

Danish Missionary Society in Japan, Part 3, 1969-1983: Diakonia 1.

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Unlike the missionaries sent by the Danish Missionary Society (DMS) from Denmark to Japan before 1969, three of the four couples who followed came to assist Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) in its *diakonal* commitments¹. The following are interviews with the two couples that served in West Japan, Birthe & Villy Malmgren and Anne Sofie & Leif Holm.

Birthe & Villy Malmgren Nurses in Japan, 1969-1980

Birthe and Villy Malmgren served JELC between 1969 and 1981. Both were trained nurses and the first couple sent to serve the diaconal work of JELC. I interviewed Malmgrens in their home in Glostrup, Denmark, on 8 April 2014.

Background

Birthe Malmgren (b. 1941) was born and raised in Hygum parish near Lemvig municipality in North West Jutland, Denmark. As a teenager in the 1950s, she participated in summer camps organized by DMS, where she met Anne Marie Gregersen and Frode Leth Larsen, DMS missionaries to Japan in 1960-1971 (cf.

¹ Diakonia: The “service as a permanent activity of the church throughout its history. (...) a “responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people” (cf. WCC 2020).

Hermansen 2014b). Birthe graduated from the nurse school of Sankt Lukas Stiftelsen (Copenhagen) in 1963. Her husband, Villy Malmgren (1940), is from Lem Station, between Ringkøbing and Skjern, also on Jutland's West coast. In 1958, he first enrolled at the Diakon Højskolen in Aarhus, decided to become a deacon, then trained as a nurse and also had to serve his military duties for sixteen months. He graduated in 1966 and worked for two years at a hospital in Denmark.



Photo 1 Birthe and Villy Malmgren at Lutheran Home 1980 (Tsuboyama 2014)

The couple had married 1963 and dreamed of working as missionaries, when “on a dark autumn night Frode Leth-Larsen rang our doorbell and asked us, when we would come to Japan. He knew we were interested,” said Birthe and continued: “We had told DMS of our interest in 1967 or ’68.” Leth-Larsen was on furlough in Denmark in 1967 (cf. Hermansen 2014b: 79). “So, we went through the screening process by DMS. And I think it was Frode who mentioned that Jiaien* was looking for a foreigner to succeed Ms. Bernhardt** who had returned to the US,” said Villy.

*Jianen, 慈愛園 “The Colony of Mercy,” is a *diakonal* institution under JELC located in Kumamoto, Kyushu. It was initiated by the American Lutheran missionary Maude Powlas in 1919, who gained support of the United American Lutheran Church Women’s Association. In 1923, Jiaien moved to its current location and opened facilities for destitute children, women and the aged (cf. Jiaien 2019).

**Dr. Esther Pearl [Barnhart] McBride (1924-2017), had trained in mathematics, biblical studies, Japanese, and social studies before she served the Lutheran Church of America as missionary in Japan 1951-1966. After her return to the US, Ms. Barnhart earned her doctorate in 1972 and became Dean of the Department of Social Work at Tulane University (cf. French Funerals 2018). In Japan she worked at Jiaien.

Preparations

Once Malmgrens had been accepted by DMS they were sent to Birmingham in England for half-a-year of training at Selly Oak Colleges, an ecumenical federation of educational facilities, primarily concerned with theology, social work and teacher training, that existed between 1922 and 2001 (cf. Wikipedia 2019).

“We were on our own at Selly Oak. DMS did not keep an eye on us or give us instructions on what to do,” Birthe recalls.

Villy: At Selly Oak, each denomination had its own compound, the Church of England, of course, but also Baptists and Methodists. We stayed at the Baptists’ Sct. Andrews College. It was interesting to share time with peoples from more than fifty nations.

Birthe: In those days, the English did not really like Japan. We met a similar attitude later, when we visited our oldest son in Australia in the early 2000s and were at a dinner party with local Danes. Some of the older ones, who had experienced the Japanese aggressions during World War II, clearly did not like the fact that one of our daughters is of Japanese descent. Back in 1969-Selly Oak, some people thought we ought to go to somewhere in Africa rather than to Japan.

Villy: A college fellow got quite worked up when he heard we were to serve in Japan.

1969-1976: Jiaien in Kumamoto

Summer 1969, the Malmgren family – Birthe and Villy with their son Ole (1966) – arrived in Tokyo on board the same plane as Mona and Notto R. Thelle, a Norwegian missionary family sent by the Nordic Christian Mission to the Buddhists.

Whereas the norm for language schooling was two years, Jiaien wanted Malmgrens to come as early as possible, so they moved to Kumamoto after only one year in the capital. In 1970, they had their second son, Klaus. Their duties at work and home did not leave room for further formal language studies, but Rev. KADOWAKI

Seiko 門脇 聖子, the pastor of Jiaien, sought to be a language training partner for Birthe and Villy once a week.

