

Tomorrow I'm going to disappear

The story of Harald Oskar Andersen



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Chapter 1. Tomorrow I'm going to disappear.

Tomorrow I'm going to disappear. I don't want to, but I have to.

I'm really sad that Anna doesn't know I'm going. I know it's going to be a big shock when she finds I'm gone.

And I won't be there as Karoline and Johan grow up. My babies! How I'm going to miss them.

But I know if I stay around here I'm a dead man.

So I've made up my mind. Tomorrow I'm going to disappear!

Chapter 2. Before I disappeared.

My name is Harald Oskar Andersen. I come from the little town of Holter, just outside of Nannestad in Norway. Nannestad is about three days walk from Christiania, the capital of Norway, but on a bike I have done it in about 10 hours.

I was born in Nannestad in 1881. My parents were Anders Mikkelsen and Karen Dorthea Kristoffersen. They worked for local farmers; my father working on the farm, and my mother doing housework. My parents weren't married and didn't stay together very long after I was born. One good thing they did before they separated was to make sure I was baptised in the Nannestad Church. The church has always been very important for Norwegian families so I am grateful that my parents did this for me. The font in the church was built around 1150 and had a 'new' copper insert made in the 1600's so it's very historic.

After my father left home I lived with my mother in the *fattig hus* (poorhouse) in Holter. I had an older brother and sister but I didn't see much of them. Later on I heard that my father and some woman had produced twins the same year I was born but I never knew them - or him for that matter.

I didn't have much of a childhood. I started school in Holter when I was six but had to work on the farm, even when I was little. I cared for the animals, chopped firewood, and helped to harvest the corn. There wasn't much time to play. We were so poor that if we didn't work we didn't eat.

Sometimes I escaped into the forest behind the farm - that's where I really felt at home. On the edge of the forest I gathered berries so my mother and I could have something nice to eat. There were plenty of *tyttebaer* and *blabaer* (blueberries) which my mother made into delicious jam, and occasionally I found some *moltebaer* - the

tastiest berries of all. I loved being in the forest. There I could be free and safe, and I could do whatever I liked. Occasionally I saw an elk, a fox or even a wild pig. (You had to be very careful when they were around!). What I enjoyed most was making small wooden boats and sailing them down from the forest on the river that flowed through the farm. In my imagination I was on those boats sailing to new and exciting places all around the world!

I think I was about ten when I finished school. I didn't miss it because I enjoyed working so much, especially in the forest. Looking back, I'm glad I was able to go to school, though, because in those days, many poor children weren't able to. It meant I could read and write and that I knew a little about different places in the world - places I dreamed of sailing to someday.

When I was fifteen I was confirmed in the Holter Church. Confirmation is a big thing in Norway and it means much more than becoming a member of the Church. Along with all my friends I went to confirmation classes and learnt all about God and the church. On the big day we dressed up in our best clothes and made our vows, then our God-parents made their vows and we all went off and had a party. I was so proud because I was now a Christian. But, more importantly, I was also an adult and could start making decisions about my future.

Not long after I was confirmed I left home and got a job on a farm near Holter. The days were long but I must have been a good worker because the farmer, Hans Jensen, let me help him with a lot of the farm work. Hans grew potatoes, corn and wheat, so each year we ploughed and prepared the soil; planted the seeds; and cared for the growing plants. Then in summer we harvested the crops. It sure felt good to have a full *stabbur* (storehouse) at the end of each season! In the autumn we made hay from the stalks of the wheat. That's one job I didn't like because it made me wheezy and my eyes and nose were always running. Our farm had a few sheep, some cows and pigs, and quite a few chickens. In winter the animals went into the *lave* (barn) because it was so cold outside. This meant there wasn't much for me to do, but I didn't mind too much. For the first time in my life I had a job and I knew I would always have something to eat.

My favourite times on the farm were when we went into the forest to get firewood or cut logs. I loved the smell and feel of cut wood, especially the *grantre* and *furutre*, the main trees used for building in Norway. I quickly learned how to cut trees down so they fell where I wanted them to, and then clean the *lafte* (logs) and get them out of the forest safely. The most boring work in the forest was cutting the thin *staur* sticks that are used for making the *skigaard* fences used in farms all over Norway. We had to find hundreds of tall thin sticks to make the *pal* (uprights), then split thicker logs to make the diagonal *staur*s that go between them.



Skigaard fence



All cabins, houses and farm buildings were made with interlocking logs like this.

What I loved most in the forest was shaping the big logs that were used for building cabins. After a while I could use my saw and axe to produce logs that would fit together almost perfectly. One of my proudest moments was when I finished building my first log cabin. My boss, Hans, even said I did a good job!

During the winter of 1900 there wasn't much to do on the farm so Hans let me have a couple of months off. I was 18 at the time and ready for an adventure! I took a tramp steamer from Christiania over to London, England, and looked for work on the ships. I was hoping to fulfill my childhood dream of sailing to new and exciting places. Fortunately I got a job on the first ship I applied for, the *SS Raithmoor*. I was strong and healthy and looked older than 18 so I didn't have to lie about my age!

That winter I did a couple of short trips between Christiania, Bergen, Stockholm, and London, working mainly as a cargo handler. I didn't get to the exotic places I had dreamed about, but that didn't matter. I was working on a ship and for me that was pretty exciting.

