

The Danish Genesis of Virginia Sorensen's *Lotte's Locket*¹

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DESCRIBING HER RESEARCH FOR *THE PROPER GODS*, a novel about the Yaqui Indians and their culture, Virginia Sorensen said her work had been "an excursion into cultural anthropology" that she thought would continue the rest of her life.² This prediction proved to be especially true of the preparation for her children's novels. In each of them Sorensen undertook the study of a different culture and locale. For example, *Curious Missie* is set in rural Alabama; *Plain Girl* is about an Amish child; and Sorensen's last children's novel, *Friends of the Road*, is set in contemporary Morocco. But probably the cultural anthropology that Sorensen enjoyed most was her study of Denmark, which enabled her to write, in addition to her novel *Kingdom Come*, a children's novel entitled *Lotte's Locket*.

A novelist can minimize the difficulty of using an unfamiliar setting by writing about characters who are also unfamiliar with that place; thus, the novelist can simply present an outsider's view of the culture. It is much more difficult to create characters who are at home in a setting that is exotic to the author. If the characters are natives, the writer must develop such a complete understanding of the culture as to weave it through the fabric of the story in the same way it is woven through the lives of local inhabitants. Sorensen was particularly adept at such blending of culture and story, and *Lotte's Locket* is a particularly good book to examine in order to understand and appreciate her thorough study and preparation. The Danish elements of *Lotte's Locket* are presented so naturally that the story seems to be narrated by a native.

1. This paper was first presented Thursday, 29 June 2000, at the 35th annual meeting of the MHA in Aalborg, Denmark.

2. Virginia Sorensen, "The Novelist and His Materials." *Western Humanities Review*, 7 (1953), 288.

Because of her ancestry and upbringing, Sorensen certainly had an affinity for the Danish culture. In an unpublished manuscript entitled *Scandinavian Americans*, she writes:

The important fact is that I always *felt* Danish. . . .The Danes in my father's family were important to me and I saw more of them, always, than I did of my mother's scattered family. My favorite Great-aunt was pure Dane, Anegrethe Nielsen Eggertsen. . . .My Great-Uncle Simon, the eldest son of three (my grandfather was Andrew, the middle son), had his father's [Simon Peter Eggertsen's] journal and translated it lovingly into English, so making it accessible to me. . . .He and his wife went to the old country when I was a young girl, and at the family party welcoming them back, I heard about the relatives still over there and about the places where Simon Peter and his Johanna had been born.

Widowed early, Aunt Anegrethe also went to Scandinavia with her daughter Esther and her Norwegian husband, Oliver Petersen, bringing back to me stories of her early life and a vivid picture of the old farm at Ved-dum, in Jutland. I knew that there was still "family" over there who would welcome me when I managed to go myself.³

Members of the Eggertsen family, Sorensen's father's family, were strongly connected to Denmark and visited it enough to make Virginia identify herself as Danish and feel proud of that heritage. Furthermore, Sorensen grew up in Manti, Utah, in Sanpete Valley, which was known as "Little Denmark" because the majority of its first settlers had been Danish immigrants. In 1956 Sorensen wrote about her childhood home:

. . .even now if you go to see the fine white Mormon Temple that dominates the landscape night and day you will likely be shown about the grounds by somebody with a Danish name, perhaps even with a Danish accent. He will tell you about the famous spiral staircases in the towers which were built by skilled Danish craftsmen not long ago. . . .

My first school principal and ward choir-leader was Brother Johnsen. My sister studied piano with Mr. Jensen. We ate bread baked in a Danish bakery with a sign like a pretzel over the door. There was a Danish Pasture, a Danish Wood, a Danish Ditch in our neighborhood. People held Danish meetings and bore testimonies in a Danish-English language that we children found side-splitting. They also subscribed to a Danish magazine called *Bikuden* and loved the works of a Danish poet C.C.A. Christensen who once studied in the Royal Academy in Copenhagen.⁴

3. Sorensen, Foreword to *Scandinavian Americans*. Unpublished manuscript in Sorensen's papers in Boston University Library's Special Collections. Not paginated.

4. Sorensen, unpublished manuscript identified "Utah, October 1956" in Sorensen's papers in Boston University Library's Special Collections. Not paginated.

Surrounded by so many town folk of Danish origin, her reaction to Denmark is not surprising:

No wonder that when I went to Denmark I felt that I had been there before. The food was prepared as I had seen it from the beginning of my time in the world. The faces of Danish farmers and shopkeepers were like the faces I had known all my life, ruddy and square. The tow-headed beauty of the children I had always known at home. The loving-teasing of my father and uncles was so familiar that I knew what the family in Vedddum was laughing about, around the table, before I knew ten words of their language. I knew how bread was made in Line's kitchen before I watched her make it, and beer soup, and cottage cheese and the best coffee in the world. . . . I knew how to combine red raspberries and red currants [sic] (both fresh from the bushes) for a pudding called Rødgrød med Fløde.⁵

