The Fjord
- A Long Row Home

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Norwegian: English

å ro: (verb) to row; *ro* (noun): state of calm, tranquillity.

FOREWORD

Hello, my name is Sigri and I need an old wooden rowboat. I want to row inland on the Sognefjord, and I want to row slowly.

For thousands of years, the fjord has been our thoroughfare. People rowed and sailed along the precipitous fjord walls, through a landscape that has been singled out as one of the most spectacular travel destinations in the world.

In addition to being the longest fjord in Norway, and the second longest in the world – the Sognefjord is also the deepest fjord on earth. It was created by glaciers over the course of millions of years.

And I want to tell the story of all this while I am rowing. Of the vessels and people who have travelled these waters throughout the ages – about currents and winds and what takes place above and below the water surface.

Is the fjord in good health?

I want to ask questions and gather facts and stories from people who know the fjord.

But why do I want to do this, what does this long fjord have to do with me?

I spent part of my childhood in Eivindvik, a tiny village located where the Sognefjord meets the sea. My mother was the vicar and I was a little big sister. We ran in the mountains and fished in the ocean.

I now live part of the year on an isolated apple farm in Luster, at the innermost point of the same fjord. My husband lives there and in Svalbard – and a bit in Oslo was well, where my children also live.

Every second week I must let go of my boys, when I commute to the west, to the fjords and the mountains and to the north.

So, if anyone asks where I come from, or where I live, I don't really know how to answer.

I am constantly doing the splits, torn between a guilty conscience and the feeling of something that is perhaps homesickness quivering through my body. Because where do I really belong?

The more the world and I seem to be hanging by a thread, the more important it feels to breathe within a landscape I once knew, feel the wind, look towards the ocean, lift the oars and get to know the rest of the fjord, to find home before time runs out on me, or something like that. I am unable to explain it any better now.

So now, I must row. At least, I must try to row the two hundred kilometres inland from the village of Eivindvik to Luster.

But am I strong enough to row all the way there? Will I manage to find a connection between my own story and that of the Sognefjord? Will I find peace of mind?

I have no idea. This is an experiment.

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Actually, I need more than a boat. I need a crew. And a rowing machine to build up my muscles.

All summer long I search for old wooden rowboats in good condition – I have written to different boatyards and inquired whether they have one for sale.

"I need a rowboat," I say to my mother.

"Okay, well, do you want the Oselvar?" she asks.

An Oselvar is a wooden boat from Western Norway. My mother's has two sets of oars, a mast, a sail, and a rudder. Every spring throughout my entire childhood she has tended and sanded and oiled this old boat. Every summer, she launched it, rowed and sailed it – and every autumn she brought it back onto land. I accompanied her in the boat a few times but was not particularly interested. I don't deserve it, but perhaps I can borrow it for a while.

I say that I want to row the full length of the Sognefjord.

"That sounds nice, but do you know how to row?" my mother asks. "Do you enjoy it?"

I don't know what to say. And then it is autumn.

1

BEFORE THE JOURNEY – A WINTER MISSIVE or: ROWING FAST AND POUTING IN THE SITTING ROOM

It is completely normal to ask people where they live and where they come from. I do it myself, all the time, it's not meant to be rude, it is something we do to get to know one another – and to push people into boxes in our heads. I am forty-five years old and have had twenty-three different addresses in my life and I have never lived alone.

Last summer it was one of my neighbours in Luster who said: "We are only newcomers, but we are very happy here all the same," and I got fixated on these words: "newcomers" and "all the same". I puzzled over them and thought: Well, so that's what I have been my whole life, even though I haven't ever really thought about that word.

Newcomer.

My mother and father were newcomers in Oslo. My mother was a student, my father doing his residency in Nittedal. I was born in eastern Norway, lived at different addresses, then moved to Bergen, different addresses there. A newcomer when mother got a job in Eivindvik, different houses there, moved back to Bergen, and so on, by myself to Drammen, to Tromsø, to Bergen, to Oslo, different addresses there. Then to Longyearbyen, where pretty much everyone is a newcomer, a newcomer in Oslo again, where it is also a bit of a melting pot. Up to Longyearbyen, the children were born while we were living there the second time, they say that's where they come from. Then a newcomer in Oslo again, a new address, a newcomer in Luster and on the apple farm. Then the commuting, doing the splits. One week here, and one week there.

I feel a bit at home everywhere and on the way between these places. For how many generations must a person have permanently resided somewhere in order to be able to say that's where they come from, that's where they belong? Is it possible to belong to more than one place?

NOVEMBER

The delivery of the rowing machine has been delayed. It is now November 14th, and the machine that I ordered in August has still not arrived. I did an extensive Google search before I made up my mind, because there are many different types and there are training programmes – and detailed outlines of the muscles used when you row correctly.

It has been raining the entire autumn. If I were superstitious, I might wonder whether it is raining so much because I hung up a picture of a sixareen on the kitchen wall in Oslo, a rowboat with three sets of oars. In the picture it is raining – it is from a job I had in Solund – and I am rowing the set of oars in the middle.

DECEMBER

Since my ex-husband, the father of my children, had emergency surgery last summer, bad news has continued to drip in all autumn long. The malignant tumours are too numerous and large to eradicate. But fortunately, they are growing slowly. I can't or don't want to write much about this, but it feels like a brick in my chest.

The rowing machine has still not arrived. And what am I thinking, that rowing will give me peace, isn't that naive, verging on hogwash?

JANUARY

On January 7th, the rowing machine finally arrives. It is in the sitting room in two huge cardboard boxes.

"How did you manage to get all of that home with you?" my eldest son asks.

He firmly believes that he is stronger than me.

"Do you want to arm wrestle? Now? Get ready to go down!"

He slams my right hand into the kitchen table with the ease of breaking wind.

Here in Oslo, we live in sixty-five square meters in an eleven story, high-rise apartment building which I call Bird Mountain. People flutter in and out of the doorways, usually returning home to sleep at night. Birds and people sit on the balconies, we can see houses and the sky and cars and people and dogs and all the way to the Holmenkollen ski jump and the Oslo fjord. 52,327 people live in this district of Oslo, 3856,1 people per square kilometre.

When we moved into Bird Mountain, I thought this was a compromise and something temporary, but this is now the address where I have lived the longest in my life. And there is a lot here that is good, running hot water, a dishwasher, the daily newspaper delivered to our door, a grocery store nearby. The fjord and the forest and nice people. Mainly moderate weather conditions. And of course: most importantly – it is unnecessary to write that that's what they are – the children. When they are with me, I am home.

It is neither the case that you get stuck for five hours in rush hour traffic when you drop them off at school and football practice, the way many people think. And the trash talk about Oslo which those who live elsewhere carry on with, imagine if someone were to speak that way about somebody else's hometown: How can you live there? Isn't it awful?

Oslo never strikes back; it just turns the other cheek. Still, I need a bit more, excuse me Oslo, mountains a bit taller, fjords a bit deeper, a bit fewer people. And when you come right down to it, I have the opportunity to have that: to leave when the children are staying with their father across the road.

But not now. My ex-husband will undergo surgery in January, so children will stay with me for the next few months. The corona virus is mutating, the world is hanging by a thread and I take it all in, shivering inside myself over all the natural diversity that is disappearing and ever new and disturbing climate reports and how several people in my close circle of friends are seriously depressed and seriously ill. My favourite uncle dies, a few more bricks are loaded into my chest, I become more sensitive, especially about how the children are doing, but I can't write much about them either.

So, can I in any sense justify a three-week-long rowing trip this year?

I evaluate myself and my life and the chaos and the people around me. It feels as if the more the world becomes unhinged, the more I want to row. It is irrational. Or isn't it?

I don't have enough contact with other adults, have no possibility to laugh off all my demons.

I assemble the rowing machine on January 10th. It takes me several hours. The machine is black metal with a white wooden frame. It has a seat and a handle attached to a solid strap. And then there is a huge drum which I fill up with actual water. I have cleared space in the sitting room and can push it up against the wall when I'm not using it – it's nice. I row for ten minutes, am supposed to take it easy at first, learn the technique.

"Rowing is a very nice natural movement and most people pick it up quickly. Have someone watch you row and compare your body positions with those on the video below. Don't pull too hard on the oars until you feel comfortable with the technique," it says on the internet.

Arms outstretched, straighten your legs first, then pull the oars to your chest. Splish, splash.

My husband has left for Svalbard and will stay there until the end of April.

In January I row almost every day. I push off. Try to find a rhythm. Slowly at first. Then a bit more quickly. Splish, splash, and oh, what a feeling. On the website it says that I am now activating all the large muscle groups: thighs, buttocks, abdomen, back, shoulders, shins and lats, whatever they are. It also says that I am now producing a large amount of lactic acid and that is good and that this is low-impact exercise, gentle on the knees and ankles. I close my eyes. Stretch out my legs. Pull the handle.

Hear the splashing. Try to picture the fjord. Waves. The mountains around me. The opening towards the ocean.

And then I see my husband clearly, standing on the dock at the innermost point of the fjord, with open arms, welcoming me home. I am naive, I guess. But I need air and I need to land somewhere.

Then I begin my research. I read about fish and Viking ships and the conditions on the floor of the fjord.

On January 29, I speak to my husband on the phone about the farm we have in Luster and the apple trees that need pruning and about a summer café we run together with a chef, about when we are going to open, and practical details and how we must procure a refrigerated counter. He wonders whether it is necessary to row the entire length of the fjord, if it wouldn't be enough to row a shorter distance. My husband tells me about the northern lights and the new wood stove he has ordered.