The sailors on the ship were tough guys and taught me a lot! Very soon I could drink with the best of them and could say a whole lot of new words - ones that sailors everywhere know, but not ones that should be used when women are around! Our times in port were particularly interesting, and gave us lots of (much exaggerated) stories to tell when we got back on the ship! It wasn't long before I had tattoos on my hands just like the other guys and felt very much a part of life on the *Raithmoor*.

The main language of trade used on the ships was English. I had never heard this language before but soon I could say the main swear words, and then could understand and talk in basic English - something that was very useful for me later on, after I had disappeared.

I got back to the farm in spring 1900 and my boss, Hans Jensen, was very pleased to have me back. He said he had missed me and couldn't imagine planting the next season's crops without me. No-one had ever said anything positive like that to me before. I felt great!

It soon became obvious that someone else in Norway had missed me. Anna! Her full name was Anna Otilie Edvardsen; a girl I had grown up with and known all my life. There weren't too many children in Holter so when we were little we played together and then went to school together. Anna was always around.

At the time Anna was working as a housemaid on a farm in Finnskjeggen, near Holter. She had a busy life. Inside the house she cooked, cleaned, washed clothes and kept the fire going so the farmer's family could stay warm. Outside she tended to the chickens, kept the vegetable garden, shoveled the snow in winter and did whatever the farmer's wife told her to do. It was a hard life and the pay was poor, but Anna was happy that she had a job and that the farmer treated her kindly. Not all farmers were like this back in those days. Many expected 'favours' from their housemaids and if the 'favours' weren't provided the maids lost their jobs. If maids found they were going to have babies the farmers didn't provide any help at all and often sacked the maid to get rid of the 'problem'.

I was 19 when I first came back from working on the ship and I started to see Anna in a new light. She wasn't just someone who had been around as I was growing up. She was pretty! Soon we changed from being just friends to being boyfriend and girlfriend and it wasn't long before we were spending all of our spare time together. Sometimes we even sneaked out when we were supposed to be working, just so we could be together! Anna was such an interesting person; so strong; such a hard worker; so practical; so loving, and so forgiving when I made mistakes or got angry. I loved her, and I know she loved me.

And then we became lovers!

The first time was in the forest at the back of our farm. I remember it so well! Amazing! Exciting! Scary! I've never experienced anything like it. Talk about young love! That's exactly what we had. It was truly wonderful.

After that Anna and I got together every Sunday afternoon during our time off, and made love as often as we possibly could: in the barn, in the forest, anywhere!

But one day late in September 1900 Anna dropped a big bombshell on me. She told me she was pregnant! I suppose we should have expected it, but when you are young and in love you don't think about such things.

I told you before that Anna was very practical. Well, her practical side came out in a big way once she knew she was pregnant. Anna kept on working so we wouldn't lose the income from her job. Then she set up a small place for us in the poorhouse so it felt like we had our own 'home'. It must have been very uncomfortable as the baby grew but all of her work was done just like normal, and Anna still found time to look after me as if I was a king. I don't know how she did it!

Our daughter Marie Karoline Haraldsen was born in March 1901. Her surname was

Haraldsen because the custom in those days was for a child's surname to be based on the first name of their father. My father was Anders Mikkelsen so my surname is Andersen. I am Harald Andersen so Marie Karoline had to be a 'Haraldsen'.

Right from the beginning Anna called Karoline by her middle name, Karoline, rather than Marie. Our Karoline was such a beautiful baby and we were such proud parents!

Anna had to keep on working after Karoline was born. She didn't even have one day off! It was hard keeping the boss happy and caring for Karoline, but we desperately needed the money and couldn't afford for Anna to lose her job. Our parents sometimes helped look after Karoline while we were working and some of the older people in the *fattig hus* were really kind. I'm sure they enjoyed having a baby around - except when Karoline screamed! I don't really know how we coped, but we did. Anna was just amazing!

Then in November 1902 Johan Oskar Haraldsen was born. This put even more pressure on Anna, but again we coped. In fact, we did more than cope. As a family we did really well. Yes, we were poor. Yes, life was tough. Yes, we had to work hard. But we had each other. We had a lovely daughter and a baby son. We loved each other and we were very, very happy.

That's why it's going to be so hard for us all when I disappear tomorrow.

Chapter 3. Why I disappeared.

I disappeared when Anna and I were twenty one, Karoline was two and Johan was just a baby.

Even now it's hard for me to describe why I had to disappear.

It all started one day when I was walking back to the farm from the forest not far from Holter. I had been cutting firewood and was feeling great after doing a good day's work.

On the way home I had to walk past the farm of one of our neighbours, a man called Arvid Thorsen. I didn't particularly like the man – in fact nobody in Holter liked him. Arvid had a harsh and confrontational manner and he didn't help out in the difficult times – something that most of the farmers in Holter were very happy to do. Arvid always seemed to be upset about something and often it was me that he was upset about! It was obvious that Arvid and I didn't get along so my boss, Hans, said I should just ignore Arvid Thorsen. Most of the time I was able to do just that.

Arvid specialized in growing strawberries. Not too many farmers try to grow this crop because the plants are expensive and they have quite a short growing season.

You have to prepare the strawberry beds early in spring; get the beds planted straight away and then keep the little plants well mulched and watered through spring and early summer. Picking of the ripe strawberries takes place from middle to late summer and the berries are delicious, with a strong flavor and a lovely deep red colour. Unfortunately birds love eating the ripe strawberries just as much as we do. Some farmers – including Arvid – frighten them off with shotgun blasts, while others cover the plants with netting. An effective but very labour intensive way of protecting your crop!