In a sense, then, Sorensen already had some preparation for writing *Lotte's Locket* before she ever went to Denmark because during much of her early life, she had been surrounded by both family and neighbors of Danish ancestry, who continued to practice many aspects of Danish culture. But, of course, she did go to Denmark, her first trip—from December 1954 until June 1955—made possible by a Guggenheim Fellowship. The primary purpose of her excursion was to collect information that would enable her to write a novel about the early Danish Mormons,⁶ but always observant, she used many of her experiences and much of her research in creating an additional children's novel, *Lotte's Locket*, which was focused neither on the Mormons nor on the 19th century, but on recent Danish history. She spent much of her time in Copenhagen where she worked in the Royal Library, and she also visited the farm called Vedddum, in Jutland, where her Aunt Anegrethe had been born. Both locations are important in *Lotte's Locket*.

A brief summary of the plot makes evident how Sorensen uses these two locations in the novel. Lotte is almost eleven and lives with her mother and grandmother (her *Farmor*, her father's mother) on a farm in Jutland. Both her father and grandfather have been killed in World War II, probably about eight years earlier. One of her father's fellow pilots, Patrick, an American from Texas, has come to Denmark in hope of meeting his old friend, only to learn of his death. He strikes up a friendship with Lotte's mother that quickly blossoms into romance, and they decide to marry in the two weeks before Patrick has to leave Denmark. This is devastating news for Lotte, who is used to her mother's complete attention and affection and who wants to remain in Denmark on the farm

5. Foreword to *Scandinavian Americans*, not paginated.

6. *Kingdom Come* was published in 1960 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World).

Lottegaard, for which she has been named and which she should inherit. Despite Lotte's disapproval, her mother and Patrick marry and set out for Copenhagen where they will take a boat to America. Lotte and her grandmother accompany the new couple to Copenhagen to send the newlyweds off on the ship. Then the novel returns to the farm in Jutland where Lotte is to finish her year in school before she, too, travels to America though all-the-while she tries to come up with some plan that will enable her to stay in Denmark. Finally, as Lotte herself has to leave Denmark, there is another trip to Copenhagen where she must board the ship that will take her to America. Thus, the novel is set in Copenhagen and Jutland—the two locations in Denmark that Sorensen visited for extended periods of time.

Sorensen evokes and recreates these settings with a wealth of cultural detail, and this paper will focus mainly on two important though very dissimilar cultural subjects central to the novel—Hans Christian Andersen and the Danish resistance movement of World War II. First, however, we'll survey other examples of the novel's abundant cultural detail to show how carefully the author studied the physical environment, the customs, and the history of Denmark to prepare herself to write.

Soon after she arrived in Denmark, she described Copenhagen in a letter to William Mulder:

...no wonder the books are entitled "Wonderful Copenhagen" and "Beautiful Copenhagen" and are written with such love and excitement. . . I have seen much of the city already and have decided to stay on at this hotel a while. . . because I can walk from here all over the old city. I am on the harbor and look out at dozens of marvelous boats, coming and going. On the next street is the house where Hans Andersen lived, along one of the canals. A few blocks away is the Amalienborg palace where the guards walk.⁷

The places Sorensen mentions in this letter all appear in *Lotte's Locket*. She used her own experiences in creating the novel. Her hotel was on the harbor just like the hotel where Lotte and her family stay when in the book they come to Copenhagen. Sorensen has Lotte look down on the harbor activity from her hotel room. She describes the scene in this way: "Huge cranes were working, picking up automobiles and boxes the size of summerhouses as if they were buttons. The whole harborside was a lively mixup of barrels and sailors and ropes and bicycles and motorbikes and trucks and people and, of all funny things, horses with hats on. . . ."⁸ The nearby street where Hans Christian Andersen once lived,

7. Virginia Sorensen to William Mulder, December 26, 1954. Letter, a copy of which is in the possession of Mary Bradford.

8. Virginia Sorensen, *Lotte's Locket* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964) 82. Hereafter the novel will be cited in the text by page number.

Nyhavn, appears in the novel in a scene in which Patrick drives Lotte from their hotel to City Hall. He talks of all the sailors on the street and then points out the plaques that indicate Andersen's rooms. Sorensen makes use of the Royal Guard and their daily parade to the palace when the king is in residence. She has Lotte follow them and then get lost because they don't return to the same place from which they began their march. Lotte becomes frightened and finally a policeman tries to help her, asking if she knows anyone in Copenhagen. She remembers that she knows Hr. Axel, a family friend who works for the newspaper *Politiken*, a genuine Copenhagen newspaper. The policeman takes her to see Hr. Axel, who not only arranges for her to be reunited with her mother, but also writes a human interest story for the next day's edition about Lotte's being lost in the city. We should note here that soon after Sorensen arrived in Copenhagen, a story about her appeared in *Politiken*. Moreover, a letter from her daughter Beth indicates that in 1961 Sorensen was still subscribing to "*Politiken Weekly*."⁹

