

Bergen, 30th September 1945

Dear all of you,

Thank you very much for your letter. We were all very glad to hear from you again. These five years of German occupation seem to me like a whole century. I'll take a look back to the 8th of April 1940. I had just returned to Bergen after having spent the finest Easter holidays you can imagine in the high mountains, with plenty of snow and sunshine every day in a fortnight. We had all got the well-known chocolate colour in our faces, and we were glad and blue-eyed and didn't think of war. I was together with a friend on a picture the 8th of April, it was from the war between Finland and Russia. At long last I fell asleep that night, and having been in my bed only for a few hours, my sleep was roughly interrupted by the sound of cannons that came nearer and nearer and at last culminated by daybreak in a heavy shooting and bombing. On opening the street door, we were greatly surprised to see the streets overflowed with German soldiers. This was the overture that led to five years of German occupation.



It was five long and dark years. In the autumn and winter evenings we stayed mostly inside the black curtains (it really happened in the light summer evenings too, but that was because of German forces). The streets were quite dark, illumination didn't exist anymore, and if we went out in the dark night, we might run the risk of being shot down by a drunken soldier. It was, however, inevitable to run the risk. My friends and I used to play bridge a few times a week, and then three of us, specially interested in music, spent a "musical evening" at least once a week. On Saturday we used to arrange private dance evenings. But on each of these meetings, it was quite natural and absolute necessary that everyone both girls and boys brought with him the food he was going to eat during the meeting. (you know this would have been ridiculous before the war) The ration of bread has been very scarce, and my mother, Ragna, and I have been longing for five years for the day we might fill our stomachs with bread.

It is also fantastic how you can turn your clothes inside out, and have an almost new dress. It is, however, tragic that the dress cannot be turned several times.

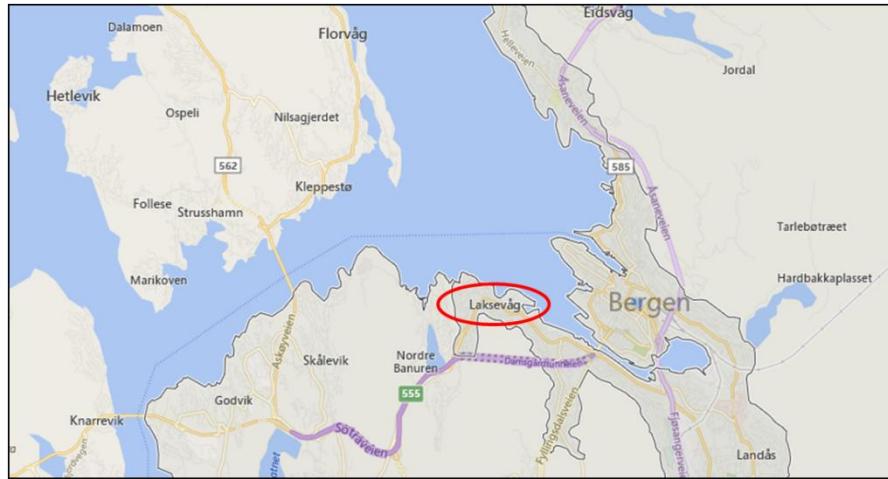


This is all only trifles, however; - we did learn during the war that the main thing was to be sound and strong and to be in good spirits and never care for the coming days. Fortunately, mother, Ragna and I have been in possession of all these advantages.



Maybe you know that "Bergen" had several air attacks during these five years, and there are still several things that remind us of much bombing and a lot of terrible nights. The most terrible attack was the 4th of October 1944 when the submarine station at Laksevåg was bombed. Laksevåg was the biggest submarine station in North-Europe. More than 100 aircraft were over Bergen that day. I had been in my office for one hour when the attack began about 10 o'clock in the morning. Because of the situation of our office (it lies close up to the submarine station) the girls had been sent away when the alarm was given and only my chief, the cashier and I were left. The attack came suddenly and we heard the sound of the bombs that were dropped. We had no chance of getting out of the office without being killed, and the house is a very little one with only two floors and no place to seek shelter. Therefore we had to remain in the office, but I can assure you that none of us had the slightest hope of being saved in this rat trap with big glass windows and also glass ceiling. A bomb that was dropped about 25 meters from us didn't explode, fortunately, but nonetheless all the windows were blown to pieces. I felt quite helpless! If I only could make a defense, it would have been O.K., but now

It was nerve shaking. However, none of us were hurt, but on looking around us we observed only ruins, and many people had been killed.



Several times during the war I've been thinking about America and I wished I was there. But I couldn't leave Norway, because I had much important work to do here. However, in February this year, I found it necessary to leave Bergen the faster the better. I must confess I was glad when I was safe out of Bergen. I lived in a hut at "Lindås" north of Bergen for three days together with 12 other boys, everyone selected from the sport club in Bergen. The day after we had left the hut, "Gestapo" was on the place. They didn't succeed in following more than half of our way, and they didn't know anything about our personalities!