Well, as I said, one day I was walking past Arvid Thorsen's farm and I could see that many of the strawberries were ripe: red, plump and very, very inviting! I did what anyone would do in this situation; I helped myself to some of the biggest berries. They were wonderful! After I had a dozen or so I was about to head for home when I heard a yell. "Get off my farm and leave my strawberries alone". Obviously Arvid wasn't too happy with me!

I started to run but just as I got past the end of the farm I heard an almighty "bang". A hail of shotgun pellets went flying over my head. Arvid Thorsen was shooting at me!

I wasn't hit by any of the shots but I was very shaken up! By the time I got home this had changed to a new feeling: anger! "How dare Arvid Thorsen shoot at me." "He could have killed me. And all because of a few strawberries!"

When I told Anna what had happened she got really, really mad. She wanted to go round to Arvid's farm right then and tell him what she thought of him. Fortunately I was able to calm her down.

It all got a little out of hand, though, when some of my friends heard what had happened.

Stein, Roar, Rolf and I were all farm workers. Like all twenty one year olds we enjoyed having a few drinks and occasionally got into a bit of trouble! How I wish that, this time, we had behaved ourselves and left Arvid alone. But, no! When I told the guys what Arvid Thorsen had done we all decided to go and teach him a lesson. We went down to Arvid's farm and thought we would have a bit of a run around in his precious strawberry patch. Lots of trampled down plants and lots of squashed berries! Arvid Thorsen would soon know he couldn't shoot at people and get away with it. How dare he shoot at someone who was just helping himself to a few tasty strawberries!

I was the first to run in among the strawberries and the others quickly joined in the fun. We started pulling out plants and throwing strawberries at each other. Pretty soon we were all covered in juicy red and had made a lovely, squishy mess. Rolf started rolling over and over in it all and said he was making strawberry jam! What fun!

We were giving Arvid Thorsen just what he deserved.

All of a sudden there was a bang - just like the one I heard the last time I was in the strawberry patch. And there was Arvid, once again, yelling and firing his shotgun! But this time he wasn't just shooting at me. He was shooting at the four of us!

I'm afraid I'm a bit vague about what happened next. Over the years I've thought about it constantly, but I can only remember bits and pieces. It all happened so fast.

I know it was the 2nd of June, 1903. It was the day that changed my life. We were being shot at. Arvid was swearing a lot. I was yelling at him to stop. "You'll kill someone!" He kept on shooting. "Stop it. Stop it!" The four of us rushed at him. The gun went flying. Arvid starting punching Roar. We tried to stop him. Stein got hit and yelled "I think he's broken my arm." Rolf and I both punched Arvid at the same time. Arvid went down in a heap. I thought "That'll teach you." Stein was complaining about his arm. Rolf and Roar said they were OK.

Then there was silence.

I looked down at Arvid and he wasn't talking or moving. No sound. No movement. Nothing. I put my cheek beside his mouth to check his breathing. Nothing. I quickly checked his pulse. Again, nothing.

My heart dropped. Everything went numb. I gasped for breath. It seemed as if my life went into slow motion.

I looked down at Arvid Thorsen and he was obviously dead! Very, very dead!

And I was the one who had killed him.

"I'm sorry, Arvid. I didn't mean to kill you. I just wanted to give you a fright. But now look what's happened. I've killed you. I'm so, so sorry."

And then it struck me. Arvid Thorsen may be dead but I'm as good as dead, myself. I'm a killer; a cold-blooded murderer. If I stay around here I'll soon be put in jail and then it won't be long before I'm hanged. That's what happens to murderers in Norway.

The other guys must have been thinking something similar because the three of them started to run away, - and fast.

And it was at that moment I realised, tomorrow I have to disappear.

Chapter 4. How I disappeared.

As I walked back home my head was spinning and my mind was going in all sorts of directions.

"I mustn't tell anybody what happened. If I keep quiet no-one will know I killed Arvid".

"Yes they will. Everyone knows Arvid was shooting at you. You'll be the first one they think of."

"I have to tell Anna". "No, I mustn't tell Anna. When I get home I've got to act as if nothing happened".

"I don't want Anna to get in trouble for what I did. Much better if she doesn't know a thing". "But, maybe she'll guess what happened? No, not if I don't tell her". "But that means I'll have to lie to her".

"They'll find Arvid's body today. That means the police will be after the killer tomorrow, so I've got to disappear first thing tomorrow morning. Any later and I'll be straight off to jail."

"Oh, what am I going to do? I don't want to lie to Anna. But I can't tell her what happened. I just can't."

"How could this be happening to me? I'm never going to see Anna again. And Karoline and Johan. What's going to happen to them?"

"I can't just run away and leave my family. But I have to! I have to!"

By the time I got home I had worked out what I was going to do. I was going to act just like normal; as if nothing unusual had happened. If Anna asked what happened I would say that Arvid had been taught a lesson and wouldn't be causing us any more trouble in the future. If Anna didn't know anything she couldn't be blamed for what I had done. Then first thing tomorrow I would head off for work as usual, but I wouldn't go to work. I would ride down to Christiana instead. I would hop on a tramp steamer and head for London, just like I did last year. Then I would get work on a ship and would soon be far away from Norway. I would start a new life in some distant country where no-one could find me. This would be much better than staying in Norway and being a murderer. At least I would be alive. And being alive was a lot better than being dead!

