

REFLECTIONS ON SVEIN LOENG'S "Friluftsliv and 'feeling for nature'"

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Svein Loeng hits the mark when he points to the author's problem "...to express this wordless core of friluftsliv." From this I recall a treasured friluftsliv student in Canada who in her course journal lamented "*(i)t is not fair to describe what I have learned in words, because the written language cannot capture everything that I have experienced.*" Perhaps this, fundamentally, is why we are drawn to engage in friluftsliv, where nature speaks to us in unmistakable and mysterious ways and where we struggle, like Svein Loeng, to bring this message back in words to our fellow humans.

Can this translation be done or are we forever caught in the painful paradox that he so intensely works to escape from, for our benefit as scholars and practitioners? He searches for and elevates words for our attention, words to replace those more mundane, academically dry words whose meaning has long ago been stolen by those in the streets and offices of the world. For words we must have; as humans we are caught in their web which sometimes can shine gloriously, but all too often entrap us in misery.

Svein Loeng resuscitates those words which generate an emotive response in us, in contrast to those we populate our urban days with, -those cognitive, abstract, intellectual terms that know not the breeze in the pines, the frosty cheek, or the glow of the setting sun. He holds up to us the "feeling" word; lets us sniff it and taste it, and I who venture the path less travelled, feel its goodness. Without the "feeling" words, Svein Loeng writes, "...you miss the soul." By this he challenges us to dust off those many words in our languages which have rusted from neglect, words which had a meaning when more grass was felt underfoot and nature was our home. For who cannot exult in nature and with inspiration create ways to communicate its wonders with those we meet? Our ancestors did it and we owe it to them, ourselves, and nature to revive their work.

But, "...is it possible to teach..." friluftsliv, asks Svein Loeng? Here he directs our attention to our schools and colleges, and strikes a chord, a reverberating ambivalent chord for many of us who have an institutional teaching role. Can we be appropriate role models here, or better yet, "compelling demonstrations" of our field and passion, as Kurt Hahn so incisively phrased it? Or are we again in yet another paradoxical situation where we exist in a context often dominated by numbers, that heritage of Pythagorean and Archimedean persuasion, with a strong sideshow of the written and spoken word of the cognitive sphere? The "...deeper 'touch'" that Svein Loeng longs for may not be possible here. "Touch" does not speak to intellectual learning; it is cry for contact and connection; for immersion. Without it "(f)riluftsliv becomes a subject like most other subjects" and partakes of the general pathology of institutional schooling where, as legendary and deeply philosophical hockey goalie, Ken Dryden, pointed out, we teach the subject and thereby fail the person.

However, as Chekov cautions, it is easy to be a philosopher on paper, but much more difficult in life. How do we then approach the crucial dilemmas to which Svein Loeng so forcefully compels our attention? How to create "...an awakening of 'feeling'"? "Awakening" tugs the string of oriental philosophy's "enlightenment" where in Zen "the instant you speak about a thing, you miss the mark". How, then, to hit the mark? We all know the answer; Mother Nature is our consummate teacher if we will only entrust ourselves in Her care. Step into our Home, as Nils Faarlund would entice us; but without reservation, and we will feel her wisdom cleanse us. This is the mission of friluftsliv; immersing deeply in the reverberating eons of the universe, in which each of us shapes tones in the eternal symphony.