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Memories from Rudbøl, 1923-1927: My Teaching at Rudbøl Danish School

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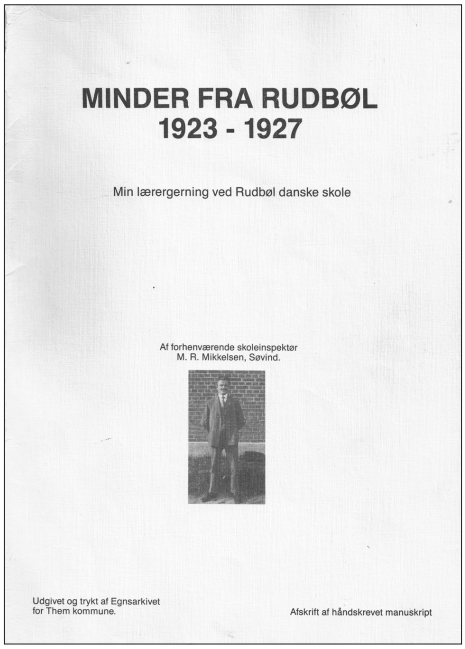


Translator's Introduction

All four of my grandparents emigrated from Denmark in the 1890s. The first time any member of my immediate family visited Denmark was almost a century later, when my wife Marge and I, together with our two sons David and Philip, went over to spend an eight-month sabbatical leave from Iowa State University in Denmark in 1981.

We knew only three names of relatives living in Denmark when we left for Denmark in January 1981, but since then we have met perhaps a hundred more. In April 1981, we met my first cousin once-removed, Mikkel Rasmus Mikkelsen. Mikkel's father, Laurs Mikkelsen, was the brother of my father Alfred Iversen's mother Stine. Mikkel was overjoyed to see us. He had always been interested in his American relatives, but had only met one previously, my father's sister Christine,

when she had visited Denmark in 1909, seventy-two years earlier. Although he was then eighty-five years old and starting to lose his eyesight, it was immediately obvious that Mikkel was a remarkable individual. He spoke no English and our Danish was not yet very good (after three months of lessons), but still we communicated very well. His son-in-law Ingolf Berg eventually came over to Mikkel's house in order to interpret part of our conversation.

Mikkel showed us some of his writings on local history, family history, and genealogical data. Most importantly for us, he presented to me two books of letters that he had saved for many years. One set was a book of letters written by my grandmother Stine from South Dakota and Iowa between 1900 and 1917. The other set of letters was written by Christine, from Michigan, India, and the Arabian peninsula where she served as a medical missionary.* Mikkel had also started putting his own life experiences down on paper in 1973. In 1979, just two years before we met, he finished the story of the years he spent teaching at the Rudbøl Danish School in Slesvig, right on the Danish-German border, just after the 1920 plebiscite that returned Northern Slesvig to Denmark.

Mikkel suffered a stroke a month after our visit and died a few months later. Marge and I finally met his brother Christian in 1984, with whom I enjoyed several long conversations in 1984 and again in 1985. In 1985-86, Christian assembled and transcribed his brother's writings about his remarkable experiences in Rudbøl. The book *Minder fra Rudbøl* (Memories from Rudbøl) had been printed by the time our son Philip visited the Mikkelsens in Them, Denmark in June 1986. Christian's inscription inside the book reads, "A last greeting to James Iversen from Christian Mikkelsen, Them, Denmark, 16 June 1986." Christian died three months later at the age of eighty-two.

Understanding the circumstances and significance of Mikkel's experiences in Rudbøl requires a little historical context. For four centuries, Slesvig (Schleswig) and Holstein were rather special provinces, with German ties as well as Danish. Holstein's population was primarily German, while Slesvig was Danish, but they were both officially affiliated with Denmark, in personal union with the Danish king. Denmark lost both provinces to Germany as a result of the war of 1864, except for a small area surrounding the ancient Danish city of

* To hear more about Christine's story, see J.D. Iversen, "Christine: The Life and Death of a Danish-American Medical Missionary in the Middle East," *The Bridg*e 28, no. 1 (2005): 9-29.

Ribe. In 1920, after the end of World War I and Germany's defeat, the League of Nations administered the plebiscite that had been promised by the 1864 Treaty of Vienna to allow the residents of Slesvig and Holstein to decide their nationality. After fifty-six years of German control and aggressive efforts to "Germanize" the Danish population of Schleswig, to the extent of prohibiting Danish meetings and imposing fines if houses were painted with red and white colors too close together, the northern German province of Schleswig was still more than half Danish-speaking and Danish-minded, even though a relatively large proportion of Slesvig's Danes had immigrated to America in the late nineteenth century. The current border, established by the plebiscite in 1920, follows the language divide much as it existed in 1864, except for the city of Flensborg (Flensburg), just south of the current border, which received a large influx of Germans during the 1864-1920 time period, but still has a large Danish-speaking population. There are still significant minorities in Slesvig on both sides of the border, and there are German language schools north of the border, Danish language schools south of the border, and a branch of the University of South Denmark in Flensborg.

In November 1922, Mikkel Rasmus Mikkelsen was asked to move to the little border village of Rudbøl and start a Danish school, alongside the existing German school. When Mikkel arrived in Rudbøl, he was single and lived in the attic in the home of a family named Christiansen. Once the Danish School was ready to open, he moved into the apartment in the school building. He was living in the school apartment when he and Tinna were married, and they lived there until they moved from Rudbøl in 1927. Following is my translation of his fascinating account of some of his experiences in the four years he spent on the "new frontier."

Jim Iversen

Foreword

On the sixth of May 1974, I had promised to give a lecture at the big school exhibition at Horsens Museum on the occasion of Denmark's Teachers Society's 100-year jubilee. The published theme was "A Long Life in the School's Service." After some contemplation I chose to talk about my first year as teacher in Rudbøl. At the coffee table afterwards I was asked to say more, and among the many questions was the following, "Have you written about your time there?" "No, certainly

Rudbøl Danish School students, fall 1924.

only a little of it." "Well, you should write about it immediately, it is school and cultural history of utmost importance." The usual approval followed.

Yes, perhaps they were right, my experiences there were certainly not normal.

Mikkel R. Mikkelsen, 1979

Rudbøl, looking southwest. The building farthest to the left is the new Danish School and next to it is the German School. Both schools were adjacent to the dike and also the road. With strong landward winds the land between the dike here and the ocean dike would flood with fresh water from the Vidå River as far as the eye could see.

Biographical Sketch of Mikkel Rasmus Mikkelsen

Schoolmaster Mikkel Rasmus Mikkelsen was born at Næsgaard near Salten Langsø in Them Parish [central Jutland] on March 6, 1895, the oldest son of farmer Laurs Mikkelsen and Kirstine Mikkelsen. His right arm was injured when he was six or seven years old, and he was thus not well suited for farm work. Money was short, so it was not easy to obtain money for a school away from home, but Pastor Niels Nielsen in Them and Mikkel's teacher Sigrid Kristensen of Salten agreed that this intelligent and industrious boy should attend the teachers' school. He attended Silkeborg Seminarium where he completed studies in 1917. Director Winther corresponded with him for many years. He was a substitute several places and was a teacher at the free school which was part of the Skanderup Afterschool between Kolding and Vamdrup during the First World War. The students at the afterschool were mostly southern Jutlanders, so Rasmus, who was strongly patriotic because of his home life, became very interested in the South Jutland question. In the meantime, he was offered a position at the large free school at Odense, and there his rich pedagogical ability could be fully developed. After the reunification [of Northern Slesvig with the rest of Denmark], Danish teachers were needed in Southern Jutland and so he went to Rudbøl, which was definitely an outpost.

On August 7, 1925, he was married to Katrine (Tinna) Viuf (born February 9, 1898), who was from Bobøl, a village north of the Kongeå (King's River). Her grandfather owned a farm, which had land on both sides of the old border. He was, as could be expected, strongly nationalistic. Tinna had attended several schools, among others Bornholm College, and she was an invaluable support for Rasmus, both in Rudbøl and later in Søvind. Their six children had a good home and all found good jobs. Tinna died on June 6, 1969 and M.R. Mikkelsen on March 30, 1982.

Christian Mikkelsen, 1987

Memories of Rudbøl, by M.R. Mikkelsen

On November 15, 1922 I received a letter from Director Winther, of Silkeborg Seminarium (Silkeborg Teachers College), with an invitation to undertake teaching in Southern Jutland. They needed teachers in the newly reunified part of Denmark. He wished to have an answer before the eighteenth of November. It was both an invitation and a

declaration of confidence, so it was not easy to ignore. I knew that he kept track of his former students. It was in part thanks to him that I had gotten a place in Skanderup from among eighty-two applicants.

November 18 was a Saturday. I traveled home to talk with my parents, but they could not advise me, other than to say I needed to make that decision myself. The next day I went to Silkeborg because I wanted to talk with Winther and possibly get more information. To my surprise, there were no students on campus. When I first came to the great hall, I saw on the bulletin board a notice about the "program for the annual festival." I had forgotten that it was the seminarium's birthday. I went up to see Winther, who lived on the second floor. Mrs. Winther let me in and bade me welcome. She called to Winther, and he gave me a hearty welcome. "Please come in here." He opened the door to the main office. When I came in, I saw that there were several men in there. One of them, my old practicum teacher at the school, got up and said, "Now here we have one of those people we can use." He came over and shook my hand. They had no questions. They considered the "case closed."

A lively conversation ensued, and among other things, they asked if I had a particular area of Southern Jutland in mind. "No, you know me, I place myself at your disposal." "Good, so I will take you," said County School Consultant N. Svendsen of Tønder. I mumbled a little bit that I hoped I could do the work. This committee was partially composed of the Southern Jutland School Society, Court Official Jefsen Christensen, etc. Consultant Svendsen asked me if I knew anyone in Tønder or on the west coast. I answered "No." "So you shall come out there. Can you come next weekend?" That was arranged. The following Saturday at noon I reached Tønder, registered at the hotel, and walked over to Svendsen's place. I had dinner there and we discussed the situation extensively. Among his questions in Silkeborg had been, "Do you enjoy spirits?" "No," was the answer. "Yes, that is an important question, which you need to have decided before you start. Either you drink or you don't drink, there is no middle ground." He was fervent about that correct conclusion. It was decided that we should meet that next morning at nine o'clock.

When I was walking back to the hotel to rest, suddenly there was great commotion on the street. There was beating on drums and blasts on a horn. I put on my jacket and walked down to the street. A truck with soldiers in high humor rumbled past. I found out that there was

a fire on a large farm out on the marsh and that the fire corps and soldiers were on their way out to help.

On Sunday morning, Svendsen, the writer Edvard Egeberg, and I drove out there. We drove out on the soaked marsh roads through Møgeltønder and got stuck close to the neighborhood of the burned farm. We walked out and up to a farm which was situated on a high berm. Svendsen talked with the poet. I kept silent, listened, and watched. We were in an enormous barn. There were places for about eighty animals. The loft beam was the longest I had ever seen, a Pomeranian beam which went the length of the building. We also went in to see the house. Large, attractive, and old. I was most impressed with the great room. It was large, but there was not much furniture, only some nice large chests and more than ten large, very large, mirrors in gilt frames on the wall. It was quite remarkable. The driver had gotten the car out of the mud, and we drove on to the burned farm. It was a quite depressing sight. This was also a large farm built on a high berm. The farm consisted of four large winged buildings around a small courtyard. The "blue roof" was thatched with reeds. Extinguishing the fire was hopeless, once the roof caught on fire. Seventy-eight animals lay burned in the ruins, a sorrowful sight.

In Rudbøl we had several encounters that impressed me with the consultant's degree of influence. We wanted to see this extraordinary new border, which was in the middle of the road south of the Vidå River, but when we got there, there was no way to cross the river. But "the poet" [Egeberg] wanted to see the border. "I will arrange it," said Svendsen. Instead of going to the window to negotiate, he opened the door to the border guard's office, and told him, "I am the county school consultant, and we are walking over the border," whereupon the three of us swiftly walked over the bridge, leaving the somewhat surprised border official alone in his office. There will be more about this unique border later.

We then drove north to see the school. And here, we were quite surprised. When we came into the school, there sat four powerfully-built men, who at once got up and stood when we came in. And then Svendsen spoke with a blustering, authoritative voice, which stood out in stark contrast to this relatively short man with a delicate build. "What in the world is this? What is going on here?" (This was on a Sunday.) One of the more obese men answered meekly, "Well, we are holding an election for the church council." Svendsen said, "An

election! For church council, here in the schoolroom? Do you have the school director's permission? Don't you know that you should ask the school commission for permission to use the schoolroom for anything besides education? What?" They mumbled an apology for their forgetfulness, and Svendsen answered, "Well, we will let it go for this time, but this must not happen often." I was completely flabbergasted. It was really rather unusual to see these large powerfully built men stand like crestfallen schoolboys caught in a bad mischievous trick. After that, I quickly learned to perform in the same manner. They knew and respected that, but one had to be careful to know the letter of the law. After visiting several places in the area, we drove back to Tønder and I traveled back to Stige.

Now the difficult task lay ahead of telling the free school directors that I would be leaving the school. On Monday, I sent notes home with the children about a parents' meeting on Tuesday evening, but no subject was mentioned. But when I came into the schoolroom that Tuesday evening, I became aware at once that they suspected something was to happen. The room was full, but in contrast to earlier meetings all was completely silent. We sang, *Har hånd du lagt på Herrens plov, da se dig ej tilbage* (Lay your hand on the Lord's plow and do not look back). I read them Winther's letter to me, told them about my decision, and described what I knew about my future work. I had promised to begin in Rudbøl in April, so I had four months left in Stige. I strongly emphasized that my leaving was in spite of my complete contentedness with the work in Stige. When I had finished, I sat down. There was a long silence, but then old Maren stood up and said, "Yes, if you left us in preference for another place like this, then we would lose our temper with you, but we know that what you told us is something that you have to do, you could not do otherwise than that, and thus we will wish you good luck and blessings in your new job." Then the entire group rose. Those were the people of Stige.

The Move from Stige

It was a rich, but busy winter. There were a lot of things to take care of. Consultant Svendsen had rented a little room for me with a German carpenter named Christiansen, who had earlier had a border patrolman there as a tenant. I would have my dinners at the inn. Because of the lack of space, I was forced to leave all my furniture in

Stige, stored in the children's play and dining rooms. I brought along only one trunk with my clothes and a case with books and teaching materials, plus my bicycle. I moved down there after Easter 1923.

Leaving Stige was a melancholy departure. It was difficult to leave this exceptional workplace, plus the children, the young people my age, and the older free school people, not least the lovable old Maren. As a going-away present, I received a silver chalice filled with polished silver *kroner*, ca. 120 Danish crowns, which they had purchased at the National Bank in Odense especially for my gift. These coins were not in circulation, since they had been replaced by the one-*kroner* bill.

No, it was absolutely not easy to leave, but many good wishes followed me on my way.

Arrival in Rudbøl

The weather was gray and stormy and my mood almost matched it. I received my instructions at the county office from Svendsen. He had a lot to say. "You are the county school commission's representative, you are responsible directly to us, you get your pay here, and you take orders only from us." Their plan was to operate the Danish School in such a way that the people there would want to continue with it, when that happened, I would receive a bonus of 30,000 Danish crowns for it.

"You must come in here every Friday and deliver a report. Thus, we can discuss the inevitable question, should it be one way or the other. If you wish information about it, they [the county commission] will give it to you."

"You must not discuss politics out there, neither national nor party politics. You should talk only about the weather, cattle, or sheep, but you should go around and meet the people, seek to win them to your cause. You must especially seek to become friends with Carsten Dethlefsen; he is 'the King' in the school commission, in county and parish councils, and he is the *diggreve* (dike manager) and boiler inspector among other things, and he is *German*."

