



Nordic News

240 Sparks Street, PO Box 55023, Ottawa, ON K1P 1A1

First Online Annual General Meeting for CNS!

In late March it became obvious that it would not be possible for the CNS to hold its annual general meeting as we usually do in May. The Army Officers' Mess, our meeting venue, had closed and physical distancing issues would have made it impossible anyway. Council was faced with deciding whether to postpone the meeting or attempt to hold it online. Even though we had only a vague idea of how we would manage an online meeting, the decision was made to proceed with that approach.

The first order of business was to set up an email account so that the Nominations Committee could communicate online with members. Hanne Sjøborg set that up and the Nominations Committee then contacted members to request nominations for the Council positions. Once three nominations for each person was received by the Nominations Committee email, a request for acceptance was sent to the nominee. Receipt of the acceptance email completed the process.

While this process was going on, Council was investigating various possibilities for holding a meeting online. President Karin Birnbaum had been using Zoom to connect with family online, and suggested we try it for our annual meeting. After a few trial runs, we were ready to have an online Council meeting. Lennart Nylund was at first unable to participate completely but purchased the necessary audio-visual equipment to allow him to do so. (Thank you Lennart!) Council then contacted CNS members individually to see who had Zoom or was willing and able to download it. It seemed clear that we would have more than enough members present on Zoom for the meeting.

We knew that voting using Zoom would be difficult, so looked into various other options for voting online in advance of the meeting, including online survey software and fillable forms. In the end Karin Birnbaum suggested the simple method of embedding the questions in the body of the email and providing instructions on how to reply to them. It turned out that the instructions did not work for every type of email account, but with a little assistance from Secretary and Nomination Committee Chair Astrid Ahlgren, everyone who wished to vote was able to do so.

Council had one more Zoom meeting a week before the annual general meeting, which included a trial run for the big day.

Overall, we are extremely pleased with the results of this process. 64 members voted in advance of the meeting, and 42 members attended the meeting. Your Council for 2020-21 will be as follows:

- President: Karin Bjåmer Birnbaum
- Vice-President: John Gilbert
- Treasurer: Lennart Nylund
- Secretary: Astrid Ahlgren
- Councillor: Hilde Huus
- Councillor: Judith Johnstone
- Councillor: Kristin Udjus Teitelbaum.

If I have given you the impression that the online annual general meeting took a lot of preparation and work, you are right! Many, many determined hours were spent figuring it all out. We are very grateful for the participation of so many members in this new way of doing things. We would much rather handle it all in person next time because we like to see everyone, but it is great to know we can do it online if we have to. And it is also good to know that we now have an established process for doing so.

Online Suggestions

Here are some suggestions for online activities that may be of interest:

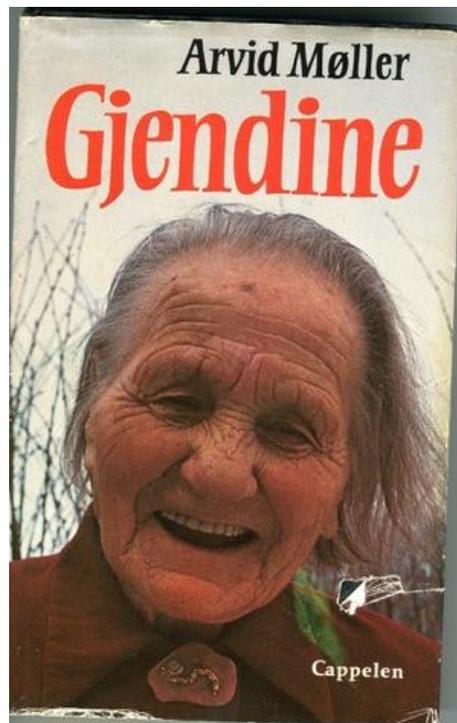
- The [European Union Short Film Festival](#) is running online and for free from Thursday, **May 14** to Thursday, **May 21** from 9:00 AM to 11:00 PM. Finnish film “Super Comfort” by Kirsikka Saari is screening in Programme 1. Saari and fellow producer Selma Vilhunen were nominated for an Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film for the 2013 film “Do I Have to Take Care of Everything?” Click on the link above for additional information.
- If you are itching to get away from your current surroundings, why not imagine yourself in a trapper’s hut on Bamsebu in Svalbard, Norway? That is where two Norwegian Canadian women, Hilde Fåln Strøm and Sunniva Sorby are in quarantine after heading there initially to collect weather and wildlife observations and data for the Norwegian Polar Institute, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UNIS and NASA. Check out their blog with many beautiful photos at: <https://www.heartsintheice.com>
- There are many online resources for learning and/or improving another language. The one I have come across most recently is called “[Read Along in Danish](#).”

