

Radio Project in the Land of the Midnight Sun

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GETTING BOGGED DOWN with the daily routine of broadcasting? Or weary of entertaining foreign visitors?

Then go off on a short-term professional foreign visit yourself!

I did—and came back stimulated and more appreciative of the importance of international and intercultural communication.

Two years ago I conceived the idea of an "Intercultural Radio Project" with Norway—with the objective of giving the many Minnesotans of Norwegian descent a picture of some aspects of modern Norway. I could do this, I decided, through interviews I would record with some of the leaders in education, the arts, and industry. I would then use these transcribed interviews as a series on my radio program on KUOM, the University of Minnesota station.

Arrangements Take Time

Making the specific contacts was a long procedure—it took me about two years, actually—because at first it was a hit-and-miss process. With a knowledge (obtained later) of how and where to make the proper contacts, the time could have been shortened considerably. Because of a warning from a friend of red tape I might encounter, I first sought clearance from Norwegian authorities to find out whether it was permissible to make tape recordings. The red tape proved to be non-existent.

Colleagues who had been in Norway furnished some leads and specific names. A bi-monthly magazine, *The Norseman*, provided

numerous ideas and more names. Everyone to whom I wrote for appointments was most agreeable and helpful.

The public affairs officer of the American Embassy in Oslo suggested that I write the Cultural Division of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for help in arranging appointments for the interviews. That source of help proved invaluable.

By this time I had been granted a quarter leave from the University, so, armed with a Uher tape recorder and plenty of blank tapes, I flew to Norway to carry out my project. When I arrived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offices in Oslo, I was assigned to Mrs. Ase Irgens-Jensen. I had only to make my wishes for certain types of interviews known, and she set them up immediately. She arranged a complete schedule to dovetail with appointments I had made myself, and confirmed the specific days and hours of the interviews. Her help was gracious as well as efficient.

Timing Proved Ideal

The timing of my leave for the interviews proved excellent—from mid-May to mid-June. In summer too many people are on vacation to make a project such as mine feasible.

There were several bonuses in selecting the time I did to carry out my project: I was in Norway for the fantastic celebration of Constitution Day on May 17 (it would be hard to beat such crowds to view a parade!), and in Bergen during the International Music Festival. And it is little wonder that Norwegians regard spring as their most beautiful time of year. The flowers were a delight. Flowers were in bloom everywhere—tulips and lilacs in the parks and city squares, apple and pear trees on the fjords. Furthermore, the pleasantly cool weather made it seem less burdensome to carry around 10 pounds of Uher recorder.

The first 10 days in Oslo I planned such a tight schedule of interviews that I literally dashed from one to the next. That was a mistake—for Norwegians do not like to hurry, and many of them would have taken more time to acquaint me with their work. To these interviews I took cabs, buses, streetcars, trains, and the underground. And I walked miles. Everybody in Norway walks! In fact, Norwegians measure distances by the length of time it takes to arrive on foot!

Most thrilling of the interviews, probably, were those with Asmund Oftedal, the director of the Bergen International Music

Festival, who took time out on a Sunday during the festival to record an interview, and the one with Mrs. Greta Prytz Korsmo, the artist who has taken the lead in the development of modern Norwegian enamelling. I interviewed Mrs. Korsmo on the afternoon of May 17 in her charming home in the woods outside of Oslo.

Professional Contacts Rewarding

Contact with professionals in another country can be both stimulating and inspiring. But a person who undertakes a project in a foreign country—even a short-term project such as mine—has, it seems to me, certain responsibilities. One is to prepare himself by reading as intensively as possible to get background on the country and its culture. Secondly, a knowledge of the language is invaluable. Although all my interviews were in English, and in spite of the fact that most young people and many—probably most—professional people in the cities speak English, there are times when it would be difficult to find your way around without a knowledge of the language. My ability to speak Norwegian left a great deal to be desired, yet my halting Norse proved open sesame in many cases. And three days on a farm in the fjords where the family spoke no English made communication in Norwegian a necessity!

I left Norway not only with a store of tape recordings for my radio program but with the greatest admiration for the Norwegian people and their professional competence. I shall never forget their friendliness, their hospitality (it would be hard to count the cups of coffee I was served!), the warmth with which I was received, and their desire to “go the second mile” in showing me interesting and significant aspects of their programs. The frequency with which we get visits from foreign professionals sometimes seems burdensome and may incline many of us to take such contacts lightly. I realize more than ever now how meaningful intercultural communication can be.