And it all happened exactly as I planned.

When I got home Anna sensed straight away that something was wrong, but I didn't tell her anything about what happened. I said that we had taught Arvid a lesson and he wouldn't be causing any trouble for us in the future. I acted exactly as I would

have done if all this hadn't happened, and, fortunately, Anna didn't seem too curious.

After dinner I put the children to bed. This was one of the toughest things I've ever had to do because I knew it was the last time I would ever see my babies.

"Karoline. Johan. I'm so sorry that you are going to grow up without a daddy. But Daddy loves you. That's why he has to go away. Daddy loves you. Daddy loves you."

Even now I'm proud that Anna didn't notice anything different when I came back from putting the children to bed.

My last night with Anna was just so hard. I had to keep telling myself that she was going to be better off without me. I knew she would miss me but I also knew she would hate me to go to jail. And then to have me put to death for murder! Far better for Anna if I just disappeared. She would be much better off without me.

Our love-making that night was bitter-sweet; for me, anyway. I don't think Anna noticed any difference. She just knew that I loved her. And I did.

Next morning I got up at 6 as normal. We had breakfast, as normal. I told Anna I was off to work, as normal. I kissed Karoline and Johan goodbye, as normal. I kissed Anna goodbye. Maybe that wasn't quite as normal! I hoped that it was a kiss to remember! One that would last a lifetime.

And then I waved goodbye and disappeared.

Chapter 5. To the ends of the earth.

Instead of going to work I got on my bike and rode to Christiania. It took many hours but with each turn of the pedals I was getting further from Holter and closer to safety.

As I rode along I was very scared but I kept thinking "Maybe. Maybe I'll get away with it. Maybe I'll be able to start a new life in some foreign country far away from Norway".

All the way my thoughts were with Anna and Karoline and Johan. After a few hours Anna would have found out that I had disappeared. How would she be taking it? Could she possibly understand why I did what I did? Would she end up hating me? I hadn't even said goodbye! At least Karoline and Johan were too young to understand what was happening. My babies! "Oh, I'm missing you so much already! And I know I'm never going to see you again. Not ever! You are going to grow up with no memory of me at all. I hope Anna tells you that I loved you, so, so much".

Every time I thought like this my feet slowed and I turned and looked back towards

Holter and home. Many times I was tempted to turn around; to go back to my family; to go back where I belonged. But if I went back I knew I would be arrested and put straight into jail. Very soon I would be tried and found guilty of murder. And then I would be hung.

Deep in my heart I knew there was no future for me back in Holter. By now the police would know who killed Arvid and they would be looking for me. Maybe there was a policeman just behind me right now? Maybe one would be waiting for me in Christiania? My feet pedaled faster and faster! And the further I got from Holter the safer I felt.

Very soon I was at Christiania's *kai*, its port. Luckily a tramp steamer was just about to depart and there was space on it for me. You can't imagine how relieved I was when we left Christiania and headed out into the Atlantic. I had escaped from Norway and no-one knew where I was. I had disappeared and done it successfully! But now, for me, there was no turning back.

In London I was very excited to find that my old ship, the *SS Raithmoor* was in up in Newcastle and had a job for me if I wanted it. I signed up then and there! I took a train from London to Newcastle and soon I was back on the *Raithmoor*. It felt so good! I knew the ship; I knew many of the sailors; I belonged. And then I found that on our next trip we were going to America! Yay! At last I would be able to see new and different places: parts of the world I had dreamed about since I was just a little boy.

My new life started on the 21st of May, 1903 when the *Raithmoor* left the port of North Shields, near Newcastle, England. We were heading for Pensacola in Florida, America, and were expected to be away for four months. Wonderful! At last a decent time at sea! But then we were told to expect some stormy weather in the Atlantic. Not so wonderful! Two days out into the Atlantic we hit a big storm, bigger than I could have ever imagined. The waves were massive, and they smashed us relentlessly for days. Even some of the toughest sailors got seasick. I sure did! I wondered how the *Raithmoor* could survive such a pounding but it was strong and well-built and we finally came through the storm, no trouble.

After the wind and sea settled down we made our way across the Atlantic and into the Gulf of Mexico. Now it wasn't the storms that battered us; it was the heat! I had never experienced anything like it before. It was so, so hot! Working on deck meant you were burnt by the sun; almost fried alive! Going below wasn't much better. It was like an oven. And there was nowhere you could go to escape.

I was very pleased when we finally reached Pensacola. I had survived storms in the Atlantic and heat in the Gulf of Mexico. Now I could do something I had always wanted to do: explore America.

Unfortunately it didn't work out like that. There was no time ashore for exploring.

The Captain made us work! He said we weren't being paid to look at pretty sights. We were being paid to shift cargo. So shift cargo we did!

Within a couple of weeks the cargo had been offloaded, a new cargo taken on board, and we were heading back into the heat of the Gulf of Mexico and the storms of the Atlantic. So much for my dreams of travelling to beautiful and exotic places! A sailor's life really isn't all that much fun!

One important thing I learnt from this trip is that I don't like countries where it gets too hot. I like places with a climate like Norway's - cold in the winter (but not too cold as I don't like long, frozen winters!), and warm in summer, (but not too hot, please!). I suppose there are countries like this in the world.