Much of the specific cultural information in the book is the result of straightforward research. For instance, Sorensen includes ancient Danish mythology. There is the myth of Gefion, a goddess promised by her father that she could have as much Swedish land as she could plow around in one day. Lotte tells Patrick the story: "So she turned her four sons into oxen. . . and yoked them to that big plow and put them to work. . . They carved out the whole island of Zealand that one day. . . And there's a lake in Sweden exactly the same size and shape, so everybody knows the story is true" (93). Another myth Sorensen includes is that of Holger Danske, or Holger the Dane, who sleeps as a statue in the dungeon of Elsinore Castle, "his arms folded and his beard grown into a table of stone" (90). In the novel Lotte remembers their outing to the castle where a guide told them that Holger Danske "had really lived in the eighth century and that he grew to be seven feet tall and could drink five quarts of mead without stopping to take a breath. He won every battle he ever fought, even against the giant Burman and Strong Dietrich from Bern who passed through Jutland with 80,000 horses" (90).

Besides mythology, Sorensen also incorporated a great deal of Danish history, for example, the story associated with the castle Clausholm, which is not far from Lottegaard in Jutland: "Farmor said King Frederik IV came to visit the family that lived at Clausholm and fell in love with their daughter, Anna Sophie. Soon he came riding back in the middle of the night and carried her off to Copenhagen to be his queen" (78). In addition to stories of kings and queens, there are a number of interesting

9. Beth Sorensen Anderson to Virginia Sorensen, September 25, 1961. Letter, a copy of which is in the Sorensen files of Brigham Young University Library's Special Collections.

and surprising facts about Danish history: "The Virgin Islands are still very much Danish, even though they belong to America. . .the capital of St. Thomas is named after a Danish queen—Charlotte Amalie" (79); "America was *really* discovered by Leif Ericson" (124); and "the first known ancestor of George Washington was a Dane named Hvass. He went from Jutland to England about 900 AD." (124). The novel also mentions many famous Danes, including the astronomer Tycho Brahe, philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, playwright Kaj Munk, and Jutland poet Steen Steensen Blicher. It is, in fact, extraordinary that all this cultural information does not seem superimposed on the novel but rather appears integral to the telling of the story.

Perhaps Sorensen's use of Hans Christian Andersen is the best way to illustrate her blending of culture and story. The first mention of Andersen in the novel refers to one of his starker tales in which a proud father squanders his fortune and brings his children to ruin. This story is told by the wind, and Lotte remembers it at night in bed as she listens to the wind. She is very upset because she has just learned that her mother is going to marry Patrick and that she will have to move with them to America. Unable to sleep, "She remembered H.C. Andersen's story of Valdemar Daae and his daughters, and what the wind had said to them. It could tell all the things that had happened since time began, for, of course, the wind could go anywhere and could see and hear everything" (31). What would the all-knowing wind one day have to say about Lotte? For the reader familiar with Andersen's story, the clear implication is that she fears her life will be as tragic as the ruined lives of Valdemar Daae's innocent daughters. Thus, the Andersen story serves to heighten the anxiety Lotte already feels about the changes going on in her home.

Andersen's stories appear often in the novel. "The poor Match Girl" is introduced when Lotte tries to light the lamp in her freezing tree house where she has gone after the wedding to feel sorry for herself (49). Sorensen makes no explicit comparison between the Match Girl's pathetic death and Lotte's plight, but the implications about the suffering and ill treatment Lotte thinks she is enduring are there for the reader familiar with Andersen's story. Later in the novel, after Lotte and Farmor have sent Patrick and Lotte's mother off on their ship and returned to Lottegaard, Farmor asks Lotte if she would like a bedtime story, continuing the custom Lotte and her mother have had of reading a Hans Christian Andersen tale every night. Lotte thinks of and rejects several, finally choosing "The Little Mermaid." But this story proves, too, to heighten her fears about being separated from her mother:

When Farmor got to the part about the ship sinking, she held her breath. For six days now, Mor would be on the sea. Already, tonight, she was far out on the rocking waves. Farther and farther away every minute. Her heart felt

faint to think of it, and as Farmor read about all the terrible things at the bottom of the sea, she felt worse and worse and wished she had decided on a different story. There were polyps down there, stretching out their writhing arms to seize the Little Mermaid. "Every one of them held something that it had caught. The white bones of men who had perished at sea!" (143-144)

Of course Andersen's tale feeds Lotte's fear for her mother, who is at sea and very far away. She might lose her mother to the sea—and if not to the sea, then to her new husband. The fear Lotte already feels is underscored and heightened ironically by an exercise—the familiar reading of a bedtime story—that is intended by Farmor to calm her. The Andersen tale thus intensifies the tension that already drives the narrative in *Lotte's Locket*. In this and the other instances in which Sorensen uses Andersen's stories, they are not simply thrown in for local color or cultural authenticity. Rather, they echo and enhance the emotions of the novel's characters and move the story forward.