"When are you coming north?" he asks.

I do another stint of rowing. Notice that my body is changing. I watch a suitably bad television series with an extremely clean conscience. It is underrated, sweating oneself into fitness to the tune of the messy lives of others, taking a break from one's own.

The water splashes and I am rowing so hard that one of my shoulders starts to hurt. Though I know my body is susceptible to tendinitis, I am unable to calm down. Snow is falling outside my window.

FEBRUARY

I speak to my husband over the phone again. He wonders whether I know what it takes to row the entire length of the fjord. I ask myself the same question. In the middle of February, I realize that either way, I can't be away from the children for three weeks straight the way things are now, so there may not be a rowing trip this year. Maybe I will have to splash around in my own little bubble here in the sitting room for yet another season, good luck.

The days have a heaviness about them, an unfamiliar gravity. I have been too light-hearted and too secure in my light-heartedness over the years, I suppose. Now the gravity is here, sitting beside me at breakfast and hanging out with me all day long.

Everything I had actually planned to do has been cancelled, but I still don't have a moment to catch my breath, what with home-schooling and home office and breakfast, lunch and dinner, and

bedtime snacks at the same kitchen table. I sleep poorly, yearn for low mountains that don't steal the horizon, low tree lines, and then nothing but ocean as far as the eye can see. When I write it like that, it sounds like Eivindvik. I read and read until my eyes water, about old wooden boats and clinker boat building and all the words turn into a mush. My husband sends a message saying that he misses me. I write back that I miss him as well.

I got my first permanent job as a journalist in a large Norwegian national newspaper when I was twenty-four years old. My mother was visiting in Oslo and asked: "Is that how you want to spend your time and energy?"

I have made a living by writing for my entire adult life and now I ask myself: Is this really how I want to spend my time and energy?

On February 19th, I think there is no need for more words – that everyone writes, and that everything is writing. That the words have lost their power. I have spent the past year writing in different genres about nature and people, trying to ask questions with genuine curiosity and approach an answer to how everything is and how it is all connected. But why should I write, if it doesn't improve things, if the words don't have an impact, don't solve anything, don't help make sense out of things or heal people?

Now I just want to row. Lift the oars, be in movement, turn off the noise, put the troubles and sadness on hold. Just row. Slowly. Not give a damn about whether what I write becomes a text worthy of publication or just drivel. Sit in that rowboat on the fjord and let it rain and blow and splash. Look at the ocean and the mountains and the waves and get wet and warm and tired. Really not give a damn about everything else I should do or ought to do. Find peace, peace in movement.

Is the rowing expedition an obsessive, idée fixe, something I am clinging to compulsively? Like other residents of industrialized nations who feel obliged to swim to the North Pole or run the New York City marathon naked to ease their internal turmoil? Is it a distraction, or is it me donning my oxygen mask first, so I can then be in a position to help others? I don't know.

I have seldom been alone. I have followed others a lot, moved and travelled wherever they wanted. It was often simpler that way and for me where I have been has not been all that important, as long as I could write and be with my little ones and have enough time outdoors and in movement. At least, that's how I like to think that it has been.

And even though this is my project, I don't fully trust myself now either. I don't want to row alone. I need people.

The past autumn and winter have left more lines in my forehead and grey streaks in my hair. I sit on the windowsill and am pathetic and attend to my inner state, but far too intently, the way one

absolutely should not do, my mouth set in a straight line, no make-up, the elastic waistline on my trousers loose below my wool singlet and the bricks in my chest. I am sickened by myself and all my brooding. I miss my husband and should probably find a proper job. I fry fishcakes without much enthusiasm.

MARCH

In the beginning of March, the spring sun shines on brown grass outside my window. And who would think that the spring sunshine could be so wonderful. It awakens me.

I have a good chat with my editor over the phone on March 5th. I say that I can't be away from my boys for several consecutive weeks now. I ask if we might perhaps divide up the rowing trip, do one stretch in the spring, one in the summer and one in the autumn? In that way I can capture several seasons and not overextend myself – this is not supposed to be about setting some kind of record or an athletic achievement. It is an experiment and it is supposed to proceed slowly and the answer is yes, that sounds like a good plan. I call my husband, ask if he will accompany me on the first stretch. He says yes, and I say yippee.

I read what I can find about the sloops of Western Norway called *Sognejekts* that sailed the fjord for hundreds of years.

In the middle of March I sleep well, laugh well, eat well, drink coffee and row hard in the sitting room. Then the good days come. I think I can manage most everything, not just rowing, but everything, writing and saving both a little bit of the world and those in the bubble around me. I can make sure that everyone is doing well, yes indeed, bring it on. I run to the store and buy ice cream for dessert, feeling like I have to celebrate my good spirits. I am grateful for days like this, when I also think that I belong and am home everywhere. The online encyclopaedia informs me that the words home and residence, in a purely legal sense, signify a place where one "regularly sleeps at night", so that must mean that I have a lexical basis for saying that I am home wherever I am, where my people are, where I am needed.

I lie down on the floor, and breathe deeply and slowly, emptying my thinking cap. That helps too.

I read that the main current running out of the Sognefjord is on the north side due to the earth's gravity. This means we must row inland on the south side. I look at the map, plan the route, and contact people. Both fjord people and experts. Two women I know from Svalbard are quick to respond. They have been on several long rowing trips on large bodies of water. They write that it is a good idea to wear ski gloves, to sit on padding to protect your behind, that it is important to have good

helpmates along the way, rowing is good for the body and soul and it is advisable to do it with someone with whom you can be playful. I have a number of names on my list, my husband, some girlfriends and maybe Daddy.

Roar Moe lives on a little island in Solund, at the mouth of the Sognefjord. He has lived alone there – except for some wild sheep – for almost thirty years. He is the one who owns the sixareen in the picture on the kitchen wall. The boat is named Morild and is more than 130 years old. Roar has a number of old boats – he knows how to row and knows what he's doing. I have interviewed him several times, so on March 23rd I call him and ask his advice about this trip. He says it can be difficult to find places to go ashore further inland. That there used to be an ingenious system along the fjord, with guest houses in convenient locations along the way, where you could find both a bed for the night and a stiff drink.

"It's quite a history," he says and talks about traffic on the fjord. From the *Sognjekt* sloops to the steamboats that arrived in the 19th century and then express boats and the world's longest tunnel. He warns me of complicated current conditions and that I must watch the wind, especially turbulent squalls.

"They are unpredictable and descend out of nowhere, down the side valleys," he says and continues with his guidance: "Pack your things in waterproof sacks," he says. "Think worst case scenario, headwinds, torrential rains. How will you get into land then?"

"What do I do if the boat starts to leak?"

"Waves and collisions can cause cracks. Most likely the leak will be in the seam, between the strakes. So, you must bring along some sealant, the best is to join the strakes using a screw and a piece of wood, but something synthetic, like Tec 7 can also do the trick. Bring along a little toolbox, maybe an axe. And an extra oar."

He says it is best to bring the boat up onto land when you're not rowing.

"That was what they did before. Brought the boats up out of the water whenever they weren't using them."

After talking with Roar, I row in the sitting room for one hour. I haven't done that before. At the dinner table I get my youngest to feel the muscles in my forearms.

"You can come with me," I say.

"I'll go with you if you pay me enough. What about one hundred quid an hour?" my eldest son says.

On March 27th, I take the train west to Bergen, wearing a mask. And the next day Mum and I drive to Hjelmås, to a boathouse on the Osterfjord, half an hour from the city. And there we see the Oselvar. It is radiant. Mum has sanded the inside, taken out floorboards and thwarts. I sand the outside of the boat, you are supposed sand lightly where it is varnished, and harder where there is green anti-fouling paint on the bottom. Anything loose has to be removed.

Mum talks about a guy in the village, in Eivindvik, asks if I remember him.

"Yes, of course, I'm not a child, I'm almost fifty," I say.

"How can a little mite like you be fifty?" Mum asks.

And these are pleasant hours. I sand and polish and get to know the boat. Mum has opened the doors of the boathouse, and we can see across the way where grandfather and grandmother had a cabin, and where my favourite uncle built himself a house, where we went swimming in the summertime and stayed up until late at night and ate sausages. Grandfather loved to row, to dip the oars in the water, listen for the blackbird, go fishing. And we were allowed to go with him.

There is a light drizzle. Mum and I have a pack of sandwiches and coffee. After our break, I do some more sanding, and then oil for a while, while Mum cleans up. Here there are paint buckets and planks and a sideboard from great-grandmother and old life vests.

"I have had plans for everything that you see here, but those plans did not all come to fruition," Mum says.

I know that I have a box or two in the attic of the boathouse. Since I have to wait for the boat to dry, I climb up the ladder and open one of the boxes with my name on it. Inside are letters, hundreds of letters, addressed to 5966 Eivindvik, from my favourite aunt in Hardanger who died far too young, and from my great aunt Bella and grandfather, and there are love letters and letters from my friend Mollen in Sogn, whom I hope we will visit on the rowing trip.

I dig deep into the box and read and dig and from the answers understand a bit of what I have written about, and it isn't trivialities, and great aunt Bella writes that she is grateful for all the goodness in life and for God.

I read aloud to Mum, who is still cleaning up below. I open one more box and one more box, where are my diaries from this time? I keep searching. I didn't know there were so many boxes. I had forgotten about them. I probably thought I would retrieve them when life settled down, when I had a home of my own, or a cellar, maybe I have never moved away from home?

"How many boxes are there?" Mum asks.

