

CHAPTER 2

SAYING YES TO CITY DWELLERS

In the village where I grew up, we children were taught early on to be prejudiced against city dwellers. Especially, of course, "the stuck-up københavnners". I don't know where we got them from, but it must have been from the tone of the adults when they - of course in a humorous love/hate relationship - referred to these strange city creatures. All over the world, I've seen a certain amount of inferiority among rural dwellers, which of course has to be compensated for by the heavies. Even some of my friends in the American South who have worked their way up from "poor white trash" to "self-made millionaires" continue to have an ingrained fear of coming to New York for fear of being seen as "rednecks" - that is, suppressed by an inner feeling rather than by New Yorkers' reaction to them.

But when I moved here from the big city at the age of three and was visiting family members in the city, I retained a certain sense of loyalty towards Copenhageners for a long time. I remember, among other things, how I could feel hurt by derogatory remarks about them, for example when we had the poor Copenhagen girl Vera on vacation. As with most racist remarks I've heard about blacks, homosexuals, Muslims and so on, the statements were not malicious in nature and were rarely directed at the person themselves or in their presence. But when I heard neighbors say: "What's a magnanimous merchant doing over here?" before Vera's arrival, I too was easily manipulated into this oppressive "us and them" thinking. Because here I'm more interested in the cost it has for the practitioner themselves. After all, the healthy child's experience that everyone is worth the same had not

just lush growing conditions in the sandy soil of West Jutland, where they were just as trained in chopping off the tops of beets as they were of "the others". The Germans suffered the worst. They could leave the money with us, but what did it look like to mess up our beaches with sand castles as big as their former bunkers?

On the obligatory excursions with the village school down to Dybbøl's banks, we stood like the most natural thing in the world and roared "dummen Deutschen" across the strait that separated us - while night after night we lay on our stomachs in front of the magnificent German TV shows in our West Jutland homes, where many no longer bothered to watch the Danish "crap TV". German TV was so distant and foreign that you didn't need to relate to it as anything other than entertainment, while the "fine Copenhagen talk" on TV gave you the feeling that you didn't think, speak and express yourself as well.

It was in this tension that I began to change as a "bilingual". After all, it was important to adapt in order not to be cannibalized. So I learned the local language faster than Hans Egede's children in Greenland - not just as well, but almost better/worse than my peers - with the limitations that the role as a priest's son gave me to use the worst of the berries' phrases. In this intersection, there was social conflict everywhere, so I quickly learned a good deal of self-control in the unsafe presence of adults - not unlike what I experience among many immigrant children today. As bilingual boys, we felt like co-conspirators in the defense of the West Jutland identity, which was under threat in those years, and therefore the dialect became a kind of language of freedom in the escape from the tyranny of home. In our double-edged resistance struggle, we constantly had the terrifying feeling of being perceived as collaborators among our comrades if, in an unforgivable moment, we were to reveal that we could also speak "fine".

For the most part, keeping the two worlds separate worked, but it went completely wrong when I brought my friends home and they joined me at the dinner table. I felt completely paralyzed and shut down like an oyster. I was terrified that my parents would ask me a question because when I could only speak "fine" to them, I would answer

I either didn't or only did so with two-syllable phrases like "ik' no'et", which could not be identified as belonging in either the language of freedom or oppression. Fortunately, my comrades were just as speechless in their somewhat differently learned awe of "æ priest", so I did not need to communicate with them during these painful sessions. They even began with a grace or table song, "Him we all thank with song", which was not something they were used to from their own homes.

Of course, my father was wise enough to know that all this was foreign to them, but he also knew that everything that was said and done in the rectory was passed on in the parish. So it was a matter of keeping up appearances, such as sitting with your arms so close to your body "that you can hold up a book", as my grandmother taught us, and putting the napkins neatly back in the napkin ring after the meal - again something our companions didn't have. My own napkin ring, I was always told, had belonged to Søren Kierkegaard, and I had learned to be proud of it. I still have the napkin ring here by my side, but have forgotten what the inscription with the Greek letters "lampda jota - Epsilon My Omikron Gamma" means. But despite my pride, I made sure never to tell my friends about it. After all, they knew even less than I did who the "kjøvenhavner" was. I felt a little less uncomfortable talking "nicely" with our maids at the table, as they typically came from more distant farms or villages than my schoolmates.

It was worst in the village school in Slebsager during the "exams", which, with a new "kjøvenhavner" word, they had started calling the annual hearings in April, when the school year ended out there because the children had to help in the fields in the summer. I usually did well enough at school, but when my father, as a priest, always had to take part in the annual questioning of the pupils, I shut up like an oyster again. The reading went well, as we learned to read "fine", which was natural for me, but the teacher's questions always had to be answered in West Jutlandic. So afterwards, my father frequently criticized me for only answering with mumbling monosyllables. "Why do you always mumble?" I remember him disappointedly saying much of my childhood.

From his best friend, the first teacher Teglgård, he must have known that he was doing very well in school. I and the farmer's daughter Birgit Nielsen were probably the best in the class, which admittedly only had nine pupils, many of whom were burdened by hard child labor in the fields after school. But Birgit's mother was the village librarian, so with this impure trot of an academic ballast, it wasn't difficult for us two to excel against the others who came from homes without books. In first grade, I and some of the other boys had competed for Birgit's favor by doing voluntary beet chopping in her father's fields. I - probably because I was the priest's son - came out on top, and to this day we both call each other "my first boyfriend". Yes, it was still the year of innocence, because by the end of first grade, the sexism of the outside world had already taken such a hold on us boys that I will never forget how embarrassing it was when Birgit was the only girl who showed up uninvited to my seventh birthday party in the vicarage garden and gave me a dagger as a present. I must have hurt her feelings deeply with some dismissive remark, because for the next many years there was cold air between us and fierce rivalry to be the best in class.

In 4th grade, the competition degenerated into my first Waterloo - literally translated as "waterloo" - in front of the whole class. In geography we often had a competition about the world's cities and rivers in front of a map without names. The others in the class were quickly put out of the game, but Birgit and I were equally good at pointing out the teacher's shouted place names, and none of us wanted to give up the fight. It continued well into recess, when I should have been out peeing. But there was no way I was going to give up the fight, so the pressure got worse and worse, and suddenly I exploded, causing all the rivers in the world to gather in a big stream from the desk - to the immense laughter of the class. As I remember it, I won the battle against Birgit, but of course lost in the eyes of the class, who didn't care much for that kind of academic pomposity.

Today, I find it difficult to assess to what extent this loss of face and defeat was a corrective wake-up call that I should probably not strive for the intellectual heights, but stick to "the people". Birgit had also long since seen through me. When, 45 years later, I tried to

gathering the class for a reunion, she wrote the most critical letter I ever received, which hit me hard because it was so true, ~~s~~ true. Half of them didn't want to see the others again because of the trauma they had from there. So

I wrote another letter and suggested that we use the reunion as a kind of healing workshop for our traumas, as I had learned in America. Birgit had actually been positive, but now wrote a furious letter back saying that *she* had had a healthy and loving childhood and would not put up with being generalized and psychologized in that way - and then ended up psychologizing me herself. "Measured in years, I'm probably one of the people who has known you the longest, Jacob, but I'm not saying that I know you, but in my eyes - and maybe I'm being obscenely honest - you've always been a self-important and self-absorbed person, right from before school, who constantly wanted attention, especially from your father, and which your father could never give you because he's just as self-important and self-absorbed. And any psychological trauma and repression you may have in relation to your childhood, I would imagine you need to look elsewhere than your peers."

And she continued: "Don't delude yourself into thinking that you are the great redeemer who cares deeply about other people and has made it his life's work to save and help others with their psychological problems, because the only person you are definitely interested in is yourself, Jacob, and other people are only interesting to you in terms of how you can use them."

The letter hit me hard because my father had already told me the same thing. "You only walk in your own world, only think about yourself" and so on. And my loved ones always told me the same when I threw myself into my "ego projects". For most of my life, I could excuse myself by saying that it was an environmental damage I had suffered from constantly getting attention and being the center of attention with a strong personal narrative - not least as a lecturer. But now Birgit came along and told me that it was a terrible character trait that I had already had before school. Still, it didn't completely put me off, as by then - in 1994 - I had gotten to know many artists through my work,

writers and especially actors who suffered from exactly the same self-absorption. Among them, I was usually the most humble observer, so I concluded that the need to be seen was an important component of artistic expression and creativity. Moreover, a highly skilled Jungian astrologer had long ago shown me that this side - along with the perpetual feeling of not being good enough as a result of my father's rejection - was clearly drawn in my horoscope. And when even the stars judge you as a reprehensible freak, why not try to live with your flaws by seeking star status yourself?