Birthe: Pastor Kadowaki had studied diakonia in Germany. She was a very talented woman, and we had a close relationship with her. I gave birth to our daughter Tina in Kumamoto, and when she was baptized in the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Kuwamizu Church, just outside Jiaien, rev. Kadowaki was Tina's godmother.

Christian: What kind of work were you involved in? Were you a caretaker or more a technical advisor?

Villy: A mix of both. I worked at Powlars's Home for the elderly. The rooms were very modest with two beds – one on both sides of the room. Many of the old people had not been out of their beds for I don't know how long. So I wanted to make them mobile. I had the administration buy more wheelchairs. But many residents were not used to sitting in chairs. Therefore, I asked our handyman to cut plywood-tables that would fit with the chairs and with the residents and their stomachs. He added a hole in both sides of the tables so they could be tied to the armrests of the wheelchairs. For those who could not sit in a chair, I sometimes used a stretcher on large bicycle wheels. Once on the stretcher, it was easy to take them for a walk in the neighborhood, and they seemed to like it. This project of mobilizing took quite some time.

Though Kumamoto used to be the headquarters of JELC that was no longer the case by 1970, which may help explain the fact that there were few missionaries besides Malmgrens. They had a colleague in the Rev. Andrew Ellis and his wife, in Kumamoto since 1952. Rev. Ellis was the local anchor of the J3 program under the American Lutheran Church that constantly had two or three of these short-term missionaries in Kumamoto. The young US fellows benefitted from the Ellis's hospitality and care.

Rev. Ellis, too, was literally mobilizing people to come to church. He picked up people with disabilities in his car at their homes, brought them to JEL Kuwamizu Church so they could participate in the *kohitsujikai* 子羊会 ("The Lambs Group" *The*

Little Flock?), and then took them back². Villy and his car expanded this taxi service. The wheelchairs at Pawlars's Home came in handy in that respect too, for "just outside the main gate of Jiaien is a local Lutheran Church." According to Villy, on Sundays, "a caravan of wheelchairs transported elderly habitants to church, thanks to many volunteering helpers. I had a video camera, a big bulky thing, and I have recorded the procession of wheelchairs to church. The footage was for the archives of Jiaien."

Birthe: Care for the disabled was one of the strengths of the church. We sometimes had the people from the Little Lambs Group over for dinner. People were curious as to who we were, and we let the doors and windows be open. It was a way to get in touch with the community. I had an oven and felt expected to offer baking courses, so I did. My two young children sat in tall child seats while I was baking.

Villy: Once a year, Jiaien organized a diakonia camp under the leadership of Rev. Kadowaki. Ten or so younger people participated doing volunteer services the Pawlas's homes for the elderly or other institutions.

Birthe: We would always have them over for an afternoon coffee treat a la Southern Jutland.

The oldest son, Ole, entered primary school in 1972 as befitting his age, but within half a year the family knew it did not work out well, wherefore Birthe started home schooling him made possible thanks to the supplying of educational materials by the Y's Men's Club in Denmark. She also cared for her two younger children, who only later entered kindergarten. This continued into Ole's 4th class, when Klaus, the second son, also started school at home. The situation became more than they could handle, so the children's needs were one factor behind the family's move to Kyoto in 1976.

² The Little Flock was still active in 2015 cf. the website of Kuwamizu Church 2020: "主に熊本市内の各地の教会に集う障がい者とその仲間の群れです。" – A flock consisting main of challenged people and their friends from the churches in Kumamoto City.

Furloughs

The first furlough lasted almost a year between June 1972 and March 1973. The second was in June-August 1976, and the third was in June-August 1978. During the first, Ole attended Bording (primary) Free School; the second and third were planned so the family could spend time away from the hottest season of Japan. Rev. Dr. Gunvor Lande made a survey of Norwegian Missionary Wives in the first half of the 1970s, she herself being one of them. She found that furloughs often were stressful because the housing in Japan had to be emptied for the next family to move in, wherefore the adults, but usually the wife had to pack everything, organize the storage of what should remain in Japan, while the family went home to Norway. In Norway, she would be responsible for the temporary home including children's culture shock and education (cf. Lande 1979). Malmgrens did not face similar problems.

Adoption

The family lived in a missionary housing on the Jianen compound. They were neighbors with an orphanage for children of more than 2 years old.

