

## CHAPTER XXXIV - OUR DENMARK ADVENTURE



Anita and me at Castle in Denmark

Two years earlier Anita and I were passengers on a wonderful cruise that took us from Dover, England to most of the Baltic Capitals and then south to the Mediterranean and finally ending in Athens, Greece. From Athens, we flew back to Copenhagen, Denmark for a week's stay before flying back home to Houston.

Our first visit to Copenhagen was primarily to do genealogy research. Anita had discovered an organization called "Friends Overseas" and through their help, we met a wonderful couple, Ole and Else Frederiksen. Ole and Else invited us into their home for an authentic Danish meal, took us touring all over the City of Copenhagen and helped us in our genealogical quest. Our good fortune was to continue for on our fourth day in Copenhagen, Anita had been lucky enough to make contact with one of her second cousins, who lived in a small village just north of the city. Thanks to the modern miracle of email, our friendships with Ole and Else and Anita's cousins have flourished.

A year after our visit to Denmark, Ole and Else came to Houston. They had planned to spend a week with us and a week in New Orleans. We were having so much fun together that they decided to spend the entire two weeks with us.

Our first visit to Denmark had given us a wonderful feel for Copenhagen but left us hungry to see the rest of the country. This, plus the desire to visit our Danish friends and family, led to our re-visiting Denmark.

Our re-visit to Denmark turned out to be another wonderful adventure. It began with a long red-eye flight from Houston to London. This was followed by a three-hour layover and a two hour flight to Copenhagen. Ole and Else met us at the airport with American, Texan and Danish flags flying. Ole and Else then drove us to their summerhouse about an hour from the airport. At the summerhouse, we enjoyed a brief reunion, a light snack and a long much needed rest that lasted well into the next day.

Ole and Else's summerhouse is in a small resort area called Ordrup about 35 miles west of Copenhagen on the northwest coast of Sjælland. Ole bought their summerhouse about 30

years ago as a vacation getaway. They lived in a flat in Copenhagen until their recent retirement. They sold their flat and now live in the summerhouse year-round. The summerhouse is a beautiful home situated in a large forest only about a half-mile from the beach. The trail to the beach is a narrow road for about half way, then a charming nature trail the rest of the way.

The next day, Thursday, September 11, we drove to Roskilde to visit the Cathedral and the Viking Museum. The Roskilde Cathedral is not only a very impressive structure, it is also the final resting place of 39 Danish Kings and Queens. There are a few buried in a crypt beneath the floor, but most of them are in ornate marble caskets in large chambers on either side of the nave, or the main body of the church. Each of these caskets was different, individually decorated to reflect the importance and individuality of that particular King or Queen. Anita's great-grandparents were married in this Cathedral in 1869.

After a picnic lunch, we went on to the Viking Museum, which was amazing. It was everything a museum ought to be. The museum is centered around five ancient ships that were excavated in 1962. Near this exhibition, you are allowed to watch modern day scholars and craftsmen replicate the largest of these ancient vessels using the same tools and techniques used by medieval craftsmen.

As we drove around Denmark's countryside, we saw the most beautiful scenery. The rolling hills had crops in different stages of harvest or freshly tilled land. Enormous modern windmills were everywhere. We then returned to the summerhouse with Ole and Else where we enjoyed a wonderful Danish meal and another good night's rest.

The next morning, Friday, September 12, our hosts once again loaded us and a picnic basket into their car. We stopped to view an 800-year-old castle that is still in use. We then headed for the village of Skee, the home of some of Anita's ancestors. Old Skee, where her grandfather was born, is very small. We counted only two houses. New Skee was a little bigger; it had 4 or 5 houses. We then drove to Haroldsted, the nearest town of any size. Here we found an old church that served the region. Surrounding the church was the most beautiful cemetery I have ever seen. The cemetery was organized into family plots. Each plot was about six feet square and bordered by tiny green hedges. This is small but adequate because most people in Denmark are cremated. Inside these hedges were family monuments and beautiful miniature flowers of various varieties.