"Six!" I shout.

"Six? That's a lot! Maybe I should start charging you rent," she says.

"I wonder if my life is actually here, stowed away in boxes, my entire life from zero to twenty years of age." I say.

"Good thing we stopped by then," Mum says.

In the evening Daddy shows me a picture that is hanging in the hallway. Of my great-great grandfather, who was from Flåm in Indre Sogn. He is sitting in a rowboat.

The next day, March 29th, Mum goes into the forest to clear brush and branches and I stay in the boathouse. I listen to a podcast while I apply the next coat of oil onto the Oselvar. Nina Jensen is a guest on the programme *Impetus*. She is a marine biologist and has worked for WWF, the worldwide nature fund, for many years. Now she works for the well-known Norwegian businessman Røkke, on a new, luxury marine research vessel.

"Under water, that's where I find the greatest peace," she says – there she finds something that engages her so much that nothing else matters.

"What is it about you and the ocean?" the radio host asks and Jensen replies that there is nothing more fantastic or more important than the ocean. She says that we all have some type of attraction to the ocean, and that is natural, because that was where life on this planet began.

The ocean gives us fifty percent of the oxygen we breathe, she claims. It regulates the climate. It is the workplace of hundreds of millions of people. It provides vital proteins for more than two billion people. This is an enormous source of inspiration – still Jensen's words. She also believes that the solutions for very many of the challenges humankind faces today can be found in the ocean, whether it's a matter of medicine, biofuel, energy, food. So, it's not hard to understand, this, she says, why one becomes interested in the ocean. It is the most important thing we have.

And as I continue oiling and finish one side of the boat and move the bucket to the other side, she explains that only twenty percent of the ocean floor has been explored so far. She believes that there are important connections and solutions lying there waiting for us. Is that true for the fjord, as well?

I hope we can leave for Eivindvik the first week of May.

APRIL

Now I am back in Oslo. I receive a tip about a guy who is rowing up along the Norwegian coastline in an Oselvar this spring. I write and ask for his advice. Arne Kristoffersen has just passed Florø and responds that there are many opinions in the wooden boat community, and it you ask ten enthusiasts for advice, you will receive eleven different answers. He nonetheless warns me not to row too hard. The faster you row, the greater the water resistance, so there is nothing to be gained by putting more force in your strokes. A rowboat will glide nicely at 2.5 knots, but you will waste a lot of your strength if you want to row at 3.5 knots, in his opinion. It is better to increase the frequency or length of your strokes, he maintains. Kristoffersen tells me about the website Barentswatch.no and the app Windy – to monitor the weather and wind and wave conditions – and to eat regularly, so you don't row yourself out. All the same, his most important tip is to take it easy. Stop often. Enjoy the nature and wildlife. To overthink, analyse, plan or micromanage is inadvisable, he claims.

I send him another message, asking how so, what he means. He replies: "There is something symbolic about rowing. You look back at where you have been as you pull yourself forward. You gain a perspective that is different from when you are rushing ahead, your gaze fixed on what's in front of you. *Ro*, the Norwegian word for row, has several meanings, one of which is peace of mind. Just think about that expression. When you row, you gain peace of mind while you also row through your soul and reflect upon existential questions. I mean things like choices, relationships, events, but also the here and now. Nature, practical matters, planning, map reading, what I hear on the radio: the news, social problems, etc. After having been on this trip for almost two months, I notice that I am sleeping better, my thoughts are clearer, I meet people with greater openness and notice details more. Nature is good for you."

I take him at his word. Stop overthinking things. Start looking forward to it.

I write down more tips. That you should pull hardest on the oars mid-stroke; that's when the oar-stroke is the most effective. That it is the back and thighs that you use the most, the arms only ten percent. And that it is wise to check the tides and row with the current.

Mum calls on April 9th. She is on her way to buy more rope for the rowlocks, to hold the oars in place. It is alternately hailing and sunny out in the west, Mum says. I practise bowline knots at home on Bird Mountain, a knot that comes in handy for mooring. My eldest son tries out the rowing machine in the sitting room. He can do one hundred press-ups, keeps eating and growing.

"When I am taller than you, you can never yell at me again," he says.

"Oh really, is that how it is?" I say and notice how happy I am about my children, that they came, that they exist. They ground me.

On April 16th, I receive a photo on my phone from my youngest brother. He and Mum are my good helpmates and have launched the Oselvar. And because wood swells when it becomes wet, the

seams close, the boat takes up, as they say. The next day they go rowing in the Osterfjord. I receive more photos, in one of them the sail is up, the reddish-brown sail.

I speak to Mum on the phone and tell her that someone I spoke with thinks it a provocation that I am going to row an Oselvar inland on the fjord, that it should be a *sognebåt*, the type of traditional rowboat formerly used in these parts.

"You have to liberate yourself from the folklore police. Nobody cares about such things. In the old days, you made do with what you had, did what you could, and that's still how it is. National romanticism belongs on a canvas," Mum says.

The weather explodes with the warmth of spring and I go for a walk without wearing a hat. My brother sends me selfies from the boat.

My sister calls on April 26th. Her voice on the line is fearful.

"What am I doing here?" she asks. She lives in Sunnmøre with four children and her husband – and she is missing a sense of roots. She is longing for Bergen, we have one root there. We lived there both before and after we lived in Eivindvik, in the house that great grandfather and great grandmother bought and which has a view over the whole city and is old and white. Grandmother and grandfather built a house beside it, in the same yard. Mum and dad live in Bergen now, but we five children live in different cities and villages and countries. Several of my siblings have lived in Bergen from time to time with their families – my youngest brother lives there now. I have lived far away from there ever since I moved twenty-five years ago, but every time I visit, it feels a little bit like home. There as well.

"Or are roots something we take with us?" I ask. "Like a tiny strawberry plant that can be transplanted and grow somewhere else," I say.

"Yes, but how long does it take?" she asks.

"It can take a few years," I say.

"But what if the plant doesn't thrive? Even though one has done one's best and it still refuses to raise its head and produce strawberries, what do you do then? Do you have to wait for generations?"

I miss my sister, want to console her, but we laugh instead and afterwards I row. Row hard and fast in my own sitting room.

My husband returns from Svalbard. He has sorted all the gear we need for the trip and confirms that he will accompany me on the first stretch, even though he's busy with the farm and the summer café and everything that needs to be done. Thank God.

My husband is a former businessman who broke up with Oslo, moved to Svalbard and reschooled himself to become an Arctic nature guide. Now he is a kind of seasonal worker, part apple farmer, part guide in northern and western Norway, along with the work at the café and some work in Oslo. His children are older than mine, so he is free to travel wherever he likes.

He turns on the electronic kilometre counter on the rowing machine and sits down to row.

Now our bird house is full, overflowing with outdoor gear, football cleats and sportswear, the air thick with testosterone – and I like it that way. And that everyone is under the same roof, then I am spared having to miss anyone.

We row one session a day, start checking the weather forecast for the day I hope we will cast off from Eivindvik, Tuesday, May 4th.

My husband talks to his mother. She is worried about us and about the trip, that it will be too long, too difficult.

"Remember you are supposed to run a café this summer!" she says.

We make lists of what we have and what we need: food for one week, sleeping bags, a ground cloth, tent, tarpaulin, camping stove, mess kit, matches, thermoses, coffee filters, coffee pot, coffee, a basin, dishwashing liquid, dishwashing brush, cups, flatware, a water jug, fishing line, raingear, sou'westers, woollens, a change of clothing, different kinds of gloves, hat, scarf, towel, swimsuit, sunglasses, sunblock, knife, rope, first aid kit, tape, a bailer, toolkit (screws, board, screwdriver, Tec7 sealant), axe, saw, fenders, life vest, map, compass, GPS, binoculars, anchor, extra rope, bucket, package of batteries, toilet paper, handiwipes, some toiletries and waterproof baggies and crates.

I go to Alnabru on April 27th to buy Tec7 sealant, and the man standing in front of me in the click and collect queue has rowed from Kragerø to Arendal in a *færing*, an open boat with two pairs of oars. He mostly rows for the exercise, he says. I tell him I absolutely do not row for the exercise, but for all the other benefits, but receive a piece of advice anyway:

"Keep switching between different types of gloves, then your grip will vary and this will help prevent a repetitive stress injury."

"Thanks," I say and smile in the cold spring sunshine.

My husband talks to an acquaintance in Luster. The acquaintance wonders whether we are aware that an express boat travels the fjord. My husband laughs and says he is planning sneak an outboard motor into the boat.

Dad calls. He thinks we don't need extra oars. We will have three oars even if one is broken, and we can make our way to land with that. That sounds sensible to me. The more kilos there are on board, the more strenuous the rowing will be. He and Mum prepare the boat.

The last day of April I receive an MMS from Mum with a photograph of a yellow chamber pot she thinks we should bring. She and my youngest brother have cast off in the Osterfjord. The two of them and one more person are going to row and sail the Oselvar to Eivindvik. My husband and I pack and check off items on the lists and have spread all the gear and clothing and food across the floor of the sitting room in Bird Mountain.

In the west there has been sun for weeks, they are using it all up – please sun, can you stay in the sky until we arrive, until Monday, Tuesday?

We do our best to be ready so we will make it in time for the sunshine. My ex-husband and aunt and grandmother who live nearby help out, and it looks like we will be able to leave one day earlier than planned. I am afraid to check the weather forecast, but do it anyway, and torrential rain is forecast for Monday. Is that any way to start out, by getting soaking wet?