At the time, I could live with the accusation of abusing people around me, because unlike Birgit, I was the only one who had contact with all the others from my village class and frequently stayed with them throughout my life. It's probably true that I initially used them and the poor blacks to shore up the low self-esteem of my youth, but I feel that I have followed them throughout my life has been an expression of gratitude towards the people who helped shape my life so strongly, and curiosity to follow their continued life. Funnily enough, the only person in my class who has never invited me to a sleepover is Birgit, even though I've often visited her and we've always had a great time together.

On reflection, others may have thought the same about me at the time, because I remember teacher Teglgård in the gym in 6th-7th grade suddenly slapping me out of the blue with no explanation. As Teglgård was my parents' best friend, I found it particularly incomprehensible, which is why it gave me a deeper sense that I was always wrong or doing something wrong. That it happened during a game of catch, which I won with my long legs, while Teglgård himself was being paralyzed by sclerosis, has never been a satisfactory explanation for me. But this slap was so deeply ingrained in me that I felt I was forever doomed.

In junior high and high school, Birgit and I were on the same bus to the same high school in the city for five years without hardly saying a word to each other. But my geography competitions with her helped me to later get along with the "book people". In the many years as



Back from left: Hans, Vagn Henrik, Erik, Harry, Jørgen. Middle from left: Gud- mund, Jacob, Bent, Palle, Niels, Erling, Niels Christian. Front: Irma, Margit, Birgit, Lise, Teglgård, Elna and Edith. Only the 11 were from my class, the rest from the class above us.



As first teacher and minister, Axel and Hanne Teglgård (right) always sat with my parents at the weddings. No one made speeches until my father, the priest, and then the minister had spoken and read telegrams in turn. They had a warm friendship throughout the years and spent the first few years vacationing together without us children.

As a lecturer, I often developed a close relationship with the students, and it became a favorite sport for me when I took them on long drives to test their geographical knowledge in particular. It is well known that Americans know nothing about the outside world and that even students at Harvard, which produces the world's best educated scientists, leaders and presidents, have no idea which cities, countries and rivers are where. It shook me, and since I wasn't good enough to go to university myself, I couldn't help but rejoice a little at how easily I could chop off the root of "the best and brightest" with my well-suited, West Jutland chopper. It certainly boosts your low self-esteem and gives you the courage to engage with these students on more serious topics. So I would like to take this opportunity to thank Birgit for helping me with our rivalry - even though I was made a laughing stock in front of the whole class in my overwhelming self-absorption.

Otherwise, there was little else in this rural school to prepare me for the difficult transition to the big city world. We cycled the two to three kilometers from the village, often in biting winter winds, to the gravel road where it was located. The school had previously been in the farmhouse of classmate Else Marie's thatched farmhouse, but now it had its own oblong building with three classrooms and the head teacher's home at one end. At that time there was a shortage of teachers as the few new graduates left for the big cities, and when we had teachers at all, apart from the first teacher Teglgård, they were always unfinished and untrained substitutes who barely had time to learn our names. We had so many of them that throughout their lives they have often turned up at my lectures and said: "Don't you remember me, Jacob? I'm your old teacher." "No," I've always disappointed them with few exceptions, and I get a little embarrassed when they continue: "But I had you for at *least* three months." The fact that they remembered me at all is undoubtedly because I had the same name as the priest in town.

Naturally, teaching was then, because for long periods Teglgård had to teach all seven grades alone. This was achieved by having three adjoining rooms with an open door between them. 2nd and 3rd, 4th and 7th grades. The 5th, 6th and 7th grades went together. Then the teacher could walk between the rooms and start one team with some tasks first, then move to

the other teams.

others and get them to draw, watch a movie and so on. When you think about it, it was crazy to have such a three-part education, and yet we were privileged, I knew, because in the years before I went to school myself, I had been with my father when he had to "examine" in the small school that was seven or eight kilometers further out on the moor in Klelund, where we boys liked to cycle out, because it seemed to us like the end of the world - and thus the farthest we could get away from my mother's anger. The contrast of silence out there was particularly refreshing and unforgettable. Here, all seven grades were taught simultaneously by one teacher, while it was only during periods of real teacher shortage that Teglgård had to handle six grades at once.

When I saw the school in *Pelle the Conqueror* as an adult, it was with a sense of déjà vu to my childhood experience of sitting exams with only one teacher and one class under one roof of old cut-up oil drums. But the seven grades in the class learned a lot, my father thought, as the older ones helped the younger ones and the younger ones listened when the older ones were taught. The only problem was singing, my father remembers, as the teacher couldn't sing.



With our cousins Anne and Birgit from Esbjerg in 1953. I am six and Birgit is ten.

In this way, I learned to adopt my father's optimistic view of the rich life that existed in such schools. But when I see the abandoned building today, I can't believe that it once housed 20-30 students and where they came from, out there on the Blicher Heath, where you still can't see a house as far as the eye can see.

The path of the book

Yes, we were intellectually neglected and under-stimulated, but of course we never saw ourselves as "oppressed" in the midst of the rich life that flourished out there in the countryside. Still, we couldn't help but feel underplayed when we came to the big city of Esbjerg once a month to play with our two cousins, Anne and Birgit. Because even though they were both horny and funny, we always got the feeling that we were stupid. When we read Donald Duck magazines with them, they could always see the point and would laugh at something Niels Jørgen and I didn't understand at all. And when we went to the movies and watched children's movies, we were embarrassed to sit next to our cousins who were constantly laughing. We always had to think for two or three days before we realized what was funny in the movie, and only then could we laugh a little bit. Today, we feel intellectually on par with our cousins and have done at least as well in life as they have - even though my cousin Birgit, as a Danish teacher in high school, likes to crack down on my wrong phrases and has helped edit my books. Similarly, when I give lectures at her high school, she likes to entertain the other teachers about how "heavy, slow and unformulated" I was as a boy. "I can't believe my cousin ended up becoming a lecturer," she says, shaking her head.

These suppressed emotional reactions in Niels Jørgen and me were similar to the lack of reaction that lecturers from the big cities complained about to my father when he invited them to the youth association. No matter what jokes they told, there was always a deafening silence from the West Jutland audience. As a lecturer in rural and mountainous areas in the United States, I have experienced how it is easy to form an image that the natives must simply be stupid - in

this

The vicious circle of oppression, where rural dwellers appropriate the image we have of them.

Nevertheless, I had done so well in the village school that in my own, my teachers' and my father's mind, I lived up to being one of the chosen few to go to high school. Perhaps it was the initial separation process I instinctively felt during the last two years in the village school that was to blame, because during those years in Slebsager I started to go my own way more and more. For example, sitting high up in the chestnut tree in the school yard with a book and my six inches of rye bread with com- men cheese, while my friends played around with a football in the playground. I don't remember actually reading these books, but now that I was required to do so, I think I imagined that I would do so if I got enough quiet from the restless ones below me. Maybe I was influenced by my schoolmate Jørgen Munck, who was also a bit strange. As a doctor's son and a much later immigrant than me, he had never learned West Jutland and never played like the rest of us outside his house.



My confirmation on April 16, 1961, just before I left the village school. Birgit and Anne are seen at the back left before grandma, uncle Ebbe and grandma. Grandpa had just died.



School pictures from 1961 and 1955. It was always emphasized again and again by my grandmother that I, as the eldest with the priest name Jacob, was called to follow the path of the book, by which she meant to study to become a priest. For a long time in elementary school I believed that this was my lot in life.

own large home. However, I often went there and loved leafing through his many children's books.

Unlike me, he had plowed through all the classics early on, especially Ingemann's historical books such as *Valdemar Sejr*, and I felt in Jørgen's company that I should do the same. But at the same time, I suffered from the eternal feeling that has plagued me all my life that "I can always do that later". But at the time, exploring the world was just more exciting than reading about it, and I preferred, together with the other village boys, to bury all the lead that we could find during the demolition of the old mill, like treasures in Magnus Iversen's plantation. Or build castles with drawbridges behind the vicarage and motor racing tracks out on the moors, catch vipers and take them to school and feed them mice in class and so on. But now that the city school was coming to an end, I felt I had to start climbing the chestnut tree of knowledge by isolating myself from the others with my books - read or not.

But things immediately went wrong when I started within the walls of Esbjerg Statskole on August 13, 1961 - the same day the Berlin Wall was erected. We went to the Realskolen, as the 8th and 9th grades were called back then, and had I started in any other of the city's primary schools, the transition would probably have been easier for me. But here, only the children who were programmed to continue studying in high school afterwards came. And we all took this new status very seriously. While other kids that age were still running around the schoolyard, we were now *slowly* strolling around with serious faces - the girls with each other under their arms - always discussing in the same eager circle. We were mixed with the older high school students, including my cousin Birgit and the later Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen. Of course, they paid no attention to us little ones, while we studied every step the big ones took. We always walked counterclockwise around the two beds with the chestnut tree in the middle, just as it had been done since the beginning of time. I was so programmed that ever since then I have only been able to run counterclockwise around the Kastellet in the morning.