Sorensen not only makes use of Andersen's stories, she includes many details of his life as well and presents these in a manner and context that seem altogether natural. In Copenhagen, Lotte's family dines in a restaurant that features a sandwich called the "Hans Christian Andersen," because it was his favorite: "crisp bacon laid like a lattice on thick yellow butter, and on top of this were thin slices of tomato and in the middle a nice big hill of liverpaste with a long tassel of horseradish" (110). The same restaurant offers Andersen's favorite dessert, "Peasant Girl With a Veil," which is "buttered crumbs covered with mulberry jam and a big pile of whipped cream" (111).

Later Sorensen has the family and then Lotte's school class visit important locations commemorating Andersen's life. In Copenhagen, the family visits Rosenborg palace, on the grounds of which is a statue of Andersen, sitting "alone at the end of a long avenue of trees with a book in his hand" (94). The family attends the Royal Theatre, which, Lotte remembers, Andersen "had loved. . .so much that he came there every single night" (85). Farmor says that her mother had seen Andersen several times in Copenhagen, and that "he used to take walks. . .every day, getting ideas for his stories" (95). Later, Lotte's class is able to spend an hour in Odense, the place of Andersen's birth and early life. They visit "the wonderful little house on Jensenstraede where H.C. Andersen had lived," in which they saw "books and letters and drawings and cuttings and hundreds of things he had himself owned and saved" (234). They went to St. Knud's Church, where Andersen was confirmed, and toured the Hans Christian Andersen Garden behind it. They also went through the cottage across the street where he had lived as a child.

By referring so often to Andersen's stories, by recalling important details of his life, and by commemorating the places in Denmark that

were important to him, Sorensen makes Hans Christian Andersen a presence in the novel. He is, of course, one of the world's most famous Danes and possibly the world's best-known and best-loved children's author, but there are also personal and pragmatic reasons that lead Sorensen to feature Andersen so prominently in the novel.

Like Lotte, Sorensen made her first acquaintance with Andersen in childhood when her mother read his stories to her even before she could read:

My oldest friends were The Ugly Duckling and the Stalwart Tin Soldier and the Princess who could not sleep on account of a pea in her bed. . . . So many others, too! I knew about the Snow Queen and the Ice Maiden and Ole Lukoie who was a kind of Danish sandman, except that he put milk into the children's eyes instead (I thought it would hurt much less) and held an umbrella over their sleeping heads to give them happy dreams.¹⁰

She mentions many other Andersen stories in the same passage: "Little Claus and Big Claus," "The Tinderbox," "Little Ida's Flowers," "Thumbelina," "The Little Match Girl," "The Nightingale," "The Emperor's New Clothes," "The Swineherd," and "The Fir Tree," most of which stories are also mentioned in *Lotte's Locket*. Sorensen also says that Bishop Petersen, her first bishop, "was proud to tell everybody that he had come from. . . 'the fairy Island of Fyn,'" on which Hans Christian Andersen had been born,¹¹ and her own first Danish ancestor, Simon Peter Eggertsen, was born in Odense, Andersen's birthplace on the island.¹²

Virginia Sorensen, thus, had a long personal interest in this author, but the major reason for her preoccupation and familiarity with the details of his life was that, as she wrote *Lotte's Locket*, she was also working on a biography of Andersen for young readers.¹³ She had been commissioned to write this biography in 1956 and for the next six years, she said, she "read little else." She studied previous biographies and met the

10. Sorensen, unpublished and untitled typescript on Hans Christian Andersen in Sorensen's papers in Boston University Library's Special Collections, Box 8, Folder 5.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Ben Zevin and his wife heard Sorensen speak at the luncheon at which she received the Child Study Association of America award for her second children's novel *Plain Girl*. In her remarks she mentioned her affection for Hans Christian Andersen, recalling that the current date, April 2, 1956, was "one year to the day from [her] celebration of H.C. Andersen's 150th birthday in Odense." Zevin had been looking for someone to write a biography of Andersen and immediately after the luncheon approached her with his request. She signed a contract and received an advance on this book. This incident is recounted in *The Most Incredible Thing*, Sorensen's unpublished biography of Hans Christian Andersen, in Sorensen's papers in Boston University Library's Special Collections, Box 12, Folder 3.

scholars who wrote them; she worked in the Jean Hersholt Collection of Hans Christian Andersen papers in the Library of Congress.¹⁴ She also spent a summer at the British Museum reading about Andersen's friendship with Charles Dickens and his visit to Dickens's home in England.¹⁵ She compiled an extensive collection of research cards that are now in her papers in the Special Collections of Boston University Library. She wrote two drafts of this biography, which she titled *The Most Incredible Thing*, naming it after one of Andersen's stories, but the biography was never published.

