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To the promised land

A tale of the first Norwegian emigration to the US

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In May, storyteller Anne Elisebeth Skogen gave her performance titled "Through Hell Gate to the Promised Land" to two lucky audiences: she visited the Norwegian Seamen's Church in New York on May 11, and Mindekirken Norwegian Lutheran Memorial Church in Minneapolis, Minn., on May 17. Her story is about the first Norwegian emigrants, who arrived in New York on Oct. 9, 1825, with the sloop Restauration.

Skogen has always been a storyteller. Sometimes telling tales can get a young person in trouble at school, but for Skogen there has always been something magical and compelling about her storytelling.

"I remember when I was five years old. I loved to tell and hear stories. When I was eight years old and in my second year of school, I would wait for the teacher to stop for a time and as she rested, I would see an opportunity to begin a 'story,' which my classmates would be eager to hear. Once I had everyone's attention my teacher would let me continue and tell the whole story," she said.

In Europe and Scandinavia, "stories" are tradition. The Norwegian sagas came down to us verbally because there wasn't a lot of reading and writing in Viking times. The storyteller was the journalist, novelist, historian and entertainer of the day, and a good story around a fire at night kept this magic alive for centuries.

In Norway, storytelling has been studied on the university level since 1907. Skogen completed her study in 2001 and 2005. She is also certified as a drama teacher, which she finds to be a much different discipline than storytelling.



Storyteller Anne Elisebeth Skogen admires a bronze sculpture of the "Restauration," of which she tells an oral story in her tale "Through Hell Gate to the Promised Land." The sculpture is by the author of this article Bill Osmundsen and is part of the permanent art collection of the Norwegian Seamen's Church in New York City. The sculpture was commissioned by the Norwegian Immigration Association, Inc., for exhibition in 2000. Auctioned in 2001, it was won by Victor Samuelson, and then donated to the Norwegian Seamen's Church. Photo: Bill Osmundsen