Travelling across great expanses of ocean also gave me plenty of time to think and my thoughts were never far from Anna, Karoline and Johan. Were they OK? How were they coping with my disappearance? Were they being punished for what I had done? Were they missing me?

Many times I asked myself whether I had done the right thing in disappearing. I went over and over everything that had happened. Should I have stayed with Anna in Norway? Was I being selfish in disappearing? Was I being a coward, running away like I did? Should I go back and take the punishment I deserve? Had I really made the right decision?

Deep in my heart, though, I knew I was the only one who could make the decision that I made. And I knew I had made the right decision. I had chosen life, rather than death. And in being alive, maybe one day, I could make amends to my family for what I had done. And the other thing I knew for sure was that I could never return to Norway. There was no turning back. I had left my homeland forever.

I was quite relieved when the *Raithmoor* made it back to England. Four months at sea is a long time. It makes you realise how much you miss the simple pleasures so readily available in a big city like Newcastle: good food, plenty to drink, girls,..... Even being able to choose what you do with your time. (No night watches and no bells to wake you up!). I particularly enjoyed standing on ground that doesn't move all the time!

After a few days in Newcastle the *Raithmoor* headed down to London and then off to the Baltic Sea. This time we were expecting to be at sea for three months, and, guess what? The first stop was to be the Hanseatic port of Bergen in Norway; the very last place in the world I wanted to visit! After Bergen we were to visit Stockholm in Sweden and Reval which at the time was controlled by Russia, returning to London via Bergen. I had to go back to Norway, and not just once, I had to go there twice!

I was very nervous when we berthed at the *kai* (port) in Bergen a few days later. I looked over to the familiar *brygge* (wharf) with its famous multi-coloured buildings.

They were still being used by traders, just as they had been for hundreds of years. They hadn't changed! They still leaned at funny angles; some only holding up by leaning on the building next door! I was back in Norway; back home, and Norway hadn't changed but I had. I was scared to be there. I was nervous; waiting for a knock on my cabin door from a policeman outside. I decided that I would be safer staying on the ship so I volunteered to do extra work on board. It was really hard knowing that I was so close to Anna, Karoline and Johan. I knew I could be with them in just a couple of days if I wanted to. But I also knew I had to stay strong. I had made my decision and I had to stick with it.

The round trip to the Baltic took a total of three months. The temperature was similar to what I was used to in Norway and the cities were somehow familiar; quite different from those in America and in the Gulf of Mexico. I wasn't too far from home, but I was safe. I wasn't in Norway!

When we got back to London I found that the *Raithmoor's* next trip was to be a repeat of our trip to the Baltic, but this time carrying on to finish in Cardiff, Wales. Just over three month's away. No problem! Visiting Bergen on the way there and on the way back. Now, that was a problem! I had wanted to get as far away as possible from Norway but now I had to be there four times in just six months. That was just too dangerous. I decided that this would have to be my last trip on the *Raithmoor*.

Fortunately the trip went smoothly (which for me meant not getting arrested in Bergen!), and we were soon back in Cardiff. I discharged myself from the *Raithmoor* and got a job on the *SS Umzumba*, departing from Poplar Dock, in London, England. We were heading for Port Natal in South Africa; another trip of about three months. Maybe this time I would get to see some interesting ports in new and exciting countries? But, no. Once again, I was to be disappointed. We sailed into the Atlantic, then through the doldrums and finally arrived in Port Natal without stopping anywhere. How boring! There was little for us to do while at sea other than the normal things that sailors do: talk about girls; complain about the officers; complain about the food, and look forward to the daily tot of rum.

One day the talk headed in a direction that I wasn't expecting; one that gave me a new focus for the future. A group of us were telling (highly exaggerated!) stories of what we were going to do in Port Natal when one of my best friends, Tom Davis, accidentally let slip that he was planning to jump ship there. And not just Tom. Apparently a group of about ten men had joined the *Umzumba* so they could get free passage to Africa. They were going to start a new life hunting animals in the African interior. There was lots of money to be made because the animals were easy to bag and collectors would pay top prices for good specimens.

A new thought came into my mind. Maybe I didn't have to stay a sailor forever? If my friends could jump ship in some foreign port so could I! But not in Port Natal. I like working in the forest not on the plains, and anyway, Africa would be far too hot

for me. Why don't I wait till I find a nice, cool, well-forested country far, far away from Norway? I'll jump ship there and start a new life for myself working deep in the forest. Somewhere where no Norwegian policeman could ever find me.

At last I had a plan for the future! I knew what I wanted to do, and I knew where I wanted to be.

In Port Natal my ten friends did jump ship. Three of them tried to sneak away in the dead of night, but they all got caught and ended up in jail. The others went on shore to do their regular work and acted normally. They didn't do anything unusual or anything that showed what they were going to do. Quietly, one of them made contact with a local collector who agreed to hide them in a warehouse just as the ship was about to leave. The plan worked! The ship sailed on time, with three sailors in custody on board, and seven missing.

I learned a lot from that. If you want to jump ship successfully you have to have a good plan. And you have to make sure no-one suspects what you are planning to do.

Back in England I joined the *SS Haddon Hall* which was heading out from Liverpool, bound for the Persian Gulf and India. The trip was to last nearly four months and this time we would be stopping in quite a few ports. Now I had something to work towards; something to look forward to. I would learn as much as I could about each of the countries we were to visit and see if they would be places where I could start a new life.

