

Merchant Graverholt in Adelgade 14

My father

My father, Rudolf Johannes Graverholt, was born in a poor home in Hjørringgade 39 in Hirtshals on 04.10.1919. His father had many different jobs, including stone fisherman and merchant, and the home, like the rest of the town, was very Christian. He was number 2 of 5 siblings and at the age of 6 started work as a herd boy with a farmer. Later he was apprenticed to a merchant in Horne, 5 km. away and went to business school in Hjørring. Some time after he had been educated, he got a job in Tang's grocery store on Jernbanegade in Roslev. That move probably was like if I had moved to Australia today. In Salling, Christians were only for household needs, and father quickly learned to play cards (whist, mausel and straight) and became one of Salling's best card players, despite the fact that he had hardly seen a game of cards in Hirtshals.

He worked in the grain department at Tang and during the summer he cycled around Salling and sold seeds to the farmers, including in Rybjergvej 90, where my grandmother lived, she was a widow. She was pretty good at card games and probably considered father's card playing skills an absolute plus for a son-in-law.

When they got married, they moved to Brørup, where father was employed at Margarinefabrikken Alfa, and I was born shortly after. But after a year, father was headhunted. My mother had started working as a nurse at Skive Hospital, where she, among other things, looked after a patient named Erling Rasmussen who was seriously affected by cancer. When he heard that my mother was married to a commission agent with good papers, he saw an opportunity for him to continue the business after his death. Father came up and talked with him and was hired on the spot, and shortly afterwards Rasmussen died.

The shop in Adelgade 14

The shop was located in Adelgade 14 and was called Erling Rasmussen Eftf. (successor) It was organized as a joint-stock company, in which widow Rasmussen, who lived above the shop with her two sons, had the largest share, goldsmith Hartmann, who owned the whole building, also had a large share, and father DKK 1,000.

It had previously been a fairly large merchant's farm, and on the left side of the farm there had probably been a grain store upstairs, because there was a door with a hanging pole for hoisting grain sacks etc. On the ground floor there was a large room which was used to store canned goods, as well as (after this photo was taken) an old garage which was used as bottle storage.

At the bottom on the right side of the farm Hartmann had a watchmaker's workshop. Further up there was a cooper's workshop, where an old man made churns for the export of butter to England. Further up taxi driver Sørensen stayed. He had a workshop where he had his 2 taxi vans standing. They were huge, and in the back you could fold up the folding seats, so there was room for 7-8 people in total. On a rare occasion, father ordered Sørensen to drive us out to my grandmother in Rybjerg. It probably wasn't cheap, because it only happened a couple of times. Sørensen had a huge cap and a big moustache, and I was probably a little afraid of him, he was pretty gay anyway. He was a widower and lived in Hvitfeltsgade.

Further up in the yard there was a fenced lawn on the right, where Mrs. Rasmussen stayed with the children she looked after when the weather was right.

To the left of the gate lived a silversmith whose name was probably Topdahl. I vaguely remember having a tiny motorcycle with a sidecar that was made of metal. The handlebar broke off, but Topdahl fitted a new handlebar - made of real silver!

The store

Father had a very fine selection of goods. He naturally had all the things that belonged in a grocery store, but in addition he had a department with lots of expensive wine and spirit brands, which you had to go all the way to Viborg or further to see the likes of, even though merchant Dahl at Østerbro was a tough competitor. Here, only the nice customers came up, although of course there was access for everyone - including Mrs. Tjener Stevn, who could hardly dream of venturing up there.

Father had a great deal of knowledge about wine and spirits and always talked for a long time with the traveling salesmen who regularly visited about their goods. He also got letters of recommendation from some of the suppliers, and with them he went on a couple of "study trips" with my uncle to France, where they visited champagne factories and other fine wine establishments. As far as we could tell, it must have been some rather damp trips as well.

