

Roots in Ripon

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Norway in My Heart

I have been deliberating with myself as to what topic I should address in this week's article. There is the tragedy of yet another school shooting, this time in Florida, where a lone gun-toting teenager entered his former high school intent on mayhem and bloodshed. Believe me, this is a topic I could spend countless articles expounding, but my heart just isn't in it right now.

There is the ever-pernicious Russian Collusion, raising its ugly head yet again with a report from the State Department indicting thirteen Russians and three Russian companies, charging them with attempting to influence the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election. Interestingly, the point was made that no Americans were involved in any collusion effort. This story was scrapped because it has become tiresome, with a media that is boorish in their frantic attempts to pin something, anything on this president in a strained effort to tear President Trump down.

Rather, the highlight of the week for me has been the Winter Olympics, held this year in Pyeongchang, South Korea. I am always fascinated by the dedication and toughness Olympic athletes demonstrate, whether in the Winter or Summer Games, spending countless hours training just for the opportunity to compete against others in your chosen discipline. I will say that I'm glad the two games have been rotated so that one of the games is held every two years instead of the old format where the Summer Olympics were quickly followed a few months later by the Winter Olympics. Then you had a four-year wait for this pattern to repeat itself.

Admittedly, I enjoy the Summer games to the Winter, but both are great to watch. Having spent two years in Norway in my early teens, I learned to appreciate some different sports than what was offered back in the U.S. The games that we played in Norway were primarily of the winter sport variety, such as cross-country skiing, ice hockey, slalom skiing, downhill racing, and speed skating. Many more winter sports have been added since the early '60s. Snow-boarding in a variety of forms is a big one.

So, I'm turning on the TV early in the week and already Norway has launched into a massive lead in the medals count. As of this writing, Norway has amassed 26 medals. In second place is Germany with 18 medals, followed by Canada with 16. The U.S. is presently in 6th place with 10 medals. Even South Korea has 6 medals, three of which are gold. That's very exciting for the host country.

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I am a member of the Overseas Brats which consists of kids of military families who at one point attended a Department of Defense school somewhere around the globe. For the past thirty years or so, many of the Brats have been gathering each year somewhere in the U.S. to have a reunion. Last fall it was in Huntsville, Alabama, which I wrote about in an article entitled, "Vikings Rule!" (www.chuckroots.com, September 25, 2017).

The school I attended in Norway was called the Oslo American School (OAS). Though one of the smallest schools in number, the kids from OAS always seem to outnumber the kids from schools elsewhere. We genuinely enjoy each other's company at these reunions. And we keep in touch throughout the year, mostly by Internet.

So, when the Norwegians began to rack up the medals, we OASers began group texting each other, excited to cheer on our adopted country, Norway. It's rather stunning to see Norway cleaning up in these winter games when they have a population of just over five million. Especially when you compare them to the United States, Russia, China, and Canada. But skiing and skating are more than winter games in Norway. It is a part of everyday life. I used to ski about a half-mile to the bus stop for school. I'd strap the skis to the side of the bus and ride the hour-and-a-half to school. I would pack my ice skates in my backpack so we could play ice hockey during lunch (I still have scars to prove it!). Parents would glide along on their skis with their toddler standing on the parent's skis while being held up by the hand by the parent. Kids sometimes learned the balance of skiing before they learned the balance of walking.

The two most exciting events for me this week was watching the women's cross-country relay ski race and the men's as well. Both had the Norwegians lagging well behind the Russians, or the dreaded Swedes. In each race, the Norwegian athlete overcame the gap and raced to the finish line earning the gold medal.

I know it probably doesn't mean anything to you. But to Brats who lived in this northern country for a time, it is special. We were lamenting in our texts that we wished we still had our wooden skis, or wooden ice hockey stick. OASer Steve Robinson reminded us that he took ski lessons from the 1960 Norwegian Olympic slalom champion, Tom Murstad. A lesson cost about \$1.40!

Of course, we all want to see the United States do well in the Olympics, and there's another week still to go. But there's a soft spot in our hearts for the athletes of Norway. And there always will be.

OASer Maryl Ball Sellman summed it up best: "We have so many wonderful memories from Norway. I think that's why we all get together every year, just to hold onto them."

Amen, Maryl, amen!