We visited Sierra Leone, Zanzibar, Bahrain and Madras, and ended up in Calcutta, East India. I soon learned that all of these places were very, very hot. None of them had cool climates like Norway, and none had the kind of forest I longed to work in. This wasn't too disappointing, though, because one of my friends on the *Haddon Hall* told me about two other countries he had visited previously: Australia and New Zealand. Apparently lots of people were moving to these countries because there was plenty of work available. Some sailors had even jumped ship to get there, and got away with it!

I had never even heard of Australia or New Zealand, but on asking around, it seemed that either of these countries could be just what I was looking for. They weren't too hot; there was plenty of work - including forestry work - and they were a long, long way away from Norway. At last I knew what I needed to do. I had to find a ship that was going to Australia or New Zealand.

Back in England I traveled down from Liverpool to London because I'd heard that most of the ships heading to "the ends of the earth" departed from there. When I reached London I was in luck! A ship was about to depart for Perth, Melbourne and Sydney in Australia, and then on to Auckland, New Zealand. A job was available. I signed up straight away!

And that's how I found myself on the SS *Tomoana*. At last I was going to Australia and New Zealand.

5 **CERTIFICATE**

No.	*Name of ship and official number, Port of registry, and tonnage.	* Date and place of engagement.	* Rating; and R.N.R. No. (if any).
1	<i>Raithmoor</i> 110097 London	<i>31.5.03</i> <i>for Shields</i>	<i>C.P.</i>
2	RAITHMOOR 110097-S. LONDON 1590 TONS.	10 SEP. 1903 NO. SHIELDS.	<i>WB</i>
3	<i>Do</i>	18 DEC. 1903 NO. SHIELDS.	<i>C.P.</i>
4	S.S. "UNZUMBA" 118392 London T 2144	18 FEB. 1904 POPLAR, E.	<i>WB</i>
5	<i>Heddouliac</i> 106979 <i>42, Harlepool</i> 1686	<i>New Castle</i> 4.6.04	<i>WB</i>
6	S.S. "TOMOANA" 110136 LONDON. 2605 TONS. H.P.	21 OCT. 1904 VICTORIA DOCKS, E.	<i>WB</i>

* These columns are to be filled in at time of engagement.

6 **OF DISCHARGE.** 6 1281051

Date and place of discharge.	Description of voyage.	Signature of Master.
8 SEP. 1903 NO SHIELDS.	<i>Gen. sea coast</i>	<i>C.P.</i>
11/2/03 NORTH SHIELDS.	<i>B. Sea</i>	<i>C.P.</i>
12/2/03	<i>B. Sea</i>	<i>C.P.</i>
12 MAY 1904 POPLAR, E.	<i>Port Natal</i>	<i>W. Conby</i>
29/1/04 11	<i>Russian Gulf, N. of India</i>	<i>W. Conby</i>
<i>Failed to complete voyage</i>		

Here's my 'Certificate of discharge' showing the ships I worked on and the places I traveled to. The last entry is for the *Tomoana*. Notice how it says I "failed to complete the voyage". That's because the *Tomoana* was the ship I finally disappeared from.

Chapter 6. The land of the long white cloud.

The *Tomoana* left Victoria Docks in London on the 21st of October, 1904 under Captain H.P. Conby. We were hoping to reach Australia early in December; be in New Zealand by Christmas, then be back in London sometime in March, 1905. It was going to be a very long voyage but I wasn't too worried about that. I was only going one way!

The *Tomoana* was mainly carrying freight, but there were also a few passengers on board. I soon discovered that they included a family of Norwegians heading for a town called Norsewood, in the North Island of New Zealand. Apparently many Norwegians were settling around Norsewood because there were plenty of jobs, land was cheap, and the climate was similar to Norway's. I liked the sound of that! The family also told me that much of New Zealand was covered in forest, and that the

forest was very similar to what I was used to in Norway. Lots of logging was going on and there was plenty of timber deep in what New Zealanders called 'the bush'. The trees had strange names like *kauri*, *rimu* and *totara* – but there were also fir trees that sounded a lot like the *furutre* I worked with back in Norway.

New Zealand was in its early stages of development so many new industries were starting up in the colony and thousands of houses were being built each year. Wood products were in great demand and there seemed to be an endless supply of quality timber in the bush. It was looking increasingly likely that it would be New Zealand rather than Australia where I would jump ship and start my new life!

If I did settle in New Zealand, I knew I could never live in Norsewood, though. Living near other Norwegians was far too risky. Someone might mention me to the authorities and word could get back to the Norwegian police. But working somewhere deep in the New Zealand bush - that would be great! I had all the skills already so it would be easy to get a job, and I would be far away from anyone who might discover that I had murdered someone in Norway.

I decided not to discount Perth, Melbourne and Sydney in Australia until I had actually been there, but a job in the New Zealand bush sounded just perfect for 23-year-old Harald Oskar Andersen!



The SS *Tomoana*

I had already sailed between London and South Africa, so that part of the journey was a little bit familiar. This time we experienced just one Atlantic storm, before passing through the doldrums and docking in Port Natal.

After refueling in Port Natal we headed due east headed for Perth in Western Australia. It's a very long way and we were going to do it without any stops. By now I was a pretty hardened sailor and with the *Tomoana* being a tough little ship I reckoned I could handle anything the sea could throw at me!