Gjendine's Lullaby

by Hilde Huus

To pass the time during this pandemic, many people are turning to video games. One very popular and highly rated video game is called "Civilization." I have never played it (having extremely limited experience in playing video games) but when I came across a reference to it while researching a Norwegian folk song, I looked it up on Wikipedia. It seems that "Civilization" is a multiplayer game where each player takes on the role of the ruler of a civilization and tries to build an empire in competition with the other players. "...it begins in 4000 BC and the players attempt to expand and develop their empires through the ages from the ancient era until modern and near-future times." Version VI of the game is the most recent one. A musical theme called "[Gjendines Bånlåt](#)" or "Gjendine's Lullaby" is heard frequently in the game. In Civilization VI, it is heard first as a simple melody played on a single instrument but gradually evolves throughout the game into a fully orchestrated piece.

I came across a reference to Gjendine's Lullaby a few weeks ago when I chose a Norwegian book called simply "Gjendine" from my late father's collection. The book is by Arvid Møller and has a beautiful photo of a grinning, lively-looking, very old woman on the cover. I was soon engrossed in the story of that spirited little woman.



Gjendine was born in 1871, several weeks before she was expected, at her family's *seter*, or summer pasture, which was by a small glacial lake called Gjende high up in the Jotunheimen mountains and not far from Galdhøpiggen, the highest peak in Norway. Her pregnant mother had taken three of her children and her own mother with her to spend the summer looking after the goats, milking them each day, and making cheese. They all slept in a *steinbue*, a simple lean-to type of shelter made of

rocks piled up against the side of a hill. It was in the *steinbue* that she gave birth, during the night and without assistance, to her tiny premature daughter. A pastor who was hiking through the area a few days later with a couple of friends offered to baptize the new baby. He performed the ceremony in the Gjende Lake and insisted she be named Gjendine, and so she acquired her unusual name. The photo below shows a *steinbue* in that same area.



The farm where Gjendine's family spent the rest of the year was a very small one. The whole family, from very young children up, had to work hard just to provide enough food for everyone. Their mainstay was barley porridge, which they ate together from one long wooden trough. There were times when they were forced to sustain themselves on a type of famine bread made from the inner bark of deciduous trees, which was removed, dried, and ground into flour. Gjendine remembered that the young children sometimes cried themselves to sleep from hunger. When they were sick or had toothaches, they relied on folk remedies or local healers. The children went to school for about three months each year, until they reached the age of confirmation in the Lutheran Church, for which the ability to read was a requirement.

Winters were long, cold, and dark. The Christmas season was the high point and involved lots of visiting and socializing at the neighbouring farms. They entertained themselves with stories and music. Gjendine remembered that she and her brothers and sisters loved their father's scary stories best as they all huddled close together in delicious fright. Gjendine learned many songs at the knee of her grandfather, who had a particularly beautiful voice. Her mother sang her babies to sleep with lullabies that she had learned from her own mother. Gjendine loved to sing. She, like the others around her, sang for her own amusement, to lull babies to sleep, and to comfort herself through hard times. She also sang to the cows and goats as a way of coaxing them along. Many years later she remarked that they never used sticks on their animals. Time was less important in those days. They did not feel the need to stick to a schedule.

In the summer of 1891, as a young woman of 20, she was helping her older sister Brit at “Skogadalsbøen,” which she and her husband ran as a farm and an inn for mountain travellers. Gjendine was singing a lullaby to her sister’s baby when three men came walking over the mountains towards her. It must have sounded something like [this rendition](#) by Norwegian actor and singer Pernilla Anker. The three men were Edvard Grieg, Julius Røntgen and Frants Beyer. Gjendine did not know that all three travellers were composers. Beyer is now known mostly for his extensive correspondence with Grieg, which have been preserved as historical documents. Røntgen, then 35, was a well-known pianist in his native Holland. He had already given many successful concerts in which he performed Grieg’s music, and he had started composing himself. In a letter describing his first encounter with Gjendine, Røntgen remembered her singing her lullaby in a very rhythmic yet freely flowing way, slowing down towards the end until it died away completely.

The three travellers spent a cheerful musical evening at the inn with their hosts and Gjendine. As it was winding down, Røntgen described how they walked outside to see the mountains shining in beautiful moonlight, with the sound of the river in the background. Gjendine stood up on a rock and sang the lullaby once again. It was enchantingly lovely, he wrote. Røntgen was deeply impressed with Gjendine’s musical abilities. He wrote that she could take a simple, banal melody and turn it into something enthralling. She also played the *bukkehorn*, made from the horn of a ram or goat, and out of its three notes could bring forth the most singular melodies. As the travellers were leaving the next morning, they heard the sound of Gjendine playing a tune on the *bukkehorn* until it gradually died away as they went further and further along. Grieg later used that tune in his beautiful Opus 57 “[Hjemve](#)” or “Homesickness.”

