saber - practiced for the constitutional plays. I eventually knew the plays inside out. Ivar Hansen was very important to me as a role model. "The son your father wanted, but never had," as people said. He always attended my father's birthdays, so when he died suddenly while he was Speaker of the Danish Parliament in 2004, I gave a speech in front of two prime ministers and many politicians about the person they didn't know from before he came in politics.

Niels Jørgen and I always received loving affection from the many in the parish, which my father gathered in the vicarage. Here at one of the annual constitution meetings.

When I experienced the long line of maids in my childhood - Asta 1950, Vera and Marie 1951, Anna Lise 1951, Sørine 1952, Ingrid 1953, Sigrid 1954, Grethe 1955, Bothilde and Kirstine 1956, Solveig 1957, Hedvig 1958, Karen 1959, Bodil and Else 1960, Anette 1961, Anne Dorte 1962, Helga and Kis 1963 in chronological order plus the regular baking, coffee, cleaning and gardening wives - as loving lightning rods in the relationship with my mother, I have visited them many times since then.

The early ones don't have much to complain about my mother, but the ones from my later years have a lot to complain about. Both my mother and me. I also conclude from this that my mother's mental illnesses gradually worsened over the years, just as my reactions to them increased. One of them, Anette, wrote me a long, revealing letter about my mother after her funeral in 1997. While the first ones had served with us for a whole year at a time, the last ones often left after only a few weeks with my mother. And eventually, she gave up hiring more people altogether - probably also in line with the changing times in the 70s, when the young farmer's daughters had to go to school instead of being out earning. Both my mother and the girls experienced each other as "too demanding" in these new times. Unlike the submissive girls of earlier times, they now stood up to her, which, as I said, was a mortal sin against her "bad nerves". This time coincided with my own adolescence's increasing rebelliousness, but since I had wisely learned to suppress it in my relationship with my mother, it was now increasingly affecting the maids.

In adolescence - when we were almost equal in age - their role for me was more like a whipping boy, to whom I could safely turn my pent-up anger. In my diaries from the age of 13, I am a little shocked to read phrases like "teased Karen again after school" in almost every single day's entries. When I later over the years visited Karen in Brande - most recently in 2003, shortly before her death, where she served my former favorite dish, tartlets with chicken in asparagus - I could not help but apologize. But funnily enough, every time again in the same teasing way, as it's easy to get stuck in the childhood patterns.

On the surface, everything was idyllic and it was all about keeping up appearances. I have often since found such glossy images in even the most traumatized families. I'm in my confirmation clothes here in 1961.

My mother with our little brother Steen the day after his birth on March 3, 1960.

Over time, my aggression got worse, and the last maid, Kis, I remember throwing pepper in her eyes on a day my mother wasn't home. This was during high school, when I had so many other frustrations, and during that time, my teasing was probably also to some extent sexual in nature, which was reciprocal. In any case, I remember the nightly dreams I would have when Annette came in to wake me up in the morning and made herself extremely attractive in her plaid dress with the apron, as she very, very slowly rolled up the curtain and pulled away the duvet. There wasn't much left of this seductively voluptuous young girl when she came to my lecture in Tjele in 2001, and I stood and entertained the audience about these sexually charged moments. But Anette - now in a wheelchair - blushed proudly.

It has often puzzled me, after all the sins I have committed since, why I behaved so well as a priest's son and did not have the courage to realize these nightly dreams about some of the maids in a more tangible way. And it has annoyed me that these peasant girls themselves were so well-behaved that, despite their obvious desires, they did nothing more than leave it at flirtatious teasing, even though my room was right next to the girls' room and my parents were often away from home. That's how you can keep dreaming all your life and forget that dreams are often better than reality.

I should not underestimate the importance of all the love we also received from the parishioners when they invariably filled our living rooms for coffee, singing and readings by my father. Then he stood in one of the wing doors between the three large garden rooms that he had built, just like in the old vicarage, so that they could be combined and accommodate as many people as possible in addition to those in the confirmation room. For a while we even had two pianos. As small children, we would lie upstairs and enjoy the peace and quiet in our beds, just as we memorized the plays when the actors - among them later MP Ivar Hansen - rehearsed for weeks in the summer before the big Constitution Day celebration in the garden. Today, as a lecturer, I love living in the country's many large vicarages - and dragging my immigrant friends along to experience the best of these old Danish values with informative meetings

and lectures that are so unfamiliar in most other countries. But now that the parishes have parish halls instead, and I see the priest's living rooms flooded with their children's toys and clutter, I sadly feel that something has been lost of the old vicarage coziness.