How wrong I was! The storms in the southern Indian Ocean were far worse than anything I had ever experienced before. At times the seas were enormous with howling winds, 20 or 30 foot waves crashing over our bows, and never-ending snow

and sleet. The passengers were permanently sick, and most of the crew were as well (including me!). Many times I thought the ship couldn't survive the battering it was taking, but every time we plunged into a big wave our bow came up and on we went. Actually we made quite good time because the prevailing currents were behind us, helping push us on towards Australia. In the middle of one particularly rough patch in the southern ocean, though, I made quite an important decision. If I ever went back to sea it would only be on coastal vessels. No more of this ocean-going stuff for me!

As we approached Australia the temperatures rose and the seas became nice and smooth. Soon the storms were forgotten and I could look forward to getting off the ship and having some shore leave. I can't tell you how pleased I was when I heard the call from the Crows Nest "Land ahoy"! We had finally made it to Australia!

We spent a few days in the big Australian cities of Perth, Melbourne and Sydney loading and unloading our cargo. This gave me enough time to explore the possibilities for work in each of these ports, and explore strategies for how I could jump ship safely.

Perth was no good. Beautiful weather, but far too hot. Melbourne had possibilities but it was also hot, and forestry wasn't a very attractive option. They had plenty of so-called "forests" but millions of gum trees wasn't what I would call a forest! To me a forest is green and moist, not dry, brown, and dusty. And they always seemed to be fighting forest fires. No, Melbourne was out. Not the kind of forestry I wanted to be involved in, and far too dangerous.

That left Sydney as my final possibility - for Australia, anyway.

We sailed into Sydney on a glorious, fine day a couple of weeks before Christmas and immediately I fell in love with the place! What a lively, vibrant city, and a what a stunningly beautiful harbor! Maybe this would be even better than New Zealand as the place where I could start my new life?

I soon discovered that Sydney wasn't all that I imagined it to be. Apparently it had been established as a convict settlement and now had a very strong criminal element and underworld. (Sailors find out these things quite quickly!). Worse still was that there were police everywhere, and they were very interested in the comings and goings of sailors like me. Not at all what I wanted! So Sydney was out, even though there were good possibilities for work and it looked like a great place to live.

And so that meant my new home would definitely be in New Zealand!

It took about five days to cross the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand and I decided to use this time to find all I possibly could about the country I was going to call home. I had to do this very carefully so no-one would get suspicious from all my questions and think I was planning to jump ship!

One thing I learned was that the local people in New Zealand are *Maoris* and that they call their country *Aotearoa*, which means 'The land of the long white cloud'. We have many white clouds in the mountains of Norway, so a land covered with a long white cloud sounded just great to me!

I also discovered a whole lot of practical information that would help me start my new life successfully. There were plenty of jobs available on coastal vessels sailing from Auckland, the port where we were going to dock. (Auckland is New Zealand's biggest city and its main port). This meant I could get work on a ship if I wanted to do that for a while. There were also plenty of jobs in forestry but to get to these jobs I would have to travel north from Auckland to a city called 'Whangarei', or south to a town called 'Te Kuiti' in what they called the 'King Country'. I could catch a train from Auckland to either of these places.

All this was good news! There were plenty of jobs available and I obviously had the skills and experience that employers were looking for.

I was told time and again that when I applied for a job it was vital that I made a good impression during the job interview. I needed to have all of my work experience written down tidily (preferably typed); be friendly, and speak slowly and clearly. And I must be dressed smartly in a suit and tie.

I soon had the first of these sorted out! I quickly wrote down all of the work I had done on the farm, in the forests, and on the ships, and one of the passengers agreed to type it up for me. (I had to tell them that I needed this for a job interview back in London. I didn't want them to think I was planning to jump ship and get a job in New Zealand!).

My English was quite good by this stage because that was the language spoken on each of the ships I had worked on. I still had a strong Norwegian accent but I was confident I could communicate well in English with anyone in New Zealand. No problem there for a job interview.

The suit and tie thing was a problem, though. Sailors don't really care what clothes they are wearing. And we certainly don't wear suits and ties! In fact, I have never owned a suit and doubt if I ever will.

With some very careful asking around, I discovered that one of the crew – Maurits Andersen - did have a suit. In fact he had three suits and about ten ties, plus lots of nice shirts and hats. And he was about my size! When I asked Maurits about his suits he was quite defensive and immediately wanted to know why I was so interested in his clothes. I had to think fast and I answered something vague about wanting to know how people in New Zealand dressed. I hoped that Maurits would quickly forget this conversation and not guess the real reason I was asking.

In my mind, though, I was thinking "I desperately need a suit and Maurits has three of them. Maybe he wouldn't notice if I took one to use for my interview"!

The other important thing I learned was the best way to jump ship in New Zealand. Some sailors reckoned it was best to go ashore using your 'shore pass' as if you were about to unload some cargo, then make a run for it. If you did this your absence would be discovered quite quickly and the police informed, so you had to either get someone to hide you, or leave town immediately. Others said it was better to go through customs on your day off. That way no-one would know you had gone for at least a day, and by then you could be far away. I reckoned that going through customs would be the best way for me.