Can we stand water, my husband and I? If something goes wrong, will we manage to row into shore?

I am impatient. Enough already, enough now of all this salty, shiver-me-timbers jibber jabber and loose ends. It's time to get going.

On May 2nd, my husband and I drive out of Oslo. It starts raining.

2

SPRING BY THE SEA

Is it true that everyone longs? Not every day, maybe, but now and then. Perhaps the longing is for a city or a village or a country far away where you normally don't spend time, to the north, to the south, the east or out west?

Perhaps you grew up there or one of your parents is from there, and you have spent holidays there as a child and grown fond of precisely these mountains, streets, forests, islands, beaches. Perhaps you can't go there any longer, and there can be many reasons for this, but you have many memories associated with precisely these rocks and crags by the sea, and so they perhaps become the most beautiful, wholly objectively speaking, the most beautiful on earth, so beautiful even that it defies all reason.

And then you get older and your body has more room for nostalgia. Can it grow stronger then, this longing, this pull? Or perhaps not at all. Perhaps you want never to return, not even on holiday.

My family moved from Bergen to Eivindvik when I was nine years old and back to Bergen the summer I turned eighteen.

We have never had family there and those I spent the most time with don't live there any longer, so I have just been there a few times since we moved away in 1993. Once I was invited there to talk about my books. Another time my husband came with me. It was summer and we walked up the path behind the clearing called Krossteigen and past the Water Company towards Høgefjell mountain. We passed crooked ridges in the landscape and it felt as if the path and the ridges and the view comprised something authentic, something primal, the way everything is and should be, a kind of baseline condition that mustn't be altered, the way everything is in childhood.

But when my husband asked me later if we should move here, I didn't want to. It could be because of the rain, or because I have no family here, or because so much has changed after all, or that I am someone else now, done with being the vicar's daughter?

Almost all the cells and thoughts in my body have been replaced since we ran with daddy up the paths, on the rocks, in the mountains, in the rain and sun and wind to write our names in small guest books kept in preserving jars on stone markers on the different mountaintops. If we managed to earn fifty points, we won a cup from the athletics club in the autumn.

The treeline elevation is low, so we could see north to Solund, and we could see the Sognefjord inland, to the east. A bit to the northeast there are smooth rock slopes on the shoreline, we used to take the boat there when it was hot and summer. Behind the school are some farms where mum would send us. I had to take part in the cow milking and mucking of stalls; we were not allowed to be the kind of city kids who wrinkled their noses at the smell of manure. I pointed out the school when I was walking here with my husband and told him about my first day.

It was spring and there were seven children standing nicely in a row outside the classroom. The teacher came walking over carrying her huge set of keys. She was wearing a striped skirt and had short, grey hair, and introduced everyone, explaining that Monica came to school on a boat, that Anita came by bus, but that Lena lived in Eivindvik. Then she ruffled the hair of one of the boys and said: "And this curly-head here, his name is 'Pitte' Daniel."

Petter Daniel was my neighbour, Hege's brother. I spent a lot of time with Hege. She was a year older than me and played keeper on our football team.

I had moved away from the city of Bergen and my grandparents and siblings and a school with parallel classes. I asked my Norwegian language teacher if I could write in *bokmål*, which I had spoken and written in Bergen. *Bokmål* is one of the two official Norwegian languages. The other is called *nynorsk*, "New Norwegian", and is based on the many dialects spoken in the countryside.

"No," he said. "You can't. Here we write *nynorsk*."

So that's what I did. I listened to how the others talked and tried to imitate it when I wrote. I started speaking with affectation and looking down on the city people when they invaded the village in the summertime.

Høgefjell Mountain is 396 meters above sea level. And there we can see out past all the small islands and all the way to the ocean. When I see the ocean, I understand how much and how fervently I have missed it. It's the same every time, that I don't take it seriously until I actually see it in front of me. It is like a shock to my entire system.

"Maybe we can take a walk in the mountains before we start tomorrow?" I ask as we drive west.

"Maybe we should focus on the rowing. On managing that," my husband says.

He is right, of course, and it keeps raining when we cross the old county border into what used to be Sogn and Fjordane. Gulen municipality is all mountains and islets and skerries and some small, narrow fjords, located at the mouth of the Sognefjord, between the Fensfjord and the Sognesjøen strait. It is raining in the village of Instefjord, raining in Brekke, raining in Takle and Bålen, and stops raining in Ruledal.

The road we are driving on has become even narrower since back when we used to drive here because we were going to run cross country or had football practice. There were girls from the entire municipality on the team. Some of them were older, and some were younger and even so we failed to put together more than one team of nine players. I think we were good. We drove this way to church in Brekke too. And if we were going to 4H camp or on a marching band trip somewhere else in the county.

I tell my husband all of this, babbling away and understand that perhaps that not all these details are of equal interest, or is it more that I should have told him about this differently, more like a story?

ARRIVAL IN CHILDHOOD

We drive along the Sognesjøen strait and past the town of Dingja. This road was put in after I moved. The sky to the northwest is yellow and the ocean is calm. We look out at the ocean where, if all goes as planned, we will be rowing tomorrow. We used to come here on the motorboat. We went swimming when the sun was shining, fishing when it rained: mackerel and cod – and throwaway coalfish, too. Daddy put out crab-pots. We reach Grønevika and Solleibotn, we drive past a new housing development and then we have arrived. In Eivindvik.

Norway's national bard, Henrik Wergeland, travelled the coastal route to Eivindvik in the summer of 1832 and wrote a poem entitled "Eivindvig", which I grew up with and had to learn by heart. I recite a few lines that I still remember:

"Down with the sail! In from the Sea!

Where buried beneath the Grain,

Eivindvig silently dreams!"

And now I can start explaining about the fjord and the people and everything that is and was. Because we are driving through the village, past Krossteigen, named after an old stone cross that St. Olaf is said to have put up there, in conjunction with Norway's conversion to Christianity. And many would also hold that the old Gulating, the first legislative assembly in Norway, was located here, while others claim that the assembly was located several kilometres away in Flolid.

If you just look at the map, you will see it, that Eivindvik is a safe harbour on a crossroads on the coastline. So back when the fjord and ocean constituted a thoroughfare, the region was a hub for everyone coming from the east and out of the fjord – or from the north on the way to Bergen.

That is also why they assembled as the Gulating, all arms-bearing, free men, to resolve disputes, write laws and discuss how best to defend and build the nation. People came sailing and rowing from all directions. The countryside divided people, the ocean united them.

There is evidence suggesting that people had gathered here long before the year 900 – and continued to do so, up until the Gulating was moved to Bergen in the 14th century.

The Gulating Law is the oldest preserved body of laws in the Nordic region. Iceland used the Gulating Law as a model when they formed their parliament, the Althing, in the year 930, the oldest surviving parliament in the world.

We drive past the church in Eivindvik where Mum was the vicar. The spring of my confirmation she wore a white vicar's robe covering her big stomach, where my youngest brother was growing. I'd had my hair permed and looked like a sheep. And the church and the mountains around it are still there, even though a lot has changed since I left. Everyone my age moved away in all directions after comprehensive school, into bedsits located far away to attend upper secondary school. Some came back and some have passed away. It is overwhelming, everything that has happened, the new housing development, the boy who kissed me in year eight has long since become a grandfather, that someone who went to 4H with me, has married my teacher, that someone who moved became an actor and another a pop star. And all these people who still exist as older versions of themselves, it's not to be believed, but I haven't been here, so I guess my body hasn't taken it in. There is a twenty-

eight-year-old hole here that I don't really know how to fill. What am I doing here? Am I searching for weak spots that can explain why life hasn't been as I'd expected?

There are many people looking for cuts and picking off the scabs, digging deep into childhood, with words and revisions, often with the help of a psychologist, until it all becomes larger or smaller or exactly as it was, or at least a story to tell or an explanation.

I can easily find glimpses of myself I don't like both then and later, that have shaped me. But does that make sense out of everything? Does it change anything to break our memories into pieces, throw them up into the air and then try to put them together again?

We drive past the new vicarage where we lived during the last year. I have a clear memory of mum and the Oselvar in the garage there. It is spring and she is wearing a brown corduroy dress and a headscarf and a big smile and has a pregnant tummy. She is standing in the boat; she is stripping it.

Now the same Oselvar is bobbing on the water against a lustrous sunset not so far from here, by a floating pier in that which was my childhood.

We park the car and walk down to take a look at the boat.

"Is that one there the one we are going to row?" my husband asks, implying that it's a tiny tadpole of a boat.

He is six foot five and has broad shoulders. Mum has left a green bag in the boat containing things she thinks we will need: there is a package of sugar biscuits, a chisel to hammer into rocks for mooring purposes and a green tarp. And the yellow chamber pot.

It is so quiet now that the thought of casting off is tempting. On the mirror-like surface, into the sunset, out into the strait. Should we do it – would we make it to Dingja before dark?

We decide that we need to sleep. It is going to rain tomorrow and then the wind will be from the northwest. If we have any luck, we will have a bit of a tailwind when we pass Solleibotn. Monday night the wind direction is going to change and we will have a headwind, of variable force, but then it is not the wind alone that will determine how this goes. It depends on the currents and skerries and the chemistry between us, and the rain, this rain.

We spend the night in a cabin in the yard of a friend of my sister. She has three children and a husband working on the North Sea and the boat is moored by their floating pier. And I say a thousand, million thanks. She says have a nice trip and I am grateful and tired and fall asleep almost immediately in my sleeping bag.