He also had a department with a very large and varied selection of tea, chocolate and English biscuits. My teeth still water when I think about the Ginger Biscuits we had for Christmas. I haven't been able to find anything exactly like it since, they were very strong and hard and probably meant to be dipped in the tea.

There was also a large tobacco cabinet about 1 x 0.75 meters with glass panes which contained fine cigars and cigars and was fitted with a hygrometer to ensure proper storage.

And then there was the coffee from Vestas Kafferisteri, which must have been absolutely fantastic - in any case, father sent coffee to the children to some of the nice customers who had moved to the USA. The "ordinary" customers were also supplied with coffee substitute - Rich's or Danmarks - to stretch the expensive coffee beans, and I envied their children, because the packages contained some glossy labels with nice pictures, which I didn't get, because we only drank pure coffee at home.

It was whole coffee beans that we picked up from Vestas, and as you can see in one of the pictures, we had a coffee mill with 3 large flywheels, one for each of the grinders, which were supplied from a large funnel into which the beans were poured from above. And from the grinders, the coffee then ran into a very large drawer, from where we shoveled it into paper bags, of which there were several different sizes, depending on how much the customer wanted. The coffee mill was of course always polished shiny.

At the back there was a back shop, where I had to stay when I was down and help out as a city boy - shame the nice customers only had to see employees in white coats! Here there were also shelves with lots of goods. Under half of the shop there was a cellar where wine and spirits were kept and where there was a large stock of canned goods and beer and soft drinks. There were cobblestones down there, and there was hardly more than a meter and a half to the ceiling, so it must have been enormously difficult for father to have to go down there and collect goods and in the winter to fire up the coke stove. I wasn't that tall, so I could better manage going down there.

There was a fabric awning over the windows, and it caused Dad a lot of worries on summer days when there were light showers. When someone like that came, he had to get on the bike and down and roll it up - it couldn't withstand rain. And when the shower was over, he had to go down and roll it out again - until the next shower arrived.

Sometimes he would lie on the couch and sleep, hissing in his sleep, "Oh, the damn awning". Besides, I never understood why Mrs. Rasmussen, who lived upstairs, couldn't take care of the cursed awning once in a while.

Dad was also endlessly forgetful, and my brother and I spent half of our childhood helping to look for his glasses or keys. I remember one time when all three of us were looking - dad was sitting on the sofa with his eyes turned to the sky and had completely given up on life. Suddenly my brother came into the living room with a stamped envelope and asked dad why he hadn't sent it. Dad didn't say a word but just looked at my mom who went down and started the car and drove down to the post office to mail the envelope and pick up the glasses!

But that's not how the customers experienced father. When he stood behind the counter, he was always very correct and polite - and then he could come out to me in the back shop and curse and sulp about something that bothered him. But it was never me he scolded. I think he was infinitely proud of my - and later my younger brother's - efforts as a city boy, and that gave me a very special relationship with my father.

The shop's telephone number was 49, and there was an extra telephone at home, which was free to call. On 10 January 1952, the ship Flying Enterprise sank, which became world famous because the Danish captain Carlsen refused to leave the sinking ship, which for 14 days lay with its strong side in a violent storm in the North Atlantic. I was only a little over 4 years old, but I listened to the radio newspaper's situation report about the ship every dinner and proudly called down to the shop and passed it on to Dad.

The customers

The store's special selection of goods naturally meant that it attracted the city's fine citizens - honoratores, as they were then called - and there in the mid-fifties they began to move out into the surroundings of the city - especially up Skovbakken, where many dentists, doctors and lawyers, while the common people stayed inside the city.

After school I was often a city boy and I remember that I regularly drove up Skovbakken on our Longjohn with a case of beer (and at that time there were 50 bottles in a case!), a case of soft drink, a large full shopping basket and a smaller basket. It was hard. Pulling the bike up the hill was completely out of the question, but it was in such a low gear that I could just ride it. I was probably no more than 10 years old when I started making the trip up there.