In the beginning, I tried to maintain the illusion of making it in the world of books by specializing in subjects that the others were not yet interested in or as good at. In particular, I plowed through atomic theory in 8th grade. But my great fortune and misfortune was that I had now begun not only to go to class with, but also to ride the bus every day with the class's, well, perhaps the school's, most talented student, Marius Ibsen. He came from a small croft two kilometers from the village in the small hamlet of Vrenderup out on the moors, where he had attended a school even smaller than mine. We had known each other peripherally, as his father was one of the most gifted club leaders, especially in gymnastics, and a good friend of my father on the parish council. So in 4th grade, the two of us, probably encouraged by our parents, had started a school magazine, which closed after just one issue. Not least because Marius, influenced by his father, wrote the entire issue exclusively about "linguistic gymnastics" in the driest, academic language imaginable - at a time when the rest of us in 4th grade had barely learned to read.

This is how Marius always lived in a bubble, but since he was as

socially awkward as me, we quickly found each other and always sat together on



On my 60th birthday, Marius spontaneously came to breakfast with buns - the same kind his mother had served numerous times at midnight when I sat with him on the farm to copy his assignments. Marius missed homework so much that when he retired, he did a PhD on something as incomprehensible as the books he had written in the intervening years on "administrative policy".



With Marius and the high school class on a class trip to South Schleswig in 1963.

the long bus rides to and from the city. This had the advantage that, as the class paragon of virtue, he had always prepared himself thoroughly - and at the same time, out of his own interest, had just managed to read this and that play by Shakespeare - so there was enough time on the bus to finish his assignments while he typically sat and read fiction. The problem was that every time I desperately tried to keep my head above water by familiarizing myself with special topics such as atomic theory - and for that reason alone had no time to read homework - Marius was immediately so gripped by it that two days later he had familiarized himself so well that he could now tell me far more about Bohr's and Einstein's thoughts than I myself had grasped in six months. After which, of course, I immediately lost interest in this subject and found something new to excel in, including biochemistry and astronomy, as incredible as it sounds to my own ears today.

Marius demonstrated that he lived in a bubble, or rather on a cloud, by - unlike all of us from the countryside and his own brothers - being able to speak "fine". Like his brothers, he had to dutifully peck at the beets once in a while, but Marius did not allow himself to be dragged down into the non-stimulating sandy soil, and he did not even smell of farmyard, despite the ice-cold poor man's showers he was used to taking in the morning - and, to the horror of the rest of us, even took after gymnastics. Therefore, he had no problems with the transition to the big city, where he flourished in the more academic climate and took up debates with the teachers that the rest of us from the countryside had no chance of participating in. After all, it was almost impossible to express academic thoughts in the West Jutland way of the time. In high school, we all said that Marius walked with a prime minister in his stomach, but later he became municipal director in Gladsaxe, where we two old men were called "Bossen and Bumsen" in the local press headline when he celebrated his 50th birthday at the town hall in 1997.

Perdition

In those years, the language differences were so great that when we went to

sports events in Tønder, which was only 70 kilometers south, we couldn't understand what our

opponents said, except for a few words in English like center forward or offside. To my ears, they spoke "fine" in Esbjerg, even though Copenhageners back then would probably have meant something else. The people of Esbjerg also found it easy enough to understand their neighbors who came and shopped in the city, but most of the state school's teachers spoke or were educated with a more Danish dialect.

I myself had the most twisted language - when I finally said something. The reason was, of course, my bilingual inhibitions, which meant that I knew neither language very well. I had learned to automatically speak West Jutlandic to all strangers, even though I was now in a town that was only 25 kilometers from the village,

my tours.

On my home pages, I have created a virtual cemetery with memorial pages of dear friends, teachers and loved ones who have passed away too soon. On my page for Hans Peter Knudsen, I gave the eulogy at his funeral. Today I also remember him by continuing to stay with his daughters on

Virtuelt gravsted for Hans Peter Knudsen



Hans Peter, her er min tale, som jeg sikkert ville have holdt den til din begravelse, hvis jeg ikke havde været på landevejen i USA, da du blev dræbt. Og her kan dine andre venner og familie lægge deres ved til dig på:

Hans.Peter.Knudsen.com/en-outdoors.com

Kære Hans Peter

Jeg har aldrig rigtig haft stærke mandlige venskaber, men hvis jeg har haft noget der lignede et sådant intimt forhold var det til dig. Du var et af de varmeste mennesker jeg har kendt, men jeg tror ikke at de fleste af de andre kendte denne side af dig i gymnasiet, hvor du ikke rigtig lukkede op. Du havde samtidig det som jeg elsker ved amerikanerne, evnen til at begejstres uden angst for at tabe ansigt og altså uden den mælende "cool"-hed og besættethed, som jeg hader i danskerne (og mig selv).

Som den kærlige og band-solide forsikler, du var, vil det nok overraske nogen at høre, at du var den første min mor advarede mig imod ("Sådan bliver jeg aldrig du bliver!") - dengang du blev fundet liggende af druk efter en konfirmationsfest oppe i præstegårdshaven. Ja, hvor har du tit måttet høre for det, for vi elskede at drille hinanden som gode venner gør det. Når jeg så tidligt kryttede min skurke til dig var det fordi jeg så dig i gymnasiet gå igennem den samme lidelse, jeg selv var gået igennem i realafdelingen to år før. Med vores tykke jyske dialekt kunne ingen forstå os det første år inde i storbyen og vi følte os dumme og diskriminerede (i det mindste i vore egne hoveder). Det var denne - vores fælles smertefulde omstillingsproces - som



At the top, my high school class in 1963, photographed with my father's camera. I've stayed overnight with all of them on my tours, and I've also organized our anniversaries several times - the first being the 25th anniversary above.



I loved State School, but for me, doing chores was something like describing what was going on - in my own head.

especially the teachers could not understand my West Jutland. This alone meant that I got the worst grades from the first report card. Typically good+, which is equivalent to 2 or 0 today. My parents were shocked and asked in despair at parent-teacher meetings why I got such low grades? The teachers all answered as one: "But when Jacob finally says something, we simply don't understand what he is saying!" My father often mentioned in later celebration speeches that when the school doctor asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I should have answered with my resounding West Jutland accent: "I'm going to be a dandelion child like the miracle Marius. In the end, I managed to learn to express myself so "nicely" that I was barely let into high school, where things went completely wrong for other reasons.

I saw that the struggle for big city acceptance had been tough with my friend Hans Peter from the neighboring village of Årre. He came directly to high school from the village school, while I now had a two-year head start in the big city to practice - and unlike him, I had heard

my parents speak "fine".



My room was a colorful testament to all my diligent procrastination. For a while I painted as madly and diligently as van Gogh.

him too

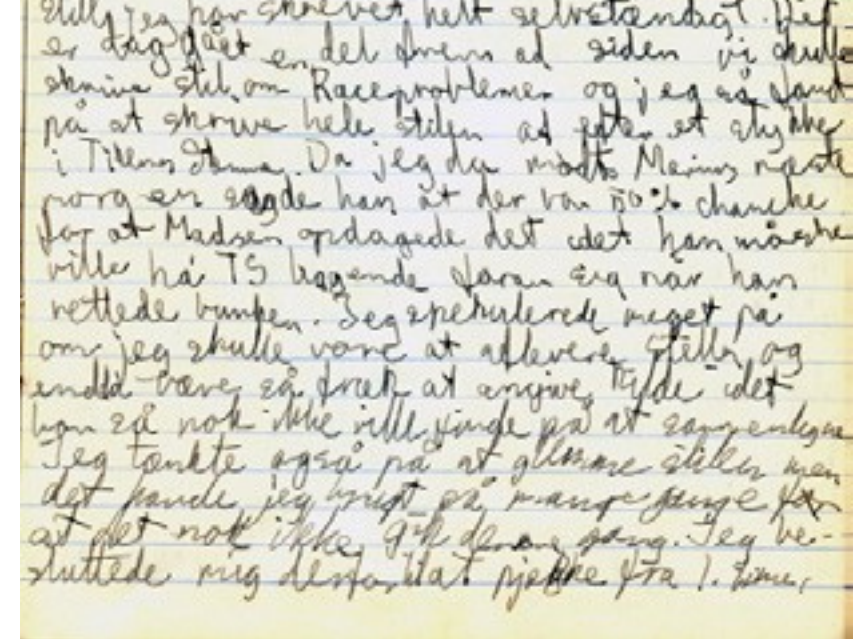
He struggled but felt totally isolated as he got no support from me, who certainly didn't want to be dragged back into the morass, now that I had learned to deal with the good guys myself.