My great plan was starting to come together! After we arrived in Auckland, I would wait till a day when Maurits was working and I was off duty. I would go to his cabin, take one of his suits and a nice shirt and tie, and hide them in my kitbag. I would carry on with my work as normal while I waited for my first day off. That day I would go ashore through customs as if I was going to have a look around the city and visit some hotels. As soon as I was on the wharf I would check out all of the coastal vessels leaving Auckland that day. Surely I could get a job on one of them. For the job interview I had my work experience typed up; I would put on my suit and tie, I would be very friendly, and I would speak slowly and confidently in English. I would be sailing out of Auckland before anyone on the *Tomoana* missed me. It would be just as if I had disappeared!

What a great plan! And in just a few days' time I would be able to put it into place!

I was very excited when I caught my first glimpse of New Zealand. From out in the Tasman Sea, the land stretched before me right across the horizon; a pale greeny-blue colour. But what struck me the most was that the whole land was covered with a long white cloud!

Aotearoa. 'The land of the long, white cloud'. New Zealand. My new home!

We sailed into Auckland on the 24th of December, 1904. It was Christmas eve - such a special day to start a new life in a new country! But how strange to be in a warm, sunny place just before Christmas. Back home in Norway I was used to having white Christmases with at least a foot of snow on the ground!

After we docked I started to wonder how my family was getting on, on the other side of the world. Christmas eve in Norway is even more important than Christmas day, because that's when we all get together and have our Christmas celebrations. There's a lovely family meal with all the trimmings; lots of presents; plenty of 'Christmas cheer' and much love and laughter.

My thoughts went back to Anna, Karoline and Johan. What kind of a Christmas would they be having? Was Anna missing me? Or was she angry with me and glad

to have me out of her life? How I wished I could be there with my family on this special day – the biggest family celebration of the year.

Our captain, H. P. Conby, obviously didn't have Christmas on his mind, though! We had come half way round the world and the sooner we shifted our cargo, the sooner we could head back to London. We were there to shift cargo, not to have sentimental Christmas celebrations!

So my first Christmas in New Zealand was spent working! It was hot and sunny and definitely didn't feel like a proper Christmas. I think many of the crew felt the same so after a full days' work we organized our own Christmas celebration. We had a big party with quite a few drinks, and even a visit from a decidedly drunk Santa Claus! So much for Christmas, 1904!

On Boxing Day it was back to work shifting cargo. Auckland had quite a modern system for doing this with big cranes lifting the pallets off the ship and placing them directly onto trains waiting on the wharf below. After a day and a half all the old cargo was off and we could start loading the new cargo – 16,000 frozen carcasses of mutton. That's a lot of meat so there must be a lot of sheep in New Zealand! Some of the sailors reckoned there were about 1 million people living in New Zealand and about 25 million sheep!

The next day the roster went up telling us the shifts we were to work, and our day off for the following week. My first day off was to be on Thursday, the 29th of December. It was now time to put my great plan into action!

On Wednesday the 28th I was on the morning shift and Maurits Andersen was on the afternoon shift. How perfect! That afternoon I sneaked into Maurits' cabin and quickly stuffed one of his suits into my kitbag, followed by a shirt and a tie. I then rearranged his remaining clothes so they looked just how they were before. I didn't want Maurits counting his clothes and noticing that some of them were gone! I then sneaked out of the cabin and tried to act 'normally' as I hurried back to my own cabin to hide the kitbag.

It's strange when you are doing something like this how you get the feeling that someone is watching you! I know Maurits didn't see me because he was working, and I was pretty sure no-one else had seen me either. I must have got away with it. Stage 1 of my plan was completed!

And then it hit me. Tomorrow I was going to disappear all over again. I had disappeared successfully back in Norway to save my life. Now I was going to disappear somewhere in New Zealand, to start a new life!

And so we come to Thursday the 29th of December, 1904. I can still remember it so clearly; the day that New Zealand became my home.

I had breakfast as normal then went back to my cabin and packed a few other things into my kitbag. I carefully covered Maurits' suit, shirt and tie with a few clothes and some of my most precious possessions, including all of my papers. I couldn't take everything I owned as that would look strange. I didn't want to be stopped by customs with my bag full of incriminating evidence!

I have to admit I was a bit nervous as I walked down the gangway off the *Tomoana*. I couldn't imagine how anything could go wrong as I had planned everything so carefully. But you never know! I took a deep breath and walked as confidently as I could into the customs area.

When it was my turn, the customs officer looked carefully at my papers and spoke very nicely to me. "Hello, Mr Andersen. Welcome to New Zealand". When she asked why I was entering New Zealand I said I was just going to have a look around on my day off. "Fine", she said as she stamped my papers. "I hope you have a lovely day in Auckland".

There were two doors behind the customs officer that I could use. The left hand door was labeled 'Way out' but she said I was to take the right hand one. It didn't have any kind of label on it. It was just a brown door; nothing special; nothing unusual. Just a brown door, standing partly open.

As I walked towards the brown door my heart was beating fast! I was about to complete a life-changing journey that began when I hit and killed Arvid Thorsen. I had been forced to abandon my wonderful family and the country that I loved. I had searched for a country where I could begin a new life free from the Norwegian police, and now I had found it. I was ready to start life all over again.

Just a few more steps and my new life would begin!

I opened the brown door and walked through.

To my surprise two policemen were waiting there for me! "Good morning, Mr Andersen" one said, "I'm sorry to tell you that you are under arrest. You are required to come with us now to the Auckland police station. Please follow us".

So now you know how I disappeared, not once, but twice.

Unfortunately, the second time I didn't disappear into quite the place I expected. But that's another story!