Birth: We were often visited by couples from Hawaii, who came for adoption of children from the orphanage. They had to stay some days at Jiaien with little to do, so naturally we invited them in. A little further away from our house, lay Jiaien's orphanage for children younger than two. We wanted another child and had previously talked about adoption, so while we were not outright searching for a child, we were motivated for adoption. We saw her at the infants' home and then she moved into the orphanage for older children. The first time we asked the leader of the home to let us adopt her, he rejected the idea. Half a year later, he asked us, if we wanted her. He even assured us that, should things not work out to our satisfaction, we could return her! That was not our approach. Once the process began, it involved both Japanese and Danish authorities, because we had a house in Denmark. The Japanese wanted all sorts of judicial information from Denmark that had to be translated by the Danish

Embassy in Tokyo. Three ministries in Denmark were involved, so our case drew the attention of the Danish Prime Minister, Anker Jørgensen, who asked for a photograph of us (laughs). The girl was screened. When I knew, she would be part of our family, I met with her every day. She eventually came into our family when she was 2 years and 8 months old. That Christmas, she was baptized Anni by pastor Kadowaki.”

1976-1981: Lutheran Home near Osaka.

We invited Mr. and Mrs. Malmgren, Deacons sent by the Danish Lutheran Church and at that time serving Jiaien in Kumamoto, to come as Diakonia Consultants and manage the organization of the care and training of the staff. The couple always worked along with the staff in the caregiving, while giving strict instructions, but they developed a close relationship with the residents, who called them “Beard-doctor” and “Gren-doctor”. (Tsuboyama 2015, 26-27)

Besides the children’s educational needs, a professional call motivated the Malmgrens’ move to Kyoto.

Villy: It was Izumi, the director of Lutheran Home, who came to Kumamoto and invited us to Osaka.

“Lutheran Home (るうてるホーム *Ruuteru hoomu*) is dedicated to useful services for everyone in the community るうてるホームは、地域の皆様に役立つサービスを心がけています。” (cf. Rūteru Hōmu, About)

Lutheran Home, a Social Welfare Judicial Person, opened as a “Low Cost Retirement Home” (*keihi rōjin hōmu* 軽費老人ホーム) in Shijonawate City, about 15 km. East of Osaka, in 1965. According to the institution’s website, the idea first arose in 1954 in the Lutheran Women’s Group (*fujinkai* 婦人会, now *joseikai* 女性会) in Kyoto Church. Initially, the purpose was to provide affordable facilities for widows of JELC pastors, but by 1960 the goal was to provide a nursing home (*yōgo rōjin hōmu* 養護老人ホーム) for “old people [more than 60] with a low income” (cf.

Rūteru Hōmu, History). The women's fundraising campaign was headed by "the first chairperson of the board, Ms. KARAKI Tae 辛木多恵, Ms. KONDŌ Michiko 近藤美知子, and Ms. ŌHARA Reiko 大原玲子." (Rūteru Hōmu, History) Ms. Karaki was the daughter of one of JELC's first Japanese pastors YONEMURA Tsunekichi 米村常吉, and a survivor of the A-bomb over Hiroshima (On Yonemura, see Hermansen 2014). The leaders visited congregations all over Japan to secure general understanding and support within JELC. Non-Christians including large companies in the local area also contributed, so the home was established, debt-free. Mr. IZUMI Ryō 泉亮 was director of the home.

In 2019, the website of Lutheran Home informed its readers that the Malmgrens lived on the premises of the institution (cf. Rūteru Hōmu, History). However, in my interview, the couple told the story slightly differently.

Birthe: We always lived in American missionary houses, wherever there was a vacancy. When we moved to the Kansai are, it happened to be a house near Ryoan-ji Temple in Kyoto.

Villy: The house has since been torn down. When my son Klaus and I went there some years ago, there were six houses on that tiny plot of land.

Birthe: The old houses were big and expensive to maintain, but they fitted our big family of six.

Villy: And the owner always fixed it if we called with a problem.

Birthe: In Kyoto, we developed a close connection with Rev. Gunvor & Rev. Aasulv Lande (1934-2019), Norwegian missionaries originally sent by The Nordic Christian Mission to Buddhists but when we met in Kyoto working for the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS). Aasulv and I were on the board of Kyoto International School. Thanks to the school we were affiliated with the international community in Kyoto, and simultaneously with the Japanese community thanks to the church. And once Anni began in the school in 1978, I also worked at Lutheran Home four days a week.

Villy: I was an advisor during the construction of a nursing home.

One year prior to the opening of the nursing home for elderly requiring special care (Jp. *tokubetsu yōgo rōjin hōmu* 特別養護老人ホーム [*tokuyō* 特養 for short]) (in 1976), the Danish Lutheran Church sent Ms. and Mr. Malmgren as missionaries to Japan. The couple lived in a dorm on the facility ground, guiding and training the personnel in caregiving. Because the personnel learned what care entails (the composition of care) and the principle ideas of caregiving with such passion, and based thereon put their skills into practice and had them honed in the field, this is now a treasure of the special nursing home.

Malmgren sensei had three principles of caregiving:

*Thorough body care;

*As far as possible to get [the resident] out of the bed, [to] avoid she gets bedridden as far as possible;

*No matter how trifling the request of the elderly is, always respond individually.