"I forgot my toothbrush. Do we otherwise have control over everything we're supposed to have control over?" my husband asks.

"I don't know," I say.

This is my project, but I want it to be ours. I need him with me. I can't do this without him now.

EIVINDVIK–BREIDVIKA

May 3rd

I dream about rain and waves rising a meter tall in the strait and that Mum is here. When I wake up, it is silent, not a single gust of wind. What kind of miracle is this? It is not raining, either. We eat a little something and get dressed, long underwear, wool socks, thin wool underneath, hats and scarves and solid gloves. I put on a yellow and black storm suit I have borrowed from my mother. Put the life vest on over it. We walk down to the floating pier and load the boat with everything we think we will need to manage in the next few days: food and coffee and tools, padded groundsheets to sit on, so our behinds don't get sore. We have a couple of waterproof boxes that will float if we should capsize – and we have red duffel bags packed with clothing, a tent and our sleeping bags. We try to balance the boat. Distribute the baggage between the front and back and put what we will need along the way in the middle, such as water bottles and a bag of nuts and a pack lunch and a thermos of coffee. The plan is to row five to six days and see how far we get. I hope we will maybe make it to Søreide in Høyanger, or maybe even to Ortnevik. We have some acquaintances along the way whom we can contact if it suits us, and otherwise we can use the tent.

We row the few meters over to the quay and the store. I worked at the store the summer I turned eighteen, my last summer here, right before I met my ex-husband. If the person I was back then had come riding down to the quay on her red bicycle now, I would have stopped her and had a serious talk with her. I buy sweet buns which smell delicious, two packages of potato pancakes, a loaf of bread and a toothbrush while my husband watches the boat.

Then I step on board again, and we glide out, away from the quay, out into the strait. I sit in the back. It doesn't work. Our oars collide.

"There will be arguments. Hefty arguments, you can just write that down in your little book," my husband says.

The oars collide again.

We switch places. I sit in the front and it feels better. Now I can see his broad back and the church and the store and my classmate and friend Lena's house and her neighbour Ståle's place. I can see Krossteigen and the old vicarage and the small craft port where our motorboat was docked. And the old house, the first place we lived here, and behind it, Hege and Petter Daniel's house.

This village was home during some very important years. I catch a glimpse of myself running up to Hege, riding our bicycles up the steep hill on our way home from practice, hanging out by the harbour, walking out on the thinnest planks on the floating pier, jumping in and making waves.

I feel home here, here as well, but don't dare say it aloud, almost don't dare think it. It feels like I don't have a right to because I have hardly been here at all since I moved away. Since we have no family here.

I don't see a soul. Both Flolidfjellet and the other mountains loom behind the store and the quay. We glide silently out into the strait, Prestesundet.

I am unable to follow the rhythm or my thoughts, but it feels as is something has lifted the winter out of my shoulders. I feel so light and we have departed, we are on our way. My husband is with me. This is happening, we are rowing, sitting back to front with a view straight into the stage set of everything that was and the rest of the world is fuzzy, far away. And I think it is a paradox, that my uneasiness brought me here, to sit on a thwart and lift the oars, to row. It could be that there is something good about uneasiness, too, a force that can move us forward.

I try to concentrate. It is clear that my husband knows how to do this, but what about me? Can I actually row?

The oars feel different in my hands from the handles on the rowing machine – they are rough and the sound they make in the water is different from the familiar splashing in the sitting room. I try to think about what I have learned: not to lift the oars too high and neither plunge them too deeply into the water. To pull the hardest mid-stroke. The oars are heavy. Two of them are longer than the other two. Should I have the longest oars when I am sitting in the front?

My husband turns and says I must stay in rhythm. And except for the mumbling and growling from the rower in the back, it is so quiet. Quiet on the water, quiet in the village, quiet in the surrounding mountains.

There is no snow left here so close to the ocean. The spring has begun to paint the trees green, it smells like spring, but there is still a slight chill in the air. I tug my hat down over my ears, smiling to myself. I wonder if anyone sees or hears us. If anyone recognizes the boat.

TRANSPORT FOR THE VICAR AND A PUBLIC HOUSE

I have a direct view of the white office building below the church where Mum works. The office is located in the former vicarage, where the dean Niels Griis Alstrup Dahl lived in his day. Dahl was the stuff of legends. He modernized agriculture, built schools and roads, organized smallpox vaccinations throughout the entire district of Ytre Sogn, took care of the poor, and donated books to a library, just to mention a few of his contributions. He was the first mayor of the municipality and went to Eidsvoll as a representative to the Norwegian Storting in 1814, 1828, 1829, and 1830. He also travelled around to visit the churches and his people – and he was rowed or sailed everywhere he went.

Those in the employ of the church or the king had the right to transport. The duty to provide transport went into effect in 1648 and citizens took turns carrying it out. Mountain and inland farmers transported the mail and passengers along trails and cart roads, while almost all of the transport along the coast and fjord landscape was by sea, up until the 1930s.

So the fisher-farmers who were in the middle of a harvest or fishing in remote parts, had to come home to provide transport. If they did not report for duty, they had to pay a fine. This was not a particularly fair system and had the greatest impact on those who lived adjacent to transport routes. In 1816 a new law was passed. Those in the employ of the king and the church still had the right to transport, but now they would have to pay for it. In 1890, a rower was paid NOK .09/kilometre. After 1896, the rate was raised to NOK .15, contingent upon fulfilment of certain conditions.

The vicar in particular was on the move a great deal. Some places the farmers paid a fee so the vicar could retain his own rowers.

And when we were living in Eivindvik, there was still an express boat that transported Mum around and out to the islands – there were still no connecting roads or bridges – and back again. To Byrknesøy, to Mjømna. I remember the trip, how quiet it was out to the end of the sound and then full speed ahead, with the wind in my hair.

In 1823, Bishop Jakob Neumann arrived to visit the dean, Dahl, in Eivindvik. He was on a long journey throughout Sogn and Sunnfjord this year. He was transported around in a semi-covered vessel called a *vengbåt*, which had a cabin in the back of the boat, offering shelter from the wind and rain. There were ten rowers and a coxswain on board. If the winds were favourable, they could sail 120 kilometres in a day and if there was no wind, they might still row fifty-sixty kilometres, or around thirty nautical miles, which is the most common unit for measuring distance at sea. A nautical mile is equivalent to 1852 meters.

“A more comfortable form of travel does not exist,” Neumann wrote of the trip.

Nine years before, in 1814, representatives from Bergen who were headed to Eidsvoll and the national assembly spent three days travelling the 300 kilometres to Lærdal in precisely such a *vengbåt*. From there they continued east over the mountains.

It would take us more than three days. Much more, but then only two of us are rowing and we can’t exactly claim to be professionals.

I match my husband's rhythm, because I am sitting at the bow and see his oars, how they dip into the water, how he braces and pulls. I see his hands and I see the water disappearing along the gunwale. We have rowed a few kilometres now, or more precisely: a nautical mile, but I haven't been out at sea very much, so I will stick to kilometres. We have left the strait, Prestesundet and set our course to the right, starboard. And the rowing becomes smoother and smoother with every stroke. We have Hisarøy Island on the other side, the port side – and behind the island lie Hille and Glavær. There used to be a popular meeting place here, a public house they called Bondestova or Glaværstova. And it was not only the *jekt* sloop crews from the north and east who came here. Also the people from Sogn came with their wares which they would trade for fish from the people of the sea. And from these encounters came many stories, about trade – and about beer and drinking and fighting.

In Gulen alone it is said there were five such pubs, which the dean Dahl wanted to shut down. He supposedly even purchased two of them in an attempt to prevent over-serving of the Gulenians. A rumour was in circulation about the wine sold at Glaværstova, that it was much stronger than at other pubs. Once the *lensmann* (essentially the local sheriff) brought his deputy to the pub to investigate. The lensmann was served a shot of hard liquor, and the deputy ordered a glass of wine, which he received and tasted. He thought long and hard before asking for another, and before he was willing to speak his mind. He drank the second as well, and a third, and then everyone awaited his judgement: "No, now I have been tasting the wine for so long that I can't tell whether it is strong or not," the lensmann's deputy said.

The public house Glaværstova is now on exhibition in a museum in Kaupanger, minus the patrons and the beer.

THE OCEAN AND EATING SWEET BUNS TO LIGHTEN THE MOOD

I become thirsty. We pass Grønevika, and the Solleibotn quay is located nearby. When the express boat started stopping here, my father was spared having to take the bus and two ferries to and from Bergen. He had an important job at the hospital in Bergen and came home to his family on the weekends. The journey by express boat from the city took an hour and a half, and I also took this boat when I started attending upper secondary school in the city. Every Friday I went home together with Dad, played in football matches and attended dances, and then returned to Bergen on Sunday afternoon.

And now the express boat is roaring towards us. Every morning it travels out of the fjord from Sogndal, and every afternoon it returns. It is still running on the winter schedule now, though it is early May, and roaring is the word, because it creates a backwash of huge waves, quite close to us.

Our oars collide again.

"Row! We must row properly now," my husband says. He suggests that we steer the bow into the waves. He poles the boat and is adept with the oars, so it is done in the blink of an eye.

The Oselvar handles the waves well, the express boat docks, we row onward toward Dingja, and now we are speeding along. All my memories collide with a clunk, clunk, splish-splash. We see more cottages, probably owned by city people. Damn city people. Why am I so against them? Because I understand, without being able to put it into words, that I am a little city girl myself?

I struggled to speak without affectation back then and should begin do the same again now or construct an idiolect that reflects the nomadic life.