It wasn't until after high school that I started hanging out with Hans Peter, who later became the first person to travel with me on my long lecture tours in Norway and America. In fact, he became my long-distance driver for the 17,000 kilometers through the American South, where we really got to discuss what went wrong in high school for both of us. I had been nominated for the annual Harry Chapin Award for Contributions to Humanity by American college students several years in a row, and my agent thought I would probably get it that year. So we ended up excitedly driving all the way from Massachusetts to the ceremony at the country-famous Opryland in Nashville. When the award went to someone else, Hans Peter jumped out of his seat and shouted out over the huge audience - still in resounding West German - "damn it".

When I organized our 25th graduation anniversary, I spent a whole night trying to persuade him to participate, but he refused outright, as the three years in the city school had been one long painful experience for

When you're busy writing up to 20 pages of diary every day about everything that happens in class, it's clear that there's no time to write more than a few pages of essay - of after someone else. Here's what happened on the day I was supposed to write about "The Race Problem in America".

of being maybe not the ugly duckling that everyone picked on, but at least the one with the foul language that everyone - including me - had unconsciously left out. When I remember the petrified, stuffy face Hans Peter always wore during school, I can't believe his blossoming and capacity for joyful emotional outbursts later on. When he was later killed by a drunk driver, I gave a funeral speech for him, which I also



Stille, jeg har skrevet helt selvstændigt. Det er dog det endel omvendt siden vi skulle skrive stil om Raceproblemer og jeg er vant på at skrive hele stilen ad fætter et stykke i Tillys time. Da jeg da mødte Meins næste morgen sagde han at der var 50% chance for at Madsen opdagede det idet han måske ville ha' TS begynde foran sig når han rettede bunken. Jeg spekulerede meget på om jeg skulle være at aflevere fælle og endda være så fræk at angive tydeligt idet han så nok ikke ville finde på at sammenligne. Jeg tænkte også på at glæde stillet man det havde jeg brugt så mange penge for at det nok ikke gik den gang. Jeg besluttede mig derfor at pukke fra 1. time.



I started illustrating my mile-long diary entries when I was still at school - here about my crush on Ingrid from the neighboring village of Agerbæk. She is seen on the far left in *Erasmus Montanus*.

in my annual Christmas letter to my old classmates to help them better understand how we had all helped to clip his wings.

But unlike me, Hans Peter made it through and was the first in his working-class family to get the student cap during this boom time, when for the first time in history it was no longer reserved for academic children like me to achieve it. I wonder if it was this surprising competition from equally talented working-class children that confused me because of the "programming" I had received from the lofty pedestal of the vicarage? At least now I could no longer blame my own problems on language confusion or any external oppression from the city dwellers. Because even though I had ended up in a class with 26 boys, and didn't have a single distracting girl as an excuse, I actually liked them all and also my teachers.

For many years, I found it difficult to understand and live with what happened anyway. The more I realized that I wasn't as skilled - or rather, suitable for study - as the others, the more I lost interest in

classes and entered a vicious circle of constant unpreparedness from home, which further reinforced the guilt of not being able to keep up. Subjects like mathematics - and I was on the mathematics course - have their own logical, gradual structure, so if you have copied the assignments for long enough, you end up having no idea what is going on and are completely unable to solve even the simplest problems during the quarterly tests. I always cunningly sat in a hidden hand's length from Marius' desk, and later in life I called him "the tramp's brake pad" because he artificially kept me too long in high school and thereby stole some of my best tramp years from me. Night after night, I sat in his attic room on the farm and copied out assignments, and I'll never forget the bike rides home through the bog on winter nights when everything was dark, and how scared I was at first. But you quickly overcome all the anxiety in the world to not have to do your own homework. A few years ago, Marius was going to America for a vacation with his wife, so his now old father came to me and said with a twinkle in his eye: "Don't you think Marius can borrow your big mobile home over there? You owe him a lot for all the jobs he did for you back then!" And that's how Marius and his family got a vacation out of my laziness.

Danish teacher Erik Madsen also helped prolong my stay in this prison. Whenever it was discussed at teacher council meetings that it was time to throw me out, he defended me with his strong authority and conviction: "Jacob has a good head if he just learns to use it one day." The thing was rather that the more I lost interest in compulsory work, the more I threw myself into everything I was interested in. On the other hand, unlike some others in the class - who at 50 years old are still traumatized by him - I actually liked Professor Madsen's deeply authoritarian black pedagogy a la Scherfig's Metropolitan School, where he himself came from.

Although Madsen, unlike the other teachers, said "They" to us and made us tremble with fear of being heard and especially of being openly belittled in front of the class, perhaps for the same reason he had so much impact that I did not spiritually fall asleep in his classes. Not that I had prepared for Madsen's classes, but I was forced to follow so much

With the various cheating tools I had invented, I was sometimes able to answer the questions even before Marius had gotten his ever-stretched arm up. Among other things, I had brought my own Minilex, which I hid behind Henning's broad back at the back of the class and quickly looked up. I did even better in written Danish, where I was almost on par with Marius, who, due to his lack of organizational skills, was frequently pulled down to the same 11 as me - the second highest grade at the time. But only when the essay topics interested me. Otherwise, I quickly copied them in the morning and made a few quick changes. For example, I got a bad grade for the essay "The Race Problem in the United States", even though it was full of naive prophecies: "It will probably take many more years before the Negro problem in the United States is solved, as it is far more difficult and complicated than one might imagine in a country that is almost completely uniform like Denmark." However, it concluded that we good white "men" could actively do something about the problem: "As a counter to all this, it must be said that among both blacks and whites there are leading men who are growing in the struggle. These include Martin Luther King, who in his book *Stride Toward Freedom* writes about how he avoided the temptation to use violence and instead used passive resistance." But when the topics caught my attention and were about personal events, such as my high school crush on Ingrid, I typically handed in 30-40 page essays. Usually many days after the deadline, though.

After struggling with the topic "On Writing Style", I was late with the 60-page dissertation and found that Madsen, to my great loss of face in front of the class, flatly refused to accept it - even though it was only a month late. The fact that I still partially won his heart, to the extent that he was able to express heartfelt feelings, was not least because he was a highly regarded translator of Shakespeare and the Greek masterpieces of antiquity. Somehow he had turned me on to Aristophanes and the obscenities of the plays, which he loved in his thick-bellied phallic worship. So I decided to write a paper on Aristophanes' play *The Clouds*, which I am still impressed by to this day. The result was so good - and so long - that when

he asked me to read my "masterpiece" to the class, it took two days of Danish lessons to the complete satisfaction of my friends. Today, Madsen's son, Bornholm's chief librarian, Jon Madsen, books me every year as a speaker at the People's Meeting, where he introduces me with the words: "Jacob, with me you will be the only one at the People's Meeting with a monopoly on the floor and as much speaking time as you want."

Needless to say, these frequent bursts of time-consuming enterprise went beyond all other schoolwork, where in my childishness I invented time-consuming endeavors and showed great ingenuity in cheating to stay afloat. A good example was the written exam in biology, where instead of reading the textbook, I had painstakingly traced all its illustrations with important keywords in advance and hidden all these notes under my shirt. Therefore, when we were given an assignment on the layout of the ear canal, I managed to make a completely faithful copy of the drawing in the book, which of course none of the examiners believed to be my own work. But since I was known to cheat, they had put Mrs. Fedders - the teacher who seemed to "hate" me the most - to sit next to me at the front of the exam room and keep an eye on me (so that small notes from a student in front didn't get through). She refused to lose face, however, and insisted again and again that she had been sitting with her eyes fixed on me for two hours. But even though she came to my defense for once, the matter still came up at a teachers' council meeting as another good reason to kick me out. This happy ending to the case would probably have succeeded if Marius - for whom all teachers had respect - hadn't stepped in as his comrade's staunch defender, claiming that "through my long friendship with Jacob, I have observed how he has a completely fabulous and razor-sharp photographic memory in his ability to visually register". Again, Marius saved me with his credibility and delayed my otherwise promising vagabond career as a recording photographer.

Even though Marius could tell a bald-faced lie when his classmates were in trouble, there was a small grain of truth in what he said. Not only had I, as the best artist in the class, created some great portraits of the teachers and displayed them on the classroom walls and front page



I took numerous photos, videos and audio recordings of my friends and teachers - in the shower, playing cards and drinking. Some of them probably wouldn't survive on Facebook today, but no one reacted to nudity back then. As a country dweller, I didn't see any of them in private, but have compensated greatly in the 50 years since. At the top, from the left, are headmaster and French teacher Ahm, Danish teacher Madsen and English teacher "Little P".

of the school magazine, the Stud, but in my eagerness to do anything but the schoolwork I should be doing, I had also started to record the class work photographically. I borrowed my father's old Yashica camera to school and discreetly photographed both teachers and students when there was so much noise in class that the photographic clicks went undetected (a method I later reused among America's worst gangsters). I also made many very long movies about the teachers with the cine camera I received as a graduation present.