The teaching is still the fundament of caregiving at Lutheran Home.

“Little things are simply little. But, little things done faithfully and with certainty leads to something big,” was a favorite saying of Malmgren sensei³. (Rūteru Hōmu, History)

3 “特養開設 1年前 (1976年)、デンマークルーテル教会からマルムグレン夫妻が日本に派遣された。夫妻は施設敷地内の宿舎に泊まり込み、5年間にわたり職員に介護の指導と訓練を行ってくれた。当時の職員はケアの組み立て、ケアの基本的な考え方を熱心に習得し、その過程において実際に職員が現場で手ほどきを受けて鍛えられたことが、特養にとって後々の宝となったのである。

マルムグレン先生の介護の原則は、

「*ボディケアを徹底する。// *できる限り離床、寝たきりにしない。// *お年寄りの要求はどんなに小さなことであっても、個別にいつでも対応する。」というものであった。この教えが今もるうてるホームの介護の基本となっている。

「小さなことは小さなことにすぎません。しかし、小さなことを忠実に、しかも確実に実行することは、大きなことにつながるのです。」

これがマルムグレン先生の口癖であった。” (Rūteru Hōmu, History)

Villy: While the facilities were under construction, I would actually stay in a workmen's hut on wheels for several nights in a row. We had many meeting. I was also involved in the purchase of equipment, etc. It was a most interesting period of time.

Birthe: It was more rational for you to stay over some of the time to cut down on commuter time. And we had an apartment at Lutheran Home where we would stay every other weekend to attend the local Sunday services.

Villy: The apartment only came later, when everything was in order.

Birthe: We would take the elderly on tours, for instance to the December exhibition of chrysanthemums in nearby Hirakata City.

Villy: A group like Rotary donated a bus for the disabled to Lutheran Home.

Birthe: We packed it with all necessities including a portable toilet.

Villy: Besides the bus we used our car, a Toyota Crown, that had sufficient room for our family plus a few more.

Birthe: It was convenient, because we also had to transport our children and their friends to and from school and other activities in town.

Church life

Birthe: We attended Kyoto Lutheran Church led by pastor KISHII Satoru 岸井敏 . We were a bit shunned by the church regarding the Holy Communion. At first, all in our family participated, but Rev. Rasmussen, the American missionary at the church, argued it to be unbiblical for children to get the Eucharist, if they had yet to be confirmed⁴. His position was supported by the local church council (*yakuinkai*). We thought differently, so all of us remained seated when the rest of the congregation

4 In the Lutheran Church of Denmark infant baptism is the norm. With the reformation in 1536, the Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation was abolished, but reintroduced by the King Christian 6 in 1736 when the pietistic movement dominated (cf. Habsmeier 2013) . Confirmation was administered to children at the age of 14 as the conclusion of their Christian education, based on Luther's catechism. It became a rite-of-passage into adulthood and hiring people without documented Confirmation was illegal. Rev. Rasmussen, while American, belonged

partook in the Eucharist. Rev. Rasmussen was not happy and even visited us to clarify his position; we did not want any conflict, but also did not change our minds. Other pastors told us, they agreed with our position, but the local church council had the authority.

Family life and challenges

“Children’s education” has been a constant issue for missionaries, at least throughout the 20th century. I have discussed Danish cases from the 1910s, 1950s, and 1960s (Hermansen 2014a: 113ff, 2018a: 54, and 2014b respectively). Where there were a sufficient number of children from one country, the mission opened schools, such as the Swedish School in Shizuoka, the Norwegian School and the Canadian Academy in Kobe, and missionaries from other countries made use of them or other international schools. For the Malmgren children, Kyoto International School near the city’s Imperial Palace Garden, *Gosho*, met their needs in the lower classes, but there were hardly any pupils for the older classes, wherefore “for the last half-a-year in Japan our eldest son, Ole, attended the Canadian Academy in Kobe,” said Birthe.

V: At the Canadian Academy Ole was involved in staging [Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s] musical “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor® Dreamcoat” for Christmas that year. Four teachers were responsible, and the children created their own costumes.

Birthe: Ole returned with colored underwear because the paint hadn’t completely dried. And because he rehearsed at home, Anni got the knack of English by listening to him singing.

to a branch of the Lutheran Church rooted in this pietistic tradition. In the 1970s’ Denmark many congregations of this pietistic tradition did not permit children at the table of the holy communion either (author’s personal experience).

Fellowship

Christian: In my research I have often heard of the importance of fellowship among missionaries, for instance in the summer vacations by Lake Nojiri in Nagano Prefecture?