"You will be in school the whole time, so you must teach both the German language and have a first-class school. You have not tried that before, but you must learn. You will have only six hours per week in Danish. In teaching the history of Denmark, you must not occupy their time with the Slesvig War and you must remain neutral on the whole

question of Danish versus German, because most of the people there are somewhat German-oriented, only a few are deliberately Danish."

"We have discussed the question about alcoholic beverages. You have just come from a school society, which is very lively. Now, you are coming to a society which is used to having everything ordered from above."

"The people are very old-fashioned, at least fifty years behind the times, you will discover."

"Now, you must first walk down and greet the local school commission chairman, he is brickmaker Lorentz Nielsen, who lives quite near the inn, and present yourself as the county school commission representative."

Yes, that was my introduction [to Rudbøl].

My Room

My room was a very small one in the attic, three meters long [ten feet] by four meters wide [thirteen feet], with two large beds, a wash stand, a little table and one chair. There was, fortunately, enough space for my large trunk.

The first afternoon I was there, I walked over to see the school commission chairman. He was certainly not pleasant, did not bid me welcome, but said only "Yes, I am German," and then there was not much to talk about, but at least I had met him.

It was nearly the same with Dethlefsen. When I came into the large vestibule at the farm, a large attractive marsh farm, the wife came to the door and said "*Guten Tag.*" I told her who I was and said that I would like to meet Mr. Dethlefsen. She called to him, I repeated my presentation and said that I would like to have the pleasure of meeting him since he was a member of the school commission. "No, I am not any more, my successor lives over there." He opened the door, walked out and pointed to a neighboring property, a house. I walked along with him out of the house. "Goodbye." Thanks, I was actually "shown the door." I was really irritated and quickly walked off the farm, straight over to his successor, and here I found a great surprise.

The man was blind, his name was Thomas Nielsen, and he was soon my best friend in the Rudbøl area. He was very Danish and very interested in all things Danish. He had two daughters; the oldest, Anne Catharine, became my best and dearest student in the school.

Many happy hours I spent in this home, and I sought and got much direction and assistance with the "local question."

At the Inn

I got my food at the inn, and chose my place at the table in the farthest corner of the dining room, where it was least disturbed. The food was regularly good, but monotonous. There were nearly always guests dining in the room, tall powerful men, who sat and drank *grog*, boiled water in a large glass with sugar and rum; the sugar bowl and rum bottle stood on the table.

One Sunday evening there were many people in the dining room. At the "common table" sat four tall men who drank and played cards. They had begun the day before and were definitely not sober. One got up and came over to my table.

"Will you have a drink with us?" he asked.
"No, many thanks, but I don't drink," I answered.
"So, a round of cards, then?"
"I'm very sorry, but I can't play cards."

Deep silence in the room."Well, it's a ringer for a schoolmaster we have then, who can neither drink nor play cards," he proclaimed loudly, as he contemptuously blew smoke at me and went back to his friends. The humor was high among the others in the room after this episode. I finished as quickly as I could and then disappeared.

My German colleague had it somewhat better. He was not a teetotaler. He liked the food there, but usually walked across the border, as he could have as much to drink as he wanted for only one *krone* in the inn on the other side. Nearly every Sunday evening, at ten o'clock when the border closed, one could see him swinging up the street through the town and out to the school, as a rule with a flock of children in his wake. But the next day it was "blue Monday," and he would be busy with his cane.

Let me write a little more about this subject: in this larger rural area there were eight inns, as well as two liquor wholesalers, who sold large casks. The school commission chairman was one of them. The inn was partly owned by Frits Carstensen of Hauberg, later Rudbølgård (more about him later). Everyone drank alcohol, including many women. A tall pretty young woman was a waitress at the "Corner Inn." There she would receive many insults, at times, which could lower her sense

of humor, but she was a good asset for the inn, and was a very nice person. I danced with her on occasion and played parlor games with her at Gendarme Rasmussen's two-day wedding celebration. His wife came from the neighboring farm beside the school.

One Sunday afternoon I stood and talked with a person outside the inn. On the grass between the inn and the road, several younger married people, several gendarmes and their wives, and others of the townspeople lay "quenching their thirst" on a nice day. One of the wives sat with her little child on her lap, but the child rolled away from her down in the grass and she was sufficiently drunk that she had a hard time picking up the child again.

I was *very* depressed.

One of the neighbors near the school, a laborer, drank a lot. When he started, he would lose two or three days in a row. Several times I had seen his thirteen-year-old son stand inside the inn door and plead with him, "Father, Father." "Yes, go away, I will come soon." But he did not come. But then it happened that his wife stopped in, and then he had to go along home with her. But I had also seen him, a moment after going home, coming out and quickly going back to the inn.

Another young Danish laborer with an attractive wife and three children also had a drinking problem and would spend time at the inn when there was no work, which was usually the case during the wintertime when the entire marsh was flooded and frozen. His situation was especially bad then. When spring came, the innkeeper presented him with a bill of about 800 Danish *kroner*. When he could not pay, the innkeeper took his only cow. He did not get a new one later.

There were, unfortunately, many such examples.

A Day in the German School

The school in Rudbøl was, like several other places in *Sønderjylland* (Southern Jutland), a one-room school. Six- and seven-year-old children were in the same classroom with fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds. They were separated into three divisions: *Ober, Mittel,* and *Unterstufe* (upper, middle, and lower grades). The same lessons in their books were likewise divided into three.

The German School was built in 1882 on the west slope of the old dike from 1553-56. There was a narrow country road on top of

the dike, paved with hard burned bricks placed on edge, and closely packed. Only a narrow sidewalk separated the road from the school door. Thus, there was a high iron railing just inside the front door, so that the children would not dash out into the road. The daily language was usually Danish, but with many German and Frisian words and names sprinkled in. The teaching language was German. The teacher was German. His father was also a teacher, who was, however, sympathetic to Denmark and who had been forcibly moved to Holstein. He was quite tolerant.

There were forty-eight children in the schoolroom. The older ones sat at two large adult-sized tables. The younger children sat at long tables with four to six at each. These tables were from the old Danish School, which was next door (from before 1864--a beautiful old building). The school hours were on weekdays from 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., with Wednesday and Saturday afternoons free. The children wore usually poor, mostly homemade clothes, many knitted. Several of their schoolbags were old soldier knapsacks of red calfskin.

Let us follow a typical school day in our thoughts: at eight o'clock the teacher called out "Come in." All the children came in and stood in their places. The teacher took his key ring, unlocked his desk, and took out his cane. It was about seventy-five centimeters [thirty inches] long, about as thick as a pen, and served as pointer, baton, and cane. It was in his hand most of the day.

We would sing, for example, hymn number 218, verse 3. One-two-three, then the children sang.

"*Bete*, Andreas" (Pray, Andreas). One of the oldest children said the Lord's Prayer in German. That went quickly.

"*Sitzen*" (Sit). One-two-three, all of the children sat down in their places.

Tablets forward. One-two-three, bang, all tablets lay on the table.

The younger ones would write "abc."

The middle group of children would write a composition or do a grammar problem.

The older group would work on dictation or on grammar and sentence structure.

After half an hour, an assignment was given, and the teacher walked around and supervised the work. For arithmetic it worked the same way. The oldest group was questioned, and answers were

given. Now and then the middle group helped to supervise or aid the youngest group.

Religion instruction was the most remarkable. The teacher read a verse, e.g., "In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth." The children, whose hands should lie flat on the table, indicated quickly by raising their forearm at the elbow. The teacher would name two or three children, who would repeat what the teacher had said.

Teacher: "And the world was desert, empty and dark." The children raised their hands. The teacher questioned two or three children, who would then repeat the phrase. And the process continued. Next day others of the children were called upon, and the previous day's lessons repeated from memory. Likewise, the hymns were all repeated from memory.

The study of geography varied somewhat from that routine, and there were maps of the countries, not large except for the names. There was a flip chart, on one side was a map of Germany with mountains, rivers, and cities in color. The children became very familiar with the map, and would demonstrate their knowledge for visitors.

The discipline in the schoolroom was very strict. Not much had happen before the cane would strike. If there was a child who did not sing along, it came on the back of the neck. "Sing!" If one's hands were not where they belonged, the cane struck the arm. One of the older girls, who had sat restlessly, got a switch, but she ducked so it hit her on the side of her face. That resulted in a red stripe, which next day had turned color to blue, green, and yellow. It was a rare day when there was no striking. One Monday was especially "blue," when twenty-four strikes were delivered.

I quickly discovered that the teacher was very much hated. Often a larger boy would clench his fists after the teacher when he walked back to his desk after delivering a punishment.

My First School Day in the German School

While I was supposed to be in school the entire day, fortunately the German teacher would leave when I taught. The first hour, I would, as usual, begin with prayer, and I repeated the Lord's Prayer (*Fadervor*) in Danish. Several of the children giggled or laughed softly. They had never heard the teacher pray, and only a few knew the Lord's Prayer in Danish.

Then I would begin teaching. My only tools were tablet and pencil; neither I nor the children had books of any sort. I wrote the Danish letters on the blackboard. The Germans and the children wrote in the old "Gothic" style. I used the modern words and sentences and let the children write them on their tablets.

At times and for variety, I would relate a little about Denmark's history. I chose to talk about King Skjold [from Nordic mythology]. That turned out not to be a good idea. As soon as I had said the first sentence, an arm shot up in the air; I ignored it, and when I continued to talk without responding, they became completely bewildered and laughed, so much that it became impossible to continue. The commotion lasted about ten minutes. The result was that the next time the children could not remember anything that I had said.

That was depressing, but it quickly got better. I wanted to teach them to listen, and to do so told them a short fairy tale. The result was completely startling. When I began to speak, they sat very still, their arms crossed on the table and their eyes on me. After a short time they could retell the story themselves and do it so well, that I could recognize the incorrect forms of speech that I had used. The result was that I became more particular with my mother tongue, particularly when I was in school.

I was supposed to have six hours per week, but gradually I wanted more. My German colleague wanted a reduction in his time, so I got a couple of hours extra. Gradually I got all the afternoon hours. When I told Svendsen about my trades with Christiansen, he said, "Remarkable, but don't talk about it."

The shortage of teaching resources was a continuous problem, but the children were doing very well. Consultant Svendsen presented us with a map of Denmark, which was a great help. I wrote to the Alfa Margarine factory in Vejen, told them about my position and asked for a set of the Alfa Margarine songbooks. They immediately sent enough to give one to each child, and that became for us a very big help and joy. The songbook could be used for both spoken and written Danish, as well as for singing. I had a violin, and the children loved to sing and enjoyed that very much. In those hours, they were very well-behaved; there were no difficulties worth mentioning. If there was a little unrest, I simply looked at the primary offender until all became peaceful again.

Recess, on the other hand, was different.

Recess

I was quite astonished to find that the children did not play at recess. They simply didn't understand the concept, in contrast to my earlier students. On the contrary, they were expert at hitting, especially the boys. There was a complete contrast between them and the children in Stige. The mentality was completely different. They were hard, at times cruel. I gradually came to realize that there was "Friesian blood" in them, which was responsible. Rudbøl was just on the language border, many of the people, especially the women, could speak Friesian. They were not a peaceful group when assembled. *Uha!* It is true to say that some of them were "very harsh, peasant women." *Ak ja!* Why does Jeppe drink?

The boys fought, more or less, nearly every day. At times it was quite severe. A bloody nose belonged to the day's occurrences. If the little ones could not compete, they took off their wooden shoes and used them as weapons. They didn't wait for the first "blow." I was sorry to see it. I wanted to correct them, but really had no authority. It was not so easy. Christiansen would light a cigarette and walk home to his wife during recess. The boys' fighting could not bother him less.

One day it was especially bad. On that day, there were several bloody noses before the first hour was up, and I thought, "How will this end?" At the next recess, I walked across the schoolyard to the large land-water canal near the bottom of the dike. I stood there very engrossed. The boys came down there to see what "our Danish schoolmaster" was staring at. When they had gathered, I asked, "Can you jump over the canal here?" "Yes, with our *klustag*." "No, without it," I answered. "No, we can't." I remembered my childhood exercise on the long jump over the wide ditches in Næsgaard's meadows. I walked back a little way, took the approach run, and jumped over, then back again. The boys were noticeably impressed. Andreas the oldest, did as he had seen me do and jumped, but he slid down into the water. His comrades laughed, but I praised him and said, "That was fine. I would not have believed you could do that, but go a little farther back when you're ready to jump, then it won't be too wide." He came back successfully and got more praise. And so the "game" was underway. There was actually some coaching that morning, no thoughts about fighting. It was a real success.

But then it was necessary to pursue that success further. In the last afternoon recess I said, "Yes, now I have taught you to jump without a *klustag*, I don't understand how to use one. Can you teach me?" Enormous jubilation and approval followed. "I will bring my *klustag* along tomorrow," said Andreas. Next morning we had four *klustag*, and much merriment. That the boys laughed a little at me in the beginning was part of the play, but they were plainly proud when I was able to use the *klustag* successfully, and told the girls, "Our Danish schoolmaster can now jump with the *klustag*." That was really a turning point. After that day there was seldom fighting, that was well demonstrated.

I had to report each week to Svendsen, and he got the whole story and was very enthusiastic. "Remarkable, Mikkelsen, do you have gymnastics out there?" "No." "Is there any equipment?" "No, absolutely none." "What would you like to have?" "An ordinary buck for vaulting." "Go home and write to Paul Madsen, Dons, at Kolding and ask him to send a good school buck to Rudbøl, and send the bill to the Tønder County School Commission." Eight days later we had a splendid buck, and so we began to learn both high-jumping and long-jumping. The boys were fantastically capable. I taught the two largest to be "platoon commanders" with full command over the buck when I was not there and with absolute duty to always be there, otherwise the buck would disappear.

Play

The poor girls and the little ones, however, were quite out of sorts, and were really a little envious over my attention to and interest in the big boys. They were almost a little angry—but now came their turn. I taught them different school games, including "Three-Man High" and "Two Man Forward for a Widow," but they were especially pleased with *kæde-tag-fat* (chain-go-down). The older girls could provide the leadership, much as the big boys were doing. Now there were no sour expressions, no fights, just fine humor, and the beginning of "good comradeship" along the entire line. But then there was a small "repercussion."

I was living with carpenter Christiansen and his wife, who were childless. They were very decent people. They frequently invited me to have coffee with them on Sunday afternoon, and we talked then,

often about music. Christiansen had a good flute, that he had "found" in a vacant house in France during the war, and we sometimes played music together. One such Sunday afternoon I perceived that there was something which was bothering them, and finally it came out: "I have heard that you run around with the children in the school, is that true?"

At first I was a little disoriented. "Run around with the children? Well, yes, sometimes in the recess period."

"Well, you play with the children? Is that true?"

"Yes, I do."

With deep earnestness: "That you should not do."

"But why not?"

"Then the children will have no respect for you, certainly you can understand that. No, our children should have such as this," and so he swung his hand to his face. "That is what we got." I looked at him with a little smile, and asked, "Does that help, Christiansen?" He looked at me, laughed a little, and answered, "No, perhaps not so much." "No, it does not, that I know for sure. Therefore I do not use it, and I can assure you, that even though I might have played with them during the entire recess, I can guarantee you, that as soon as we are back in the school room, they do what I say. I teach them that there should be no grumbling before we play." "No, I do not see, I cannot understand." But I believe Mrs. Christiansen understood; she said nothing, but sat quietly with a smile on her face.

Lonesomeness

Even though the work was going well, the children were well-behaved for the most part, and I was busy with the new school, it could not be avoided that lonesomeness at times became depressing, even very depressing. That spring and summer I learned the deep truth of Bjørnson's poetry:

Vær glad, når faren vejer
hver evne, som du ejer.
Jo større sag, des tyngre tag,
men desto større sejer.
Går støtterne i stykker,
og vennernerne får nykker,
så sker det blot,

fordi du godt
kan gå foruden krykker.
Enhver Gud sætter ene
han selv er mere nær.
(Be glad, when the Father weighs
each ability you possess.
The greater the matter, the heavier the weight
but even greater the victory.
If your supports disappear
and friends forsake you,
it only happens
because you can already
walk without crutches.
Each difficulty brings
you closer to your God.)