Understanding the pain of others

Of course, my mother has occasionally played and cuddled me in the long moments when my father was not present. But I have often wondered whether the idyllic image of my mother and I playing together is one I have experienced myself, or whether I have conjured it up in all its archetypicality because it represents a deeper loss from my own childhood. The question is also whether she has been able to do it with the presence and sincerity that makes a child feel truly loved. With her difficult and self-absorbed mind, such happy moments with my mother have probably been largely characterized by a certain automaticity on her part, as something a mother should remember to do in the child's first year of life. I remember, at least as a 13-year-old, when my parents had the late-born Steen, how my mother stood and listened rather helplessly as she was taught by the instructive nanny, Mrs. von der Recke, that "this is how you do it... and the child also likes to be cuddled here and there". If she needed such homework help after having already given birth to and raised two boys, how helpless was she when, as a 26-year-old spoiled peasant girl, she was the first to have me?

Of course, it was a time when the child was not the center of attention like today's curling parents, so in that sense, I was probably not deeply damaged by the absence of the warm and sincere love that is poured unconditionally from the heart by people who have been given a surplus of their own. In any case, I was no more damaged than most of my contemporaries - not to mention the millions of love-starved generations before me.

Therefore, when I try to analyze the human being Åse Grete Rigmor Hansen as objectively as possible for her lack of abilities in this respect - and for exactly the same reason feel strongly for her - it is on the basis of my own remembered reactions in conjunction with the many similar

When I washed dishes, I would always get a break from my mom's overfusing and daydream. I learned to love it to such an extent that it later made me a popular hobo in the US. As soon as I walked into people's homes, I always set to work on their dishes, which often accumulated for days - especially those of apathetic blacks and hippies. In many an American home, I have introduced the well-suited Danish dish brush to replace the impractical American washcloth. I've never understood why people get dishwashing machines and thereby cheat themselves of the best philosophical moments.

consequences I have seen among the hundreds of children I have lived with in American - not least black - homes. And partly by observing later in life my mother's awkward behavior patterns when interacting with other children, including my own, to whom she clearly had neither the desire nor the ability to give undivided attention for more than a few seconds - even in the most hysterically lost baby language. The result was that her own grandchildren reacted to this rhetorically exaggerated but fundamentally flawed love by never developing a close relationship between them.

When my mother would dutifully come in to say goodnight to me after a long day of scolding and reprimanding - sometimes even sitting on the edge of the bed for a moment with a few hollow words about "how important it is to love each other", and maybe even daring to give me an awkward goodnight kiss - I remember how often I would quickly pull the covers up over my head to protect myself from her kisses. But soon, Mom probably gave up on these disappointing sessions, and in fact, it was the maids who were usually sent in to tuck us in, they have since told me.

Over the years, I've come to realize that my uncles' explanations about my mother's problems don't hold water. They were not caused by an external "pampering", but by an internal illness. Today, I am convinced that my mother suffered from ADHD, and that this was the diagnosis I fell victim to and inherited as a child. In my mother's childhood, you may have noticed the "wild, unruly boys", but many girls with ADHD are actually symptom-free in childhood and are often mistaken for the quiet girls. That's why the image of my mother as the good girl at my grandmother's coffee tables fits perfectly. It wasn't until she hit puberty that she began to display the typical female symptoms of introverted, dreamy, forgetful, messy and inefficient, making her appear lazy. When this is coupled with the key characteristic of both my mother and women in general with ADHD being hypersensitive to criticism, it's clear that her conflict-averse family gave up making demands on her early on and later described her as spoiled.

When such girls grow up, they often have great difficulty holding on to their thoughts, jobs and boyfriends, just as my father described my mother. The fact that he held on to her for 30 years after discovering his life's mistake was probably only because he was a priest and therefore didn't dare change her for his secret lover for the last 13 years of his life, Ragna. Because it had really unpleasant consequences for him that the "nice", slightly confused (though still in a charming, young girlish way) and even beautiful farmer's daughter he fell in love with back then quickly developed the symptoms.