Birthe: We did not go there, except once. In October 1969, shortly after our arrival, we participated in the consecration of the Shinreisan Church building [in Misawa village near Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture]. It was built by the Nordic Christian Mission to Buddhists (CMB) with which DMS had a close contact at that time (see also Hermansen 2016). The leader of Shinreisan and the construction of the church building was Rev. Aasulv Lande, we mentioned earlier. In 1971, Olaf and Martha Roesgaards were sent by CMB from Denmark as new managers of the Shinreisan institutions. We developed a good relation with them, so when they went on vacation by Lake Nojiri, we went to Shizuoka to cool off at Shinreisan. Compared with Kumamoto, it was significantly less hot, and we enjoyed the rural atmosphere of the farm.

Villy: We never travelled in Japan as much as we would have liked to, for church and work were naturally prioritized.

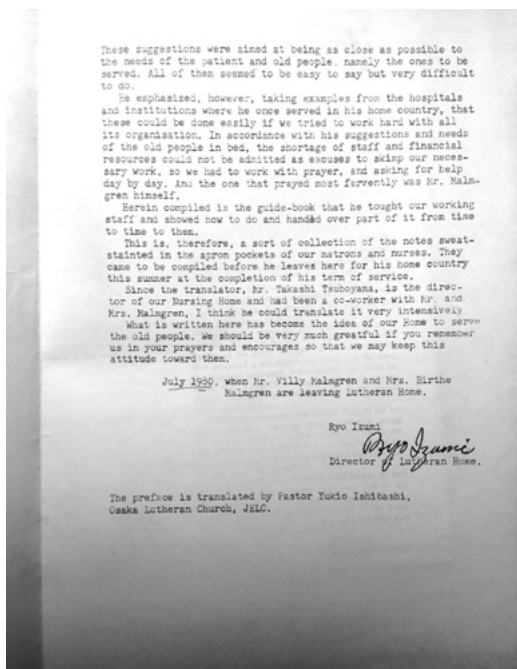
Birthe: We were invited to the All Lutheran Free Conference (cf. Allen and Ingulsrud 2015:183) and we went but only once. We did not feel a great need for being with the American missionaries.

Villy: In Kumamoto there were not many missionaries of any denomination, so we developed friendships with those we met, some of them for life. DMS had more missionaries located in Taiwan in those years, and we visited all of them.

Home again – DMS / mission and the social status of “the wife.”

Birthe and Villy decided to end their commitment in 1980.

Birthe: For the sake of the children’s schools, I returned to Denmark with them a couple of months ahead of Villy. I searched and found a house for rent in a suburb of



Copenhagen.

Villy: You told me by telephone about the options. I had to finish the work at Lutheran Home before I could return.

In a July 1980 letter to DMS, Mr. Izumi, director of Lutheran Home, wrote:

“In accordance with his [Villy Malmgren’s] suggestions and needs of the old people in bed, the shortage of staff and financial resources could not be admitted as

excuses to skip out necessary work, so we had to work with prayer, and asking for help day by day. And the one that prayed most fervently was Mr. Malmgren himself. // Herein compiled is the guide-book that he thought our working staff and showed how to do and handed over part of it from time to time to them. (...) What is written here has become the idea of our Home to serve the old people. (...) July 1980, when Mr. Villy Malmgren and Mrs. Birthe Malmgren are leaving Lutheran Home. Ryo Izumi (sign).”

The letter leaves no doubt about the director’s gratitude for the work done and the influence exerted by the Malmgren couple, and the website of Lutheran Home, quoted above, is equally appreciative. There is thus no correlation between this fact and the fact that once they were back in Denmark, Birthe and Villy realized that legally she had been *accompanying* her husband, wherefore her eleven years of work

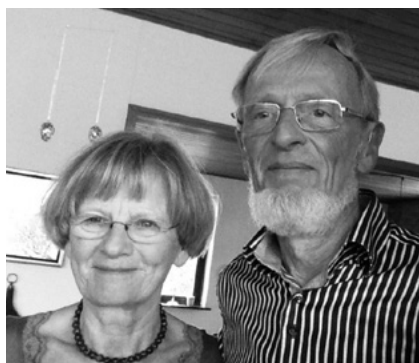
in Japan do not count [present tense!] as reckonable service for pension purpose.

Birthe: I had no judicial rights. I wasn't a member of a labor union. I have decided not to let this bog me down, as it could have done. I appreciate that the mission paid the school fees, and that we had some unique experiences, but in hindsight, I wish we had been more mature before we left for Japan. Mine was not an isolated case. We knew a Finnish missionary, whose husband left her, so she lost her judicial standing in Japan and had to go home. Within the first year of our return to Denmark, I had a phone call from DMS and was invited to come and "cook a witches' brew".

The caller was Elisabeth Sørensen, the wife of mission secretary Knud Sørensen. They had been DMS missionaries in Tanzania, and like Birthe, Elisabeth had no rights on the return to Denmark. The two women therefore initiated a change of the system, whereby the accompanying partner would be guaranteed some personal rights including pension scheme and labor union membership⁵.