They have since been a big hit at every class reunion we have held over the past 50 years. Instead of doing homework, I took the time to curiously film the rotary printing machines at Jydske Vestkysten to provide the necessary drama in a movie about our scandalous excursion to South Schleswig, where I showed the drunken prelude to two students' expulsion that ended up in the national newspapers. Funnily enough, I behaved like a paragon of virtue on that trip, but you have to do that when you "distantly" try to record other people's trouble. Since there was no sound on movies back then, I often dragged the huge Grundig tape recorder my father had bought for the youth association to school and hid it under my desk. As one of my classmates, Niels Thostrup, later recalled when he proudly entertained his friends, who like him today are high school teachers, at a dinner in 2011: "Even in our school days, Jacob was the one who recorded everything in class for his huge folk memory archive. And since I was sitting right behind Jacob, it was my job, every time he pressed the noisy switch on the reel-to-reel recorder, to cough or clear my throat loudly on his signal."

Today, when I'm known for portraying people, you would probably conclude that all this showed my first budding interest in real people rather than boring books about them. As a loner, I had previously mostly explored nature and, among other things, created the movie "The World of Small Animals" with close-up shots of caterpillars emerging from the pupa and turning into butterflies, and of dung beetles in their underground tunnels while digging in cow pies in my room (the only one of the movies I have not put online, as it looks too boring today, now that so many professionals portray it better). But I started to romanticize, for example, the dockworkers at that time. Sometimes I skipped school to work on the docks myself, just like I did during my summer vacation. It was hard to get up at three o'clock every morning in the hope of being hired and then spend the day "wearing the paint off your back" by dragging half pig carcasses on board the English ships in the years before mechanization. But no worse than having your self-confidence worn down in high school.

Marius experienced the same thing on our vacation trips when we

canoed up the Gudenåen river and he lay in the tent at night reading Shakespeare,



I took this picture of Marius on the left on the train in England in 1961 when I couldn't believe he was always sitting with his head in a book everywhere.

while I explored the nearby towns. On a trip to England at the age of 13, I was amazed to see him sitting all the way on the train in this exciting new country reading Shakespeare or similar literature. However, a little later I managed to coax him into exploring the bar at the other end of the train, whereupon our part of the train was unfortunately cut off and we ended up in Leeds rather than at our destination in a youth camp near Hull. Solely by virtue of his good English skills, Marius managed to get us to the camp late at night. Here he was again reading, totally unaware of what was going on around him at night when the girls - including the Muslim beauty Fatima from Morocco - knocked on my door one after the other. Unfortunately, at this early age I didn't know what to do with them under the covers, but they were still more exciting to me than even the juiciest passages in Shakespeare. I had made many clumsy attempts at first to dress myself in artificial academic garb, but when that failed, I soon developed a childishness that is one of the things I look back on with the greatest pain. The more I sounded "stupid" and "unformulated" in my constantly unprepared state to the teachers, the more they unconsciously avoided me,

The more I could, in my introversion, suddenly appear with occasional explosions of silly behavior, for example with a water pistol erasing what the teacher with his back turned was writing on the blackboard. Little P, as we called the English teacher, was always after me and often started demonstratively opening the windows and shouting "mmmjjjjjjacooooob!" with his eyes fixed on me whenever there was the slightest disturbance in class. Maybe because I had once brought an ammonia-smelling camembert from home and pressed it into his chair so that he was unable to teach. And when you're a suspect - whether you're guilty or not - you might as well live up to expectations.

When Little P later committed suicide, I continued in the same stupid vein for a long time, saying that I was probably partly to blame, but fortunately I have repressed many of these embarrassing examples where I acted as the class clown, but my old classmates have a much less selective memory and often remind me of them when we get together. However, they also praise me for being the first to rebel against the still black pedagogy of the time, three or four years before the great '68 rebellion. Some secretly admired my fight against the most authoritarian teachers, they say. However unconscious my rebellion may have been in that direction, I do remember that I frequently used phrases like "no one should tell me to carry all those books home", although the truth was probably the opposite, that I was so unprepared from home that I rarely had the right school books at school and for that reason couldn't keep up.

Today, I'm happy to say that I never hated any of my teachers. Even when, for understandable reasons, they became my enemies - as in the case of Little P, Fat Erik and Mrs. Fedders - I always felt that they liked me and that it was a teasing, mutual love affair. I feel privileged to have never had "enemies" who wanted to hurt me, and since then I have only bothered to photograph people or groups I "fell in love" with. And today I can see that I drew my tormentors for the same reason. The word tormentor originally meant "supernatural being", and I even drew Little P with loving angel wings on. So I wasn't entirely surprised when he chose to use them shortly afterwards.

My drawings of teachers sometimes appeared on the cover of the school magazine, like this one by our history teacher, Hubner. None of us were leftists, but we ridiculed him anyway because of his political one-sidedness as a political refugee from Stalin-era Czechoslovakia. Our Another history teacher, "Red Knud", challenged us as a communist much more, so together they gave us the same fine political balance in school as the "terror balance" of the outside world.



My tormentor, the English teacher "Little P", who I drew in cubist style with angel wings for the cover of the school magazine. In the classroom, I decorated the walls with my large paintings of the teachers, which I have exceptionally lost since.

The kick

The fact that it took me almost two and a half years to get kicked out was not only due to the annoying, dutiful block Marius, but also because it was in the middle of a change of principal. With the first principal, Jens Ahm, I had three "tea parties", as I called these cozy meetings in class with the charismatic and understanding man, who tried in vain to persuade me to pull myself together. With the next and somewhat slow-witted headmaster, Gudmund Jensen, I achieved a total of four tea parties, as he didn't know me very well and therefore, in a misguided, naive belief in my as yet undiscovered talents, persuaded me to repeat 2nd grade for a short period of time. I was stupid enough to agree to this for fear of the consequences with my parents, but in the new class the picture naturally repeated itself, while I felt like *nothing at all* without my beloved friends in the boys' class.

So when I got the final kick, I felt an infinite sense of liberation and walked around the dining hall beaming with joy and slightly tearful, pouring farewell schnapps to all my dear comrades, who at the time I thought I would never see again. The only member of the teaching staff who had voted against my expulsion, I later learned, was not surprisingly Associate Professor Erik Madsen. He attended the world premiere of *American Pictures* 10 years later, and every time I was invited to show my slide lectures at Esbjerg Statsskole, he always stood triumphantly with his arms crossed on the balcony with his subtle smile. "See, I was right. Jacob had a good head when he first learned to use it." For his 25th high school reunion, he invited me to the party "as the blackest sheep of my entire career".

Nowadays, when I give talks at schools - not least to 9th-10th graders of school-weary age - I always start by talking about how I was kicked out of school because of ADHD. Just this little sentence works wonders. Again and again, teachers express shock to me that I made all their ADHD students - even the immigrant students from the ghetto - sit in complete silence for three to five hours. "You have



Niels Thostrup and I were the only academic kids in a class of 26 boys. So it wasn't easy for me to put the book and the expectations on me on the shelf.

suddenly given them hope that there is a future for them too," they say. Even better for me is to see these students - typically with their (dejected) backwards caps and saggy pants - circle me after my long lectures and say thank you in their own backwards way.

way. Because until I got this magic word ADHD into my lectures, I always saw them sitting noisily in the back of the room and leaving after just an hour. Today, they recognize themselves in me, and because I focus all my mental energy on those kids, I manage to reach them too.

Of course, my failure at school was also class-related. Until the 1960s, it had mainly been academic children who continued their studies, which is why I was programmed again and again - like the doctor's son in the village - to follow the book. I had been instilled with a sense of being slightly better than the others, but what I learned from my own crushing defeat was that you can't take what you see around you for granted. I had seen it as natural and reasonable that the peasants' boys were only meant to be men, while their girls were meant to serve in the houses of the gentry - just as I had seen it with all the maids who had looked after me in childhood. And since they had left school at the age of 14 up to that point - and had only attended school in the winter because they had to help in the fields in the summer - it's clear that in those years before the influence of television they also sounded uneducated and not very articulate.

And suddenly (and as always unprepared) I was thrown into the confusing revolution of the 60s, where I had to compete on equal terms with all the farmers' children of the world - and even see them as my equals and believe that even the farmer's daughter Birgit could do as well or better than me. In my defense, I can say that I was not alone in my privileged confusion. Because it was at exactly the same time that I was following the civil rights struggle of the blacks in America, where the whites were learning in exactly the same way that those who had always looked after their children and cooked their meals were actually more than "niggers" and had the right to become more than just black servants - and one day even presidents.