Certainly, I had both the city and the countryside inside me back then, just as I do now. I can't rid myself of either and what is the difference, really? Is it just that I have read so much about this polarisation and projected it into my own body?

I am weary of these pairs of oppositions, village vs. city, jobs vs. nature, one side against the other side of the fjord or the country or the world, contempt for the elite and contempt for ordinary people, hand in hand, or us vs. them, all these echo chambers and feelings and facts and foolishness, all mixed up in these blustering times.

We pass the new cottage cluster, and the cottages look identical to me, with slanting roofs and an abundance of angles and huge glass surfaces.

6000–7000 new cottages are built every year in Norway and most people want them equipped with electricity and water and access roads and Jacuzzis and outdoor lighting that is lit around the clock, year-round. The building expansion into and destruction of nature leads to a loss of natural diversity and is one of the largest problems the earth is struggling with now. According to the UN, one million species are at risk of extinction. I have written a great deal on this subject and have a lot of anxiety about it and many other things.

But you can't carry the misery of the world on your shoulders at all times, it will destroy you. And there is good news as well: the restoration of the natural world is an issue that is rising in prominence on the political agenda and the voices of its advocates are increasingly being heard. And here in Gulen, when later this year protestors, landowners and the municipality win the fight against the planned large-scale construction of a huge wind power facility on Dalsbotnfjellet, there will be a loud celebration and the popping of champagne corks on the mountain tops.

There are many people who are protecting the natural world on land, but who is looking after the fjord?

We pass Dingja.

My sister told me that she and two friends once borrowed the Oselvar. They were just twelve years old and launched the boat from the shore of Eivindvik. There were no mobile phones or any such conveniences back then. And my sister did not think for one second that perhaps they should have let someone know they were planning to set out on a voyage. And as soon as they had rowed ten kilometres, all the way to Dingja, they borrowed a phone and called home. Our mother was just proud, but the father of one of the girls was frightened and furious. And it must be said that this father knew how dangerous it could be if the wind picked up, or if they capsized. He was a seaman, and owned

several large boats, and this was before the road was put in, so he jumped into one of the boats, sailed to Dingja and towed the girls home again.

"Should we take a break and have something to drink?" I ask, for the second or third time.

"Soon," my husband says.

I don't understand why he doesn't want to take a break, but I don't ask either.

Because now we see the ocean.

We have passed Hisarøy Island, and then the landscape opens to the west. This is Sognesjøen Strait, and the ocean is right there, straight ahead of us. It smells of salt and a thin line divides the sky and the sea. And then I feel a shock to my system again. This deep sense of longing for something that is here, right in front of me. A shock and a flash of meaning and then finally we take a break.

I am sweating inside my storm suit. I pull down the zipper and remove one of the wool sweaters. There is more movement in the water here, so we rock and splash in time with the boat and waves.

"Do you want a sweet bun? Or two?" I ask.

We drink water and eat sweet buns with a yellow cream filling from the shop in Eivindvik. Our mood is improved considerably by the sweet buns. The wind also picks up. We drink several large gulps of water before rowing on with renewed vigour and white flour and sugar in our system. We are moving at a solid clip now, the porpoises say, an eagle says, clunk, clunk.

We are approaching Sygnefest.

WHAT IS A FJORD?

It is a bit unclear where exactly the Sognefjord starts. And how long it is. I contact the Norwegian Mapping Authority to clarify this, because some sources say 226 km, others 205, still others 204 or 200. There are so many numbers. Trond Eilev Espelund at the Mapping Authority says that the length of a fjord is measured along the middle line and that usually one begins from the point furthest inland. "But if two people do the same job, the answers will be different. It has to do with how much one generalizes, in other words, where one situates the meander points. The greatest uncertainty however lies in determining where the fjord ends," he says. He has measured and created a list of all the fjords that are longer than 25 kilometres in Norway, including Svalbard. There are eighty-eight such fjords in all, totalling 5555.7 kilometres.

Espelund has measured the length of the king of these eighty-eight Norwegian fjords, the Sognefjord, at 226 kilometres.

There is only one fjord in the world that is longer, Scoresby Sund in Greenland, but it is full of ice and not navigable, like this one. The word fjord comes from the Old Norse word *fjǫrðr,* meaning a place where one travels. The word has the same origin as the Norwegian noun *ferd* (journey) and verb *å fare* (to travel).

I become so fond of the word. Fjord. That it has this particular meaning. And I am glad that we are the ones travelling the fjord now. At a solid clip, on what feels like absolutely the right route. Yes indeed.

Fjord is one of the few Norwegian words that is found in all the languages of the world. There are myriad definitions of what a fjord is, but I think one of the most precise is this one from Professor of Geology Atle Nesje: "A fjord is a long, narrow valley with steep walls that is filled with seawater." If we want an even more precise definition, we should include the word "threshold", that all fjords have a threshold.

If one had seen the fjord landscape from a short distance above, from the air, one would see it clearly: that the Sognefjord is narrowest at its easternmost point, then it becomes wider and opens up to the west. The tall, massive mountain formations furthest inland kneel toward the west and crumble into skerries and islets furthest out in the sea. We refer to the entire system of fjords rippling inward to the heart of Norway as the Sognefjord. But there are a number of side fjords. It is possible to view the main fjord as a depression in the landscape, a long trough or like the impression left behind by a thick tree trunk – full of seawater. And there are many small arms and branches sticking out in all directions, away from the mother trunk or the mother tree and all twenty-seven of them have names.

These tributary fjords have their own system and own dynamic.

THE FJORD IS CREATED

But how was the fjord created? 65 million years ago that which is now called the mainland in Norway was almost flat and most of the landscape was worn down to sea level. At this time, the earth began to swell and one of the hubs of this swelling was the mountainous region known today as Jotunheimen, where the highest mountains in Norway are found. Into the fjord and up into the mountains in the east. At different altitudes, the rivers began digging. At weak points and along mountain crevices in the landscape they dug and the water flowed to the west and to the ocean.

2.6 million years ago, the first great Ice Age which covered Scandinavia with ice arrived and there was not just one Ice Age, no, there were forty, perhaps even more. And during every Ice Age, glaciers dug into the landscape, or to put this differently: with the help of stones and gravel the ice creaked and rubbed against rock, sanded it away, around 0.5 mm a year – so the valleys which the rivers had begun to dig became deeper and deeper. And between every Ice Age, the glaciers melted and the ocean gradually filled the valleys that were deep enough and extended all the way to the coast. Around 11,500 years ago, the last, big Sognefjord glacier receded, leaving in its wake the fjord landscape as we know it today.

Scientists maintain that the Sognefjord is different from other Norwegian fjords because it has only one marked threshold and it is located here near Sygnefest. This is the shallowest point of the fjord, between 100 and 200 meters deep, or to be exact: 158 meters.

The glaciers that came from the east met islets and skerries and the ocean here – and were thus prevented from digging as deeply here as they had done further inland.

Forty–fifty kilometres inland, outside of Vadheim, is the deepest point of the fjord, 1308 meters. What this means is that directly below us now, or soon, there must be a drop-off along the bottom of the fjord. And the mountains we see around us don't stop at the water surface; they continue their descent under the water, as steep as can be, yes, in fact even steeper than above the water. There are a few shelves on the way down, until the rock face drops straight down to a flat, muddy floor. The deepest layer of the floor is made of sediments from the last Ice Age, along with organic materials from land and natural production in the fjord. If you overlook these loose sediments, the deepest point of the fjord is 1500 meters.

Because of the depth, combined with the shallow threshold, many years pass between each time the deepest water in the Sognefjord is replaced by water from the ocean.

THE FJORD BREATHES

The fjord is made up of layers of water: the upper layer is a lightweight, warm brackish water, from five to ten meters in depth. This is the layer that is in motion the most. A somewhat heavier and saltier layer lies just beneath and is also in movement, while the water at the very bottom can remain stagnant for prolonged periods of time.

Marine biologist Lene Buhl-Mortensen at the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research thinks of the fjord as a breathing organism. In her mind, above the threshold, the fjord breathes quickly and superficially at all times. It exchanges water with the ocean. The upper layer of the fjord flows out into the ocean, bringing fresh water from the rivers – and then a counter-current of salt water emerges just beneath it, that comes from the coastal current, which is flowing in the opposite direction.

"This new water supplies oxygen and preserves the diversity of small animals and plants floating freely in the water, plankton," she says.

Beneath the two upper layers, from around 300 meters below the surface, is a deep-water basin, which at its deepest point descends to 1000 meters below the threshold.

"You can see the fjord breathing deeply and replacing the deepest water around every seven years. Sometimes more frequently, sometimes less," says Buhl-Mortensen.

The deep breathing, the renewal of the water, requires wholly unique conditions. When the salty water of the Atlantic Ocean comes close enough to the coast due to high winds from the north, often early in the spring, such conditions can arise: the rotation of the earth then deflects the water to the right of the wind direction in the northern hemisphere. This is called the Coriolis force, and the upper water layers are then drawn away from the coast. Then the saltier water from the Atlantic Ocean can spill over the threshold, the shallowest point of the fjord, and flow inward. And since this water is saltier and colder than the water at the bottom, this ocean water sinks all the way to the bottom and replaces the old fjord water there.

Life under water. Plant plankton that is eaten by animal plankton, which is eaten by fish, which are eaten by mammals. This is how it is, both in the ocean and in the fjord. But in the fjord, there is also a supply of nutrients from land, and the algae blooms earlier and spreads out into the ocean. It may sound simple, but in reality, complex physical processes are at work, and a sensitive interaction which we don't yet fully understand: Many mysteries remain.