My friends, my really close friends, lived so far, far away, and there were not, as now, telephones in the neighborhood. There were none down there. One day, I was so depressed, I decided to travel to Stige the next weekend. As decided, so fulfilled. Saturday noon I cycled to Tønder [about four miles–Trans.], and got on the Hamburg Express bound for Copenhagen. At four o'clock I was in Stige. I will never forget it.

It was like coming home, there was certainly a welcoming attitude and my happiness returned by greeting my friends. We had a delightful evening at Hedelund with invited guests, songs and music. And I must admit that my disposition was greatly improved and I got great encouragement from my old friends. Sunday morning I attended the free-congregation church (*valgmenigheden*) and I had the opportunity to greet and converse with many other friends. Yes, here were my friends, my true friends, here I felt at home among people who also loved to sing.

On Sunday afternoon, my steps turned back to the south. Now I could again face my work with renewed courage.

Taking a Vacation, July 7-18, 1923

One day towards the end of June [1923] I was, as usual, in Svendsen's office. He asked where I planned to go on my vacation. I answered that I didn't have any travel plans as yet. "Then you should

travel to Germany, it is very cheap to travel in Germany." I answered that I really couldn't speak much German. "You will learn that by travelling," he answered. His assistant at the office, Teacher Torp, then said, "You can travel with me, I am going to Oberammergau for ten days." "Remarkable, you can travel with Teacher Torp to Hamburg and stay there for a few days, then from there go on to Hannover, Hildesheim, and Goslav, through the Hartz. And when you have gotten that far, you will know enough of the language. Do you have a passport?" Yes, that I did have. It was then decided that I would arrive in Tønder on a certain day at a certain time.

There was mild concern in Rudbøl when I told Christiansen that I would be traveling to Germany. "You cannot speak German." "No, that is why I'm going, to go down and learn, because everyone here can speak Danish." (They spoke Danish at the inn, except when they became a bit inebriated or especially when they talked about me and I happened to be there.) But Christiansen was an honorable man. He gave me a letter to an old war comrade of his, to contact in case I got into difficulty. But it was better with Thomas Nielsen. He shook his head at first, but then said, "You will do fine. You are young. But now I will help you. I have a brother who is with the *Wohnungspolizei* (housing inspector) and a city architect in Hamburg. I will write to him, and perhaps you can stay with him." He kept his word. I soon received a letter that I could stay with him and he would help me adjust. I got his address: Johan Nielsen, Hammerlandsstrasse 242, Hamburg.

And so the travel day arrived. My passport record states that I traveled from Tønder on July 7, 1923, and reached Sønder Løgum (Süderlügum) on that same day. We traveled on the "bath train" from Sild through Højer. That was before the Hindenburgdamm was opened. Then the Germans sailed from Højer to Sild. The railroad cars were loaded in Sønder Løgum, through Denmark (Tønder to Højer) and the loading was completed before the closed area near Højer Sluse. So I did not need a passport for that part. One car was not full. To ride in that car, a passport was needed, and that was the one I was on.

The journey went quite well. We arrived in Hamburg in the afternoon. I asked about the streetcar to Hammerlandsstrasse and got on that. One kind woman was going the same way and helped me with the transfer and showed me where to get off. I then easily

found Johan Nielsen's address. I was in Hamburg for three days, and managed with my German dictionary in my back pocket. I followed Svendsen's recommended route and had a splendid trip, with many experiences. I sent several cards to the Christiansens and to Thomas Nielsens and told them how it was going.

I arrived back in Denmark, going through Flensborg on July 18, 1923. One thing amused me afterwards. When I first came into the inn in Rudbøl to have dinner, and people began to talk about me, I quickly heard: "Shh—he understands German, he has traveled alone in Germany his entire vacation."

Rudbøl Danish School

The work on the new [Danish] school proceeded rapidly. The German school was renovated during the summer, with a new floor among other things. The main entrance was moved to the gable by the playground, and an outhouse with toilets and space for fuel was built on the playground, on the dike slope between the road and the marsh canal. This playground became the common playground for both schools' students. There was some discussion about which school would be in the new building, but Svendsen laughed that off. On August 22, 1923, the new Danish School was dedicated.

The school directors were County Representative Siv. Schack, Regional Court Representative Jefsen Christensen, and Consultant Nic. Svendsen. Countess Schack came with some others to the dedication. In addition, the local school commission, headed by President Lorentz Nielsen, was in attendance. There were several speeches. The children sang a couple of songs. Lorentz Nielsen gave his speech after Svendsen's announcement: "Be thankful for the new school, take care of it, and please take off your wooden shoes before walking into the school." (This last I had strongly wished, because otherwise it was impossible to keep the schoolroom clean, but it was much against the people's wishes, so therefore that order had to come from above. It was received with some bitterness that it was the brickmaker who delivered the order.)

The next order of business was the most important. The forty-eight children were to be divided between the two schools, the German and the Danish. The parents were free to make their own decision. And that was not necessarily so easy. There were many things to think

about, not the least of which were their jobs. All of the people who were employers were Germans.

Christiansen and I were placed at each end of a long table in my office. Two German mothers came quickly in and enrolled their children in the German school. They stood there, not moving, and no one else came in. But Svendsen was quick to comprehend what their purpose was. He went to them and asked, "Have you enrolled your children?" "Yes." "So will you please perhaps make room for others?" And with a kind gesture he showed them out through my door. I quickly saw that they were not pleased about that. But now the "lesser people" had a chance to make their decisions. When the enrollment was finished, there were twenty-eight children enrolled in the Danish School, and twenty in the German School. It was immensely moving.

There was one mother who had not registered her child. She urgently asked Svendsen if she could wait until her husband came home from work at five o'clock. "Well," Svendsen answered, "Mikkelsen, walk over and get the answer after he comes home, and then go to Patrolmaster Hansen and call in the information to my office before five thirty." I agreed to do so. At five fifteen, I walked over there. I opened the outer door, then walked a little stiffly on the floor tile, so I had to lift my feet a bit. But when I came in on the porch, I quickly heard, "smoke in the kitchen." Little Marie was complaining loudly, and I could hear her. She stamped on the floor and shouted, "I want to go in with the Danish schoolmaster." It was somewhat embarrassing. I tiptoed quietly out again and discreetly closed the door. Then I knocked on the door. Marie was gone, but her parents enrolled her in the Danish school, and her brother in the German school. There were several others who had done similarly, and consequently had children in both schools. I should comment a little more on that development. The father was German, the mother was Friesian. She later became the custodian for the school. He was the man who had invited me to play cards and for a drink, and had characterized me as a "ringer" for a schoolmaster.

Marie became one of my sweetest students. I will have to admit that I had a little favoritism for her. She later became a kind of foster daughter to my landlord and landlady, carpenter and parish council president Christiansen. Eventually, she married a young man who had strong Danish nationalistic tendencies and they had a little daughter. One time Tinna and I went back to Rudbøl on a visit and stopped in

to see them. Christiansen was proud of his little "foster" grandchild, who could sing in both Danish and German, but Marie confided to us that her daughter would attend the Danish school, when she became old enough to do so.

The Result of the Division in Enrollment

To have as many as twenty-eight enrolled in the Danish School surprised all of us. Svendsen had told me that he would be satisfied if I could get fifteen in the Danish school. I had myself counted on eighteen. In one way, I was happy and satisfied, but in another way apprehensive. I knew that eight of the twenty-eight children were from completely German homes. For example, Theodor's father was a German member of the school commission. I learned later that Theodor, also of Friesian background, had told his father, "You can enroll me where you wish, but I will do better with the Danish schoolmaster." I found out long afterwards about another little fellow. His father had been ordered by his employer to put his three sons into the German school, but they still put little Nicolai into the Danish school instead. Theodor eventually became quite Danish, he later visited us together with Gendarme Chief Rasmussen, their neighbor, who in many ways, became a good help and support. Later, Theodor's younger brother became a zealous Nazi.

Red Cross and the Volunteer Fire Service

My prior training in first aid with the Red Cross turned out to be important for my situation with the people in Rudbøl. My training began on Funen, in Stige. There was a gutter along the street in front of the schoolhouse where rainwater collected from the road. When the temperature got below freezing, the water turned to ice for some distance, and the school children liked to glide on the ice. One winter day Knud Madsen fell and unfortunately cut himself badly on his hands because of the jagged ice. He was hurt and frightened by the sight of blood, so I quickly got him inside and put bandages on.

At evening school a couple of days later, his mother thanked me heartily; the wounds were nearly healed. She would like to know where I learned to bandage so well, and then I had to admit I did not have any training, but really needed to get properly trained. "Yes, we could all use some training, we gardeners, for we often cut ourselves,

on broken glass, for example," said Karl Fr. Jensen. Everyone agreed. There were immediately ten of us interested. It was decided that Mr. Jensen should talk to Mrs. Damsted, who was the Red Cross leader in the parish and see if it were possible to set up a course in first aid.

It turned out that we could. That was possible because of Odense's chief physician Svendsen participating as teacher and instructor. He had published a handbook on emergency treatment, and that became our text, with classes held in the neighboring town of Lumby. In order to take the exams we should have had two courses with four weeks off in between, but I had plans to travel to Sweden and could not do that. When I mentioned my difficulty to Dr. Svendsen, he said, "Well, we can continue without interruption, but you will have your pin before you travel." Everyone agreed, we took our exam, I received the pin from Mrs. Damsted, and I was happy. I took the pin along with me to Sweden.

The Pin

One Sunday afternoon [in Rudbøl], we were sitting and drinking coffee at Christiansen's, and he asked, "What is that pin you are wearing, some kind of national badge?"

"But, Christiansen, don't you, as an old soldier, know this insignia?" I answered, a little surprised.

He looked at it more closely and exclaimed, "It is the *Rotes Kreuz* (Red Cross), are you a first aider?" "Yes," I answered. "I had one of Denmark's most skillful military doctors as my teacher." I could immediately see that he was amazed and impressed, and he began to praise those who were "first aiders." It was true that he respected me because I was a teacher, well okay, but a first aider, that *was* something. He was a *Hauptmann* (captain) in the volunteer fire corps, and really wanted me to join the local corps, but I really did not have any special desire to do so.

One Sunday after returning from vacation, he talked me into it. "If I should join your corps, it would have to be as a first aider." He flew up like a cork out of a bottle. *"Ja, Donnerwetter,"* and with a speed I would not have believed possible, he flew out of the living room and up to the attic, and a moment later stood with two uniforms, a work uniform and a dress uniform, along with a helmet, and he was quite enthusiastic. It was easy to see that he had won a *great* victory.

I was caught a bit off guard, and tried to excuse myself, as I did not understand German command.

"First-aid men are completely outside command. You may arrange everything as you wish. We do not have first-aid equipment, though. How will you manage that?" "I can get that arranged well enough," I answered. I made two belt bags, and Christiansen procured a massive belt bag and a Red Cross armband for my "work uniform," and so I was ready to go.

There were both Danes and Germans in the fire corps. They had quite a good spray hose on a light wagon, which had a harness for attaching to a horse, but which could also be easily pulled steadily by several men, as there were several handles attached to the wagon. They were divided into specialized groups, with a "nozzle team," a "hose team," and a "ladder team," with several different ladders. They had frequent practices, and the whole corps functioned very well.

Well, now they also had a "first aider," a special "group." When the fire corps had practices, I would find a suitable place and practice placing bandages on "victims," who were usually the children. They were eager spectators and thought that it was exciting that I was now a member of the fire corps. I had procured different kinds of bandages, red-edged practice bandages, military bandages, of different sizes with compress, cotton, and bandage ready for use. In addition I had procured several burn bandages, *bardella*, *movismuthpulver* [a powder], etc. The contents of the bag were specially intended for use with burns and scaldings. I very quickly found a practical use for them (in autumn 1923).

One day Adolf came speeding on his bicycle, blubbering, "Please come right away." His mother had scalded herself. I clipped on the belt and the bag and cycled back with him. She had been preparing the washing and had set a pot of water on the stove at a neighbor's. When she carried the very full pot back over the stone bridge, she stumbled on the uneven stones and some of the boiling water spilled over her shoulder and breast. Fortunately, she had only a shift on her upper body, but it did not look good. I put some special bandages on her with plenty of absorbent cotton, and told her to call the doctor. Old Dr. Kühl from Højer came. "Who has put the bandages on you?" "I sent for the Danish schoolmaster, he is our first-aid man." "Why have you sent for me? He did it exactly as it should be done." He did not do anything further with her bandaging. I must add here that she

was fanatically German-minded. Her husband was the first one from Rudbøl who had been killed in the First World War.

There was a lot of discussion in town about this event. I had gotten the "seal of approval" from Dr. Kühl. Fortunately, it was very seldom that I had to function in that capacity.

Margarethen-Spende

One Sunday afternoon, after I had moved from the Christiansens' attic to the apartment in the new school, I was invited to afternoon coffee with the Christiansens. Mrs. Christiansen's brother, grocer Thyssen, and Mrs. Thyssen were also there. Soon, a conversation started about that "first-aid thing" and Mrs. Christiansen lamented the fact that sometime in the past there had been a kind of nursing department in Rudbøl, and there had been a cabinet with medical articles in it called a *Margarethen-Spende*. Earlier, that had been kept at the school, but where was it now? Thyssen thought it must be at the inn. "Let's go and see." A moment later we three men were on the way to the inn, and after a long search, we found the cabinet in the inn's hayloft. It was in pathetic condition, but nonetheless, I was impressed over all the medical materials that were still in the cabinet. We walked back to Christiansens and told the women the result.

After a short conversation, in which they asked me if it could go back to the school, I consented, and told them that I would get it back in order and take care of it. Thyssen was a member of the parish council, and it wasn't long before he came with instructions to buy whatever was needed, and to present the bill to the council. The cabinet and its contents were thus moved back to the school. It took a lot of work to get it all cleaned and repaired and in place. I purchased bandages, cotton, gauze, iodine, and other things and put them in the cabinet for further use. After this, the children wrote a list of all the contents, and a note with the list was sent to every home. One day Dr. Kühl stopped in, he had heard about the cabinet, and wanted to see it. He was quite pleased with what he found, and after that there were frequent requests for items that were loaned to the homes in case of injuries and illness.

The people were pleased that I had agreed to restore the cabinet to service and to keep it at the school. There was some appreciation that they had regained something of what they had in the past.

Christiansen was a little bit proud of me, and I was often invited to go with him to meetings of official boards around the county, and at those I was introduced as "Schoolmaster Mikkelsen, our first aider."

Water

The water supply in Rudbøl was quite primitive. In reality, there was no water supply. Wells could not be dug, because it was old seabed, and there was too much salt in the ground. The only real water supply came from rainwater. Tubs and other containers were placed under the gutters from the roof and rain was collected from the downpipes. If that was not acceptable, water was dipped from the ditches or canals, which, of course, had to be boiled.

When I had first come to Rudbøl, and had been there for three or four days, I had come down with a bad sore throat. Christiansen asked me if I had drunk from the water bottle which stood in my room. When I told him I had, he said that I should not do so, because all people who "came from the north" got sick from it. The local people were either immune, or they boiled the water first, or they diluted it with liquor.

I became more interested in this general problem and started my own investigation. At the school, there was a pump in the backyard. It sat on a cistern, which collected rainwater from the roof of the school, but of course, there was much dirt in the water, bird droppings, etc. The teacher said that the cistern was half full of mud. The children seldom drank from the pump; they walked down to the canal and drank the water there. The animals in the marsh did that also, and often, when they finished drinking, they would turn around, and "repay."