When I tend to interpret my own school failure as a product of past class oppression, it's because of the shame I always felt about not succeeding. Shame is not about something you've done, but about who you are and about not being good enough. And not least about how others see you.

I remember once when my high school girlfriend Ingrid took me to a play at her newly established high school in Grindsted. I think it was Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and all the others sat and clapped and laughed while it all went over my head, making me feel as irrelevant as the six characters. As this is an intellectual play, and it wasn't about having done your homework, I couldn't help but conclude that my abilities didn't extend to intellectual thinking - a basic feeling that has stayed with me ever since and contributed to my decision to turn away from an intellectual or academic career.

After failing in high school, I now only dreamed of getting as far away as possible. The disappointment shone out of my father, who had known that things weren't going well before the expulsion and had frequently called me into his office for serious conversations. Always with him behind the desk and me sitting in the fine old rococo chair, where he also put all those who voluntarily approached him for counseling. I had so many uncomfortable and embarrassing moments in that chair with the feeling of being small that, on the day my father died many years later, I demonstratively sat behind his desk while I directed the priest who was to conduct the funeral to the seat on the other side, explaining that now the roles were reversed and she would now have to put up with being "the small one".

My father's reproachful words and his deeply furrowed brow still vibrate in my head and make me cringe in a mouse hole, feeling like my whole life has failed: "Now you need to get a grip! Is that wise? What do you want now that you've ruined it for yourself?" The words drilled so deeply into the weakest point of my life that I have never been able to make a choice myself, but have always let others choose for me.

But now my father wanted to force me to take responsibility for my life, even though I still don't understand why it should be a human duty to choose. When he could look so sad, I remember trying really hard to think of something. Although I had no idea what to do with my life, one day during one of those service-long sessions I came up with a godly, clever answer: "I want to be a lieutenant

Reserve!" I had no idea what that was, but I thought it sounded great for someone who already felt so much in the reserves. Then my dad took me at my word and started playing around with the idea.

Given my attitude towards gardening, he knew that "mercenary" wasn't for me, but he thought that maybe that was exactly what I needed if I was going to learn to use my head. But when he pointed out that lieutenant of the reserve had something to do with the military, it immediately discouraged me. I would probably end up in the Oksbøl camp, where my father taught, and become one of the drunken soldiers I had seen enough of at Havnekroen in Esbjerg. Or one of those who were ordered to occupy our village several times a year, where we enchanted boys immediately surrendered when they under their brown-green camouflage nets ordered us to fetch pastry for them at the bakery in exchange for being allowed to sit on their guns and "shoot down" the vicarage. No, I wanted to get as far away from everything that reminded me of my West Jutland Waterloo as possible. I wanted to go to Copenhagen. That's why the idea of becoming a guard suddenly came to me. I was tall enough to hide under my bearskin cap, and I was also inspired by the fact that the only guard we knew around there was my father's best friend, Ivar Hansen, who had visited us one day in his colorful uniform. His mother was on the parish council and had been the deciding vote to hire my father, and later I painted scenery with him when he performed in the youth association plays. As the great inspiration he was to me, many years later I gave a speech about this at his funeral in front of no less than two prime ministers.

So my father immediately approved of the idea, after which I enlisted in the Life Guards in Copenhagen - completely voluntarily, mind you. I was ridiculed for this by my later many friends among the conscientious objectors of the time, which was a concept that was totally unknown to us in West Jutland. But as I wasn't due to start wearing the jersey until August the following year, my father decided that I should go to folk high school beforehand so that I could broaden my horizons a little. "Only if it's also in Copenhagen," I replied. He didn't mind the idea of getting me as far away as possible, I think, and when he

Because Hal Koch had a special regard for Krogerup Folk High School, it was decided that I would follow in his footsteps in the spring. But when I was still a few months away from the school, my father made another choice for me. "Now that you have chosen to leave high school, you have to learn that you don't get through life sleeping," he said.

"What?" I thought. At no point had I "chosen" to leave high school myself. It was my authorities who chose to kick me out. But I quickly learned that this was the term my father used to describe me to the family's good friends and fellow priests, as it could otherwise be interpreted as if the priest's son was too untalented to follow the academic path. It certainly sounded less rebellious than "the pastor's son was kicked out of high school", which has been my favorite expression ever since, precisely because it implicitly contains more rebellion. The more I heard my family putting icing on the cake in an attempt to make me look nice to my surroundings, the more I started to realize that I was actually rebelling against all that niceness. And I wasn't alone in these years, when my classmates were some of the last to choose to wear the then still class-laden student caps after graduation. Even more offensive was my father's expression "sleeping through life" after all the diligence and time I had spent cheating and copying at Marius' place late at night.

Now my father made sure to find me a job in the big city of Varde.

What he hadn't thought about was that as a night porter I could now, in his liberating absence, sleep unhindered all day long. Sentimental as I am, I'm a little sad that the old, classic Hotel Varde on the square no longer exists, as it was my first real workplace. I had dreamed of getting out and meeting real workers and immediately identified with my colleagues, most of whom lived in the hotel like me. I don't think I left the hotel once in those two months, because in the intense world inside, the outside world didn't exist.

Of course, the nights as a night porter were long, but I filled them by drawing or joining the waiters on visits to the kitchen and

the maids. I still hadn't mastered the sexual aspect, because I remember childishly agreeing to lock a jealous servant in a room where another servant was sleeping with a kitchen maid, so we could douse them both with a large bucket of ice-cold water in the middle of the act. I had learned from my grandmother that we had to be careful when the young men of the town stood in the garden in the dark flirting with our maids, and grandmother would suddenly turn on all the lights and open the windows (and the bachelor Magnus Iversen from the farm opposite the grocery store was so frightened that he smashed his head into the flagpole during the escape and instead settled for marrying the grocer's servant girl, the less pretty Yrsa). After the long nights at the hotel, I loved it when my replacement, the old head porter, would come and have breakfast with me. It always consisted of half a piece of rye bread and half a buttered roll - both with a thick layer of butter and sprinkled with coarse salt. It was almost like being allowed to enjoy the rebellious, crispy rolls of my childhood - now not just on Sundays, but every single day - and perhaps helped to reignite the flame of rebellion in me. In any case, together with one of the young waiters and the bartender, who was gay, I slowly began to plan a mutiny against the hotel manager.

The bartender was the first openly gay person I'd ever met in real life, and that was one of the new things that made the city so exciting for me. He wasn't openly gay - we never talked about it - but he was so affected and feminine that even I, with my thick-headed peasant prejudices, could recognize the stereotype from the homophobia of the time. When he told entertaining stories in the bar at night, we liked him and were angry when the manager wanted to fire him, probably because he was so transparent. When, despite my protests, he was fired anyway, the young waiter and I erupted in full revolt over all the other oppressive conditions we had learned to put up with until then, but now suddenly realized were also unfair.

With the little education I had unlike the others, the director perceived me as the intellectual (read left-wing) ring leader. I barely knew the word leftist, and in high school I had

I was mentally and professionally in the bourgeois block. So my rebellion was not something I had learned in any way. I just felt deeply indignant about gay discrimination and didn't feel I could passively just stand by. In any case, the director, H.C. Petersen, ended up keeping my co-conspirator, a young waiter, while he fired me. I'll never forget it. There were many stairs from Hotel Varde down to the paved square, but as I remember it, the manager kicked me so hard in the back that I fell in a big arc in the middle of the square, where I lay in agony. But above all, I remember how surprised I was to see the light of day for the first time in two months. Yes, I really did see the light here, because unlike the kickout in Esbjerg, the kick in Varde didn't feel like a painful defeat, but like a eudaimonic victory. A little pain in the body is worth taking along to achieve freedom of spirit, which I later learned to practice on the road.

Drinking and education

But I needed many more of these Chaplin-like kicks in my youth before I, like him, learned to "take responsibility for my life". The happy identity as a vagabond is not something you are born into. To use my father's expression, you don't come to it asleep. I got the long education, not least at the next place he chose for me, Krogerup Folk High School. When I have since advertised the folk high schools in all of Denmark's newspapers, it's because the folk high school was a turning point for me. When the Folk High Schools Secretariat once asked me to elaborate on this in a promotional video for TV, I don't think they used the recording because I had a hard time remembering and describing the Folk High School stay as anything other than one long drinking trip. How can these two statements be related? In 1996, 30 years after my own stay, when I was invited to Krogerup's 50th anniversary celebration by virtue of now being one of the school's more famous alumni, a slightly older, distinguished gentleman sat down at the table during dinner and asked me who he was. He looked at me in amazement and replied: "Well, I was your principal when you were here. Do you really not remember me?" That probably says it all about my high



school days.