Meanwhile, however, her work and fascination with Hans Christian Andersen found published expression in *Lotte's Locket*. For her own part, Sorensen identified closely with Andersen. "My career is in several ways very like that of H.C. Andersen," she states. "I too wrote novels and short pieces for many years, writing for adults with some success but nothing out of the ordinary. . . ." ¹⁶ She then describes the awards and success her children's novels have brought her, adding, "It seemed that with books for children I had at last found my proper voice, just as it seemed so for Andersen when he finally began to be noticed for his Wonder Stories." Sorensen modestly denies that she shares Andersen's genius, but adds, ". . . all the same, these facts of our two careers are the same, and I feel they help me to understand his feelings better than I might otherwise have done."¹⁷

The unpublished Andersen biography includes several examples of Sorensen's sense of a particular understanding of the Danish author's feelings. The first is the admiration and respect each felt for poetry and the desire of each to be a poet. She also felt she understood Andersen's pain at the lack of respect he had received in his hometown. After quoting Andersen's pleased and grateful response to the Odense Common Council at their invitation to a festival in his honor, she adds, "As a writer who had thought now and then of the old saying about a prophet and the absence of honor in his own country, I read his words with feeling."¹⁸

A 1957 letter from Sorensen to William Mulder suggests another way in which she felt herself to understand Andersen; she, too, appreciated the affectionate and enthusiastic response of children to her stories and was somewhat amazed by their success:

14. Ibid.

15. Sorensen, "The Libraries in My Life; Library Dedication—Edmond, Feb. 9, 1969," speech, manuscript in Sorensen's papers in Boston University Library's Special Collections, Box 8, Folder 5.

16. Sorensen, *The Most Incredible Thing*, not paginated.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 5. (The first section of the manuscript is paginated.)

The Children's Field is its own world with its own enthusiasms, its own kind of dignity. People are not afraid to shout and say "We love you." And the children themselves. . . Bill, I do sometimes feel like H.C. Andersen! This may sound extravagant, but I had long since read his amazed statements about the success of "the little tales" as compared with the difficult, heart-rending struggle of the novels.¹⁹

It is evident that she admired Andersen, especially his extraordinary talent as a writer. In her biography she wrote, ". . .when we think of him and of his life, we must think of his effect upon the world and of his influence upon children everywhere. I have told his stories to children in schools as far apart as San Francisco and Morocco, Norway and Jugoslavia [sic], always to wide eyes and happy laughter[,] and sometimes even a few tears have rewarded me."²⁰ With this background in mind, one can read *Lotte's Locket* as a sort of homage to Hans Christian Andersen as well as Sorensen's opportunity to use some of the material she had acquired for her biography. Given the circumstances, it might have been tempting for her to set the material as a series of weighty monuments to the great Danish author and to show off her own reach and grasp of the material (something known technically among writers as "research dumping"). That instead she incorporates this interest and wealth of information with restraint and in ways that seem natural to and, in fact, help drive the narrative in *Lotte's Locket* is a great tribute to Sorensen's own talent as a writer.

With similar intensity and similar technique, Sorensen also studied and made literary use of a specific group of the *Holger Danske*, the Danish resistance forces of World War II.²¹ She learned of the Hvidsten Group while she was visiting her relatives at Veddum. In January 1955 she wrote to Bill Mulder:

I was taken on grand tours all around Veddum, and to Ars and to Mariager and Hvidsten Kro near Randers. I am returning to Hvidsten Kro (you'll know it is the most famous Inn hereabouts, its owner, Marius Fiil, having been killed in the resistance along with his sons. His widow Gudrun now runs the inn, and how very charming it is. If only I could really talk with her and know the story. . .)²²

19. Virginia Sorensen to William Mulder, April 15, 1957. Letter, copy of which is in the possession of Mary Bradford. The ellipsis is in the original letter; nothing is omitted from the passage.

20. Sorensen, *The Most Incredible Thing*, 12.

21. The novel explains the reason the underground army called themselves *Holger Danske* by recounting Andersen's story about the mythic *Holger Danske*: "There was a belief in Denmark that if the country were ever in danger, old *Holger Danske* would rise from his chair and draw his beard from the table the way King Arthur drew his sword from the stone" (90).

22. Virginia Sorensen to William Mulder, January 30, 1955. Letter, copy of which is in the possession of Mary Bradford.

Her curiosity was piqued, and she did not stop inquiring until she got the information she was after. Two months later she wrote in another letter to Bill Mulder that a friend had located a Danish manuscript about the Hvidsten Group, and that she and her Danish teacher were translating it into English.²³ Sorensen finally hired the teacher, Emilie Andersen, to complete the translation, which was sent to her two years later in two packets—the bulk of the text on August 11, 1957 and the epilogue on November 7, 1957. The title of the work was *The Hvidsten Group*, its author Axel Holm. This translation is now in Sorensen's papers in the Boston University Library's Special Collections. It is a moving and powerful account of the quiet, unpretentious Danes at Hvidsten and the surrounding area and their heroism in organizing to receive air drops of men and materiel to sabotage German operations in Denmark during World War II.

