

A Journey Within A Journey

by Walter Bjorkman

One year after
my father
the carpenter and fisherman
left my life
as my mom used the summer
to lighten her load
 We flew alone from Idyllewild
before it became JFK
on a four-prop silver bird
 Allan eleven going on twelve
myself only ten (and a half)
 The pillars of New York
towered in the distance
as I used the barf bag
to perfection
 Stopover in Gander, Newfoundland
at the edge of night and the world
to re-fuel and also to repair
A four hour delay
from the air
 In early June
still a cold barren waste
two newfound young strangers
in a strange land
 Nordic stewardesses
watching to see us safe
they pillowed me to sleep
 The rising sun
through the window

splashed my eyes awake
to white-washed cliffs
of Scotland

 Glasgow to re-fill once again
the silver bird and our bellies
and quickly in to Stockholm
sixteen hours all in all
where our family
was waiting

 Barefoot boy with cheek
I climbed wood piles
Jumped in hay lofts
caught perch & pike for lunch
dove into cold rushing
dark waters

 Hand-milked my first cow
rode in the wagon behind the horse
trained to shit on the bridges
so the clean-up guy
knew where to look

 Smoked my first cigarette
shot my first
and only gun

 Saw Jailhouse Rock
when my retarded cousin
took us in to Gavle, the big city,
and we slid around
to a seedier theater
when the first one
wouldn't let me in
for my age

 She swooned when Elvis
pelvized his hips,
she a young girl of twenty

we were just amazed

at where we were

We set off from
the tiny town of Hogbo
Unca Ole, on his first vacation ever
at age 56
with Allan & I
on a steam-powered train

Down to Goteberg, up to Lillestrom
we stopped and rested for the night
riding a wild mouse
at a carnival
Norwegian jugglers and clowns
in sight

Into the boarding house
entering that room
that forever stays in my mind
a picture on the wall
that I had in
my bedroom way
back home

Through the highest mountains
we passed the Seven Sisters' falls
riding through Valhalla's walls
Trolhjem — home of the trolls
off to the ferry
in Andalsnes

Three hour ride through fjords
and around desolate coasts
foot-long hot-dogs
fresh made that day
steering the vessel
in open waters
under the Captain's
careful gaze

Then a bus around winding cliffs
to Molde, the 'City of Roses'
to the foot of another pier
forty minutes to Aukra
to the island
of my peers

Just seven Norwegian miles around
(about fifty miles US)
Gjetvik was the address of the farm
just that, nothing else

Sod roofed barn and chicken coop
brand new wood one on the house
birch, strong and resilient
and the hills where sheep
once often were brought
by my mother,
left behind

She once pulled a calf
out of it's mom, with a rope
as the WWI bombs fell
on the very land
on which I now stood

They hid in the rushes
as boots stomped yards away
no father at home
he off to find his way
in the new world
their mother confined
to a bed

Kaffe here, kaffe there
kaffe everywhere
two stoned out young strangers
eating smorgasboard til ill
and trying to act polite

Finally a day to do
what they have always done
into the Viking boat we scrambled
to help feed everyone

Hand-line fishing in the fjords
with multiple hooks — count 'em - six

The shirt was really cool
in the white stripes
the smudges were Runic symbols
in different shades of blue

But no one on that tiny island
had a Kodachrome back then
my original Brownie camera
no Polaroid-Land

The boat was about 24 ft I guess
behind my 90 year old grand uncle's
humped back (yes, a troll)
the scrolled Viking serpent head

Oar powered
with wooden rollers
to rest the line
and to help in pulling
but at the moment of truth
it was pull up hand over hand

The fish were in the 20 - 30 inch range
I could only guess the weight
I pulled in two on one drop
with only a little help from my friends

Cousin Rudy pulled up a cod
out of season
we were rigged for haddock,
it was dressed for the weather

When he got it in the air
I stood up to look
it was as tall as me

and perhaps almost as heavy
but the line broke
and in a smooth splash
it disappeared forever
a life-sized fleeting vision
from the sea

Unca Ole
pulled up a sea robin
he had never fished the salt water
only the rapid streams of the foothills
for the pike, perch and brim

I yelled to him
“don't grab it”
knowing it's spiky spine
from fishing the waters of NY
with his brother, the carpenter
just a few years behind

He laughed, pulled it off the hook
his calloused farm hands
not bothered a whit

We caught 28 haddock that day
in four hours total
we went back and had
the best fish-boil ever

Feeding fifty relatives and guests
who came to see
their newfound strangers
from across the sea

The cast iron cauldron
in front of the house
new potatoes out of the ground
with salt and butter
flying all around

For those moments and summer
we were left without a care

To fly back on that silver bird
and face the world with no fear

It is a time
I'll ever remember
although it would all
tumble down later