Jan Raagaard and Jørgen Michaelsen in dressing gowns for class, and drinking scenes "After the Storm" from our room with bookseller and Kafka expert Rene Jacobsen, who died on April 17, 2019. Almost all my drinking buddies went on to become authors, Jørgen published five books with his art.

Nevertheless, I blossomed here and wrote to my old high school friends that I had finally found the type of school that was right for me. No black pedagogy, no homework ... and "everyone brings pillows to class so they can sleep off the previous night". During the few annual parties at the state school, I had always struggled with my tie when I puked in the boys' bathroom, but here you partied all the time and without wearing a tie and wedding cream like at the high school parties. I was so influenced by this new spirit that I never wore a tie again and have since "learned to use my head" by hiding my inner confusion with a natural, uncut head of hair. And through the thick fog of intoxication and the rush of freedom, some messages from the teachers still penetrated through the hairstyle down to my otherwise always absent adhesive brain. One of the teachers who really shook me up was the Danish Film School's later retired pro-rector Niels Jensen. With the humor and seriousness with which he conveyed history and film, he could put me in a

dual state of paralysis and enrichment. He had an incredible pedagogical ability to arouse and inspire, which led me to pursue avant-garde art films for many years afterwards.

That folk high school, unlike high school, "is for life", I also felt in the history subject. I don't remember much from high school history lessons, which I have been able to make use of later in life, while the living, oral narrative penetrated me in a completely different way on the high school's sleeping pillow. The high school's soporific "Delian naval alliance" and "the 19th dynasty's Hittite peace" is something you just "fall asleep to" on night boats in Greece or night trains in Egypt.

I also gained a completely new, left-wing and humanistic outlook on life through the frequent joint lectures by the poets Thorkild Bjørnvig, Ole Wivel and Erik Knudsen, especially the latter. It's hard to put into words how they influenced me through the beer buzz, and it wasn't until years later that I realized they had changed me. Ole Wivel, whose black cat I brought with me after his tenure as head of the team before me, I had peripheral contact with over the years through his son-in-law, Per Kofod, who later published *American Pictures*. Once, in a highly intoxicated college spirit, I thanked Wivel for opening my eyes to the Vietnam War and thus kick-starting a commitment that would decisively change my life.

In high school, I had been far too shy of such authorities to ever talk to them. But it meant a lot to me several times before his death to tell Erik Knudsen how the only thing - apart from the toothbrush - I had carried in my luggage all the 220,000 kilometers I hitchhiked along America's highways was his poetry collection *The Flower and the Sword*. It represented for me the "spirit of Krogerup" better than anything else and also put words to my incipient dilemma. Should I continue to simply enjoy life and go my own way in nature, or should I actively participate in the fight against the injustices of the world, which was so important to Erik Knudsen? The poem "Credo" from his first poetry collection inspired me so much that I translated it into English and purposefully went around photographing pictures to illustrate it in my homemade book, which I carried around and showed to all drivers who

picked me up. That usually got them to give me a couple of dollars for some food and a movie, so in that way I exchanged Erik Knudsen's spiritual food for physical food. And that's really what "school for life" is all about, I think.

Early in my stay at the folk high school, I was seduced on the kitchen maids' bathroom floor by Lotte, who had signed up for kitchen duty in my first-year class after having been a student in the fall. I say "seduced" explicitly, because as a pastor's son, my sexual life had been so repressed that even though I had frequently spent the night with my high school girlfriend Ingrid until four o'clock in the morning, when my or her father would knock on the door to announce that it was time to cycle the five kilometers home, neither of us had ever even thought about taking off our underwear in bed.

Funnily enough, I'd fallen for Ingrid because I thought she was uncharacteristically daring by appearing in a swimsuit on stage in the local ama- dry play. But Lotte, the city girl, was different and showed no respect for my backward Puritan values. She had even prepared the attack on me by wearing something fragrant, which she said was used in upscale city circles and called Ortho-Gynol. The reason we ended up on the cold bathroom floor during one of Krogerup's parties was because she had conspired with her live-in kitchen maid, Hilda, who had seduced my first roommate, the director's son Mogens. As the youngest in the school - and probably the only male "virgins" - we were both terribly awkward and nervous during this joint attack. The next day, we sneaked shamefully along the walls to the barber in Humlebæk to buy condoms in case we were subjected to a double attack again. We weren't so ignorant that we didn't know that we should protect ourselves in that case. At the time, condoms were only sold in the kind of man-hating barbershops where the worst part was running the gauntlet of waiting customers with all their traumatizing obscenities. How nervous and shy I must have been has been confirmed throughout my life by the little thrill I still get when I drive past the barber shop in Humlebæk, where I bought the first and last condom of my life.



My film footage of Lotte partying in my room and working in the kitchen. Next to my drinking friend Ole Andersen, with whom I continued to go on wild drinking trips long after high school. But he too later became a writer. I have four of his South Schleswig novels on my bookshelf so far.

But against Lotte's continued onslaught, a raincoat would have been far more useful as she unleashed explosions of waterfalls during her orgasms. I can't forget the shock of the first time, wondering if in my clumsiness I had done something wrong and accidentally punctured some internal organs. The problem came later in life when, for many years afterwards, I thought that things had gone downhill for me sexually, because I was never again able to trigger such spring floods in other women.

Far worse than the shock was the shame I felt when Lotte told me that she had had a sexual relationship with a guy before me. It was almost impossible to get over, and I wondered how I would deal with him if I ever met him. Would I knock him down, or could I calmly look him in the eye? Lotte was on board with all the latest trends and was one of the first to get the new, liberating birth control pills when they became legal that summer. After that, there was nothing to worry about for our lucky generation, who were also the first to be able to get Viagra and antidepressants when potency and good mood started to decline later in life.

I was also fascinated that Lotte was from an old Tater family and therefore a gypsy - or Roma, as it's called today - which is why I associated her exuberant and seductive extroversion and beautiful appearance with the wandering, singing gypsies I knew from movies and myths. In high school, she became known for her mind-reading abilities when she struck

into a kind of trance and involuntarily began to retell everything that people around her were currently thinking. Although it could be extremely embarrassing, she was unable to stop the flow of words. This in turn made me feel inferior, as the only person she couldn't seem to vent her innermost thoughts on was me, which made me feel like I was probably completely mindless - or thoughtless, as my dad used to say. Conversely, it was perhaps me of all people who scored Lotte because she felt challenged by not having me in her power - and in a way never quite got the power over me, although it seemed that way for a long time. Because she had enough suitors at the college. Perhaps it was also because I stole flowers in the middle of the night in the cemetery between the college and Louisiana Art Museum and "proposed" to her. It would be 52 years before I confessed my sins to the then pastor during a service in Humlebæk church - and was forgiven!

The Thorkild Inspirators

Being hopelessly immature, I had been put in a room with an even more immature director's son of the same age, as we were both the youngest students. It was not mutually intellectually fertilizing, but when the eight years older Thorkild came hitchhiking to the school a month after the others arrived and was given a private room, I somehow managed to get under his wing. Thorkild was like a teacher in search of a student. He was a carpenter and a carpenter's son from Viborg, but emigrated early from the bourgeois straitjacket. He hypocritically recounted how one day he left his father's carpentry workshop in discontent with a bundle on his neck and walked barefoot out into the world with a "goodbye dad, see you later". Even in high school, he usually walked around barefoot with huge, purposeful strides and a firm, forward gaze - all in stark contrast to my own tendency to crawl along the walls as a big excuse for myself.

He had great psychological empathy and ability to read and describe people, and I think what made him fall for me was seeing me during meals at the long tables in the dining room: "Jacob,



From my movie: Thorkild, always eagerly debating with the teachers and as I loved him; smoking his pipe in his room in front of the drinking trough with the beer bottles between our beds, telling stories all night long.

why do you only take the dishes or cold cuts that are right in front of you instead of asking the people at the other end to pass us what we want, like the rest of us?" With that, he hit the combination of my black hole of inferiority complex and my inability to choose. I had long since become accustomed to being satisfied with what I was "served" and thus avoided the frightening thought of offending a whole range of people who were older and better educated than me. But since Thorkild was also an experienced and especially more entertaining, mysterious anti-authority for these young people, it was incredibly important for the (re)building of my self-esteem that he took me in. When you are nothing, you have to hide under borrowed feathers. Our room quickly became the school's gathering place where, night after night, the students sat fascinated and listened to Thorkild's stories about the horses' drinking troughs that we had dragged in from the stables to put the beer bottles on.

I documented these seances, where he suddenly drunkenly grabbed a knife and tore down my home-painted Jackson Pollock-inspired ceiling, on film (they can be seen on YouTube), but best were the long nights when Arne Skovhus had kicked open the door and chased the audience to bed, and Thorkild continued his stories alone for me. Among the many things he was fascinated by were haiku poems and Zen Buddhism, which he could recite and describe with a clenched fist with such empathy that for many years on the country roads in America I felt completely natural

home among Buddhists. Thorkild taught me that you only travel properly if you take nothing with you, not even a sleeping bag.

