

Homebound: a travel letter from Seattle

We've packed our bags, ready to go. To go home to Bergen, Norway. Home from what exactly?

The University of Bergen and University of Washington exchange program and NAFOL, National Research School on Teacher Education, facilitated my research stay at the University of Washington in Seattle for two quarters as a visiting scholar.

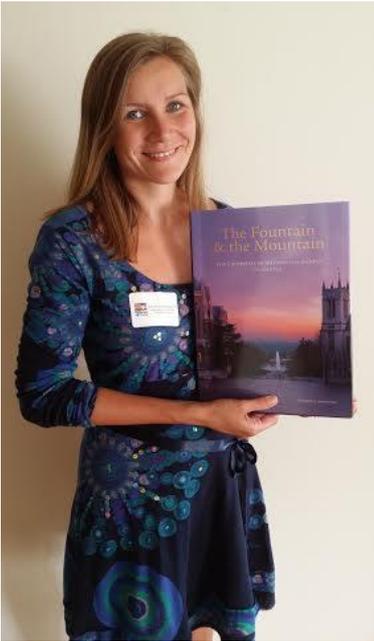
I've had the time of my life. What made it so awesome?

During my research stay, I have developed as a scholar. Traveling abroad made me realize that the Norwegian "jantelov" had to be put to rest, or at least set aside for a few months. At seminars, conferences, lectures and meetings I learned more about myself in academia than I thought I would before I came here. It also made me appreciate the education I have from the Department of comparative politics and all the various NAFOL seminars even more.

Putting myself "out there" gave me invaluable contacts. The wonderful people at the Department of Scandinavian studies where I had my office, but also the College of Education and Department of Political Science (my other office during my stay), were very inspiring to me, contextualizing my work and enabling further collaboration.

A special thanks to Professor Christine Ingebritsen who made me feel like I belong. In Seattle, at the UW, and in academia.

During my stay I was so lucky to have the help of Professor Walter Parker, the big "Kahuna" in social studies education, who helped me visit schools and classrooms to learn more about how civic education is conducted here. I



Last day: UW book present from my colleges with greetings inside!

got a better understanding of the Advanced Placement government course, and project based learning like mock congress and mock elections in different school districts. I was even able to visit a session in social studies teacher education at the UW. These experiences showed me that though we have different ways of organizing our teacher education when it comes to practice, theory, political support and school system, the everyday life of the teacher is confronted with pretty much the same challenges of bureaucracy, standardized testing and assessments that we have at home.



Visit to Garfield, a public high school in the Central District

We`ve had the time of our lives. What made it so awesome?

First, I came here with my family. Our daughter was almost 10 months old when we got on the ten hour flight from Amsterdam. This was also were she decided to start crawling for the first time. My husband has had the joy of being a “ SAHD”, a stay at home dad, from January to June. When he and our daughter, Hermia, walked the streets of Seattle, everybody was looking at them, smiling and saying “hello”. This has been so good for Hermia. She`s now walking around saying “hello” to everyone, and chatting about things that she cares about like doggies, is, and balloons (which you see everywhere especially during graduation which is a huge deal around here). Everywhere they went people were excited to see a welfare state in practice, a dad who was actually paid to be the caretaker, not just for a week or two, but for several months. Maybe that has inspired the democratic (and liberal who recently legalized marihuana) people of Washington state to include some parental leave compared to what they have now which can be everything from nothing at all (using unpaid sick leave).

Second, we lived in the beautiful neighborhood of Laurelhurst with the most amazing neighbors ever. Close to several playgrounds, a local coffee shop and market where we could buy the most delightful treats; fresh local fruit, meat and cheese. It will be very strange going back to Rema 1000. Also, I could walk to campus everyday (with the extraordinary view of Mt. Rainier and even the Space Needle). There was a very nice walking and biking trail all the way around Lake Washington. Lots of locals use their bikes to get around. Still, Seattle has quite a traffic problem (which we can relate to in Bergen). According to the locals the best time of the day to drive your car? Well, from 0945 am to 10 am...

Third, we got to travel and experience more than the local Seattle area. We were invited to two cabin trips and we went to Vancouver in Canada, to California and the beautiful coastline of Oregon. We were also able to make a visit to North Dakota, which showed us a different “Midwest” way of life.

They had “supper” instead of “dinner” and it was flat farmland everywhere. We thought a lot about the Norwegians who came here and dug their way all through the United States, through miles and miles of land, and finally got to Seattle- and there was nothing left but the huge Pacific Ocean.



Twin Peaks! Alf, Hermia and me sightseeing at the Snoqualmie falls

All in all Seattle is not that different from Bergen. After all, we are sister cities. On the 17th of May we even walked in the parade with the Norwegian Club at UW. The parade takes place in Ballard, a neighborhood with a strong Norwegian-American presence and heritage. The parade started from my old elementary school where I almost learned how to ride a unicycle in 5th grade. It was so great to come back here as an adult. I did not attempt the unicycle this time.

Utdrag fra notatblokkene mi første uken i Seattle, januar 2015

Første dagen på campus. Det er store flotte bygninger overalt, masse gress og høye trær. Mennesker i alle varianter med alle slags uttrykk haster forbi med kaffekopp i hånden. Noen har medbrakt, andre med den kjente Starbucks logoen på. Mange av dem har klær med en stor W på, de er Huskies, studenter fra University of Washington. Jeg lurer på hvor de skal alle sammen. De ser ut som

at de er på vei et sted, at de har en tidsplan, noe de skal rekke, «places to be». *Got my own library!*

Jeg går rundt hjørnet på Gerbering Hall, og der mister jeg nesten pusten. Opp stiger storslåtte Mount Rainier, for en fantastisk utsikt. Fjellet er 5000 meter høyt og fra et sted på campus ser du rett mot det! Jeg kjenner at det er godt å være her. Jeg har god tid og rusler videre bort mot «Odegaard Library».



Skal si de har anstrengt seg for å få meg til å føle meg hjemme, tenker jeg og ler litt for meg selv. Når jeg kommer til Department of Scandinavian studies er jeg litt spent. Det er en kjempehøy bygning som heter Raitt Hall.

Den første jeg treffer på er Terje Leiren, acting chair på instituttet. Han er veldig hyggelig og ønsker meg hjertelig velkommen og sørger for at jeg får nøkler, kontor og internett. Første dagen går knirkefritt. Jeg treffer mange hyggelige folk og spiser lunsj med Professor Ingebritsen, som er min supervisor her. Hun er leder av Bergen Exchange program, Jeg skal være her frem til sommeren, og nå er det bare januar! Det er rart å tenke på!

Det går noen dager, og plutselig slår det meg der jeg går under de hundreår gamle kirsebærtrerne med Starbucks koppen min. Jeg er en av dem nå. Jeg er en av dem som haster forbi, jeg har et sted å gå, folk å treffe «places to be». Jeg er en Husky.