Conclusion

Back in Denmark, both Villy and Birthe first enrolled in Danmark Sygeplejerskehøjskole (The Danish Nurse University), and then worked as leading nurses for the rest of their career. The author has visited them on one or two occasions with health care students and professionals from Japan in the late 1980s and the 1990s, when they were heading the caretaking of elders in a Albertslund, a suburb of Copenhagen.



⁵ Let us note that the women's liberation movement in Denmark had made many (most?) women join a labor union since the early 1970s, i.e., after Birthe left for Japan, and that union membership was a condition to qualify for unemployment support.



Anne Sofie and Leif Holm
Deacons in Japan, 1978-1983

“The other day, I saw a television program about a former marine and his girlfriend who were going on a summer vacation. He had prepared his knife and got his hiking boots on. Her suitcase was full of bathing wear. In other words, we have to reconcile our expectations.”

The observation was voiced by Anne Sofie Holm. She and her husband Leif Holm find it illustrates what they feel was missing when DMS sent them to Japan. They lived and worked there from March 1978 to June 1983. In their home on 26 April 2014, they told me of their expectations for, experiences during and reflections on their lives as missionaries.

Anne Sofie Holm (1948-) was born in Resen-Humlum parish, just outside Struer, a smaller port town by Limfjorden in Northwest Jutland. Her family was actively supporting overseas Christian mission, and one of the teachers in her primary school was Karl Emil Melchiorson, missionary to Japan 1959-1963 (cf. Hermansen 2018). “Melchiorson and his wife had only praise for Japan and the Japanese. I never heard a word of complaint from any of them.” “By profession I am deacon trained as social worker and specialized in music therapy. I worked as a church organist before

we went to Japan. When I told my family that we planned to go, my mother asked, if we had been considering this for a long time, and my father was reluctant to let me go. He feared we would not come back.”

Leif Holm (1945 ~) was born in Elsinore north of Copenhagen. His family stems from Bornholm, one of Denmark’s easternmost islands where the very pious Lutheran Mission originated, the LM that sponsored the first Danish missionaries to Japan, Jens and Andrea Winther (cf. Hermansen 2014a). First trained as a carpenter, Leif later became a skilled nurse and deacon. “My maternal aunt was vehemently opposed to my going to Japan. My mother and paternal aunt from Bornholm, on the other hand, came and stayed with us in Kobe for a couple of months around Christmas and New Year for the baptismal of Louise, our fourth child. It was still rare for people to travel to Japan, so a local newspaper on Bornholm ran a headline “Dagmar Holm has left to visit a nephew in Japan”!

Leif: We wanted to be missionaries and had talked of going to India or somewhere in Africa, but DMS recommended Japan, because the educational environment would be better for our children. What the organization or the church expected from us was not clear, but we thought “they knew.”

Anne Sofie: They said we could choose between Kumamoto on Kyushu and Kyoto/ Osaka – places Birthe and Villy Malmgren had served. Kyoto seemed the better choice, for we wanted to make sure our children could attend school and live at home. We had heard stories of long-term separation of children and parents from older missionaries, who had to send their children to boarding schools far away from home, and we did not want that for our children.

Leif: I was told, we could just go and then search for the location where we wanted to work.

Anne Sofie: We chose Kyoto in part because Malmgrens lived there. But the sending turned out to be an example of not-reconciled expectations. I was not yet 30 and Leif only in his early 30s. And a bit naively, perhaps, we expected the other

parties to know what they wanted from us and to care for us.

Anne Sofie: We were given the most of a year of preparation at the College of Ascension at Selly Oak near Birmingham in England, which was good for our English language skills. Lectures by the famous Presbyterian theologian and India-missionary Lesslie Newbigin introduced us to Buddhism. Theologically, we felt more at home with the Methodists than the high church brand of the Anglican Church that hosted us.

Holms were commissioned for Japan in a worship service at Vestervang Church, in Elsinore. Johannes Johansen, a famous hymnal poet and later bishop of Elsinore, wrote a hymn for the occasion. The commissioning in Denmark was in stark contrast to what happened next in Japan.

Anne Sofie: Once we were in Japan we were mostly on our own. We were not introduced in any church, and we had no written contract specifying what we were supposed to do. The integration was left up to other missionaries. Birthe and Villy took good care of us – helped us by finding a house, getting a car and sharing their experiences. We were also helped by other local missionaries. In many ways, we found our living conditions satisfying and we sought to immerge in the community as far as possible. I have seen pictures of the living rooms of the Danish missionaries in China that looked exactly as Danish as the living room of my grandparents. Our house was mostly furnished like the Japanese. Our older children liked their international school but they also enjoyed playing with the neighborhood children. However, when it came to our work, the situation was not as gratifying.