He had slept on beaches in Spain and in the jungles of India long before young Danes started backpacking with all kinds of gear. He could waltz into anyone's home and be accepted immediately, and without ever asking for anything, he let people feel the joy of hosting him. From him I learned my principle that you should always take what people give you. In Christian America, I lived out his philosophy by always carrying this quote from Luke chapter 9, verse 3 in the picture books I made: "Take nothing with you on your journey, neither staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money, nor two robes each. When you enter a house, stay there and travel on from there. But if they will not receive you, leave that town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

But as you can see, I betrayed both Jesus and Thorkild by carrying their wisdom around in a heavy bag. Thorkild also taught me in the most embarrassing way that you can't take quick shortcuts in life by lying your way through. One night, when he told me so vividly that it all made sense to me how hard it had been to vomit while working in a storm on a fishing boat on the North Sea, he suddenly asked: "Jacob, can you imagine that? Have you ever been on a fishing boat?" I was so embarrassed that I hadn't tried this in my short, fat life that I immediately replied: "Yes, of course I have!" I took the liberty of cutting a corner here, as I had occasionally been down in the fishing boats in Esbjerg while working on knocking salt off fish. But Thorkild, with his human intelligence, could immediately see that I was lying. "Jacob, you've never been fishing. Look me in the eye." The embarrassment of being caught in such a white lie by my great teacher has stayed with me ever since and has frequently prevented me from venturing too far out into the wilds of the sea as a lecturer, where it's easy to forget to tighten the rope around your waist for the sake of entertainment. But above all, talking to Thorkild taught me how important it is to be an honest vagabond, because people won't open their hearts to you if they suspect you're guided by dishonest intentions. Like Bob Dylan - who we

in high school had started listening to - singing: "To be an outlaw you have to be completely honest."

But Thorkild is also an example of how honesty has its limits. "We Jutlanders were thoroughly fed up with many of the Copenhageners going home for the weekend and leaving us alone at the empty folk high school in Humlebæk. On the other hand, the party basses were the ones who were left, and then there was drinking. During the long Easter, things went completely wrong in Easter Brew, which had run out one night. Thorkild was drunk as a skunk and shouted to me: "Jacob, come



The big-talking Thorkild - or Niels T. Holm, which he used in America - stands embarrassed without a word and tries to make me understand why he can't talk to me after we haven't seen each other for five years.



The always barefoot Thorkild and O'Neill visited me in Denmark in 2003 and again in 2005. When he died in 2007, I made a TV program with his son Silas about his great importance to Silas and for me - and my own father image. Because when he hitchhiked home with me after the Berlin trip in 1966 to meet my parents, he didn't much like my father and vice versa - competing father figures, as they were for me at the time. I was annoyed that he was attracted to my mother's "sensitive, empathetic mind", who loved vagabonds like him. That's probably why he inspired me a lot of my fatherly rebellion two years later.

We'll just pick something up at Wiibroe." I knew that, as usual, he had no money and had no idea what he had in mind. Nevertheless, as his faithful companion, I walked down to Kystvejen, where he started hitchhiking without much luck and therefore stepped out into the middle of the roadway and forced a car to stop. This is how he took me out on my first ever hitchhike.

When we got to Helsingør in the almost hijacked car, we found the Easter-closed Wiibroes Brewery, and by jumping on each other's backs we managed to climb over a two-meter high iron gate. Inside the brewery, in a building on the fourth floor, we managed to find a whole box of Easter brew, which we managed to get over the high iron gate. It could only have been divine intervention, because it was one of the heavy wooden crates with 50 beer bottles that were later abolished because they were too heavy for ordinary brewery workers and were instead used as furniture for the '68 generation. For the trip home, Thorkild called a taxi, which he must have either given a couple of beers to take us home to Humlebæk or made me pay for. I don't remember, as I was both drunk and dazed. Wiibroe, one day I'll come and pay for my sins! Thorkild justified our desperate attempt to save Easter in Krogerup's anti-capitalist spirit: "With all the money Wiibroe has earned from our stay at the folk high school, they owe us at least one free box."

When the stay ended with a big trip to Berlin, I was sad, that Thorkild couldn't afford to come along. So when, after the last

When I arrived at the Central Station with a hangover and couldn't go because I had forgotten my passport and papers in Humlebæk, I immediately went back to Thorkild to try to persuade him to hitchhike with me to Berlin. I don't know if he did it to impress me one last time, but with his infectious vagabond charm, he managed to get us both almost for free as the only passengers on a flight with a stopover in Hamburg - so we got to Berlin almost as fast as the others. As there was no room booked for him at the hotel with windows directly facing the wall at Checkpoint Charlie, he ended up sharing a double bed with Lotte and me for a week.



In a country without urban planning, I remember how Kress' grand art deco buildings began to stand as empty symbols of a proud past on desolate, crime-ridden inner-city streets, while all business had moved to suburban malls, where the city government did everything it could to shut down bus lines so that black people couldn't shop there.

After Thorkild had threatened to kill me to get hold of her in a drunken rage at the college, I was a little reluctant to have him living in the room. But in shared Berlin, it was fine with a cheap case of beer as a wall between us in bed.

No one like Thorkild has helped lead me down life's exciting wild roads, and even then our paths crossed. One winter I hitchhiked all the way across Canada down to San Francisco on my way to Latin America, partly to visit him in the Zen monastery he now belonged to. Here I learned that he had moved to their much more isolated meditation center, Tassajara Hot Springs, way out in the beautiful mountains of California. When I got there, it turned out I had to walk the last 25 kilometers on mountain trails, as cars could not drive all the way. As it was getting late, I thought that Thorkild would be able to arrange an overnight stay for me, but when he was called out, he was completely silent and desperate and tried to signal to me without a word that I had arrived in the middle of media week, where no one was allowed to talk or have guests. There was nothing to do but walk the 25 kilometers back - now in pitch darkness on dangerous ridges and paths. Fortunately, I found a gold miner who invited me to share his blanket by the fireplace, and that's how I ended up

- like my great teacher - sleeping outdoors (and actually the only night in all my hobo years).

Part of the story of Thorkild is that he soon married one of the richest American women, Margret Kress, an heir to the Kress family, whose shops in beautiful art deco buildings dominated every main street in the big cities for 100 years and formed the basis of the prosperous Kress Foundation, which has funded numerous museums of European art. But Kress discriminated against blacks, which is why during the civil rights struggle there were numerous *sit-ins* at Kress' "lunch counters" (the McDonald's of the time). Thorkild personified the American dream of arriving penniless and working your way up from "rags to riches". He said that when he first arrived barefoot at Maggie's huge apartment on 5th Avenue in New York, next door to Jacqueline Kennedy's, the doormen refused him entry and referred him to the service elevator.

But when I hitchhiked up from San Francisco in 1975 to stay with Thorkild in Sausalito, he sat sad and abandoned by Maggie in one of their once numerous houses. During those years, the Kress chain was under pressure from suburban chain stores (which could better discriminate against poor blacks without cars) and the stock was plummeting. So rather than meditate, Maggie had to take care of business, he said, and she went on to work for the Getty Museum and curate exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. So now he sat alone in their huge mansion, staring meditatively into the blank white walls. Maggie was a personal friend of the Dalai Lama and remained a Buddhist until his death in 2007.

Thorkild later married the wise woman O'Neill Louchard, who still sends me New Left articles, and before Thorkild died of cancer on his 66th birthday - just three months after Maggie's death - they visited me several times together in Denmark, where I introduced him as "the man who started it all for me" at one of my slideshows. With his seductive belief that I could become something by wandering the wilds of life, Thorkild was a great inspiration and is without a doubt one of the most important saving angels of my life.



It often took many years before I really discovered the many ways Thorkild came to control/disrupt my life. As a Zen Buddhist, he was enthusiastic about the Buddhist Allen Ginsberg and the beat generation he had started, which laid the foundation for the hippie movement and my generation's counterculture. Night after night he sat excitedly reading aloud to me from Ginsberg's seminal "Howl", which Erik Knudsen was also enthusiastic about. I didn't understand much of the long, strange poem, but something seeped in, because in the US it was as if Ginsberg took over Thorkild's authority role for me as an activist friend. I have never demonstrated with anyone against the Vietnam War and photographed so many people being arrested in



as many cities as him. So when we were neighbors on the Lower East Side for many years, I asked him if he wanted my fellow passenger, the poet Pia Tafdrup, to stay, as she was inspired by "Howl". I still have Allen's negative answer, but Pia nevertheless met the man whose poems I still only know from Thorkild's reading of the unforgettable and for my generation so seminal words: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an early fix, angelheaded hipsters ..."