In recent years, many have puzzled: Are there less fish in the fjord than previously? In the innermost part of the Sognefjord, called the Lustrafjord, there is almost no point in casting one's line. Why not?

Over the years, I have heard several explanations.

COFFEE IN RUTLETANGANE

We are still achieving good momentum. The boat moves well through the water when we manage to stay in sync. The fjord and the boat and our bodies are in movement. We are silent. And since we are rowing backwards in the boat, we can still see the ocean. What a pleasure – if only it would last. Although I can feel the effects of the rowing in my arms, I also feel as if I can row far, the view of the ocean is propelling me forward.

"There's nowhere else I want to be," I say, or do I just think it?

I can see my husband's broad back. His red windbreaker and the life vest on top of it. The grey ocean. And steep, black cliffs on the north side of the fjord. This is now what is. The rest of the world is fuzzy, my phone is set on airplane mode. I don't know what stories are making headlines in the online newspapers, what the children are doing, what people are worried about at this moment. I focus on the oars. The ocean. My husband's back. My breathing. The bricks in my chest have lost weight, are more like pinpricks, a few stitches.

The cliffs in the north are Solund. There is no mainland here, only grey-black rocks, mountains, and 1700 islets and skerries, stones and wind and virtually no trees that succeed in putting down roots.

There aren't many people who put down roots here either – there are fewer people than islands – and way, way out in the ocean lies Utvær, Norway's westernmost island.

The hours splash by.

"How's your bum doing?" I ask.

"Surprisingly well," my husband replies.

We are approaching Rutletangane, a cluster of skerries and islets along the shoreline on the south side of the fjord. Here you can find shelter from harsh winds, while maintaining a good overview of the fjord, so throughout history this has been a safe harbour for fjord travellers. Here there was a courthouse and a place of execution, and on one of the islands there was once a stone church. The church is gone now.

In the spring of 1184 several of the King of Sweden's ship were here, just before the gory battle of Fimreite further inland on the fjord.

We are looking for a suitable place to go ashore. My husband pulls in his oars and moves to sit closer to the back of the boat, on the thwart. And good heavens, it's heavy going, rowing alone. Will I manage to move the boat at all?

A huge smile spreads across my husband's face and he says: "Use the right-hand oar – now the left-hand one, a little, no wait, the right-hand one."

I huff and puff and then we find a landing spot, guide the boat carefully onto the neck of land, tie the line at the bow to some stones and the line at the stern to a tree. We assess the situation.

"How does it look? Can we leave the boat like this?"

We eat lunch. Pee. Disable airplane mode and check our phones, just to confirm that nothing serious has happened to the children or in the world. No news is good news. I think carefully before opening my mouth to speak now; my head is full of my childhood, but I try to refrain from sharing all my thoughts. It can easily become a bit much. I ask my husband if he wants coffee. He does.

I notice a rocking sensation in my body, before we see on the weather report that the wind is going to pick up and we climb back into the boat. We adjust our padded groundsheets before settling our bottoms on our respective thwarts and shoving off.

The waves rise, the water becomes choppy. Our oars collide again.

"We should be sailing now," my husband says, "sailing off into the sunset," and I agree, but say that we don't have enough experience.

The wind is blowing aslant, the waves are growing taller and without doubt we would capsize and there'd be a shipwreck and brrr. We put our faith in stable rowing and solid progress. Clunk-clunk, splish-splash.

A POTATO SHIP IN FLAMES AND A FERRY THAT WANTS TO DEVOUR US

We see Losna, the easternmost island of Solund, where one of the most powerful dynasties of Norway lived in the 14th and 15th centuries. In addition to owning large properties and holding important positions, members of the family were powerful officials in the Middle Ages. Legend has it that they had large ships moored here to guard the property and collect duties and charges from other boats travelling in and out of the fjord and on the shipping channel.

During the Second World War, the Germans tried to take control of the same channel. They laid mines in the stretch from Losna to Sygnefest to barricade and control the fjord. Boats on the way in or out had to travel through the sound Krakhellesundet.

And one dark December night in 1944, a German convoy was on its way through this sound. The Germans had no fighter planes to aid them at this point, so they had to travel at night to avoid detection by English aircraft. The lighthouse beacons were not lit; the Germans had seen to having

these switched off. The cargo ship Ferndale took the lead, loaded with potatoes. The captain looked for land, but the current was strong and suddenly the ship crashed into a huge rock looming out of the water like a monster: the famous Seglsteinen rock of Krakhellesundet. The tugboat Parat sped to the rescue from Florø, but shortly after it arrived the next morning, both vessels were detected by an English aircraft and firebombed. The Parat sank and lay alone at the bottom of the sound for a few hours, until half of the Ferndale sank as well.

A hidden German ship shot down two of the English aircraft, one of which crash landed in the mountains in Losna.

In the days the followed, the local population were nonetheless able to secure the potatoes from the remaining half of the ship that was still afloat.

Further east lies Hyllestad municipality and I try to find Lihesten, the highest mountain there, rising a steep 777 meters out of the sea. The mountain is a landmark which people have used to navigate along the coast for hundreds of years. I scaled this mountain a few years ago, on a hike in truly horrendous weather, through fog and wind and rain, and mud on the trail and in my shoes.

Historical glimpses, noteworthy years, and my own memories ripple in and out of my consciousness in time with the choppy waves now hitting the boat. They are coming from the northwest, hit the Oselvar at an angle, and the boat rocks. And the more waves there are, the more difficult it is to row in sync, to achieve a good rhythm. Sometimes the oars land on top of a wave, other times at the bottom or in mid-air. It is frustrating, and our baggage is now strewn helter-skelter, yet there is a kind of calm on board. Flashes of sunlight. We don't speak.

I study the oars. They are the same colour as the boat, light brown and there is something about the form and colours and speed of this vessel on the fjord, which combine to make me feel a little bit at home here already, at home along the way. Or could it be that I feel that way because I am rowing with my husband? That I am home when he is with me? I keep these thoughts to myself.

The first ferry of the trip is approaching us now, a white, pitching vessel. She berths at three different municipalities: In Krakhella in Solund, Rysjedalsvika in Hyllestad and Rutledal in Gulen. It seems as if the huge ferry creature is headed straight for us, as if it would open its jaws and devour us. We row the best we can. The ferry comes about; it could be it was merely curious about the tiny mosquito of a vessel or wanted to frighten us a little.

We breathe and I can feel the effects of rowing in my arms, in my back, in my shoulders. I have never rowed for so many consecutive hours in my sitting room.

It feels like we have been out for several days already, even though we have only rowed around twenty-five kilometres. And that is more than enough for one day, or that's how it feels. For me at any rate.

OLD FRIENDS AND A FUNERAL

We are still in Gulen and approaching Breidvika. Mum has some friends who live on a farm here and they have offered us shelter for the night. We find the pier and moor the boat, go ashore, feel the rocking in our bodies, and make a sausage dinner on the primus stove out on the quay.

My husband has blisters on his hands from rowing. We tape them, and in the morning, he will wear different gloves.

Kåre Krakhella, Astrid Sandvik, and a happy, grey cat come down to the quay and inspect the boat. Astrid's long red hair has turned completely grey, but her smile is as I remembered it.

"We were so fond of your mother," she says. "This trip of yours is really true to her spirit."

"What a wonderful boat," her husband says.

They offer us ice cream and stories and tell us we can sleep in the cellar if we like. The children have long since moved out and this is the last year they will be keeping sheep. And now the fjord turns white. The sun sinks in the west and Kåre Krakhella tells us that the road running inland to Brekke was built in the 1960s. Before that, boats were used for just about everything. He tells an old story about a funeral:

"The weather was frightful and the fjord was not rowable, people said, so the boats remained on land, but they had to have a wake. And a wake there was. When the storm finally passed and they were well on their way to Brekke, the oarsman in the one boat asked the people in the other: Do you have the coffin? They did not. They had left it on the beach.

So this is what they did. They rowed. Wearing their Sunday best to church. The vicar and the christening child and grandfather with his pipe. Maybe they sailed home again at a time of day when it didn't matter all that much whether their clothing was wet. If there was a wedding, the wedding boat led the way. On this boat sat the most strapping men, in their shirtsleeves, to ensure the best possible momentum. They would often race to church.

They rowed to the homes of relatives too. To markets. And to hayfields and pastures. Because of the mountains and the steep shorelines, the villages along the Sognefjord were like islands in a fjord before there were roads. And people adapted to this landscape, this life. There was often little land on each island, so the boat was a farm vehicle the farmer relied on, not solely for the transport of people, cattle, and hay, but also for fishing.

I say that we will probably be making an early start. Astrid says we must feel free to use the kitchen to make coffee.

"And watch out for the shallows between here and Bålen, 100 meters from land," Kåre says.

"Now you've become your mother's twin spirit," Astrid says. And then night falls.

MUM AND NIGHTTIME BROODING

Mum was the first female vicar in Bjørgvin diocese. She drove to Eivindvik with a gaggle of children in the spring of 1985. She was thirty-four years old at the time, eleven years younger than I am now.

The bishop was against female vicars at this time, as was the dean, but the parish council in Gulen wanted Mum, and she was very well received by all the churches and schoolhouses along the narrow roads or far away, out at sea. The vicar Signe had to learn to drink coffee and the vicar's children accompanied her to all the churches in the municipality, sitting primly beside one another on one of the pews close to the front and opening the green hymnal to the assigned page when the hymn singing began. With time I learned a good deal of the liturgy by heart.