The manuscript first describes Hvidsten. It then introduces several individuals who eventually participate in the drops, including Niels Fiil, the son of the innkeeper; Niels Kjær Hansen, a bachelor and jack of all trades; Henning Andersen, the miller; Søren Peter Kristensen, the carriage maker; the veterinarian Albert Iversen; and Johan Kjær, the mechanic. Marius Fiil is described at length:

In the inn is Marius Fiil. He has become a very well-to-do man because his inn is known all over the country. It is worth a visit there just to see him. With his tall, thin body, his bald crown, his hawklike nose and the small, gay, daring eyes, he looks like an old scotch pirate. He is full of mischief and he loves to gather people around a good table. He is innkeeper of second generation, and an innkeeper's opportunity to talk and philosophize has developed him strongly in that direction. . . .

The innkeeper at Hvidsten is known far and wide. People come from all over the country to the inn. When especially fine visitors arrive, he doesn't take time to put on his wooden shoes but runs out in his stocking-feet to receive them.²⁴ Journalists and artists gather around him. He himself is a peasant artist. He can play and he can lay bricks. He has built a house, with his own hands, for his oldest daughter.²⁵

Marius Fiil is central to the community and has expressed his nationalistic feelings despite the German presence, so he is the one the leaders approach to see if he'll "receive something from the air out at Skrødstrup

23. Virginia Sorensen to William Mulder, March 31, 1955. Letter, copy of which is in the possession of Mary Bradford.

24. Sorensen uses this and subsequent details to describe the innkeeper in the novel.

25. Axel Holm, *The Hvidsten Group*, 4-6. Translated by Emilie Andersen. Unpublished manuscript in Virginia Sorensen's papers in Boston University Library's Special Collections.

and fetch it." He asks his wife Gudrun whether he should do it or not, and she answers, "I cannot see any other way, Marius, than that you must harness the little dabbled one to the wagon and go out and get those things"²⁶

Receiving parachutists, explosives, guns, and ammunition, hiding them, and then transporting them to where they needed to go—these were complex operations and required the help of many. Marius eventually organized several family members, neighbors, and friends who were willing to participate in the work. The manuscript notes that each of these men, aware of the danger, asked his wife about joining the movement. For example, Johan Kjær told his wife, "Rigmor, you must be prepared to hear that some night I am going to go out together with a few others to fetch ammunition not far from here." At first she responded, "What nonsense is that?" but then when she realized her husband was in earnest, answered, "I think there is satisfaction in being in on it." The carriage maker's wife said, "I think you are doing right," and the wife of the veterinarian said, "I was rather proud to learn that my husband was such a good Dane."²⁷

The manuscript describes one of these parachute drops in detail; most of the passage is quoted verbatim in *Lotte's Locket* (175):

On a solid place out on the heath they lighted three red lanterns and a stronger white one throwing light in the direction of the wind.

They waited and listened again. They thought they heard a whir from the clouds.

Axel Nielsen carried a radio on him and attempted to call the flyers by saying in the microphone in English:—Hitler is calling Mussolini, Hitler is calling Mussolini, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

A faint buzzing. The plane came down gliding. They heard the bomb scuttles [hatches] being opened and saw small parachutes with containers and one large one with a man come down [descend] in the white light.

The Hvidsten men stood as fixed. It was so fantastically beautiful and strange.²⁸

In the novel this passage has been written by Hr. Axel, the *Politiken* writer and family friend Lotte goes to when she is lost in Copenhagen. It is likely that Sorensen named Hr. Axel for Axel Holm, the author of the Hvidsten Group manuscript from which she obtained the information.

The contributions of the Hvidsten Group are noted in other accounts of the Danish Resistance Movement. Jørgen Hæstrup's three-volume

26. Axel Holm, 16. Sorensen uses this incident in the novel; Gudrun's answer is quoted almost word for word, including the misspelling of *dappled*, 162.

27. *Ibid.*, 22.

28. *Ibid.*, 24-26.

study calls them "the famous Hvidsten group," and says that they were the among the first to receive drops from the RAF. Haestrup quotes the official report sent to London by Flemming B. Muus of the first parachute drops at Hvidsten: "The reception of Lamp [the parachutist Kaj Lund] as well as of Habit [the parachutist Lok Lindblad] went very well. Immediately the men reached the ground, trained personnel 'undressed' them, brought them to a waiting car and within 10 minutes of landing they were—in both cases—seated before a well laid table in a famous country inn. The reception committee dealt most efficiently with 'chutes, containers, goods, etc.'"²⁹

Haestrup also comments on the complexity of the tasks undertaken by the Hvidsten group. After all the preparations of the air crew, he says, "it remained for the men in the Field to place the reception teams at each point, to organise the alarm system, to provide guards, to make arrangements for light signals, to organise transport and storage, as well as to work out the further distribution of the materiel after reception."³⁰ He then notes:

It must then be clear that the work carried out in Hvidsten in the spring of 1943, with so little previous experience, must take an outstanding place in the history of the Resistance. These men had every right to the words from England: "First of all we all send you and the boys our hearty thanks and congratulations. . . your receptions have been first-class and the air boys wish me to convey a special word of thanks."³¹