One morning, I was down in town early, and I saw the baker come out of the bakery with a bucket, walk down to the canal just below his building, and get a bucketful of water. I then became aware that just five meters from his place, there was free drainage from his rather large stable dung-heap out to the canal. It was thus not so surprising when I later heard that several residents, among them my landlord, had suffered from typhoid. He himself stated that he had first really got well when he served in the army.

But what about the water supply for the Danish School? Yes, at first it was only from the aforementioned land-water canal. We got the water there and boiled it. When that had stood overnight for cooling off, a thick sediment remained on the bottom, we had to then prudently pour the water on top off into a second container, and throw away the residue.

But then we had the winter of 1923-24. It started with the great flood at the end of October. The water came right up to the school. On November 2 it began to freeze and remained frozen until about the 24th of February. I had to chop a hole in the ice to get the water. But at last, there was no water. There was discussion about getting water from Rudbøl Lake down on the other side of town, but that was quite a distance to go. [The school lies about half a mile, in a north-by-northwest direction, from the closest part of the lake.–Trans.] But then the snow started to fall. Every evening we took our large zinc tub, filled it with snow, fired up the range, and set the tub on it. Next morning the snow was melted and the tub was about half full of water. Even though we might have thought the snow was clean, actually the water was full of pieces of grass and other debris. It was, after all, windblown snow. Yes, water was a valuable commodity, it could now and then be used more than once. The water we washed in, we later used to wash the floor.

I complained about the situation to the commission and county Dr. Lausten-Thomsen came out to inspect. He was a splendid, warm South Jutlander, and we became good friends. His influence resulted in the building of a large filter system, which collected all the rain water from the roof. The water was filtered through several layers of sand, gravel, and stone and was collected in a reservoir. It was splendidly good, clean, soft, and completely tasteless water. The children would not drink it. They continued the old way of drinking with the cattle from the canal. "Yes, but they must drink the filtered water, they must not drink from the muddy ditch, or we risk an epidemic of typhoid," said Lausten-Thomsen.

"One can force a lamb to water, but cannot make him drink," so goes the proverb, just as with children. I pondered long about that problem, and then had an idea. It was a delightful summer day, warm and as beautiful as it could be out on the marsh. In the afternoon,

I read Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale about *Krible-Krable*, the troll who put color in the drops of ditch water, so they became as living creatures, tearing the arms and legs off each other, and they struck much harder than people could. The children thought that was amusing. We discussed the fairy tale, and I asked them if that could be true. "No," they all laughed together. "Are you quite sure?" Yes, that they were. "Shall we try it?" I asked. Yes, they would like to do that. "So take the glasses which stands in the window (jam glasses, which we used for flowers and botany, that I had emptied and cleaned), and then go out and get some water, there where you drink from the canal. One boy and one girl go out, and come back with the water. Set the glasses in the window in the sun." That they did. Then, when the water became still, I took a pair of good magnifying glasses and walked over and observed the water, and it was interesting to see in the sunshine. The water was quite full of little animals, which the children then also wanted to see. "Yes, please, in lines, you can look, one after the other, the girls at one glass, the boys at the other." They had some really interesting expressions when they quietly walked back to their seats.

"Well, was Hans Christian Andersen right about that?" "Yes," was the answer. Now, you can look at that again at recess, and then you yourselves can look at the clean water from the tap in the school. They did that. I never saw any of them drink from the ditch from that day on. Lausten-Thomsen and Svendsen laughed heartily when I told them the story.

In cases of illness the doctor prescribed "clean water" from the school. People fetched it in their milk cans.

The Storm and Flood of August 30, 1923

It was a dismal day. Already in the morning the wind was blowing hard. It soon became a storm, and out here in the flat marsh it could rage unhindered. It was eight days before we were to move into our new school, which was quite solidly built, designed to withstand storms from the west, with a doubled roof support.

The road alongside the school was on the lee side, away from the wind, so that when a person passed the school, the storm would strike a person violently and literally toss him or her over the road. There was a telephone pole, and a person could grab on to the pole to keep from being blown over. The boys entertained themselves by running

along the school with unbuttoned jackets, then holding them open when they came to the end of the school building, so with their jackets as wings they would fly over to the telephone pole. But eventually the storm became too violent. It became a hurricane.

At noon I dared not keep the children any longer. A man came in from the road to seek shelter. The two of us, as well as the bigger boys, took the smaller children by the arm and we managed to struggle into town, where I got the children delivered to their homes. About four or five o'clock I walked back into town. Several roof tiles had blown off. A large poplar tree had blown down next to Hauborg, and was swept down the street until it came to rest in the lee of the grocery store.

Down by the lake, over past the inn, Gendarme Chief Jensen lost his new house. It was overturned and left on the bank by the lake. It was a horrifying experience. The storm finally died down during the night. The next day I was over by Højer Sluse, and talked to people about the previous day's events.

Daily Work

In order to have a first-class school, the daily work required some organization and preparation. The students were divided into three groups. Quite soon after starting I changed the arrangement to have the youngest ones come one hour later and leave one hour earlier than the older ones. That way, I could spend more time with the older students and provide them with a better education. But the materials for teaching were continually in short supply. I had the children bring tobacco tins. They were cleaned and then I cut pieces out of them in the shape of letters in the order we learned them. For numbers and for counting we used large nice kernels of red corn. We used those for all basic arithmetic operations. We had no counting frame [abacus]. For teaching the older students, I also made teaching materials for Danish, arithmetic, and geography (I drew a large map of Denmark).

After I had gotten my own home (in the school building) and my furniture from Stige, the preparation for teaching was much easier. When on a visit to Fyn, I bought some old school books from an antique book dealer, and clipped pictures out of those to use in teaching. Teacher Pedersen, of Gessø, had a slide projector. I would have certainly used one, if possible, but we had no electricty in Rudbøl, so I would have to have one that used acetylene gas [carbide].

He managed to arrange for me to get one procured from America through the Hartz firm in Copenhagen. That worked best, of course, in the evening. We could not darken the windows, which were so tall that I could not reach the top even when standing on the window sill.

Cooperation between the two schools was quite good. In the last hour every morning Christiansen and I exchanged schools. He taught German to my students and I taught Danish to his. The students in the German school never caused me any trouble. They were very pleased when I would read a story to them, which was their reward for their diligence. On the school grounds, there was seldom any friction between the two groups of students.

Once in a while the parish president, Lorentz Nielsen, would come by and ask how it was going with the "catechism." It was quite essential for him that the children memorize as much as possible. I made a list of what the children should learn: the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. In Bible history we taught scripture texts in a gradual manner. Through Jesus' words we taught the sacraments of baptism and communion in their contexts. We learned many hymns and songs. We read them, discussed them, and sang them. We sang a lot. The children wanted to sing and they loved and admired my violin, which was amusing to me.

My Appointment

I was still a temporary employee of the school commission. Now it became time for this position to be filled. The application needed to be endorsed, and therefore I got a German recommendation, which stated that I had worked at the Danish School to the satisfaction of the school commission as well as to the parents' (and the children's?) *voller Zufriedenheit* (total satisfaction). I had at first not sought that endorsement, but Svendsen's assistant Teacher Torp gave me my application back and told me to get it in order, because it had to be complete and correct in case the Germans tried any "hanky panky."

Torp was right. The Germans "cheated." Shortly after the application deadline had passed, I saw the German teacher walking around with a person who I later found out was an applicant for "my" position.

The first day of fall vacation I traveled to Stige. It was mostly a delightful trip, but I felt somewhat uneasy. I had a feeling that

something was wrong. Already on Tuesday, I traveled back to Rudbøl, and walked out to see my good friend, blind Thomas. I was absolutely right. Thomas related that after I traveled away on Saturday morning, the order came that the teacher nomination should be made that afternoon. Here the German teacher was nominated as number one, and I was nominated as number two. There were three Germans and two Danes on the school commission.

The result became known quickly, and there was a great protest. The Danes, especially the gendarmes, had written a petition, in which they requested that I be called as teacher, they had changed teachers often enough. (There had been eighteen different teachers during the years of the war. The German teacher Schneider, whose uniformed photo hung in the German School, had been killed in the war.) And now they wished to keep the one they had. By the end of Sunday, they had obtained ninety-eight signatures. Everyone had signed their petition except for the three German commission members.

On Monday, Chief Gendarme Jensen had bicycled to the county school consultant in Tønder with the list of petitioners, and the day after it was printed in *Vestslesvigs Tidende* (West Slesvig Times). That was the lay of the land.

Confusion reigned supreme. However, I became the appointee despite the official nomination. I received a letter that I should come in and see Svendsen. He congratulated me and said, "I am handing Rudbøl over to you, and wish you good health and fortune in the work there. And you should know, that you can always count on the support of the county school commission." That was a great declaration of confidence and support. He also later declared that these were not empty words.

Once I was appointed, I could now prepare for the coming free time work. I wanted to have an evening school, as we had in Stige. I received approval from Svendsen and the school commission's approval of the plan and I started with the young people. But then I had a visit from several adults who wanted to have their own evening school to learn to read and write in the Danish language. I talked to Svendsen about it, and he said, "Seize the opportunity, here is the appropriate form, complete it, and put things in order."

That went as planned, but then the Germans showed up immediately with the complaint over my presenting "political propaganda" and wanted it forbidden. Well, they were informed

that this was a real course in a proper school setting, and approved by the county school commission and director. There was nothing to complain about.

It was different with the parents' meeting and the slides. There was nothing about that in the law, so they could forbid it if they wanted to. And that they did. I talked to the consultant about it. "I cannot do anything about it. Send me a written inquiry; we need to get the (Education) Ministry's decision." I sent the inquiry and waited. Svendsen was angry, for there was no answer from the ministry. "His Excellency, Jacob Appel, is too slow to do anything, he doesn't understand that down here we need quick decisions."

Four months passed, then came the instructions. I was allowed use the school room for these different purposes, *without question*, I only needed to inform the school commission of these *purposes*. But, in the meantime, a very important event occurred, which I should have ducked, but it became a boomerang, which came back to hit me and hit hard. It concerns the event which I described in the article, "The First Christmas Tree," which follows here.

From *Horsens Folkeblad* (Horsens People's Newspaper), December 20, 1967

Feature Article: *Det første juletræ - et ungdomsminde [The First Christmas Tree -- A Memory from Youth],* by retired schoolmaster M. R. Mikkelsen

On August 22, 1923, a new Danish school was dedicated in an outlying parish of Southern Jutland—and with that began a new period in the history of this little village. The people were not strongly interested in a specific nationality. The farm workers on the one large farm were pro-German, only a minority of the people were deliberately pro-Danish, most of them were *blakkede* (blurred, or fuzzy), as it was called in Southern Jutland. But now, with the opening of the new school, they suddenly had to take a position on whether their children would attend the Danish School or the German School. It was a difficult choice for many, for there was an occupational question that came with these decisions. All of the employers of people in the community were Germans. For the children, the decision was easier, because they had noticed that the new Danish teacher, who had worked as an assistant teacher in the German school since the spring, did not use the cane, which otherwise played an important role in the

school. Yes, the new Danish teacher had not smacked any child with a cane, even once. That was worth noting.

The selection, which took place under the supervision of the highest authority, was nearly sensational. Of the forty-eight children in the school district, twenty-eight chose to attend the Danish School, and only twenty the German School. The local school authorities were pro-German, and had counted for the Danish School, at most fifteen. They began to consider the young Danish teacher as "dangerous." He should be taken down, and thus started the chicanery.

Christmas drew closer. The children, however, did not seem to notice. The teacher discovered, to his surprise, that there was not the great anticipation here as among the children on Funen, where he had taught earlier, or as he remembered from his own childhood. Closer scrutiny among the children showed that the greatest joy of Christmas for them was vacation from school. There were no Christmas trees, with the exception of the home of the two sons of the customs officer. And Christmas gifts? No one talked much about that. The people were mostly uniformly poor. It often was a worry just to have enough for the daily bread. They had learned Christmas carols by rote—by repetition.

But there were many new things going on in the new Danish School. The Christmas carols and songs were festive, especially if one did not listen too critically, and the teacher could easily sneak in his violin for help. The teacher talked with the children about Christmas trees. No, there were no possibilities, for there were no pine forests for miles around. Still, the teacher resolved that the children should have a Danish Christmas tree in the school.

The rumor about the Christmas tree spread quickly and the German teacher also heard of it. The relations between the two teachers were normally friendly. They talked together and agreed that they would have a Christmas party in each school the same evening, the 22nd of December. But on December 14, the local school commission president came into the school room. It was in the middle of the reading hour. Without saying hello, he walked up to the teacher and said, "I have heard that you want to have a *Weihnachtsbaum* (Christmas tree) in the school. Is that true?" "Yes." "I forbid it." "Well," the teacher answered curtly. "Will you continue reading, Anna?" And since there was ostensibly nothing more to discuss, the president turned and walked out. But when he was well outside, there came an audible sigh

from the flock of children, twenty-eight pairs of worried, questioning eyes were directed to the teacher, and Anna waited without reading. The teacher looked at the little flock and understood what stirred in their little hearts. He nodded to them and said, "You shall have your Christmas tree."

Now, it must be stated here that the president was within his rights. There were very strict regulations in the border area about what schoolrooms could be used for and there were no statements about Christmas trees. Then he had made this forbidding statement, but the thought went through the teacher's head, yes, you can forbid it here in the classroom, but in my apartment I am the chief, and there we could all be together. Therefore he could give the children an answer to their unspoken question. Afterwards came the thought: what about his German colleague? Had he gotten the same order? The same rules should be in force.

A couple of days went by. In the evening the teacher sat and corrected the children's papers. Then a knock came at the outer door. Outside stood three serious men, fathers of some of the children. "May we speak with the schoolmaster?" "Yes, please come in." When they had come in and sat down, the oldest of them took the lead and said, "Yes, we know that you have much trouble and many difficulties just now, but we are representing all of those who have children in the school—and we want to tell you that whatever you do, and however you do it, you should know that you have us on your side, and if there is something we can help you with, just say so, and we will do what we can."

Oh, how warm such a handshake can be.

They got a hearty thank you and information about how the matter would be handled. They thought that was very good. That helped the spirit, and with a cup of coffee, the conversation continued, mostly about the poor school commission president, who was not popular in the town at the moment. He had offended his neighbors and destroyed one of the few diversions that all could expect to have.

A couple more days went by. In the middle of the morning, a knock came at the door, and in came the president. It was easy to see that this time, he was not on his high horse, and eventually the statement came: "The council has now discussed the matter and decided that you may well have a *Weihnachtsbaum* in the school." "Well," was the short answer. The teacher could not find it within himself to say "Thanks."

And so preparations began in earnest for the celebration. The confirmation class got extended school time and received instructions for making Christmas decorations. How happy and thankful they were—as well as proud and secretive toward the little ones. The invitation was short and sounded good: "All are welcome, including the elders," of whom there were many in the town.

At least the eagerly anticipated evening arrived—many people came. The teacher was astonished that there could be so many people in this little town. The children assembled in the teacher's rooms, the others in the schoolroom. The helpers were ready. The candles on the tree were lit. The children came into the room in a long procession, the youngest in front. And there stood the tree—in all its splendor, red and white, with masses of sparkling lights. Everyone was bid welcome and then the Danish Christmas carols rang out with such warmth as the teacher had scarcely heard before. All the children sang from the heart, and many mothers had learned the carols from their children. To his amazement, the teacher saw that many of the older people sang along with some of the carols, while tears ran down their cheeks. The explanation came later. Under German rule [1864 to 1920–Trans.], in the beginning, religious education in Danish had been permitted, and there they had learned the Danish Christmas carols.

The Christmas gospel was read, and a few words were said about the joyous message. Several hymns were sung, and in closing they played some Danish and Christmas singing games. Christmas gifts and candy? No, there were none, but no one missed them. They did not know the custom. And so, this first Christmas celebration ended, with a round of thanksgivings. Not least the elders' gratitude was deeply touching.