A gardener at the cemetery noticed us looking at tombstone inscriptions and asked if he could be of help. Else and Ole conversed with him in Danish. They told him we were Americans on a genealogy mission to Denmark. Upon hearing this news, the gardener told us of an amazing coincidence. A learned genealogist named Pia Viscor was scheduled to give a lecture to the local genealogical society on Danes who had migrated from that region to the United States, in just two hours. The timing was just perfect. We had time to enjoy our picnic then we could attend the lecture.

At the church meeting hall, we were pleased that the Vicar, Pia and one other person spoke English. The tables were laid with beautiful tablecloths, flowers and candles. Each place was set with a cup and saucer and small plate. Everyone in attendance greeted us and shook our hands, making us feel very welcome. The meeting started with everyone singing a song. The Vicar had kind words of sympathy on the anniversary of the tragic September 11<sup>th</sup> and praise for the American people. This was followed by Pia's lecture. Everything was in Danish but the warmth showed through and we felt very welcome. We had delicious Danish pastry with coffee then sang another song before ending the meeting.

After the lecture, Pia invited us into her home, which was 300 years old, where we enjoyed a wonderful visit. Pia had some genealogical information about Anita's ancestors that proved helpful. Early in the evening, Pia's husband, Petr, who is from the Czech Republic, returned from an outing with his son and joined our little impromptu gathering. Petr was a molecular physicist at the University of Roskilde. He explained what he did with amazing clarity. He has developed something that will make the microchip as we know it today obsolete. He was granted a patent and is developing his company and product. The day will come when his work is universally recognized.

The following day, Saturday, September 13, we traveled to Præsto and Store Heddinge, the villages where my first wife Margaret's ancestors called home. Præsto was a charming village with a positive sense of history. It was obvious that the entire town was being restored to yesteryear standards. The buildings were all joined together from one street to the next. The quaint two story houses faced each other over long narrow cobblestone streets. The buildings were painted pastel colors. Finally locating the church, we searched the gravestones for familiar names but came away empty.

From Præsto, we journeyed up the coast to Store Heddinge where we found a very unusual church. The village church had been built on the bluff overlooking the sea. In 1928, the soft chalk cliffs supporting the church had eroded to the point that the front half of the church plunged into the sea. What's left of the church is still standing. Its gaping wound has been sealed and large boulders now line the beach to prevent further erosion. This is probably the old church that serviced Margaret's ancestor's needs.

I left Store Heddinge puzzled as to how Margaret's ancestors could have come from both villages at the same time. Later, I was to learn that her ancestors were from the Region Præsto and not the Village Præsto. The Village Store Heddinge is in the Region Præsto.

Sunday, September 14, was the day we visited Count Grev Christian Ahlefeldt Lovenborg's estate. The estate consisted of a castle, a manor house and farm buildings sitting on over 2,000 acres. Anita and I were privileged to visit the estate because Ole and Else are good friends with the estate manager. Torben, who ran this great enterprise, had received prior permission from Count Lovenborg for us to walk around the gardens surrounding the castle and moat. The Count came out of the castle to greet us as we approached the moat bridge. He seemed pleased to be meeting a couple from far away Texas. He and his son were very friendly towards us. After touring the estate, we were treated to wine and chips with Torben and his wife, Barbara. We then drove back to the summerhouse for another delicious Danish meal and to rest up for another day.

Monday, September 15, was a breather. We spent part of the day going to a nearby shopping center and the bank. I had run embarrassingly low on Danish money and needed to stop at the bank for a quick transfusion. Anita did some shopping at the local store. Ole and Else purchased some items from the grocery store.

Tuesday, September 16, we traveled from Sjælland, the largest Danish island, across Fyn, Denmark's second largest island and on to the City of Kolding on the Jutland Peninsula. On our way to Kolding, we stopped off to visit the Egeskov Castle, which is owned by one of Count Lovenborg's cousins. Count Egeskov is an astute businessman and has turned most of his estate into a wonderful tourist attraction. The gardens around his castle are magnificent. The estate

also boasts several quality museums. I found the auto and motorcycles museums to be especially interesting.