Although the work of these resistance fighters was excellent, it was always fraught with danger. They operated successfully for about a year, but early in December 1943 three of the parachutists they had helped to enter Denmark were caught by the Gestapo and immobilized before they could take the cyanide pills that would keep them from revealing under torture the names of other resistance fighters. Marius Fiil knew about the arrests but chose to remain at home, ready to receive more drops, rather than to try to go underground or escape to Sweden.³² Unfortunately, on March 11, 1944, the Gestapo struck and arrested several of the Hvidsten Group. Three of these who were not arrested and might have fled did not because they didn't want to cast suspicion on the others. Two days later the carriage maker, the miller, and the radio dealer were also arrested.³³

29. Jørgen Haestrup, *Secret Alliance: A Study of the Danish Resistance Movement, 1940-45*, trans. Alison Borch-Johansen, (New York: New York University Press, 1976-77), 1:184-185.

30. *Ibid.*, 227.

31. *Ibid.*, 229. The message from England is from a letter by R.C. Hollingsworth, to Flemming B. Muus May 9, 1943.

32. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 306-309.

33. Axel Holm, 65.

The men were held separate from each other and interrogated by the Gestapo for ten days. Finally, they were taken to a concentration camp with other Danes. For several weeks the prisoners alternated between hope and fear about what the Germans would do to them. As long as they were in the concentration camp, they hoped they would simply be forgotten. Eventually, however, they were moved to another prison and in late June court-martialed. Eight of them were condemned to die: the innkeeper Marius Fiil, his son and son-in-law; Johan Kjær, the mechanic; and also the radio dealer, carriage maker, miller, and veterinarian. Fiil's daughter was given a life sentence in prison along with Jens Stenz, and three others were given lesser penitentiary sentences. The night of June 28 those to be executed were informed that they would be shot at four o'clock the next morning.

Each of the men had time to write a letter to his family, and these letters are included in the epilogue to the manuscript:

From the innkeeper, Marius Fiil to his wife, Gudrun, his children, son-in-law and grandchild:

My darling Gudrun, Bitten, Tulle, Gerda, Ritta, Otto and to Baby,

The clock has struck eleven and is going on twelve. And we shall soon depart. God is calling us home and we will all be under His care and better off than any human being on this earth.

We are all in good spirits for we know that we are going home to eternal rest and peace in God's arms. And when all of you, Dear ones, keep our homes as when we were there, and work for them, then we shall meet again some day in the house of God where there is peace and no war. But until then you must all keep together and work for the home and for the cause of Denmark so the coming generations, who shall carry on our names and traditions, can say: Our fathers died with honor for Denmark and for our King. Remember, many went before us. Remember the Danish seamen all over the world. The Danes here at home before us, and those who come after us. We have all done our best—be it ever so little—and we are not ashamed. We say as Blicher said: "Let us always behave in such a way that our Father will own his children." And we can be proud of our children, Gudrun. Carry on your fine work then they will honor our memory. There will be sorrowful days for you, my Darling, days of struggle and work, but you will bear your burdens in the name of God and trust in Him. He has helped me through these last days, only place your fate in His hands and he will help all of you too. God will keep you, He will give you peace and He will be with you always, you dear ones at home. Amen, in Jesus' name. Your father, and your husband Marius.

The second letter is similarly moving:

Letter from mechanic, Johan Kjær, to his wife and children, written in prison the night he was going to be shot, together with the seven other Hvidsten men.

Vestre Faengsel, the 28 of June, 1944
(Western Prison)

Dear Rigmor and Henning and Jørgen,

Father is now going to die but you must not cry. I die with honor. Boys, you must now be good to Mother, always. Darling Rigmor, we have had many good hours and days together, do not forget that, now that you must live in the memories. I have had the great joy that Niels Kjær has willed you his house, take good care of it, little Rigmor, and you must not grieve too much because of me. I shall surely be happy where I am going. Darling Rigmor, I am prepared to die. It is only when my thoughts go to all of you at home that I wish to stay, for I have only good memories of our life together and I know that [our sons] will grow to be men of the right fibre, who do not say Yes when they mean No, and the other way around. . . .say Good-bye to all our good friends from me. . . . Little Rigmor, think of the others when you grieve, and say to yourself that we died for Denmark, as Danish men, and, once more, explain that to the boys when they grow up.

I still have some time left. At four o'clock it is all over. Please give the boys each something that has belonged to me so they can say, this has been my father's, and kiss them both from me and tell them to be brave, they must not cry. You must also be brave, dear little Rigmor, and you can do it, I know it. . . .I kiss the lower right corner of the paper. It is my last kiss to you, and once more, thanks for all the happy hours you have given me. Our life together has been short and yet so rich.

Goodbye, you dear ones, Rigmor, Henning and Jørgen,
God keep you and protect you now and forever.