Some of the places up there I had to go down a staircase behind the house and open a big hatch and put the goods in there - and later the girl and I remember one time when I had hauled a huge load up to dentist Dragheim and when I got back to the shop dad said they had just called and said they forgot to order a pound of coffee so I had to go up there again, this time admittedly on the small cargo bike, but how furious I was.

Down in the city center, on the other hand, I almost always got a tip. I especially remember Mrs. Stevn, who lived at Havnevej 19. Her husband was a waiter at the Hotel Jylland, which was directly opposite the shop in Adelgade, and drank quite a lot, as all waiters did back then. He often came in through the back door and asked careful father if he could get two bajes on credit to take the worst hangovers before he had to go to work, and then he was allowed to sit in the back shop and drink them. So even though the family's finances were definitely miserable, I always got a little tip from Mrs. Stevn. She was a really nice lady.

One of the slightly wealthy in the city center was a lawyer who lived in Torvegade opposite Topp's pastry shop. He usually only got bottles, and they always had to be put under the kitchen sink, and while I sat down and did that, he squatted behind me and "got around to" touching my thighs. I remember thinking it was disgusting. But then the word pedophilia had not been invented.

When I drove out with goods, I always brought a "contrabook". It was an approx. 20 x 15 cm. book with lined pages, on which all the goods were carefully written down with a fountain pen, and as far as I remember, the amount owed was paid on the first of every

month. If you had the money, my father, for example, occasionally let Stevn get a little extra credit.

In recent years, Dad had a three-wheeled scooter with a closed cabin and a large storage box at the back. It made driving up Skovbakken a pleasure.

Dad was a snob

My mother always said that father was a snob, and in a way he was because he had to be. When the fine ladies came to visit, I had to be ready to open the door for them, even if they had their hands free, because I had to drive their goods home to them after they had left.

But I remember that I certainly didn't bow to them - I didn't actually give them a glance.

But they expected to get special and exquisite treatment - otherwise they would undoubtedly have found another place to shop - so here Dad was really a snob.

I remember that my grandmother used to say that father "was ve å spring övver æ disk" when the really nice people were visiting and I wasn't there to open the door for them.

But with the "ordinary" customers - eg Mrs Stevn - he had the manner of dealing with them that they now expected. They were given credit and could be allowed to drink a few bajes in the back shop, and I am convinced that my father had more respect for them than for the nice ones.

So yes, father was probably a snob, but he was also extremely social.

Among other things, he always used Fløjtekaj's boys as town boys.

Fløitekaj was a window cleaner and probably got one or more items every day to quench his thirst. He lived out in Brårup in what was probably called the express train - a long two-storey residential building with apartments, which was on the east side of Brårupvej, as far as I remember by Glattrupvej, and here he had a large group of children. Their finances were hardly anything to brag about, which is probably why father always used his boys as town messengers.

One of them was called Arvid, and I was particularly good friends with him, because when things were busy, we both worked. We had a certain, short, tune that we whistled and then we could hear where the other one was. For example, if one of us was driving in Adelgade, he could hear the other cycling up Asylgade. Back then, there wasn't much car noise. We were very proud of that.

I wrote that I was probably a socialist, and it showed once in a drawing class at school. We had a substitute who was very proud to be the son of Bishop Christian Baun in Viborg (he was the one who in 1956 refused to ordain Helga Jensen as a female assistant priest in Skive-Resen Parish and demonstratively absented himself from the ordination ceremony). Once he was about to use a derogatory term and said "like one of Fløjtekaj's sons". I was normally a very nice and well-behaved boy - a spoiled mother's boy, I would almost say - but then I exploded and told him in a very definite tone that he absolutely should not criticize Fløjtekaj's children, who were at least as good as him. As far as I remember, Mr. Baun didn't say a word.

Christmas

During the entire Christmas month, we didn't see dad at home. He came home after midnight and had gone down to the shop again before the rest of us got up in the morning. It was extremely busy throughout the month of December, and I rushed down there when I got time off from school to help out, partly as a city boy and partly with cleaning, setting up and other incidental work.