For the next three days, we made the “Hotel Tre Rose,” or the Three Roses Hotel, our home. On our first day in Jutland, Wednesday, September 17, we drove to the small North Sea island of Rømø. It was a beautiful beach but just thinking about the cold North Sea gave me chills. My chills were short lived, however. I could hardly believe my eyes when I spotted a young beautiful German girl walking from the water line back to her camp. She was completely nude. I found it very difficult to feign disinterest under the circumstances. Else, our Danish hostess said that “they” had to be German because a Dane wouldn’t act in such a manner.

On the next day, we went to Sonderborg and visited the museum of the 1864 war. In this war, Denmark suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians. Anita was especially interested in this museum because her ancestor was in this war and the War of 1848-1850.

On the following day, we left Ole and Else and caught the train at Kolding heading to Copenhagen. The trip was about 120 miles and took about 2 hours. From there, we caught another train to Hillerød, which is about 15 miles north of Copenhagen. Aase, Anita’s cousin, met us at Hillerød and drove us to Gilleleje, where she lives. Gilleleje is a seaport town located on the northern most tip of Sjælland. It is about a 30-minute drive north of Hillerød.

Aase and her husband, Ib, live in a beautifully decorated home within walking distance to town. Their home is full of bookshelves, paintings and artifacts. Among these personal treasures is a beautiful quilt hanging on the wall. This quilt was made by Aase and replicated a “Little Danish House.” It had been exhibited at the American Quilters Society show in 1988. It was also displayed in the Summer ’90 edition of “American Quilter” magazine. Her curios are tastefully arranged so that it is hard to look without seeing something that challenges the intellect. Less artful but equally fascinating were three large skylight windows stationed above the living area. These large windows were operated by remote control. They also had the marvelous ability to automatically close themselves at the slightest hint of rain.

Our five day stay as Aase’s guests were filled with adventure. We spent one day exploring the Kronborg Castle. This is the castle that inspired Shakespeare to write “Hamlet.” To the Danes, Kronborg is even more famous as the home of Ogier the Dane, a giant stone figure. Legend has it that he will come alive if ever the nation is threatened. Our final days were filled with sightseeing, train adventures and one final look at Tivoli.

Tivoli is the old well-established amusement park that inspired Walt Disney to build Disneyland. Tivoli is a mixture of thrill rides, restaurants, fun houses, beautiful gardens and concert halls. Aase surprised us with tickets to the closing concert at the grand indoor concert hall. It was a marvelous evening. We took the train into the city, experienced Tivoli dining and theater. After the concert, we leisurely strolled through the park enjoying the wonderful gardens, tastefully lit with thousands of tiny lights.

Eva and her husband, Jens, came to Aase’s house and cooked a special meal for us. It was a traditional Danish Christmas dinner. We started off with a salad consisting of sliced tomatoes with egg and tuna topping. This was followed by roast pork, sweet red cabbage and boiled potatoes. For dessert, we had ice cream topped with sweet cooked figs. Needless to say, it was all delicious. Eva and Jens took us to a museum close by, where Aase volunteers, while the pork was cooking. After dinner, we had a delightful visit.

On our final day in Denmark, Aase and a friend drove us to Helsingør where we caught the train to Copenhagen International Airport. From there we flew to London with a connecting flight to Houston. On our flight home, I couldn't help but think of our wonderful time in Denmark. Nearly all of our meals had been in Danish homes or picnic lunches prepared by our Danish friends. All of our meals had been traditional Danish fare, and I found them simply delicious. Each meal, be it lunch or dinner, included flowers and candles on the table. I thought of our friends Ole and Else and of our cousins Aase and Eva. I thought of the adventures we shared together and the many hours of being with people we really cared for. Most of all, I thought of how wonderful it had been.