When the church in Eivindvik celebrated its 125-year anniversary in 1988, Mum had everyone dress in wadmal garments, with hats and headscarves, and the people came rowing from all the islands as they had done in the old days. The small craft harbour was full of rowboats. Mum was fond of boats and the Oselvar was taken out every summer. In a photo album there is a photograph of the Oselvar with Mum, Dad, me, and a man on board. The caption below the photo states that we rowed to Mjømna and a church service there in July 1989.

Mum was always busy. She always presented a cheerful face. A kind woman came and made us dinner from time to time and washed the floors. I remember one evening when it was raining, the wind was blowing, that I looked out the window. I was the oldest and was about to put the youngest to bed. I stroked his hair and the spot between his eyebrows, sang a lullaby and worried about Mum – when would she come home? Was she coming home? I searched for signs of the vicarage boat out on the sound.

There was often somebody who needed her more than we did, but Mum always came home and Daddy worked double shifts on the weekdays in town so he could be with us until Monday. On Saturdays, the house smelled of pizza that Daddy had made, and now and then of fresh baked cinnamon buns.

Mum tried to offer some advice that as it turned out was quite difficult to follow: She said I could read books about mistakes people had made throughout the ages, so I would be spared making the same mistakes myself. She said that if I went to a dance, it was not necessary to snog in the corners.

Some of her one-liners are embedded in me and I repeated them to my own children: "Be kind to all human beings and animals," she said and I say as well. "Everyone has flaws," she said and I say as well.

I was a precocious big sister, did all my homework, made a family newspaper, wrote for the local paper. We didn't have a television, there was a lot of talking and a lot of noise and there were always a lot of people in our home. It was difficult to finish one's sentences, tell stories without being interrupted. When I was older and joined the outside world, I was surprised that people listened when I spoke. In upper secondary school, I began to relax and as soon as I graduated, I moved away from my family and responsibility, left behind my well-behaved self, fluttered away, but is there any point in dwelling on all of this, searching for joys or flaws. There are holes in everything, that's how the light gets in, somebody sings and that's how it was, all of it.

“You just go ahead and write. But don’t you dare write about me,” Mum said when I became serious about writing and my texts were published here and there.

So I didn’t, until now.

And this is not a novel, so it could be I should dial back on writing about others from the past. I can’t afford to lose any relatives. The strategy least likely to cause harm would perhaps be to stick to myself, but can I trust my own memory? I have forgotten so much, perhaps repressed things, too. Most of what I remember is safe and light, effervescent. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the time of Glasnost, when it felt as if both the world and I were on the right track. But I know that my siblings remember other things entirely and remember things differently than I do. Am I a reliable narrator?

We all have our struggles and sorrows and secrets. If there is one thing we have in common, it is that. The question is how many details we must include so the stories about others will help us better understand ourselves and the world? Must one always pass through the innermost door?

I dislike the public airing of private matters, but it is possible these thoughts also come because I don’t dare, am not able or don’t see the point of smashing through my own innermost door and reporting from there about my mistakes.

I am almost asleep in the cellar here in Breidvika now, my face is warm from the wind and sunshine and my body soft, still rocking slightly. I think about the fjord and words, and how words summon different associations in all of us: words like home, like belonging.

I think that we humans are both fragile and resilient creations, minorities each of us in our own special category, so dependent upon sufficient food and water and sleep and each other. And I think of the blood that carries everything we need through our body; the blood vessels are like fjords and the cells small hamlets, each with their own special needs.

What a brooding hen, the night twists and upends everything.

Not much wind is forecast for tomorrow morning, it will be calm for a few hours, but then the wind is supposed to pick up, easterly winds, right in our faces. I set the alarm on my phone. I thought my husband was sleeping, but now he turns over and mumbles something.

“If you’re asleep at six, shall I wake you up?” I ask.

“Just go ahead and leave, I’ll grab a taxi and catch up,” my husband replies.

I laugh and say thank-you to myself that I have such a great guy to row and spend my life with. He grounds me, he as well.

BREIDVIKA–ORTNESET

May 4th

We wake up before the alarm, boil water for the thermos, put sunscreen on our faces, and are in the boat before six. The sun rises above Hyllestad and the rays hit us and the boat.

A slight headwind already, in this golden morning light, we find our rhythm quickly, and our momentum seems good to me, even though we are rowing windward.

After a couple of kilometres we find a cove and go ashore, have a sandwich for breakfast and make pour-over coffee. Oh, the aroma of coffee. The dark flavour. Now we're ready for the day. We have cold griddle cakes for dessert and see the ferry that travels from Rutledal towards Rysjedalsvika, the one that almost devoured us yesterday. A blue tanker ship is headed into the fjord. The express boat is headed out of Sogndal.

We find two messages in bottles on the shore. One came from Brekke, a bit further inland, some anonymous children have sent drawings out into the world. The second letter has travelled all the way from Vik:

HI! MY NAME IS JULIA AND I AM EIGHT YEARS OLD. I AM VERY FOND OF ICE SKATING. I LIVE IN VIK IN SOGN, 6893 FLÅTEN. I LIKE TO READ, WRITE, ROLLER SKATING, ICE SKATING, LEGOS, DRAWING AND ANIMALS AND GOING FOR WALKS

I HAVE TWO CATS NAMED MONS AND MOLLY. I WILL BE VERY HAPPY IF YOU SEND ME A LETTER IN THE MAIL. MY ADDRESS IS WRITTEN HERE.

As he rows at the stern, my husband talks about his grandfather, after whom he is named. Steinar Rorgemoen built a farm in a place without roads, high in the mountains of Telemark, beside a beautiful lake called Gjevarvatn. He and his wife had six sons and one daughter. My husband's father moved away to the city, where he met his wife and settled down. But every summer he went back, with his entire family.

"We, the city family, would drive to the end of the lake where Grandfather would come and pick us up," my husband says.

And it was not a little lake; it was huge and long. My husband seems to remember that his grandfather called it "the fjord" even though it did not contain a grain of salt.

"There were three rowboats there, which my grandfather had built himself. Eventually, one of the boats acquired a motor, but we kids were out rowing every day, all summer long. We went rowing and swimming and had a fantastic time."

Every single summer my husband was at this farm and by this lake and in the surrounding countryside. With his relatives. In the mountains. Fishing in the lake and in the rivers, going hunting with the others. When he was a teenager, he got a summer job there and went to work with one of his uncles. There was a lot of joking and the witticisms came thick and fast. And all of this has left its mark on him and can explain a great deal: That he wanted to have his own remote farm in an area without roads, even though it wasn't in Telemark. That he knows how to row. How to pole and turn the boat around, all of this is engrained in him like reflexes, and the oars are part of his arms: he doesn't need to think, he just does it, even though he is now rowing in salt water and not fresh water. It can also explain his broad shoulders, his fast-talking wise mouth and his love for Svalbard – and living so close to and within the nature there.

We met one another there, a bit clumsily, newly divorced and happy to be out in nature, both of us. And with some of the same questions in our bodies, such as: Is there love after love?

I like looking at him: his arms, his back, his movements, hands. Those hands of his. I think that he is actually a strong rower from the Viking Era, luckily for me, born in the wrong period, in my period.

"But that they rowed from Luster to Bergen in five days, is that possible?" my husband asks, this is something he has heard.

"Then they must have had good weather," I say.

"But they were also cut from a different cloth," he says. "Nowadays, there are a lot of soft hipsters and restless dreamers," he continues, and I have to laugh. Could be that's what we are. Restless dreamers.

Later I find more information about these urban legends. Usually it was *Sognjekt* sloops that sailed the long journeys to Bergen. They had good cargo capacity and when the wind was right, sailed at a solid clip. But people would also use oars on smaller vessels. A man from Hafslo allegedly rowed all the way to town because he needed a new almanac. It has also been said that a man who was called Gamle-Esen, born in 1834, rowed from Bergen to Balestrand, a distance of almost 200 kilometres, in five days. There is another story about two men who rowed a sixareen to Bergen. They sailed there on high winds. On the trip home, they rowed from Hille in Gulen, leaving at four o'clock in the morning, all the way to Kvamsøy by Balestrand, arriving around nine o'clock in the evening. Then they were so tired that they almost fell asleep on the thwarts. Also in more recent times, people have rowed and paddled on the fjord, but more for amusement. An Englishman, Gordon Pugh, has even swum the entire length of the Sognefjord.

I am feeling it in my arms now. I must adjust my sitting position a bit, think about rowing correctly. Not raise my shoulders so much.

"Think about those who rowed from Kvadehuken in February," my husband says and then we are in the north and in Svalbard and the year is 1923.

Several men spent the winter at a geophysical research station. They had invited a trapper, who lived nearby, to a Christmas party and when he didn't show up, the hosts were worried and two men set out in a rowboat to find him. They shoved off in a small open boat with enough supplies for three weeks. They rowed and rowed, but ran into brash ice, were driven out to sea and never returned. They perished on a deserted island on the northwest coast of Spitsbergen.

It was a tragedy. The director of the station committed suicide when his men didn't return and it later turned out that the trapper, who had been the focus of the rescue operation, had been eaten by a polar bear on his way to the Christmas party.

It is difficult not to think about people who, throughout the ages and also in our times, have left their homes to cross the open sea in small vessels. Fleeing destitution and hellish conditions, they

load hope and a few possessions on board and set their course for what maybe would be peace, maybe a better life.

When did the human race start rowing?

(END SAMPLE)