

Dear all

It all began when, while I was in the process of transforming five old caravans into sculptures for the European Capital of Culture in Stavanger in 2008, I had great difficulty obtaining permission to drive them legally on the roads. During that process, I dreamt that I saw the *Camping Women* sailing on water – and everything seemed so easy. Gentle rocking movements, moving slowly forward, without obstacles on the road – and no traffic rules to deal with.

Now, eight years later, the dream has come true, and the three sculptures are CE-certified and can sail according to all maritime regulations!!

The *Camping Women* gave me experience in bringing art out to people where they are – in sharing something unexpected in public space – to be surprised and to wonder, alone or together, in unexpected places. Not everything needs to be so controlled, calculated, and understood in an instant. The essence of art is not always so easy to explain.

And it is not easy either, as I now sit and try to write a speech for such a momentous event as this – launching my three *Life-boats*.

They are three female figures in concrete; and they are so simple in their starting point that everyone can relate to them. They represent three stages in a life cycle:

- The young woman, lying on her side with her hip as the cabin.
- The pregnant woman, lying on her back with her belly as the cabin.
- The old woman, lying on her stomach, with her back and behind as the cabin.

They embody three universal human conditions: *My ship is loaded with Longing, with Life, and with Memories.*

The beautiful eyes, which I feel emphasize their characters, are made by glass artist Peter Kuchinke!

Composer Geir Johnson has written about the music inside the boats:

In *Life*, I have tried to recreate music that a human being might register while still in the mother's womb – sounds arriving from outside, from an unknown world. Some may seem inviting, while other parts may feel more challenging – just as life itself gradually reveals itself to most of us.

In *Longings*, the listener will encounter music from many different corners of the world, traditional music with the sea as a common theme. The sea has always fascinated humanity in art, and this is only a small excerpt of that history – from a Laestadian hymn in Finnish, to gospel, to Thai music about the sea in their tradition – as well as from many other countries.

In *Memories*, I have let the voices of some of the women who served as models for the sculptures be heard, in their own words, as they share what has shaped them through life.

The young figure holds a treasure chest inside her, intended to collect texts and letters about dreams, hopes, longings. The pregnant figure will eventually gather self-portraits from children and young people, and the old woman carries 19 figures, like symbolic figureheads, on her back. These are portraits of real women – several of them are here today. What they share is that all are over 70 years old, some well over 90. They come from different cultures and have engaged with cultures other than their own. The process around this ship has taken a long time and developed in a very – to me – exciting way. Journalist Marianne

Knudsen joined the selection process, and later also sociology professor Ann-Dorte Christensen, who has created a book where you can read about the women's life stories. It will be published by Aalborg University Press in October, but there is a brochure about the book here, where you can also identify many of the ship's figureheads. She writes beautifully about them:

*As a classical symbolic form of expression, the figurehead represents the ship's protector. The third Life-boat therefore gains 19 female protectors. Beyond taking care of the ship, the female figureheads, in all their diversity, should also be understood as protectors against narrow-mindedness, oppression, and intolerance. They do not represent different nations; rather, they are ambassadors for the transnational and for cultural values that cross borders. It is the content, interplay, and movements in these intercultural encounters that the sociological analyses will highlight and convey, both in writing and as an integrated part of the figureheads' sculptural expression.*

For as long as humans have traveled on water, they have felt the need for protection. Now I have let the figurehead, which usually serves as an appendage at the front of the ship, take over and become a ship in itself. A total protection of life.

We have all been inside a woman –

Within her, life is created and nourished. We all share the same biological components of a life cycle, and that makes us all alike as human beings. I believe we need to dwell on that life-affirming and simple connection between us – especially in all the conflicts we are experiencing today.

This is a great and emotional day for me...

Eight years of work, which has often felt like pulling teeth – are finally over – and in many ways it has been about daring to believe that it is possible to walk on water! Many have said that I am brave – I think I am probably naive and stubborn. But now I know much more – after an eight-year education – for I truly feel that I have been back at school in so many ways. Along the way, I was close to giving up, for without a commissioner – and without funding – it has often been an uphill struggle!