With my mother, the experience of being different gradually turned into a feeling of being wrong and a failure - not least as a result of my father's reactions. With her tendency to turn things inwards, she developed anxiety, depression and stress. She constantly felt misunderstood by the outside world, with a basic sense of feeling left out in the heavier religious community, whose more cheerful companionship she both sought and loved. And she was frustrated that as a priest's wife, she couldn't share her problems with anyone.

I ran away from home too early to become a saving angel to my younger brother Steen, as I learned in his reproachful speech at my 60th birthday party. But like him, I was repressed enough by my mother to spend my life carelessly spouting an angry "mother tongue" of hurtful remarks at others.

After my mother's death in 1997, her best childhood playmate, Hjørdis, also told me how Grethe had been so egocentric that she never tolerated being told off when they played. So, people's explanations for my mother's growing mental illness are all beautiful and well-intentioned, and the forgiving understanding and insight I gained through them has helped protect and shape me. Later in life, when I encountered people whose behavior seemed incomprehensible and reprehensible, these explanations helped me more than if they had said: "your mother is nothing but an unthinking egotist" or similar categorical condemnations.

Many of my later problems with making deeper commitments and seeking love in more committed relationships - that is, the side of me that I turned into something positive and creative as a vagabond - undoubtedly goes back to the fear of being swallowed up by a partner like my mother. Because as I repressed reality myself, it has given me a certain cynical (photographic) distance to life and love.

No matter how much rational behavior my parents collectively tried to demonstrate to the outside world, my personality was equally imbued with the overwhelming dark power my mother had over my mind and my brothers' minds. Her constant mood swings and the anxiety that followed permeated everything in the parsonage. No matter how far away I hid in my remote attic room, her constant slamming of doors and excited, often screaming abuse of my father, the maid and my brothers permeated everything and everyone. She always brought it down on herself - especially if you contradicted her, which we brothers almost automatically did in our younger years. How can you not verbally rebel against constant demands that seem unreasonable and incomprehensible to children when a "why do I have to do that?" was always answered with "because I say so - do you understand!" shouted with hands at their sides and glaring eyes. And if there was any further resistance, she would always shout "I'll get daddy!" and burst into the office and pulled him out of his important work.

As a rural pastoral counselor who often counseled families with marital problems, my mother's hysterical intrusion could undoubtedly be quite therapeutically healing for married couples who

came and imagined that their own little problem was one of the world's biggest. In my and Niels Jørgen's childhood, my conflict-averse father always took my mother's side without contradiction - "do what mom says" - in order to quickly get some peace and quiet to get back to the office and continue writing his sermons and speeches. He knew that if he tried to reason with my mother, when reason was at least sometimes on the children's side, it would immediately trigger a mental breakdown in her. First she would start screaming hysterically that everyone was against her, and then she would bury herself in bed for three days, where in later years she would numb the pain with whiskey.

Seen from the protective shell I created around myself, the emotional climate of my childhood years was on the surface calm and peaceful. But it was less harmonious for the more sensitive Niels Jørgen, who has often accused me of being blind and not remembering anything about it all. And certainly not for my 13 years younger little brother, Steen, who ended up being far more devastated by the growing disharmony after I left home.

It wasn't until we two older brothers had left home and Steen was left alone with Mom's worsening illness that Dad began to take some responsibility by calling Steen into the office and defending him: "You have to understand that Mom is sick, so I have to be careful when she is unreasonable with you." It was a relief for the child to know that he was not to blame, but the other two of us never got that protection from him. Well, "maybe we deserved it too", as abused children later in life often post-rationalize their own early oppression.

It was too late for Steen. He became so locked in by his blistering resistance and defiant anger that he carried his unresolved rage into his later marriage, which was consequently a long replay of his relationship with our mother and ultimately failed. He ended up in the psychiatric ward with such severe depression that his psychiatrists called me in to try to open him up and understand him. They ended up using my first drafts of this memoir to get to the bottom of his childhood traumas, especially with my mother, and then treated him with electroshock therapy.

With Dad and Mom on the Storebælt ferry on our way to my grandparents' summer vacation in Marbjerg. When we reached the relaxing ferry, mom first started to relax and cheerfully looking forward to it myself. Ever since then, as a speaker, I have associated ferries with freedom, wanderlust, community and, most importantly, the enforced relaxing rests that are so important to people - which is why I eagerly debated against the Great Belt Bridge back in the day.