But then, everything had to be cleaned up. All of the twelve-to fourteen-year-olds helped. The decorations were carefully taken off and packed away. Each of them received a pine branch and a little decoration for their help. When they were finished, they stood and put their heads together. "Yes, Anna, say it," sounded a loud whisper. "What should Anna say?" Yes, they would so like to have permission to play singing games and folk dance to the teacher's violin. They had gotten permission to do that now and then for birthdays and special occasions. To make the story shorter—it turned into an extra half-hour and then some. This group of children and the following year's confirmation class assembled every year on the 22nd of December in

the Danish School for the school's Christmas tree. Despite weather and distance they came back to be together with their old friends to find their half-or whole-hour's play, and to remember their lives' first—and perhaps most festive—Christmas tree.

For the teacher, that Christmas remains one of his life's richest memories.

Elections

In the spring of 1924 there were to be elections both for the parish council and the school commission. These were events which set tempers in a violent uproar and which had disastrous consequences out there in the little Højer country parish.

The parish council election stood mainly between the Danish and the German candidates, but among the many gendarmes and the poor portion of the people there were Social Democrats, and they wanted a Social-Democratic slate. That gave rise to dispute and discord among the Danes. Old Patrolmaster Hansen, who knew the Germans better than most, thundered and swore against it, warning it would cause a division among the Danes. Well, he could not convince them to do otherwise. Besides a German list and a Danish list, a Social Democratic list came into being. At that time, the German Social Democrats were in the majority, so the first on the list was a German, and the second a Dane.

And then came the election. The results were awaited with excitement, but there was no predicting the outcome.

The Social Democratic list got twenty-seven votes so that only the first person on the list was elected, the German. People wondered about this and began to count. It became clear that twenty-seven votes was exactly what the Danish Social Democrats could muster. Consequently they had seated the German, while the German Social Democrats had voted for the German list and helped them to a good result.

That is the way it went. The patrolmaster said, "Can you now see I was right?" But for the poor chairman, Gendarme Jensen, who had fought believing the motto, "brothers unite," it was a bitter defeat. The worst was not that no Danes were elected, but to be taken so thoroughly by the nose, to be so humiliated. Ah, the "dumb Dane." It was bad, very bad. Oh, how he swore. That was the first time the election went that way, but it should also be the last. And it did. The

Social Democrats disintegrated from that point on. From then on it was the Danes versus the Germans. Those who had been "defeated" in this election became my best support in the struggle. They did not forget my unpleasant experience concerning the Christmas tree.

The school commission consisted of five members, three Germans, including the president, and two Danes. Two of the Germans were quite fanatic. In addition to the president's pettiness, I will mention a certain occurrence, which turned out to be rather dramatic.

A widow, Hanne Nielsen, who lived south of the Vidå River, was a Danish nationalist. She had a son and daughter in the Danish School. The daughter was confirmed in the autumn of 1923 and thus would ordinarily be done with her schooling. She sought permission to attend school one extra year, because her schooling had been rather poor during the years of the war. That permission was granted.

Some time after that a school commission meeting took place in the Danish School. I received a short communication concerning the meeting, without any details about the agenda. I walked out to Thomas Nielsen's to see if he knew anything, but he did not. It was mysterious. But the next day, I received a note from him, which stated that the meeting concerned Georgine's extra year. Thus her mother Hanne Nielsen had been asked to come to the meeting. It was prudent to be in a defensive position, so I prepared some notes for the meeting.

The evening arrived, and the two Danes, Thomas Nielsen and Andreas Jacobsen, along with two of the Germans, President Lorentz Nielsen and Nic. Franzen, and Hanne Nielsen assembled in my apartment, but the third German, Anton Matzen, was not there. "He will likely not come, because he has sat at the Corner Inn most of the day," said one of the men. After a half hour of waiting, it was agreed to begin the meeting. Lorentz began: "It has become clear, that it is on political grounds that Georgine is continuing in school, and that is what we are here to discuss."

I quickly responded and asked: "What do you mean, political grounds? I am the teacher in the Danish School, and I teach in the Danish language, and on Danish, but I do not engage in any political matters. I request that specific examples be presented, to which I can respond." There were none which could or would be presented. They began to "beat a retreat;" no, they had nothing to complain about.

Thomas Nielsen indicated that it was to Hanne's credit that she would offer an extra year's school to her daughter, that could only

be to her benefit. Hanne Nielsen explained that the only way she, as a war widow, could help her children was to see that they received a good education. They had gotten so little instruction thus far. Well, yes, they all knew that. "And there are certainly none who know that better than you, Lorentz, when you consider your Misse," she said. Then she sat down. His daughter had very little talent and probably could neither read nor write properly.

The usual consent and recognition was confirmed by the council, and Thomas Nielsen concluded that there was nothing against Georgine's continuing in school, which the others affirmed. Hanne asked, "So I can count on this matter having been decided?" Yes, they confirmed. So she got up and walked out. I walked out with her.

But when she started walking to the south, I saw that there was a man stumbling along the wall from the north. It was Matzen. "What's going on? I don't like it that the womenfolk go when I come," he said. He came in and sat down. He was drunk. "Well, you've come too late, our meeting is over," said Lorentz. "But I am the one who wanted the meeting called!" Matzen became completely infuriated, swore, and banged on the table. It was quite unpleasant.

"Stop," I said. "If the meeting is going to continue in this tone, you must leave my home. I do not wish it to continue here. Please, you can go to the schoolroom." I took the stand lamp, opened the door, and walked into the schoolroom with it. "If we are going to hold our meetings in this manner, you will have to send someone to haul me there, Lorentz, before I would come," said Thomas. "The same goes for me," said Andreas Jacobsen. They went outside to the sidewalk. "Goodnight, Mikkelsen," said the two and walked away. The other three also disappeared. That was the last meeting that particular school commission ever held.

The school commission election was anticipated with a certain excitement because of all the different factors concerning the school. We were all aware that the majority of the people in the voting area were Germans. So the general astonishment was great when the result was announced to be forty-seven German votes versus forty-eight Danish votes. With that one-vote plurality came the third seat, and the president's position. It was probably the only time that I saw my German colleague set aside his dignity. Without his jacket, bare-headed, and wearing a pair of torn slippers, he came over. "Have you heard, have you heard? Now, I believe we can find peace with our

work here." "Yes, I believe that also. I shall do what I can for that," I answered. The county school consultant was very satisfied. "Fine, Mikkelsen, fine, but can the Germans take it?"

We had peace at work, but there was one single time that the "high horse" struck again, and thus there was some commotion. The Danes had found their voice, however, and this time they did not allow that commotion to pass without a response.

My Home Life

It gradually became my desire to try to make a difference in Rudbøl for the long run. Until the school dedication, I had lived in a little room at carpenter Christiansen's. They frequently invited me down to visit, knowing full well that the little room was best only for sleeping in. Two beds, a wash stand, a little table and chair, that was all. I ate most of my meals at the inn. The surroundings in that place were not an inducement for me to stay longer than the time for eating. So I took long walks. The terrain around Rudbøl is quite flat, but in good weather it is quite beautiful, with a fantastic extensive view. Later, I could sit at my desk and clearly see the houses in Tønder. The distance as the crow flies is ten kilometers [six miles].

In the summer, after vacation time, Chief Gendarme N. Rasmussen married. He owned a house just across from the school square, which was situated on a very large yard with a nice garden. These two delightful people took pity on me. I was invited to dine with them, and that was a release from the inn, which I did not regret. Their lovely home became my retreat. Mrs. Rasmussen's father owned one of the large German farms in the vicinity, so she was well known. For me, that became a great joy and benefit.

After my employment became permanent, I got a housekeeper in November, a somewhat older girl from Møn. She was a very gentle person, and my home life was cozier and more like a normal home. She had hoped for a permanent job, but when that did not happen for her, she returned home to Møn, and I had to search for a new maid.

The Garden

Normally, a garden is a part of the school property, and since I really wanted to have a garden, I put in a request for one. We two teachers then each got a piece of the sloping area next to the dike. One

of the Germans said, somewhat maliciously, "So, Mikkelsen, now you can get to work on your garden." I laughed and said, "Not yet. The law states that it must be fenced and have proper drainage. So, I will have to wait." Then he couldn't say any more.

Later, when I was on a vacation, around the time of Pentecost, carpenter Christiansen and this same man came to start work to erect the fence on this little piece of land. They were somewhat put out that this was necessary, and Lorentz Nielsen, a man with the same name as the former school commission president, said reproachfully to me, "But, pray, Mikkelsen, why do you want a garden? You have absolutely no use for it. If you really needed a garden, we would all have them." "Yes, well, we will see about that," I said, and pedaled off on my vacation.

My father, as always, was prepared to help. He sent a couple of sacks full of rhubarb, shrubs, and perennials, and I got busy laying out the garden, sowing, and planting. The garden was rather primitive, with difficult soil full of clay, but the previous summer I had seen, on my trip through Germany, how well the vegetables grew on the marsh on the way to Hamburg. The rhubarb I wanted to have grown quickly. I took a barrel that I had gotten from Stige the previous autumn full of apples for the children, sawed it through the middle and set the two halves over the plants. The one half lacked a bottom, so I laid a sack over it. The rhubarb grew well. Cabbage and other plants also grew successfully. The townspeople would come out on their Sunday walks to follow the new experiment. The women in particular often stood and discussed it. Those two barrels, which stood closed and unapproachable, what did they conceal? One evening, right at suppertime, Lorentz came by, as he had some sheep in the marshland beyond the school. He stopped as usual, looked in all directions, and since he saw no one, quickly straddled the solidly-built garden fence, strode over to the taller half-barrel, lifted the sack and studied the contents with interest. Then he quickly went back across the fence, not suspecting that I stood behind my long white curtains (which closed over the windows, so no one could see in, a gift from my mother, and very expensive) and laughed at him.

I made a bank of turf in the garden, where I often sat. The plants were growing quite well. I have never before or since harvested such fine cabbage. Now and then, I took the children out in the garden, told them about the plants, and explained what they should be used for. When summer vacation came, some of my older boys offered

to take "good care of my farm," and I understood that they wanted me to trust them to take good care of it, so I thanked them and said yes. The girls offered to take care of my potted plants. So the garden was in good hands. In the middle of the summer I got a letter. The creamery director had, as so many others, been out there on a walk, and they related that there was garden work in progress and that it looked good. There was not one weed in the garden when I returned from vacation. The example became contagious. A gendarme rented a piece of ground, cultivated it, and divided it into parcels, which he rented out.

Some years later Tinna and I bicycled to Rudbøl. We visited Gendarme Rasmussen, who took us "sightseeing." He showed us the town's special place: the colony gardens. The most distinctive was Lorentz Nielsen's. He showed it to us himself, as proud as a peacock. It was definitely worthy of admiration. Rasmussen told us that he spent most of his time there and there was not a weed to be seen. He had obviously had *zweck med en goer* (need for a garden).

In the summer of 1973, I made another pilgrimage to the community. The town was unrecognizable. There were masses of plantings, and my own garden was unapproachable because of the vegetation. But, of course, it was fifty years later.

School Excursion to Stige

In the first part of the summer of 1924, something happened which caused a commotion in this little town. One day I received a friendly letter from one of my friends from Stige, who invited me to come up to Fyn with my school children and stay "as long as I wanted." I was glad and greatly touched. What an event this would be for these children who lived on the flat marshland. Only a few had been on a railroad train, only a few had seen hills and forests, they knew only the marsh. But how could it be accomplished? School trips of several days were, at that time, an unknown concept.

I went in to Consultant Svendsen and showed him the letter. He became very enthusiastic. "Travel over there, Mikkelsen! My, what an experience that would be for these children, who have never seen anything but the marsh." "Yes, but how can it be accomplished, we would have to be gone for at least three days." "Okay, now listen. Go over to traffic inspector Joost, at Tønder main station. Show him the

letter, greet him from me and ask him if he will help you accomplish this trip." *Javel*! (Yes, sir!)

I went over to his office. Southern Jutland, after reunification, had become a special traffic district and Joost was the overall supervisor. I introduced myself. He greeted me in a friendly manner, with some warmth, I thought, and I immediately suspected that Svendsen had telephoned ahead. I conveyed Svendsen's greeting, showed him the letter, and immediately stated my request. It was received in a friendly manner. "Here is an outline. You can complete it, as you plan the trip, and then send it back to me." I thanked him heartily. Such a commotion, such effort, and significant conversation.

But I thought to myself. Mikkelsen, how dare you travel with such a flock, how can you keep control over them? I would have no enjoyment, they are clever children, and would have to do always what I say. It would be difficult, dangerous, headshaking. There were a good many written messages concerning accommodations, scheduling, etc. The Stige people were enthusiastic. My students were nearly completely in festive spirits. The event to take place was almost inconceivable and unthinkable in its complexity.

I received a housing list from Stige. I knew the people and their children in both places. Karl Frederiks would like to house a boy of thirteen, the same age as their Asger, who was a good swimmer, my student Jens Sehnor was a good match. Peder Clausens, president of the school district, wanted two older girls, to match their own two, etc. Only children over ten years in age were allowed to make the trip.

When my application outline was granted and came back from the traffic inspector, there was only one correction. We traveled with the express train on the way home from Fredericia to Tinglev, with the result that we had a two-hour layover in Fredericia, enough for a hike to *Landsoldaten*, the statue of the foot soldier, from 1858, and to the old ramparts. I didn't tell them that it was the Slesvigers and Holsteiners who here had taken a "beating."

It was a very expectant troop, who on an early summer morning, began on foot on the six kilometer [four mile] walk to Højer. Hans Nielsen drove for the girls and my housekeeper. We got on the train, rode to Tønder, and from there through Ribe to Bramming. It was the journey itself, and the train, which occupied the children's attention. But when we rode from Lunderskov through Kolding and saw the large hills, then came the astonishment. To the children, these were mountains on both sides of the train. Then yet more astonishment

to see the great forests just after Fredericia. The boat ride over the *Lillebælt* (Little Belt) was exciting, and now there were compartments for us on Funen.

During the first part of the trip the children asked many questions, but now they were quiet, except for a few questions and my narrative. They looked and looked and looked. It was like a fairy tale for them, very adventurous, almost inconceivable. We finally arrived in Odense, and I could see that the Stige gardeners' wagons were parked in front of the station. We all came up from the tracks together, and then were driven on a roundtrip through a completely flag-bedecked city, quite fantastic. It was the city's annual festival day, the hunters' festival, but we took it as a welcome for us.

There were also flags in Stige, waving festively in the sunshine throughout the beautiful landscape. The children were quiet, but their eyes were shining. We assembled at the community hall (*forsamlingshus*) near the Stige Free School. When we were unloaded, it was requested that I organize the introductions between the young guests and their hosts. When that was accomplished, the Rudbøl children with their hosts and "new friends" marched into the community hall and were seated at the festively decorated tables. There was plenty of food and drink, and the children were hungry. Conversations began, and the *Sønderjyder* (South Jutlanders) and *Fynboer* (residents of Funen) sang well together.

But then we had to separate, each child to his or her own host. When my own Rudbøl students gathered around me to say goodbye and thanks for the day, it became remarkably quiet. I noticed that suddenly I was quite alone, surrounded by the somewhat forsaken flock, who were about to leave me, their last connection to their homes and their homeland which they had left that morning. But when we separated, the host mothers were gathering their young guests around them, and they walked away.

The next day, the two groups of children went on an excursion to Odense. The Odense children rode their bicycles, those of us from Rudbøl rode in wagons. There was much to see: Hans Christian Andersen's house, St. Knud's Church, a boat trip to the Women's Beech Trees, among other places. I will only write about one of these experiences.

When we entered St. Knud's Church, we were not, as is customary, received by the church attendant. No, it was the archdeacon and the choir director, both dressed in their vestments, and the "cross and

ribbon." I was quite amazed. Still more, when we began the tour. All the places in the church were open, the customary chains and barriers were gone, everything was shown and fully explained.