It has been a long journey – a wonderful journey, and a heavy journey. But I have met so many extraordinary people, who believed in the dream with me, who truly invested themselves alongside me.

First, ferrocement expert Erik Foldager, whom I found online when I discovered that you can, in fact, build ships in concrete – that people have done it since 1848! – and when Erik is asked how long these ships can sail, he answers that he doesn't know, because those built in 1848 are still sailing!! But he would only join if ship engineer Lars T. Olsen agreed to design and calculate for CE certification – and he did! An exciting journey into each other's worlds began. I can make sculpture – and they can build boats! So we have ping-ponged a lot about making it work optimally, both sculpturally and technically as ships.

Dino, Henrik, Bo, and Malene, who have been employed in the project for all these years, and Øystein, who has volunteered for over four years!!! – have worked for years welding reinforcement rods, tying chicken wire, and, not least, on the fittings!! – And three times over the course of the eight years, we have gathered 100–150 people each time, who contributed their time and energy to what we call a *casting party* – where together we cast the hull, wet on wet, over four days each time, with a feast of food and social gatherings. These times have been worth everything – I remember saying that every time – and reminding myself of it every time!

There are so many people I should thank – all those who have taken part at so many levels of the process! A mix of all ages and backgrounds, both professionally and culturally. The last time, we were people gathered from 18 nations. I cannot begin to list names here, for you are so many. You know who you are!

From the very beginning, there was such wonderful support from North Jutland – both the region and the municipalities – which allowed me to get off to a good start. As time went on, it became necessary to create an organization around fundraising – and then Inger and Ole Davidsen appeared, creating both the Independent Institution *Life-boats* and the Support Association. They were deeply involved in the realization

of the project before they so tragically passed away in Greenland almost two years ago. A great loss. I have modeled them into *Memories* as rib figures, where they carry part of the construction. DSILB has been instrumental in making the project possible, together with the Support Association.

The chairmen of both associations, Torben and Søren, sail in *Memories* and will take part in christening her. Else Marie will name *Memories*, as one of the figureheads – the Danish representative – and someone who has believed in the project since the very first sketch!

In the pregnant figure sail Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen and her daughter Inga, who is expecting a child today!!! They too have been great supporters throughout the process. Alongside them is the Mayor of Aalborg, who will name the pregnant figure – as Aalborg will become the home harbor after 2017.

In the young figure sail my youngest daughter and Michael, who in many ways is family, both to us and to *Life-boats*. They have grown up alongside these demanding ladies and have both shared in and given the project a large place in our lives. They sail together with Rebecca Matthews, who, when she first heard of and saw *Life-boats*, immediately understood both the vision and the visual expression – in a way that made the next steps so much easier to take. The European Capital of Culture has given us the opportunity to complete this – and ensured that it would not take another eight years – though I would have carried on until it was finished! That is how stubborn – or driven – I am, or how important it has been for me to give something back to all those who have supported the project on so many levels: personally, with time, with funding, and with expertise.

One of the main reasons I managed to do this is thanks to my mentor, concrete engineer Knut Grønli, who said to me when I stood before my first major commission: *Remember – you can do absolutely EVERYTHING – if you see your limitations as a resource. Then you can know what you can and cannot do. And that way you can find those who can solve what you cannot do yourself.* And in this project, I have certainly found them!!

A huge thank you to all of you who have made this possible!!!

And to my wonderful Claus – who has been there the whole way!! And to our daughters Sigrid and Tonje, who have had to share far too much with the ships. Now I hope they will take the time to sail along at a slow pace.

I will end with what Claus wrote in our wedding invitation: *We often think that it is all too late – but no, perhaps it has only just begun!*

Now *Life-boats* are here –

I – and so very many others with me – have created them. Now it is you who must use them!!