Anne Sofie: A pastor who can preach in the local language will easily fit in, but that was not our case. I liked talking with the neighbors and people I met on the street. Had we been allowed to stay longer, I believe our oral skills would have developed sufficiently for further work. In the second year of our first period, we moved to Kobe. We lived in an older house on Yamamoto Street in the city center. It is gone after the big Awaji-Hanshin earthquake in 1995. I gave birth to our fourth and fifth child at the private Christian Stella Maris (Kaisei) Hospital. So the first years, I was busy with

being pregnant and rearing infants. Sometime into our second period, I had talks with a local church of helping out at its kindergarten.

Leif: I worked at Lutheran Home as a successor of Birthe and Villy Malmgren. During the second term, I concluded that I wanted to do something else. The institution did a meaningful work, but Malmgren had taught them everything, so the staff managed on their own. I was neither absolutely necessary nor completely redundant. I observed, how the staff carried loads of sheets and beddings by hand. Because I am a carpenter, I bought some wood and made small wagons for easy transportation of the textiles; it lessened the physical burdens. However, I wanted to find a place where my skills



Photo 3 Leif Holm in front of Kibō no ie in Osaka, 1981

were more in demand. A missionary colleague, Pete Rasmussen, took me along to Kamagasaki, the day laborers' area in Osaka. As you know, the German missionary Frau Elsbeth Strohm was leader of the Lutheran institution *Kibō no ie* (希望の家 House of Hope and Joy, see Hermansen 2005. On Frau Strohm, Church and Diakonia see also Morimoto 2012). In those days, the church was generally not so supportive of her diaconal work, but I considered working along there in our third period.

During its first summer in Japan, Norwegian Aasuly Lande introduced the family to the fellowship of missionaries and Japanese neighbors in *Nojiri Lake Association*. They all liked it so much that they eventually bought a house in the community and spent at least two weeks but mostly more of the summers by the lake in Nagano Prefecture.

Anne Sofie: In my childhood, parish members, former missionaries to India, had told about their summers in the mountains, and China-missionaries also escaped the heat of the season. Like them, we needed to get into the cooler mountains. All the Norwegians were there, and most of the Danish missionaries, too, came to Lake Nojiri, at least some of the time.

Leif: The second year at Lake Nojiri, I worked at the nurse station for the association. It not only paid for our stay but also got me in touch with many of the residents. The worship services were theologically varied but inspiring like the fellowship as such.

When the couple moved to Kobe, the older children attended the Canadian Academy, and the younger children went to St. Michael's Kindergarten. During their first furlough between December 1980 and August 1981, the children attended the international department of the Bernadotte school, to keep their English intact.

The furlough was otherwise busily scheduled with meetings. DMS had a wide network of "kredse" (lit. circles), local supporter groups that would gather once a month to share the newsletter from DMS, pray for individual missionaries and their work, and often invite a missionary on furlough as speaker about her or his work & life (on *Kredse*, see Nielsen 2019, vol. 2:114-116). The meetings could take place in a *Missionshus*, a facility dedicated to mission, but meeting facilities at the parish church and private homes were used as well.

Anne Sofie: Later, when we had to return to Denmark, we had issues with DMS for not counting us individually, but for the meeting activities in Denmark, the organization certainly counted on both of us. If it had had its say, we would individually have been giving talks at different locations every night. We had to remind the organizer that our five children needed at least one parent at home at night.

CMH: Other missionaries have told of speaking at a gathering in the south of the country one night, and in the north the following. One said, he drove roughly

12000 kilometers to cover meetings during a furlough. That is a quite a distance, considering Denmark is merely about 400 Km from North to South, and from East to West.

Leif: In our case, the secretary did a very fine job scheduling the meetings. She focused each week on one area of Denmark, for instance North Jutland. It was in part necessitated by the fact that I relied on public transportation. Many people wanted our visits. On the busiest days, I had four meetings: A morning session at a parish church invited by a pastor to talk with teenagers in his or her Confirmation preparation classes, a luncheon with a group of elderly parishioners, an afternoon meeting with a different group of people, and finally the big evening gathering. Such days were not that frequent though, but I normally had two meetings a day every day for a whole week.

Anne Sofie: In hindsight, it would have been smarter if we had apprenticed with some of the older American missionaries for the first couple of years. That way, we would have been channeled into the church. Rev. Notto R. Thelle, a Norwegian colleague, told us that the congregations were mostly so small that they could just about afford the local pastor, and sometimes not even that. Therefore, they would focus on Sunday services only.

Now, I hear of Japan's aging society, and understand that some people must lead a very frugal life to make ends meet because their pension is low. Logically this must mean there is a need for diaconal care among the elderly. The church should involve itself in this task, like it was involved in Denmark prior to the establishment of the welfare society.