At last we received an explanation. The archdeacon asked us to sit down, and then told us that his father had been pastor in Bylderup [about four miles north of the current border, and east of Tønder–Trans.], and had been deported by the Germans after 1864. He asked us to take a greeting to his family's homeland. The choir director's father had been a teacher in that vicinity, and had met a similar fate. Whether the children understood the deep feelings underlying what they told us, I'm not sure. But I did. I had now also been a teacher close to two borders and had experienced elections and reunification "on location." For me, it was a great experience and honor.

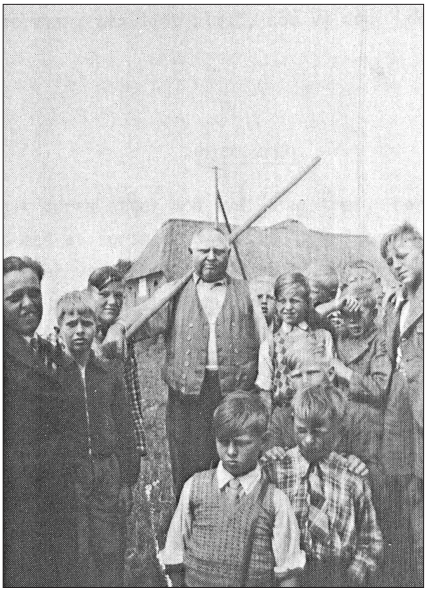
We got back to Stige in good time, so that the children could be together privately. It had been a day with fine weather, except for a little wind, which however, we didn't notice much in the city.

On day three, the trip turned southward. I believe that the children were tired, but they kept busy telling about the homes where they stayed and the packages they had been given. Those included clothes and things from the gardens. The trip proceeded quite without incident, except for the two-hour layover that Inspector Joost had presented us with in Fredericia. We traveled home through Tinglev. When we reached Højer, we were happily surprised to see Hans Nielsen stopped with his big wagon with seat-boards, and Niels Thyssen with his governess cart for the girls, so we had a ride home. That would have been a long hike, if we had had to walk back to Rudbøl.

One peculiarity was that Nielsen and Thyssen regretted that we had had such bad weather. The children laughed and said, no, we had fine weather. In Rudbøl there had been a fierce storm. One waterspout had taken a man who was sitting on a load of hay, driving along the Højer road, and lifted him and the hay completely over the fresh water canal to Møgeltønder, while the horse and wagon were left on the road. The boys could not believe that, but Hans showed us that the load of hay was still there, on the other side of the canal.

There was a lot of conversation in the ensuing days in the children's small homes. It was nice that several of the children maintained connections in the years following. That involved mainly the older girls, primarily at the initiative of the girls in Stige. Each year packages arrived at several of the poor homes in the Rudbøl

area. Contact had been created between the "old land" and the "new," between "mother" and "daughter."



Hans Nielsen (known as Hans "Kog," meaning "marsh") with his "klustag" surrounded by school children, who had been on tour at the border. Hans Kog was a wagon man who had a small farm near the school. He had gotten his nickname "Kog" because his farm buildings were situated, not like the others out there on higher ground next to the dike, but down in the marsh—the "kog"—Friedrichskog. He was a Danish nationalist and a good supporter of their group. He was the man who had been the spokesman for the deputation concerning the Christmas tree for the school. A "klustag" is a vaulting pole, which had a flat part on one end to keep it from sinking into the saturated marsh. It was used by everyone in connection with the canals.

People in Rudbøl

Carsten Dethlefsen

I have written about my visit with the "Parish King." He was the dike supervisor, in addition to having other duties. We did not usually notice him on a daily basis. He had his work with the leasing of fens [wet pieces of marshland], and kept those accounts. He was the *kog* inspector. He was a "big" man, who stayed out of the small local commissions, and was more occupied with "greater things." He had been a member of the Tønder County Commission, but that had not gone so well. The county commission chief was Count O.D. Schack of Schackenborg Castle in Møgeltønder. One time there was a meeting of the county commission, and at that meeting Dethlefsen was unfortunately rather drunk, and as the big man that he was, he became insulting in his remarks, and called the count a "dishrag." Understandably, the count became angry. I don't know the precise details, it was not something people talked about, but Dethlefsen had to resign from the county commission. Certainly, he was a capable

and well-informed individual. During my first year, I greeted him when we met each other, but after the first time, he did not return the greeting. "Gracious, I won't inconvenience you," I thought to myself, and then refrained from greeting him. But the last year I was in Rudbøl, he did greet me, and so I returned his greeting. At times he could be quite friendly. I always let him speak first, however. One had to be respectful.

Innkeeper Christiansen

Innkeeper Christiansen was a rather small, unimpressive man, but a good businessman. He gave nothing away. He had a good business in alcoholic beverages. When anyone had had enough to drink, and that happened frequently, he knew how to handle it. He knew almost everyone, and it usually went quite peacefully. But there could also be an argument, and even though it was not something nice to see, it amused me nevertheless to see the little man in action. "What, you want to fight? Then, out with you!" and like a cat, he was quickly and furiously behind the man, encircling him with his arms, and the man would sit as though in a vise. Bending over backwards, he would lift the victim's feet off the floor, trot over to the outside door, which he kicked open, and before the poor fellow knew what was happening, he was lying on the pavement outside the entrance. That earned him respect. I never saw any of the victims come inside again.

Anton Matzen

Anton Matzen owned a farm near the school. He normally had about 800 to 1,000 sheep. One portion of them grazed on the coastal land on the seaward side of the great North Sea dike, where he had leased grazing rights. That is where several hundred of his sheep drowned in the great storm and flood of 1923. He came to me and asked for help in writing an application for compensation. He had two sons and a younger daughter. His mother-in-law was a dear old lady named Helle Kristine, who was a nurse and helped take care of children. She attended my wife Tinna when Aase was born. Anton Matzen was a member of the local school commission.

Matzen was fanatically German and the others in the household also thought of themselves as German, but the sons got from me the weekly paper *Hjemmet* (The Home) and told me that they had learned

to read *Knold og Tot* (Katzenjammer Kids), so those two rogues had a little benefit from that.

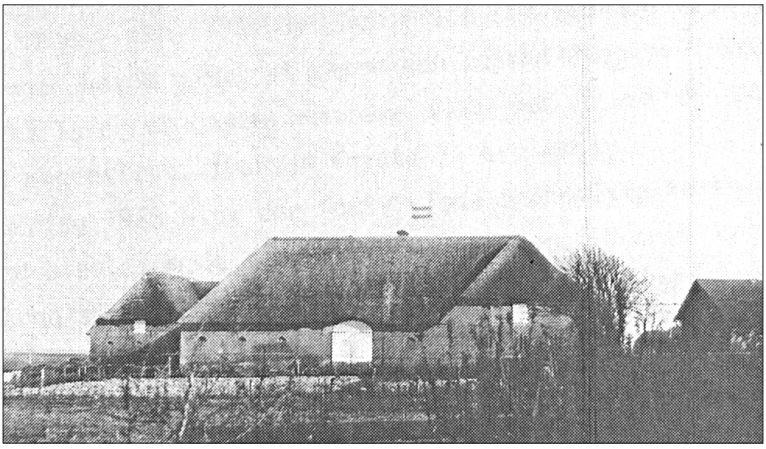
Anton Matzen was among the worst of the "drinking brothers" in the Rudbøl area. He was often drunk, and the worst of it was that he became crude and at times downright evil. He could always be heard when coming out of the inn in the evening. Then he walked and shouted and raged, and struck his iron-tipped cane on the road, such that the sparks flew. He walked by the school on his way home. Most women were afraid to get near him. He was sometimes talked about by others, who reported seeing him chasing his wife and sons out into the cold when he came home. But when the sons were grown, they took control. Then the father had to sit outside, if he started to make a fuss when coming home.

Fritz Carstensen

Fritz Carstensen lived at Hauberg, a large farm in the middle of Rudbøl, which today is called Rudbølgård. He was the town's most powerful man. His activity in large scale commerce was sufficient for him to have that distinction. He was a skilled businessman. When I arrived at Rudbøl in 1923, he owned eight buildings in town, including several inns. Several of these buildings he sold to gendarmes. In the marsh he had several hundred horses on pasture. The next year he had about 1,000 cattle on grass in the marsh. Later he had sheep, and all other farmers sought to follow his lead. He drove around to other markets and traders, and would often drink a good deal on these excursions, but he drove a small buggy with a good horse in front. When he decided to start for home, the stable boy would harness the horse, hitch him to the buggy, and hang the reins on the whipholder. When he had gotten Fritz up in the seat, he led the horse out into the street, gave it a stroke on the shoulder, and the horse would find the way home. Several times when I had met the conveyance, Fritz was asleep, and the horse, at a walking pace, with the reins slack, was homeward bound.

The very first time I saw Fritz Carstensen in Rudbøl, I was surprised. Certainly, I had seen this man before. Later, Jens Christiansen told me that several of the "big farmers" during the First World War were exempt from service to be suppliers to the army. For example, Fritz was a supplier of horses. Suddenly, I knew the

answer. I had lived at *Markedsgade 30* (Market Street 30) in Silkeborg while I attended the teachers' college, which was right across from the market square. Several times I had seen two Germans purchasing horses, sometimes in rainy weather, holding a cane and standing in the middle of a circle of horses, designating which ones they wished to buy. After a short inspection, the sale was made. It was at that horse market that I had seen Fritz. Fritz's daughter married a "big farmer" to the south. The wedding party was held at Hotel Sylt in Højer. It must have been a good party, because they emptied the hotel's stock of spirits. No matter, they sent a wagon to Tønder and got another 800 *kroner*-worth. That was a lot of money at that time, but whether that was sufficient, I don't know. To mark the festivities, he hoisted the German flag high over the farm, and that caused a good deal of commotion. Apparently, the Danish flag law was not yet in force in Southern Jutland [which allows the flag of another nation to fly at equal height next to the Danish flag], so the police were powerless to enforce that law. Policeman Iversen ill-temperedly fretted and fumed.



Hauberg (later Rudbølgård) with the German flag.
The farmhouse burned down some years later, in October 1966.

In the mid-1920s, the economic conditions were desperate. The Danish *krone* fell and became, "*en 50 øres krone*" (a half-crown). That meant that the Germans took advantage and bought a good deal of property. That happened especially through the newly established German *Kreditanstalt Vogelsang* (Vogelsang Credit Bank). Many of the

Germans had counted on putting their money into Danish *kroner*, as immediately after the war their funds were in German *marks*. One large Danish farm near Møgeltønder was for sale. The asking price was 120,000 Danish *kroner*. A bid of 118,000 was received. They wanted to keep it in Danish hands. Fritz Carstensen had begun to buy farms and at the time had three large farms. He went to Brink and offered 120,000 *kroner* and, to the Møgeltønder Danes' great sorrow, got the farm. There was a story told in the Corner Inn that a colleague asked Fritz how he dared buy it for so much money. "Well," Fritz answered, "In a couple of years I can pay for it with that big roan bull out there." But it did not happen that way at all. The establishment of the military force came to be meaningful.

The German-Danish border at Rudbøl.
Behind to the right is the customs house.

Later, Fritz lost everything. Vogelsang foreclosed on all of his farms. Fritz's difficulties hit him hard. He lived with his daughter and son-in-law, south of the border, a poor man. Now, he did not have his faithful horse to take him home, when he was drunk. One evening, on his way home, he fell into a roadside canal and drowned. His son was employed as manager at Rudbølgård. Years later I heard that he was killed by suffocation in the hay barn, under the unloading mechanism.

Cornelius Petersen

Cornelius Petersen was, for several years, Denmark's most discussed citizen (like Mogens Glistrup is in our day [the 1970s–Trans.]). He was a teacher's son from South Slesvig, a determined Friesian. Unique, intelligent, very uncompromising and self-willed; distinctively Friesian. Much could be written about him. Here I will write only about my contact with him through the school.

He was nearly always in opposition. He seemed to be constantly in dispute with the personnel at Møgeltønder School, where his children attended. Svendsen was unhappy because mediation with him was impossible. One day Cornelius Petersen's oldest daughter came up to me and wanted to enroll her three siblings in the Danish School. I said that I would be happy to have them, but they needed to do that through the school council, but I would talk further with the county school consultant.

After school I bicycled quickly over to Svendsen and told him about my visitor. "Oh, Mikkelsen, take them, take them! That would benefit everyone. That will please Cornelius, he knows a first-class school is better than the fourth-class, and you could certainly bring peace to both the children and Cornelius. I will take care of the official orders. Let the children start with you." *Javel*, that was done. In fact it did work out to everyone's satisfaction. I got the three children in school, Marie, twelve or thirteen, Lorenz, ten or eleven, and little Hanni (Johan), who was strikingly like his father. Marie was a sweet and good-hearted girl, always helpful with the younger ones. I was happy for her, even though she was a little slow with the school work.

Cornelius, who he had been a teacher's son, had a good feeling towards the teacher. I had a very good relationship with him. One time Tinna and I were invited to Vester Anflod in order to get acquainted. We were received in a very friendly manner. He asked me many detailed questions concerning my teaching, the school, lesson assignments, etc., and I answered honestly, for they were not trivial questions, and the conversation was a long one. At one point he remarked about the teachers, "They should be hung!" "Should my husband also be hung?" asked Tinna quickly. "No, the noose should be loose enough that your husband could slip through," was his answer. Some time later Marie came to school with a copy of Cornelius' newspaper *Bondens Selvstyre* (The Farmer's Self-Government) with the inscription "to the

schoolmaster." The lead article on the front page was about school and education, and when I read it, I recognized our conversation on the subject. He had actually appropriated and sanctioned my "school vision," and that was quite flattering.

Vester Anflod was a normal large marsh farm with the buildings built on a very large berm. Cornelius had built it in the Friesian style, which meant that all four wings came under one roof, with a rather small courtyard also under the roof, as the four wings' exterior roof surfaces extended up to a high point. The living quarters on the south side were only half under the larger part of the roof. The farm was, as most marsh farms, supplied with thick lightning rods. Unfortunately, this beautiful impressive farmstead, which marked the whole area and which was a great tourist sight, is now gone. It burned down. That must have been an awesome sight to see when that mighty building went up in flames. This Eiderstedt farm was the only one of its kind in Denmark. There had been some "close shaves" at other times. [The Eiderstedt Peninsula lies about forty miles south of Rudbøl on the west coast of South Schleswig–Trans.].

One morning a short-lived but violent storm came up over the area. The children were at recess. Suddenly a lightning bolt struck the one lightning rod on the barn at Vester Anflod, which glowed red for some time. The boys came running, rather shocked. They said that they were nearly knocked over, by the pressure wave, that it was like someone hit them on the legs.

Another Time It Was Closer

It was on a Sunday at 10:30 a.m. I came pedaling south from Møgeltønder, where I had been to church. When I rode past Vester Anflod, I saw smoke coming out of the great roof. At the same instant a couple of men came rushing out of the gateway with a carriage bucket down to the ditch. They shouted "Fire" to me. It goes without saying that I raced home, donned the uniform jacket, and got on the alarm horn, which an instant later resounded over the town's Sunday morning quiet. It was only a few minutes before we were four men with the water wagon with Christiansen in the lead, headed at a fast trot towards Vester Anflod.

Before we got the hose in place by the great road canal, it was fully manned with eight men (four-plus-four) with the wagon, the hose laid

out and shortly after we heard Christiansen's call for "*Wasser*" (water). And so we pumped mightily. For once, at least, the preparations were "on point." The smoke increased, but we could see no flame. Shortly after noon a hose wagon came from Tønder, but it was not used. At about three o'clock they could begin to carry furniture, a writing table, etc. in again. Cornelius got in his car and drove to Møgeltønder and got food and drink, and so we got a much-needed dinner hour. We were "cheated out" of our noon meal. But Vester Anflod was rescued. Cornelius was happy, and the rest of us were satisfied with our Sunday action.

