

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Sandra C. Looney

21 April 2004

Isaiah 43: 9: “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

This is an ordinary story. I tell this story as a parallel story to the ones Ole Rolvaag weaves through his novels, particularly the trilogy the Senior Academy is studying--Giants in the Earth, Peder Victorious, Their Fathers' God.

This story is about Liv, my great-grandmother, my mother's grandmother, who left Norway at 23. I did not know this story until recent years. The details remain sketchy, yet they shed a kind of light. We all have such stories in our family histories. But this story belongs to me. And now to you too, as I tell it.

In 1872 my great, great grandfather and grandmother became convinced that they must leave Norway. In that year 13,865 persons left Norway. Among them Gunleik and Helge and their three daughters, the oldest being Liv, who was 23.

They had toiled on a small farm in Telemark. It was meager with little possibilities for improvement. As they say, poverty loomed everyday and Sunday.

Liv is deeply affected by her father's decision to leave because she had met a young man, Ole, whom she had come to love. They had begun to make plans for their future. She had received a little wooden box from Ole with his initials carved on top, a gift that she kept her entire life.

Ole's family emigrated too, but without Ole, who had military service. Ole's family consisted of his mother and sister and brother Gullick. Gullick took a job as a railroad builder and, after a time, earned enough money to purchase himself land. That eventually became a farm of 640 acres, with good possibilities for grain and livestock. Liv worked as domestic help for a German family who operated a hotel. She worked there until her parents came with horse and sled one bitter winter day and took her home.

Then her parents decided Liv should marry Ole's brother Gullick. And so it was—Gullick and Liv, my great grandparents. My Oslo relatives are Ole's descendants.

My mother wishes me to tell you that Gullick was a good man: all accounts point to him as a good man. They had a fruitful marriage: seven children,

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among them my beloved grandfather Olai. They farmed and prospered. Two grandsons still farm the Aamodt land.

My mother tells me how kind Liv was, how she spoke to the grandchildren of Telemark, how she bustled into the kitchen for her brown sugar candy for her grandchildren, how she was so touched whenever she received a present she would cry, how she was known for her work on the loom and her Hardanger stitchery.

These details are all I know, but they are nourishing. Here is no character development like that in Ole Rolvaag's novels: no pulsing, larger-than-life Per Hansa, who loved and conquered the prairie, building his kingdom; no dark, brooding Beret, too frightened by the prairie and backward looking, who nonetheless achieves prosperity on this prairie; no complex combination of the two, no Peder Victorious, with his own drives for fulfillment as a Norwegian-American, both forward looking and backward looking.

But there is one detail more in Liv's story. In 1934, after Liv's death, our family found one poem in the bottom of her trunk. One poem, written in Norwegian.

Here is Liv's poem:

Melancholy moments bring visions of the past
I pause, see times and dreams that had me singing
The present holds no allure for me
My thoughts are often dark and dreary.
My adopted land with fruitful plains
The land of freedom they proclaim
Where anyone a home can make and live secure and confident.
My thoughts oft travel memory's lane
To my fatherland and Norway's rockbound coast

By the pristine fjord and valleys of Telemark

There was my home, there my dreams of yore remain.

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Immigrant history is full of human fires that smolder, as Lloyd Hustvedt said, under the footnotes.

Today we consider heritage. We have inherited from our recent ancestors—their fortitude, their far-seeing visions for future prosperity, their faith. These are a part of the soil of the prairies.

And we accept this heritage in full. We accept their longings, their heartaches. We acknowledge the cost of their home-leaving.

They came to these prairies and housed the ideas that were important to them. They built homes, churches, schools, colleges, seminaries. Our Heritage Park visualizes their values. These institutions are our inheritance.

Those who examine Rolvaag's novels speak of his consistent theme of the Norwegian-American dilemma--the past in Norway and the future in America. It is true that his writings come out of his particular place, his particular time. But Rolvaag's novels, even when first published, had universal appeal. They did not just describe the Norwegian immigrant experience for Norwegians. There is in Rolvaag the human pursuit of fulfillment, the pursuit of deep potentialities that lie within the human heart, the pursuit of Self and Soul. The yearnings of any immigrant group manifest themselves in Rolvaag's rich dramas.

The particular issues of Rolvaag's novels concern us too: they belong to the particular time and place. The quarrels within the Norwegian communities were important and heated. The tensions with other immigrant groups were strong, not always fair or pretty. Many viewed their neighbor's faith as superstition, worse, idolatry. Such conflicts tore lives apart. Rolvaag's last novel, Their Fathers' God, portrays the religious conflict between the Irish Catholic Susie and the Protestant Peder Victorious, a conflict that defeats their marriage and brings no victory.

Today, mindful of the total of our inheritance, let us confirm the eternal verities of our faith and hold to the true and the eternal. In this season of spring newness, in this wondrous regreening time of the prairie plans, in this

place, let us accept their legacy of culture and faith, and, with God's help, sustain it anew for the generations that follow.

Isaiah 43: 9.

Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

HOLY COMMUNION
Wednesday, April 21, 2004

Prelude “Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds”
Robert Hobby

Welcome/Announcements

Faculty Recognition Award Christy Hansen, Presenter

Call to Worship

P: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

C: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

P: Behold, God makes all things new

C: And we are witnesses of these things.

P: The grace and peace of Jesus Christ, raised from the dead to
bring everlasting hope, be with you all.

C: And also with you.

Prayer

HYMN “Now the Green Blade Rises” LBW #148

Scripture

Sermon Sandra Looney, English

Anthem “Cry Out and Shout” Knut Nystedt
Collegiate Chorale

Eucharistic Prayer

Lord’s Prayer

Distribution “Peace I Leave with You” Knut Nystedt
Collegiate Chorale

Blessing, Benediction

Postlude “Allegro Maestoso” Felix Mendelssohn
from Sonata in C minor

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHAPEL MUSICIANS NEEDED: female vocalists and a string bass player. Inquire with Kevin Stillson, Jon Larson or Pr. Paul.

HOMOSEXUALITY & THE CHURCH - Reading the Bible. Thursday, April 29th...10 am in the 3-1 room.

SENIOR SPEAKERS - the sign-up list for Senior Speakers for the '04-05 school year is available on the Narthex table. For those of you who are student teaching or studying abroad in the spring, please consider the fall dates.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY Holy Communion, 10 am - Sandra Looney, Engl;
Collegiate Chorale; Academy for Seniors; Faculty
Recognition Award
- CIA Event - 'Feminism' ...Shannon Siemens, Dot
Pogue, presenters - 9 pm (chapel)

FRIDAY Worship, 10 am - Molly Grimm Truesdell, Senior Spkr.

SUNDAY Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul

MONDAY Worship, 10 am - John Clementson, Educ.; Faculty/
Staff Choir

TUESDAY Worship, 10 am - Sinai Praise Band
- OUTREACH LUAU - 7:30 pm - Chapel...All
members of outreach are invited to join the fun!!