The three travellers returned the following year and repeated their experience, listening to Gjendine’s beautiful voice singing all the songs she could remember. Gjendine could see that Julius Røntgen, a widower with two young children, was attracted to her. Before he left, he proposed to her but she turned him down. Much as she liked and was attracted to him, marriage would have meant leaving her home to move to Amsterdam. She felt it would be like tearing a plant up by its roots. She would not have thrived there. She was later offered the opportunity to go to Amsterdam to study classical vocal technique but turned it down for the same reason. In the end she married a local man and settled down on a very small farm to which they added a small sawmill. They supplemented their income with her husband’s reindeer antler carvings and her “tattooing,” a form of lacemaking. They raised two daughters but sadly lost a pair of twin girls when Gjendine miscarried late in her pregnancy after a bad fall on some ice. It was a life of hard work and frequent worrying about whether they would have enough to get by but Gjendine never regretted her choice.

The travellers returned to visit Gjendine several times over the years and she maintained a correspondence with Grieg and Røntgen, without knowing much about their lives and occupations. Gjendine was under the impression for many years that Grieg was an actor. In 1905, he enclosed in a letter some money in appreciation for all of the songs she had taught him. It was only on his death in 1907 that Gjendine learned that Grieg had been a composer. The lullaby that Grieg first heard Gjendine singing to her sister’s baby in 1891 shows up as Number 19, “[Gjendines Bånlåt](#),” in his short piano pieces “Opus 66, Norwegian Folk Songs.”

In 1961, when Gjendine was 90 years old, she received an invitation to attend the Bergen International Festival as the guest of honour. She found this ridiculous but accepted the invitation.

Two officials from the festival and one nurse made the long drive to her home to fetch her and drive her back. Of course the nurse was completely unnecessary as Gjendine was in excellent shape. The festival director later noted that she looked like a 60-year old and someone else remarked that she walked like a 30-year old, which made 90 altogether.

At the festival she was introduced to the King of Norway, the Shah of Persia, and many other dignitaries. A gold watch was presented to her to commemorate her first meeting with Edvard Grieg 70 years earlier. There were numerous interviews for television, newspapers and magazines. The story of the little *budeia* (milkmaid) who sang for Edvard Grieg made headlines not only in Norway, but all over the world. She enjoyed the whole event thoroughly in her own calm, down-to-earth manner. It was fun to hear pianist Johan Øian play her lullaby, she said, but he played it so well she hardly recognized it. She fit in easily with whatever company she was in, sipping sherry and smoking cigarettes to be sociable. She thought everyone was making far too much fuss over her, but said that if they enjoyed doing it, she had nothing against it. She laughed when she saw herself being interviewed on television. “A wrinkled old piece of leather like me, and now a tv star,” she chuckled.



Gjendine is presented to King Olav V of Norway

Gjendine lived to be 101 years old. She was fit and well and took walks daily, sometimes for several kilometres, up until shortly before her death on May 13, 1972. What would she have thought of her lullaby being heard every day by thousands of people all over the world as they play a video game about conquering the world I wonder? I think she would have found it hilarious.

Contributions to Nordic News

We appreciate receiving your Nordic-related articles and news to include in the *Nordic News*. Please email them to the editor, Hilde Huus, at communications@nordicsociety.com

Canadian Nordic Society Co-ordinates

Our website is www.canadiannordicsociety.com, and you can contact us by email at info@canadiannordicsociety.com.

The CNS council list, including email addresses and phone numbers, is available at: <http://www.canadiannordicsociety.com/council.html>

And the CNS has its own, very active, [Facebook](#) page.

Join CNS or Renew your Membership

September 1 is the beginning of the new membership year. You can join CNS or renew your membership online, by mail, or in person. We encourage you to pay online using PayPal. This is the quickest and most efficient method. If you prefer, you can pay in person at one of our luncheons or events. Please speak to one of our Council members.

Online

To pay online, go to the CNS website (<http://www.canadiannordicsociety.com/join-cns.html>) and complete the membership form .

By mail

Please print and complete the membership form below, enclose a cheque payable to the Canadian Nordic Society and mail to:

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Membership Application/Renewal*
(Membership year starts on September 1)

Date: _____

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

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Family Membership \$45, Individual Membership \$30, Student \$20

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<http://www.canadiannordicsociety.com/register-renew-member.php>