But what had happened? Well, primarily in the loft over the swine stalls, there were about 120 loads of marsh hay, and the short rich marsh hay is very difficult to get completely dry. A small portion was put in too early, started smoldering, and caught fire. That would happen somewhere in that area nearly every year. Usually one could smell when there was danger. Therefore Christiansen often walked around in the evenings after harvest and sniffed, and now and then he gave orders for the hay to be taken out again. Cornelius' daughter Misse had taken some green pears and in order to let them ripen, had stuck them up on the hay. On Sunday morning when she went up to check on them and stuck her hand in the hay, she burned herself and ran down to the front door. Thus the fire was discovered before any flame could be seen.

Several young men with pitchforks tossed the hay down and at the same time held the fire in check with the hose. Often the signal was given to *"Wasser halt"* (stop the water). It was a tough job in the heat under the roof. Those of us who had worked up there looked awful when we were through—full of sweat, dirt, charred hay, and smoke. The rest of us had it easier; we stood out in the sunshine and took turns manning the pump. It was a great day for the *"Ruttebülle Freiwillige Feuerwehr"* (Rudbøl Volunteer Fire Corps).

Inspections and Study Visits

During those years I endured nearly all possible inspections. When there were exams at Tønder Teachers College, the High "Lord" Examiners liked to have a little excursion for variety, so they would tour through Møgeltønder, Rudbøl, and Højer, or in reverse order, and as a special event on the tour, they would have inspections of

the two schools in Rudbøl. In that way, I got all possible kinds of inspections, except for a visit from the king—he came for the first time the year after I left. For example, I had two visits from Ministers of Education Jens Byskov and Nina Bang. They each came with their trailing government officials. Jens Byskov was peaceful, taciturn, nearly phlegmatic. Nina Bang was the complete opposite: quick, fiery, very talkative.

As soon as she entered the school, she asked "Well, children, do you know who I am?" All the hands went up. I pointed to Mouritz: "Nina Bang," came the quick answer. In a moment, I could see that response had not fallen on good soil, so I pointed to Anne N., who said sweetly, "The Minister of Education." That salvaged the situation a little. On the rest of the tour she had been very busy. The entourage had arrived two hours later than we expected. There had been some "friction" in Højer. There were disputes between the Danish and German teachers there, different problems, questions of prestige, which the diplomatic Svendsen would rather have avoided. One example concerned the common teachers' room in Højer, in which hung a prominent colorful painting of Kaiser Wilhelm "from the old days," which the Danish teacher wanted removed and the German teacher did not.

Svendsen had naturally oriented Nina thoroughly about all the problems. When she came into the teachers' room with her entourage, she stared with amazement at the huge dominating picture and then asked, "What is it?" The German teacher respectfully answered that it was of His Majesty Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany. "There is no longer any Kaiser of Germany. You must remove that immediately." "*Javel*." It was removed, and as the fine man that Svendsen was, he supplied the teachers' room with two pictures in its stead, one of Luther and one of Goethe.

In the years after World War I, many significant changes were made to the map of Europe. Many new national boundaries had been created, and within these new borders there were several minorities who had rights to be considered. There were two at the Danish-German border, at the Polish border, at the Belgian border (Eupen-Malmedy), etc. The county school consultant's assistant, Teacher Torp, (a fine and pleasant young man, who unfortunately later lost his life in a traffic accident) was a specialist in minority questions, especially concerning school conditions, had traveled through the different areas, and had many contacts around Europe. Therefore there were many visits to

Tønder, and it was Svendsen's favorite ploy to take these visitors to Rudbøl, and to show them the quite ideal conditions created there. The parents themselves could select either Danish or German, the children played in the same playground, the teachers taught their own language in each other's school, had good relations with each other, loaned books to each other, etc. In the German school it was Svendsen's standing "device" to ask the children how many spoke German at home. There were only two, and that was because their mothers came from farther south. "Yes, and we are Friesian women." Those were interesting visits and made quite an impression on the visitors.

The most amusing—yes, nearly festive—of these visits I will describe here. This visit was by a woman teacher from Stockholm and a county school consultant from Tornio, on the Swedish-Finnish border. They were important, distinguished people, quiet and reserved. Well, Svendsen went to the children quickly with his question, whether they knew anything about Sweden. That went quite well. Exactly how it went I do not remember, but as an answer to the question, "How do you know about Sweden?" the children answered, from "Niels Holgersen's Journey." [This book, *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*, is a children's story by Selma Lagerlöf that contains much information about the different provinces in Sweden.–Trans.] I had read the book to them shortly before, together with information about Sweden's geography. The conversation continued, with the two guests participating. At last the Swedish consultant said, "I would like to ask a question." "Yes, please." And when he had obtained an answer to his question, he turned to Svendsen and me and said: "I don't believe that Swedish children know as much about Niels Holgersen." Svendsen beamed. It was a successful visit. When the guests had left, after a hearty thanks, I read a story for the children. They had certainly earned it.

Marriage and Baptism

It is not my intent now to write very much about my family life, but there are some things that were meaningful for the work at Rudbøl, which are necessary to mention. My wife Tinna and I were married on August 7, 1925, and we received many congratulations and gifts from the Rudbøl children.

Quite naturally, I spent more time at home now and did not go out as much, but at the same time had more support for my work. Tinna taught sewing lessons for the young girls in the wintertime, since there was no handwork teaching in the school. We met together with several families of similar age, including Gendarme Rasmussen (our nearest neighbor, where I had often dined), Gendarme Madsen and his sweet wife, and also Policeman Iversen and his wife.

On February 4, 1927, our oldest daughter, Aase, was born at Rudbøl, and that was a big topic of discussion in our little town. Her baptismal event was rather special. She was baptized by Bishop Ammundsen from Haderslev in the schoolroom which was packed with people, many of whom had probably never seen a bishop. It was a festive event. The sponsors had come, and we were to have a family dinner afterwards. Tinna asked the bishop, "Would you like to have a spoonful of soup with us?" and he would very much like to do that. He took off his bishop's robe and gold cross and we had an enjoyable dinner together. After dinner, he wanted to see the border, so we walked down to it. The time was four or five in the afternoon, before the bishop started back to Højer.

In this connection I should also write something about our local clergy. Pastor Braren was of that generation of young ministers who did not agree with the "clenched fist politics" that some would consider against the Southern Jutlanders. He was convinced that would be a mistake. He was German-inclined, and German-educated, but he had also studied in Copenhagen. He had lived here in Denmark, in the Danish pastorate circles, and it was in Denmark he met his wife, a Danish pastor's daughter, whose maiden name was Monrad.

They were serving a parish north of Haderslev near the old border. They had thus experienced the plebiscite and subsequent reunification. That morning when the king rode over the old border, Mrs. Braren and her little adopted daughter were there, while Pastor Braren had stayed at home. She was the little girl that the king had swooped on his white horse, which means she got the title "The King's Johanne." At the table in the Højer parsonage was a photograph of the king with little Johanne. It was in a silver frame and signed by Christian the Tenth. When the pastor held services in the German School, Mrs. Braren often walked over to us and said, "Now, Mrs. Mikkelsen, we will have a cozy time." On such Sundays Tinna would

decorate the coffee table, and we would talk about matters both Danish and German.

His confirmation teaching was quite rigorous. The children had to go to church every Sunday, and on the next Tuesday had to meet with a four-page report of the sermon in their notebooks. Then the pastor dictated to them four pages of dogma which they wrote in their notebooks, which should be recopied by Friday. In addition they had to learn a hymn, from memory, of not less than twelve verses. That was not the worst. They were also coached and became fantastically adept at memorization. I thought, to put it bluntly, that the members of the confirmation class were to be pitied. Often they could not read their "churchly" dictation, and I let them transcribe it in school, where they could help each other.

One Sunday, when the pastor held services in the Danish School, he remarked, "None of your students were in church last Sunday," and he was offended by that. "Well," I said, "I can easily understand that." "How come?" "Tell me Reverend, were you out walking on Sunday?" "Yes, out in my garden." "Were you out on the dike road?" "No." "Well, I was, but I had to give up my usual walk and turn back; the road was covered with ice and smooth as a mirror, it was impossible to walk on." "Could not one of the parents have driven?" "There is only one who has children in my school who has horses, he is a wagon man. Perhaps he thought that his horses should have a free day. He is good to his animals."

More could be told, also about his examinations. The parents and teachers were invited to his preliminary examination, on the Wednesday before confirmation. That was some examination, with many unanswered questions. Time after time Teacher Jensen of Højer and I would look at each other and shake our heads. We did not know the answers to many of the questions. But improvement eventually came, and I was the one who caused the change in direction. I had decided that I would talk with Braren at some time, about his, according to my Danish inclination, unreasonable requirements from the confirmands. That opportunity did not come before the time came for us to move from Rudbøl in 1927. We and the Danish teachers in Højer were invited, with our wives, to a departure party in the pastor's home.

We talked about education, among other things. His opinion was that we taught too little memorization to the students. But then I spoke

my mind, and said at last. "Do you expect to see your confirmands in church after they are confirmed?" "Yes, why not?" "I am afraid that they have all developed an aversion to your form of teaching and compulsory church attendance, so they would not wish to come any more." It got embarrassingly quiet. When we left to walk home, Teacher Jensen said, "Thank you, Mikkelsen, that you got it said, that was sorely needed."

Two years later, we were together with the Jensens. The first thing he said was: "I have a greeting for you from Pastor Braren." "Indeed, I certainly didn't expect that." "Yes, and I should say, that you had it right, what you said that last evening we were together. That helped, you can believe it, his confirmation teaching has become more humane."

Excursions and *Kinderfest*

In the summer of 1926 we took an excursion to my home area with the school children. Pastor Nielsen, the Pedersens, who managed a dairy, and my father had sent the invitation. That became a three-day tour like the earlier one to Stige, and it was quite successful. We saw a lot in Silkeborg, such as the machine factory, the paper factory, and other things that were ordinarily not open to the public, but Pastor Nielsen was a person who could be very persuasive. We were housed several places in the city. The trip also went up through Skjern and Herning. I had talked about the heath to the children and also about *Hedeselskabet* [The Heath Society, which was responsible for turning most of the heathland into agricultural purposes, because of the loss of Slesvig and Holstein in 1864.–Trans.] The children asked again and again, "When we will see the heath?" We had seen only planted fields, evergreen plantations and fences. It was first, near Borris, that we came to "the Jutland Heath." We did not see very much of the heath plain [as featured] on our old national map. [The area near Borris, which is also near Skjern, which Mikkelsen mentions here, is one of just a few areas where the old heath has been preserved. One of the larger areas of preservation is in the new national park in Thy, in far northwest Jutland.–Trans.] The trip home was through Skanderborg and East Jutland. The children were especially enthusiastic about the lakes and *Himmelbjerget* (Sky Mountain).

The year after that the German teacher Christiansen and I again discussed the question: excursion or *Kinderfest* (children's party), and we agreed on an excursion. I would take my troop to Fanø [an island in the North Sea], so the children could see sand dunes and the North Sea; he would go to Schleswig. We traveled to Fanø, and saw the harbor at Esbjerg, had a sailboat ride, climbed the sand dunes, etc. This time it was only a one-day trip.

Christiansen's tour was delayed. I was a little disturbed, because the old German school commission's president's son, Mads Nielsen, had come home from Germany, where he had been a business teacher, and he often came in to visit the German teacher. With my "inborn" mistrust of the Germans, I became a little afraid of their working "a number" on us, and that did indeed happen. One day my children told me that the German School was not going on an excursion, but was going to have a *Kinderfest*, and it would be something big--now they would "overshadow" the Danish School. The German customs officers would come over to play. They were all former military musicians, had been eight years in the service, and had received the customs positions as a "reward" for their service.

Well, that was not pleasant to hear. That would constitute some sort of "victory" for about half of the townspeople. I was angry, because the agreement that Christiansen and I had made was broken. I was well aware that it was not really his doing, but the brickmaker's, and my distrust of that firm, which supported discord, while I made an effort toward cooperation, became stronger. That was definitely not the first time. But this time I was not alone. Tinna was also angry, and we quickly decided to "strike back."

She quickly walked down to Gendarme Madsen, and in the evening our friends were assembled with us. We all agreed that their trump should be called, preferable with a thorough "victory." The gendarmes were all "fire and flame." The situation reminded them of the "plebiscite," which otherwise was never mentioned. The work to be done was parceled out. Some money would be collected, gifts purchased for prizes, play and competitions arranged, and Tinna and I decided that we would direct a little skit or perhaps a children's comedy.

But what about music?

"I will try to do something about that," said Madsen. "I will go into the chief in Tønder and tell him everything. And then I will try

to get some of the gendarmes' orchestra members to come out here." This was early in the week. The Germans were to have their festival fourteen days later. We wanted to do ours before theirs. Thus, we only had about five days to prepare.

"*Du milde kineser"* [Literally, "you mild Chinese," but in English, "Great Scott."–Trans.], we were busy. There were not many children's comedies, so I had to do that myself. I dramatized the fairy tale, "Hans og Grethe" very freely, with a nasty troll in the forest, and with *nisser* and *alfepiger* (elves and pixies). Tinna sewed costumes for the girls and I took the smallest girls and instructed them in *elverdans* (the dance of the elves). I wrote out the parts and selected the actors. They were assembled, and I read them the play, after explaining their roles to them. When I asked them when they would have them memorized, they said, "Tomorrow." "Well, we will see." But they were right. For once I blessed their training in memorization. We began the play practice. Gendarme Frederiksen had promised to be the troll. In addition I practiced *Prinsessen og Gangerpilten* (The Princess and The Serving Lad) with two older girls. The festival was announced, and was to be held on Saturday. Madsen had procured four musicians in plain clothes. I was happy.

Then we needed to set up the competitions. The children were to be divided into three groups, and there would thus be six competitions. Gendarme Rasmussen took charge of the shooting match with gallery rifles and the oldest boys would compete. The middle group would have a bicycle-riding ring on the school grounds, and Gendarme Frederiksen would oversee that. The youngest boys group were to play marbles in the school room. The girls would play "ring ball" and "ring play," and the littlest girls would also play marbles. Rules for the competitions were prepared, and the points to be awarded for each group. In addition, each group would have its own leader.

The committee members worked well together. Three families bought gifts in Tønder, useful gifts for all of the children, with approximately the same values for all age groups. For example, each of the girls in the oldest group got fine material for a new dress. The boys in the oldest group each got a pocket watch, which were cheap at that time. That was all taken care of. The afternoon party with coffee and dance would be in the inn in the ballroom, and there was also a stage, on which the children's comedy would be played. The tables would be covered and decorated; the mothers were very busy.

There was much enthusiasm generated for the project, particularly when Cornelius Pedersen came home in his car with a load of beech greens from Ballehus Forest. That was a special sight for the people in Rudbøl. His daughter and wife also came. They decorated the long table with garden flowers (seldom seen out there) and festive napkins, very nicely done.

Saturday, the festival day, arrived. The competitions were all held in the morning. That went well, and each event was applauded. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the children assembled in their best clothes, with their arch of flowers, long willow greens finely bunched like wreaths of flowers, two children under each arch—it really looked very festive. I had invited all of the children to the party at the inn, and therefore several children from the German School were in attendance, especially those who had siblings in the Danish School. It was exciting, because the rumor about some kind of theatrical presentation had spread. They had never experienced that before.

There was a festive tour through the town. The musicians played, and spirits were high, not least because of the way the festival had come about. After all had arrived at the inn, the children were seated at the festively decorated long table. Then the actors slipped to the side and dressed for their roles. And the level of excitement rose. The curtain came up for Hans and Grethe, who were in the wilderness in the forest, and at last became tired and exhausted, laid down to sleep. It was dark, but when the moon began to shine, the *nisser* and *alfepiger* came out and performed their light and lovely dance around the two who were asleep. The little ones performed very beautifully. But when they were gone, the big black troll came sneaking in and sniffed Christian blood. A shudder went through the spectators, when he grasped Hans to eat him. When Hans cried for help all the *nisser* (boys) and *alfepiger* (girls) came running, and chased the nasty troll, with great hilarity among the spectators, and the troll, with hearty applause, was banished from the stage.