In the autumn 1982, Holms were informed that the financial situation meant DMS had to reduce its commitments, which translated into pulling home missionary couples from Bahrain, Taiwan, and Japan. In 1982, DMS had three couples in Japan; Holms had been there the longest, followed by the Marit & Erik Wengel and Else &

Kresten Christensen.

Anne Sofie: Kresten Christensen called us to propose they would return, considering the time we had spent growing roots in Japan already. We replied that given they had just finished their language studies, they deserved a chance to make use of their skills. Besides, we understood ourselves to be the more expensive, because we had five children.

Leif: Of course, we were disappointed. When we left Denmark for Japan, we imagined ourselves committed for 15 or 20 years, I guess.

In the end, DMS informed Holms that when they returned to Denmark at the end of their second period the following June '83, they should not expect to be send out again.

Anne Sofie: It could not be helped. However, what followed was a true disappointment with the organization. Both of us had resigned from work in Denmark in order to go to Japan. We were both commissioned and sent off as missionaries to Japan. We trusted DMS and had no written contract. We were salaried as a family. Therefore, it was an unpleasant surprise to learn that they had only paid into Leif's retirement savings.

Leif: DMS could have done more to alleviate the harshness of the situation for us. We had sold our house before leaving for Japan. Consequently, we had nowhere to return to. We had left from Elsinore in North Zealand and resettled in West Jutland. It would have been a help, had DMS offered us lodging for some months at the headquarters in Copenhagen, for physical and emotional acclimatization and time to work out plans.

Anne Sofie: I think we returned with a feeling of having been let down and that we wanted to avoid being asked to do more meetings for DMS at the moment. We chose West Jutland, because my sister had a summer cottage near my home town Struer. And we stayed in that area because I thought my parents should have a chance to be in closer contact with their grandchildren. It did not work out so well

due to language difficulties – the children had a hard time understanding my parents' dialect; vis-versa my parents could not always understand the Danish with a mixture of Japanese and English our children had adopted. The culture shock might have been lighter if we had been in North Zealand. As it were, we settled in Vinderup, a town east of Struer but still in West Jutland.

Leif: Initially the rumor had it that “a big Chinese family” had moved in, but we were well received in the town.

Anne Sofie: We were welcomed in the church and Bible study group. People wanted to hear about Japan. They were surprised when I got the piano I had sent from Japan. Of course, in a rural community, people had opinions on what kind of lifestyle would be appropriate for us – with little room for extravagance. It was not a problem in our case, for we did not have exclusive furniture or an expensive car. Rumors spread fast. I worked as an organist in the church. During a one-month summer vacation, I was in charge of summer camps for DMS at a different location. Leif had to stay home for work. So, I packed the car with our children and put the suitcases on the roof rack. Immediately, the rumor was out that I was divorcing Leif and had left home, for people had seen the suitcases (laughs). For them, we were always interesting in both a positive and negative sense. Later, in 1987, we moved here where we are now. We have good neighbors of our own age, who have lived and maintained their farms all their lives and never once been to the capital or other far-away places in Denmark.

Leif: For some years after our return, we had little contact with DMS. That gradually changed. Anne Sofie has been involved in the Norwegian-Danish mission organization Areopagos as chair of the Danish section, and as such she was invited to participate in the annual meetings of Danmission [the name of the year 2000-merger of Dansk Missionsselskab, DMS, and Dansk Santalmission, DSM, cf. Danmission/historie].

Concluding remarks

The lack of contract with DMS, the lack of a proper introduction to the JECL church, the feeling of being necessary at Lutheran Home, are all, I understand, examples of Anne Sofie and Leif Holm's experiences of not reconciled expectations – “the bikini and the survival knife.” They find that had the management of DMS been professionally as well equipped for administration as it was for theology, things might have worked out differently. It might not have changed the economic situation that necessitated the premature termination of their commitments in Japan, but the handling of the people involved could have been improved. Though we did not discuss the details of the economy, the early 1980s was an unfortunate combination of Japan entering its decade of Bubble Economy, whereas in Denmark the decade was known as *Fattig firserne*: “the poor eighties” This resulted in lower income for organizations like DMS, and increased the frequency of the question: Why should we do mission in a rich country like Japan? The fact that DMS, starting with Malmgrens, had switched its support to diaconal projects in Japan, may have made it more difficult for many living in the Danish Welfare State to understand the need for stimulating the social involvement of the church. Under these circumstances, Holms may have felt it difficult to argue for the continuation of they stay in Japan, especially because, as Leif said, he wished to change his commitment to a place with a more obvious need for his skills, i.e., his working at the Lutheran Home could not justify the expenses of having a family of 7 in Japan. The difficulties faced by Anne Sofie bear much in common with those I heard from Birthe Malmgren, see above, and warrant an in-depth discussion that shall be more solid once the data from interviews with the remaining Danish missionaries to Japan in the 1980s and 1990s have been processed.

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