That these childhood injuries were externally imposed traits that constantly stifled his gentle personality, we all experienced with great relief when, after his final breakdown and psychiatric help, he has since overwhelmed everyone with his liberated love and empathy.

I feel it is important to mention here because it highlights how lucky Niels Jørgen and I were to escape my mother's worsening mental illness in time, which for many years gave rise to envy on Steen's part, which I experienced in a reproachful speech for my 60th birthday. Conversely, I have often wondered whether I was actually tone deaf, psychologically numb, or simply trying to entrench myself emotionally to survive the terror of childhood and thereby better able to use my experiences.

For long periods of time, we children also suffered from the fact that we were not allowed to have intercourse with certain families, where my mother had taken a dim view of a generally strong-charactered, authoritative woman who had once stood up to her. I may have inherited this side of her in reverse, having spent a lifetime spending

oceans of time and mental energy on to make peace with my enemies, opponents or critics. In other words, I am similar to my mother in the sense that our "enemies" consume our minds and come to define us. Oddly enough, this side of me is seen as my "inclusiveness" - the ability to make peace with the Ku Klux Klan and so on - but it's more like "narrowness" when I can't just "rest in myself" at the sight of my opponents.

A gift I also got from her is a sensitivity to the moods and moods of others. I later referred to the rapidly fluctuating emotions of repressed people as "switchblade mentality", especially when I saw it in my black girlfriends. But the biggest legacy she probably gave me was something Niels Jørgen pointed out to me during a recent dinner. In my single-minded focus on her illness, I had almost overlooked her spaciousness and extroversion during the periods when she became exuberantly cheerful in her encounters with other people - not least with quirky existences. She had a completely different ability to connect with people than my more reserved father. He wasn't the one who would invite the usual cutters, "barons" and "merchants" home for coffee and sing-alongs. Mom loved it when they smelled of booze, or when they stomped their worn-out shoes on her fine carpets and sang "The sun rises in the east" in a deafening voice. Then my mother would blossom and play with them for half the day without being discouraged by the feelings of inferiority that being with more educated people always triggered in her. It was as if she was "set free" from her deeper pain.

But considering that I may also have inherited a bit of my mother's "can't stand being contradicted" mindset, my weakness has been that I have too often tended to oppose people I perceived as even greater "oppressors". Thus, later on - at an only slightly more mature age - I got into endless and time-consuming arguments and even lawsuits with several of my publishers in fear of being at the mercy of these authorities. In my struggle against people I saw as people in power because, like my mother, I felt a deep intellectual inferiority towards them, I probably sometimes unconsciously used destructive methods that turned me into the very

monster I was fighting against.

But with his fear of touch, my father - as I later did with my children - would probably have reacted to the accusation of being too emotionally reserved. He certainly shut up like an oyster when I brought it up in his 70th birthday speech in front of the many assembled pastor colleagues, who afterwards confessed to me that they all felt personally affected. When this fear of touch - and I mean that quite literally as the absence of a loving fatherly hug - went hand in hand with his consistent defense of my mother, it could not help but constantly make me feel like I was doing something wrong and had a bad conscience. When I was constantly told by those around me that my father was "a great man" and committed to always doing the right thing, I couldn't help but get the confusing feeling that I wasn't living up to his expectations and that there was something wrong with *me*. This was undoubtedly devastating to my self-esteem. Although I have long since reconciled with my father's mental health difficulties as an adult, the mere raising of his eyebrow could re-stimulate childhood patterns of suffering throughout my life and make me crawl into a mouse hole.

Getting in touch with my repressed emotions was also not something I got help with from my devaluing father and the whole jantelovian oppression we grew up with in West Jutland. Therefore, I have no doubt that it was necessary to come to the more emotionally liberated and liberating America to realize that deep emotions do not necessarily result in pain and frustration. And to learn to see them as a gift rather than a curse. It wasn't until I got help from others over there that I gradually began to be able to free myself from my parent's powerful inner housekeeper and to express the most positive aspects I share with my mother in the form of a warm, beating heart with a deep, instinctive compassion for the pain of others and with my father in his incredible - and present - work with pastoral care. Qualities that greatly inspired me in my own counseling of hundreds of distressed motorists as a hobo and later in my workshops.