After the play, there was singing and playing of *Prinsessen og Gangerpilten* (the Princess and the Serving Lad). That was also fresh and festive. After that we played and sang with the violin, and then the musicians played for dancing. It was jovial, and we sang a great number of songs, I must say. But when we were to close just before the dinner hour, a "deputation" of mothers came to me and asked whether we could not perform the comedy again some evening, because their

husbands had all been at work and had not been able to come, and surely they would like to see it as well. I promised that I would talk to the children, and they very much wanted to do it again. I promised that if they could do as well in the evening, I would photograph them, so they could each have a picture. That was a festive evening. The entire ballroom at the inn was filled with adults, among them many who did not have children in the school. And again, it must be said, the children performed very well.

There were high spirits among us all, because the entire celebration had been arranged in a matter of only a few days. It was not only quite successful, but it had given these poor people of this little village a great experience. We can do it, when we cooperate; they had experienced something which they had certainly never tried before; namely, solidarity and community spirit, happiness about standing together and helping each other in a difficult situation. That great, good prize awakened joy and admiration.

The Germans' *Kinderfest* the next week turned out to be a lusterless performance. There was no music because the German customs officers had not been able to get permission to perform in Denmark. There was no children's comedy, and only very little parental support. It was a defeat for them, which we teachers did not mention to each other. We avoided each other for a while. I was sore at Christiansen.

It was our last performance in Rudbøl. Had we remained there, I would have tried after that to hold *Kinderfest* together with the German teacher. I do not believe that it would have been so difficult to do.

One of those last years that I was there, the older students and I went on a long bicycle excursion. We toured through Højer, Trøjborg, Løgumkloster, and Møgeltønder. [The roundtrip from Rudbøl would total about thirty-five miles.—Trans.] It was hard to find enough bicycles, but we had a fine tour. Especially exciting was the visit to Løgumkloster Church, which was under restoration. The children were interested in the small beautiful statues on the altar. When the artist discovered that, he showed them one. One of the girls asked him how he gave them silk clothing. "Well, first the figure is finely polished, lacquered and coated with real and very thin gold leaf, which remains glazed to the agate underneath. Over the gold is painted a very fine thin red or blue paint, which the gold can shine through, therefore making it look like silk." It was hard for us to leave there.

Kinderfest 1927. Ready to march from the Danish School.

Our production of "Hans og Grethe."

Preparations for Departure

Shortly after our little Aase had been baptized by the bishop on my birthday in Rudbøl School, she became ill. The doctor diagnosed bronchitis. She was little and delicate, so the sickness took hold and was hard for her. Our frame of mind did not improve when the doctor told us that the cause was the rugged climate of the marsh, and she would not be able to shake off the illness as long as she remained there. We should move to a milder climate, closer to the east coast of Jutland. That pronouncement gave us much to think about. Tinna was convinced we should move. She had never really felt at home out there.

For me it was quite another matter. That eighteenth of November 1922, Winther had said to me: "It is important that the work goes well. If you can manage it for perhaps two or three years, then we can find a replacement for you. It is not a place where you can endure for a long time." But I had become comfortable out there. I was especially happy because of the loyalty of the people. One would always know if that was the case, and I had been a teacher long enough and in enough places I knew what that was worth. The situation caused many deep thoughts, but Tinna was convinced, and I knew there was no other way. I discussed the situation with County Consultant Svendsen, and we agreed that I should use the summer vacation period to seek another place. That point in time was propitious as there was a Danish majority on the local school commission, so Svendsen could easily procure the teacher he wished. We knew that for the next time, the majority would most likely be German.

Vacation time came, and I visited many places, had many experiences en route, but will leave that account for another time. I was about to accept a position at Sønder Vissing, and it was near the end of the vacation period. On the way home, we stopped in Bobøl. I picked up a copy of *Statstidende* (National Times) and saw in the newspaper a notice about the position of head teacher and church cantor in Søvind. Where was that? I opened the map. It seemed promising, a station town, quite near Horsens, forest, and beach. The school handbooks showed a large school, five classrooms, a gymnastics hall, two women teachers, and a pre-school, among other things. We discussed it more thoroughly. Then suddenly, my brother-in-law, Teacher Sørensen, said "Søvind, who is it we know there, Else? Wasn't it Pastor Enevoldsen

who moved there?" "No, they don't live in Søvind," she said. The map was opened again. "No, the parish house is in Elbæk, and it is a two-point parish, Gangsted and Søvind." "Yes, so it is. He is there. Apply for it. You will never find a more decent man to work with than Pastor Enevoldsen." That settled the matter. A few hours later, I was back on the way north again.

And Søvind it became. A short time later, I received the letter of nomination and later the letter of call. The die was cast. I was happy. I would have five classrooms instead of just one, three teachers in all, in one large, delightful school, which could mean a good future.

Had I been able to see into the future, my happiness would have been much diminished. That became a tough year, at the end.

A Meeting

It was a busy autumn. There were many things to be settled and put in order. It was not just the work at the school alone, but also the less public work on behalf of the entire country. Thus, I prepared a precise map of the local citizens and their nationalistic orientation, the school children's attendance, who were good helpers, and many other things. And then there were the national societies for which I was a representative. I had participated in many good meetings in the past few years, as a representative in language and school societies. There was a lot of business to attend to, and our "chiefs," Court Official Jefsen Christensen and H.P. Hansen of Nørremølle, were busy men. They were quite capable, and there were many others. I had the most contact with the language society's secretary, Jacob Petersen, who was very capable.

These were crisis times, very difficult times, in the fall of 1927. There was a summons to a meeting of representatives in Bylderup-Bov. As a speaker, there were, among others, Hansen of Nørremølle. And he was our old chief, "our Hans Peter," who spoke. I have heard many, many speakers in my long life, but none so "on fire" as he was that day. And that day, the spirit was with him. His earnestness made a great impression. He talked about a lot of things, but among them it was about the Danish teachers who had come down from the north, and then left again, who had deserted the calling, which was the most meaningful in Southern Jutland, the children, the youth, the future.

Oh, how that hit hard, how that burned. Emotion and tears took control over me, I had to go out. My good friend, Teacher Jensen from Højer, understood how it hurt. He came out and comforted me, but still the pain sat there, deep in the mind.

To suffer *defeat*, that can be difficult enough, but one *can recover*. But to *desert*, *one cannot recover from that for a long time*. It sits as a sting, deep in the consciousness. That is what I felt that day, and for a long, long time thereafter.

Conclusion

On October 23, [1927] the first day of fall vacation, we moved from Rudbøl. It was hard to say farewell to the children, when they came with their gifts. It hurt also to say farewell to the steadfast friends I had out there, especially "Blind Thomas." He was sick, and I thought to myself that would probably be the last time I saw him, and it was. It was also tough for his daughter, Anne, who had been Aase's steadfast babysitter that summer. Oh, how she cried the forenoon we left. She was a good-hearted girl, who had found her fortune in using her kindness in a rich life's work. We sent our furniture with a freight truck from Tønder, drove to Bobøl, and stayed overnight there. Our reception in Søvind was not all that pleasant. I had hoped that our tribulations were now over, but, on the contrary, they lay in wait for us, but fortunately, we did not know that.

Consultant Svendsen had found a young man to take my place, with quite good marks on the teacher's examination. That should have been good, but I was not quite happy with him; he was quite indifferent and haughty about my information on the school, the children and the community. Tinna could not stand him. He lived with us our last few days in order to get to know the situation. We let him have some of our furniture, for example, our large brass hanging lamp. He did not seem to care. A few months later, in February, I saw in *Folkeskolen* (The Folk School), that he had moved to a position on Fyn. Thus, I knew how things had gone with him in Rudbøl. That distressed me. Letters from the children and friends in Rudbøl spoke their distinct language. For a long time, my thoughts were as much in Rudbøl as with the work in Søvind. At night, in my dreams, I was often in the middle of the difficulties out there. It did not help any, that there were earnest spoken and written requests to come back. Had I

been alone, I would have yielded, but Tinna liked living in Søvind. She could not consider moving back.

This "deep yearning" concerning the work in Rudbøl I only let go of for the first time last year (1973) when I went on a "pilgrimage" out there, fifty years later.

A Pilgrimage, August 9 and 10, 1973

Tinna's sister died in early summer 1973. At her funeral the family members in the Bobøl-Føvling area asked me to come and see them sometime. They have always been very friendly to me, all of them, so I resolved to visit them and at the same time, continue on to Rudbøl. It was exactly fifty years since I had arrived in Rudbøl the first time. The visit with the family in Bobøl was delightful. They were so cordial, and I had a couple of delightful days with them. The plan for the trip to Rudbøl was that I would stay overnight at the inn, and look up old friends that I knew. On the way down I stayed at Ribe and visited the excavation site of the oldest part of Ribe. They were searching for the remains of Ansgar's church.

When I arrived at Rudbøl, everything was different. There were many new buildings, but there was also much more vegetation than there had been before, which completely altered the character of the marsh. I came to our old neighbor's house opposite the school, in which Patrolmaster and Parish Judicial Officer N. Rasmussen had lived. No one was home, but a baby carriage was parked out front. I felt a little ill at ease. I walked over to the house and knocked on the door. A little frightened woman opened the door slightly. "My husband is not at home, my husband is not at home," she repeated, and I could not get her to answer any questions.

Then I drove down to the inn. Everything was different. The old beautiful inn and barn were gone, replaced by a new lavish tourist motel with a terrace, parking places where the meadow had been, a swimming pool, and small shops in a long courtyard. I walked in with some apprehension. The innkeeper came to the front, and I asked if it was possible to stay overnight. "Do you have a reservation?" "No, I don't." "Then, it is quite impossible. We are completely booked for our big Saturday celebration." I told him that I had been a teacher here fifty years earlier, and would like to find old friends. He had no time

for such foolishness, how could I be so stupid. He was interested only in his "business."

I walked over to the border. Nothing was the same. No contacts were possible. Then I drove back to Rasmussen's house. A young woman had just come home. She told me that the school had been closed a couple of years earlier, and now the school system was "centralized" in Højer. Rasmussen had moved to Tønder, on the street in front of the Ribe Iron Foundry. I saw that both Fritz Carstensen's Hauberg and Cornelius Pedersen's Vester Anflod had burned down. The area's two largest manor houses were gone. Oh, what a change. Then I drove over to Tønder, feeling somewhat depressed.

I quickly found Rasmussen's home. I was made very welcome, with open arms, and that was good. And the conversation began. The Rasmussens told me about all the changes. They had just celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Well, of course, I had attended their festive wedding, fifty years earlier, which had been conducted in both Danish and German. So many of the old acquaintances were gone. I asked after "Sister Anne." Yes, she lived in Rorkær, just to the east of Tønder. I had sought her telephone number, but had not found it. Rasmussen then tried, but also in vain, and then called a colleague and got her number. I called her with a similar response. "Please come out here, I have two or three hours free, and you can have supper here with me." I accepted. Anne needed to go out and put some "old folks to bed" at seven thirty, so then I would come back and stay overnight with the Rasmussens.

I drove out and found where she lived. We had a very happy reunion, with much, much conversation, especially on the rich life of work that Anne had experienced, and her many travels. After that, I drove back to Rasmussen's in Tønder. My photo album generated a lot of conversation. Rasmussen got me up-to-date on many things. I found it remarkable that so many of my former students were no longer living. Perhaps it was because of being malnourished during the First World War. The next morning I headed back across Southern Jutland towards Kolding. It was a delightful trip, beautiful weather, and a magnificent landscape. With the Christiansens, the reunion was just as welcome. I could nearly not slip away from there. Finally, late in the afternoon, I started for home to Søvind, richer with many experiences and memories.

I cannot close this section without writing down the most beautiful comment I have ever received. It was Rasmussen who said it, the evening we sat and discussed the old memories from Rudbøl. He said it very gently. "Yes, you transformed Rudbøl completely the first year you were there. It became a completely different town." Very surprised, I asked, "How was that?" "Well, I am sure you know, once you think about it." Mrs. Rasmussen quietly added, "Yes, that is quite right." I was deeply thankful to have had all those experiences.

Postscript

Our oldest daughter Aase, who was the direct cause for us to move from Rudbøl, recovered quickly once we had abandoned Rudbøl. She had no more attacks of bronchitis. Our good friends and neighboring teacher Olav and Dagmar Jensen, head teacher in the Højer School, had a daughter, Kirsten, the same age as Aase. As a two-year-old, she also became sick with bronchitis, and it came back again every winter. Now and then she would be sick for an entire month. The doctor told them the same that he had told us, but they were both too strongly engaged in the work for the country out there at that very demanding outpost, which they could not think of leaving. But when Kirsten was twelve years old, "the hammer fell." They learned that if they did not leave the marsh immediately, her illness would become chronic, and she would suffer with it the rest of her life.

We got letters, full of worry, from them. The head teacher's job at Stensballe School was vacant. I recommend that they seek it. He was employed there, and we were happy about it. But it turned out to be a big disappointment for them. So they again traveled southward, and he got a good position in the Dybbøl School. [Dybbøl is on the opposite side of the Jutland peninsula from Rudbøl, out of the marsh area.—Trans.]. We saw them off with great sorrow. I would liked to have gone with them, but Tinna would not. But Kirsten did recover from her illness.

And then, a few years later, a unique circumstance arose, which is why I write about it here. When Aase and Kirsten were grown, they met again, in Tønder, of all places. Aase was attending the teacher's college there, and Kirsten worked in the library. One time later Jensen and I discussed that happenstance. We agreed that it was rather ironic about our daughters. First, they had chased us away from the frontier,

against our will. And now, they were both back down there. Yes, life's ways are sometimes curious.

A Meeting

I had traveled back to Rudbøl a number of times after we moved from there, as a tour leader to Tønder-Rudbøl-Højer, sometimes for the historical society, sometimes for the older classes at Søvind. But I had never chanced to meet anyone in Rudbøl that I had known when we lived there.

On June 12, 1979, I was out there with the sixth and seventh grades and four teachers. The tour bus parked by the inn, and we walked over to see that remarkable border. On the way, we walked past several houses with neat gardens. In one of these an elderly gray-haired man was working on clipping his garden hedge. I could not resist. I walked over to him and asked, "Did you perhaps know a teacher named Mikkelsen, who worked here in Rudbøl fifty-some years ago?" He looked at me, smiled, stuck out his hand, and said, "Yes, of course, hello." I did not recognize him and so had to ask him his name. It was Hans Nielsen, who had lived in one of the houses by the border, one of our best Danish homes. His mother was a war widow. He was the oldest of my students, and the first one confirmed. What a surprise! Heuneche started the tape recorder, and the children listened. They probably all thought it was most remarkable that this gray-haired man had been one of my students.

But we had to walk further on to the border. On the way back the children wanted to stop at the ice cream shop, and then I got a long talk with Hans, and much information on old students. I promised to stop in, if I returned to Rudbøl later. He asked me: "How old are you?" "I am eighty-four." "Well, I will be seventy my next birthday." He was born in 1909. It had been fifty-two years since we had last seen each other.

June 1979

Later Photographs:

This photograph was taken on April 21, 1981, at the school in Søvind. Left to right: Mikkelsen's son-in-law, Ingolf Berg, Mikkel R. Mikkelsen, Mikkel's daughter Inga Berg. (Photo by J. Iversen)

This photograph of the Rudbøl Danish School building, built in 1923, was taken in 1988 looking south. The school was in operation from 1923 to ca. 1970. (Photo by J. Iversen)

This photograph of the Danish School building was taken in 1988, looking west. The photograph shows that the road and building are built on a berm, significantly higher than the adjacent marshland. The German School, built in 1882, is to the right. (Photo by J. Iversen)