Your father and your John³⁴

How the execution of their neighbors affected members of the community is evident from their response. By noon that day, news of its occurrence had spread from house to house throughout the area. Each house lowered its flag to half staff. On Sunday all the people, not generally church goers, flocked to the services, which were about the fallen men. Despite the fear of German presence in the congregation, one minister said of those executed:

Their memory shall remain honored among us, those who gave their lives for Denmark's freedom. We will never tolerate one blot on the sacrifice they brought. One often hears, "They didn't have to do it," or "What is the use?" But

Wherever Danish hearts beat,
wherever the sound of Danish rings,
shall everybody, big and small,
bring forth their country's thanks to you.

. . .In the midst of the misery and distress of the present time our dead friends shall bear witness that there is life in the old tree of Denmark. Their death is fresh shoots on the old trunk. We have been in great fear for the

34. Axel Holm, Epilogue

future of our country. Some of us were willing to die for it. We know quite well that our country is not saved by that, but if some were willing to die for it, there ought to be many who are willing to live for it.³⁵

Sorensen wrote on the envelope that contains the translation of this manuscript: "This is very important for *Lotte's Locket* background." Indeed, the substance of this story becomes part of her novel. She uses the neighborhood of Hvidsten as the location of Lottegaard. Lotte's own grandfather and her mother's brother are, in the novel, two of those who were executed (72), as are Lotte's schoolteacher's husband, the miller, and the innkeeper (whose wife, Tove, now runs the inn in the novel, just as in real life Gudrun Fiil, the widow of Marius Fiil, ran the Hvidsten Kro where Sorensen first heard of the story). Lotte's own father had been a pilot who enlisted in England's Royal Air Force and then flew the planes that brought the parachutists, guns, and explosives, and dropped them for the Hvidsten Group to receive. He was not executed with the others; his plane failed and he was killed in the crash.

The memory of these powerful events has become one of the forces that holds Lotte's community together and one of the major stories of her life. And of course, this war story has a compelling character of its own. Sorensen tells it simply, as Lotte understands it, revealing parts of it gradually, in the ways it has affected the community. The importance of the sacrifice to the children enters the novel when at school their teacher says, "I will give a prize to the student who writes the best composition about the meaning of the Liberation" (153), the end of the German occupation of Denmark and of World War II. Thus, the Danish Resistance story becomes the focus of attention for Lotte and all her friends.

At this point the role of the war resistance story in the novel's overall structure is to provoke and carry the crisis and breakthrough to insight that will lead Lotte finally to accept her mother's marriage and Patrick, the American, as her new stepfather. Lotte's composition for the contest is a poem about Denmark as "the Motherland" and about how the sacrifice of the local heroes has returned peace to Denmark. Her friend Ole, the grandson of the famous executed innkeeper, has written a poem about the actual day of the Liberation. Lotte and Ole win third and second prizes in the contest, respectively. It is Lotte's friend Lisa, who wins first prize. She has written about the friendship of nations and the way they helped each other to bring peace. "Our newspapers were full of appreciation for the gifts of pilots who flew over Denmark during the war, like our American friend Patrick, who says he loved Denmark before he ever stood upon her soil" (203). She describes the friendship of nations in

35. Ibid.

times of peace as well as war, especially of Denmark and the United States, and mentions Rebild Park, a gift from Danish Americans to Denmark, "where Danish and American flags flew together even during the war" (203) and where Danes and Americans together celebrate the Fourth of July, America's Independence day. "This is a wonderful thing," Lisa says, "and we wonder why more and more countries cannot celebrate Independence Days for and with each other" (203) because, she concludes, "peace in Denmark is not enough. We must find a way to have peace in the whole world"(204). Lotte somewhat grudgingly admits that Lisa's ideas are better—more current, important, and original—than her own. It is a culminating moment in the novel.

Sorensen is excellent at implication and understatement, and the novel doesn't talk about the effect of Lisa's composition on Lotte, but there clearly seems to be one. Patrick was courageous in Denmark's defense, flying missions with Lotte's own father to drop the parachutists and supplies for the underground. On a larger scale, the United States presence in the war was very important in bringing about the liberation of Denmark that Danish heroes had died for. In finally accepting Patrick, Lotte seems finally to understand his gift to her country and people and the relationship of that gift to her father's sacrifice. She needs to include this generous stranger in her concept of home and family. The coming together of Denmark and America in Rebild Park mirrors the coming together of Lotte's new family, each union serving as metaphor for the other, and so, of course, at the end of the novel, Lotte, her mother, her grandmother, and Patrick will go to Rebild Park to celebrate the Fourth of July.

Sorensen went herself to the Fourth of July ceremony in Rebild Park in 1964, the year *Lotte's Locket* was published. It must have given her great satisfaction to have brought so much that was important to her—Danish history, the Danish way of life, the stories of Hans Christian Andersen, and the real life incidents of the Danish Resistance forces during World War II—into a story for young readers. In a letter to her sister Gerry, she wrote that her editor had called *Lotte's Locket* Virginia's "lovesong to Denmark"³⁶ The richness and authenticity of its Danish content show that her editor was right.

36. Virginia Sorensen to Gerry Simmons, May 5, 1964. Letter, a copy of which is in the possession of Susan Saffle, Gerry Simmons's daughter.