There is one thing which people used to call "nerves" and the nerves had a very hard strain during the war, especially among people who worked "underground". To creep down the

trap-door of a cellar night after night, and to sit by the radio in a narrow cellar-age and simultaneously hear the German foot-steps above your head, and all the time be aware of the part that there is no other persons in the big house but Germans, - may be very interesting, or to transport ammunition and weapons by daylight through the town in cases marked with "Hansa brus" or hand-grenades in totes marked "Fish balls" may also be of interest---- but only for a short time; in the long run it is nerve shaking indeed.

When I left Bergen I thought my course was going to be shaped for England, - but no! I remained in Norway, but my home became from now a little cheese-house among the great



snowy mountain ranges several miles north of Bergen, and my dressing was from now the well-known English battle-dress, and my pen was changed for a U.S. carbine. However, I did keep one of my properties namely my skis, which became my best and absolute indispensable friend night and day for months. Everything we needed was brought to us from England by sub-chasers or from the air. The first month in the mountains was inhuman, the weather was as bad as it can be with snow storms and darkness, and the R.A.F. couldn't reach us with food. Therefore we had to go down and fetch all our provisions and ammunition from the sub-chasers that came close to the mouth of our fjords. It was heavy burdens we had to carry every day over weeks, but nothing could give us better training and time was going to show that we needed all the training and all the muscles in the fight against the Germans.



It came to blows in April and the fight lasted for about a fortnight. The Germans were 1800 men, - we were 150. We had to fight in high snow, and that was an advantage for us. We were all young and well-trained and everyone was a good ski-runner. None of our enemies could go skiing. Thus we could go forward half a mile when the Germans could advance only a few meters. I can mention only a few episodes: We had got to know through the "Walkie-Talkie" that 80 Germans were advancing, six of us were sent against them to bid their welcome. The Germans were thrown back, and after having finished this task the same six had to go skiing several miles to fight against other detachments. We were sleeping in the snow, waiting for attacks whenever and wherever.



Three boys were sent from the headquarters to my station to assist us. (You see, we were only three boys watching the whole "Sognefjord" and we needed help). On their way, they met with 15 Germans struggling with the deep snow – all on foot. On observing our three boys the Germans shouted out that they were Red Cross soldiers, and we couldn't shoot them. As one of our boys went up to them, the beast suddenly fired. He was hurt, but not seriously. The 15 Germans were killed, - one of them called out: "Pity! Pity!" He was shot down from behind by one of his own officers! I broke my arm in the struggle, but now I am fine again. The Germans called us the slaughterers from Matre. 150-200 Germans were killed, our loss was six killed and 2 hurt.

Well, - I suppose this is enough about war! I am now back in the office. It is a dull life, but it is better than the military life, because that's no life at all. This first summer in a free Norway, has been extraordinarily fine. I cannot remember a single summer with so much sunshine, and I can assure you that we utilized every day and every hour! I began the bathing season the 7th of June in Oslo where I was parading before the King and where I spent a very amusing week. As I first came to Oslo I didn't know a single soul, but after a sleepless week, I had been acquainted to nearly half of the population, thanks to the intoxication of victory among the people. People in Oslo did like us, and we accepted a lot of invitations from the people we met. The summer is over and all the festivals too, the autumn has come and the

weather is still very fine, but cold. There has been arranged a lot of concerts here in Bergen during the last weeks, and we have also a number to look forward to. I've been promised by my song-teacher to have a concert with the "Harmonien" Orchestra in March or April next year. "Harmonien" is very popular here in Norway, - the orchestra used to play once a week, and it is nearly impossible to obtain a ticket.

Ragna is playing the piano, and she does play really good. We have not got our radio back yet, and I think it'll be a long time until we obtain such a good radio as *that* the Germans deprived us of. An English sergeant who used to visit us, has been so kind as to lend us a "wireless-set" for some weeks. Today he has been and fetched it as he is going to leave Bergen, and we miss it.

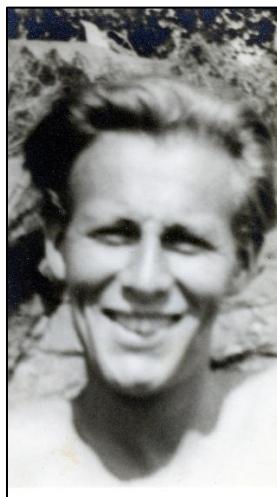
I wish I could come over to America, and I hope I'll succeed one day, but I don't know how. I've been thinking of taking a job on "Stavangerfjord" but I am afraid I'll not be allowed to go ashore in the U.S.A. And even if I were allowed, do you think there is a merchant, a ship owner or any office (whatever it might be) that would take interest in having a Norwegian student in his office. I don't know, but I am sure I'll succeed to come to the U.S.A. one day.

Well, I have to finish my letter, - it is growing a little too long to be interesting. Hope I'll hear from you!

Best regards to all of you from

Finn

If you remember the girls I corresponded with before the war, - please give them my best regards!



Finn Larsen - 1945

(Taken from a photocopy of a handwritten letter. Photos and maps were added. Finn Larsen was the nephew of Agnes Larsen Helleland)