In the run up to Christmas, Dad shopped for goods that could not be had for the rest of the year. These were, for example, oranges, candy sugar, dates and figs, various kinds of biscuits, etc. Kandis had nothing to do with the orchestra, but was yellow-brown sugar colored with caramel and processed into large crystals that were almost impossible to bite into pieces. One placed a small piece at the front of the mouth and sipped the coffee

through it. It was a real delicacy. On the 4 Advent Sundays, an exhibition was made in the two windows and on the entire floor in front of the counters - with wine, nuts, figs, dates, chocolates, oranges, etc. and it took many hours, because it had to be set up artfully. I honestly doubt it was seen by more than 25 people, but it was once a tradition that had to be kept up, although it would have been better if Dad had gone home and had a few hours of well-deserved sleep. I think the other merchants in town did.

Status

Once a year, the entire inventory had to be cleaned up, and I really liked that. Like dad and my little brother, I was really good at arithmetic, and I really needed that here. It happened in the way that father, a shop assistant and my little brother crawled around the shelves, while I stood in the middle of the store with a strip calculator. Then they shouted, for example, "13 cans of 4.85" and then I had a few seconds to work out how much 13×4.85 was and enter it on the calculator - before the next message arrived. One of our commissioners sometimes came and stood behind me to see how I was doing—he thought there was something supernatural—but could see nothing but that I was good at arithmetic. It was fun.

Competitors

In August 1964, Skive's first real supermarket - Løvbjerg - opened on Posthustorvet. I don't really know if dad was worried about the competition from there, because their prices would probably be lower than ours. But one day I went in there with a notepad and a pen and wrote down the prices of 15-20 items that Dad also kept. Then I went home and compared with father's prices, and he was apparently both relieved and a little proud of his son - because his prices were fully competitive. There was also a shop on Holstebrovej, which was called something like "the warehouse", and they could compete with father's prices, but certainly not in terms of quality.

Supplier

There were various wholesale companies where you could buy in, but father did not want to be a member of such a chain, he wanted to be independent - and besides, it was not liked to mention Brugsen at home. He did, however, buy a bit from HOKI. This was achieved by driving down opposite Søndre Skole in Asylgade into a farm next to Diges Trælasthandel. Further down the farm, right down Vestergade, was Vesta Kafferisteri, where we bought all our coffee. I really enjoyed coming there. The lovely smell of coffee filled almost the entire front yard.

Great coffee! So great that Dad sent coffee to some of his customers' children who had moved to the US.

We naturally bought beer and water from Thordal. I vaguely remember when the brewery was located at the end of Nørregade, from where it moved to Resenvej in 1954 and became Hancock.

We also shopped at Cort Traps Vinhandel, which was located on the corner of Nørregade and Nordbanevej with a very steep staircase and probably sold mostly hot wines.

Approximately every three months, my parents met in turn at the home of merchant Houmøller (who had a business on the corner of Nørregade and Sallinggade), merchant Karner Nielsen in Ringparken and merchant Plejdrup (father of the director Per Fly), whose business was on Brårupgade opposite Egerisvej. Then they got coffee and smørrebrød, after which the men sat down in the dining room and played whist, while the women sat in the living room and played 500. But apart from that, they had nothing professional to do with each other, and when we needed something urgently in the business, it was almost always merchant Dahlgaard in Brogaarden that was sent to.

My mother always bought wine, chocolate and coffee from him after my father died, and once when I was there, he proudly showed me his wine shop. It looked a lot like Dad's, which wasn't so strange, because he had taken over the shelving system from Dad's shop, along with the very distinctive price tags that sat on the front edge of the shelves. He was very proud of them, and he generally had a great deal of respect for father's abilities as a quality merchant.

Sale of the store

Sometime in the sixties, father had bought out Mrs. Rasmussen and Hartmann, and in the late seventies he sold the business to his friend, Jensen, who, together with his wife, ran the business. As far as I remember, Jensen didn't run it as an actual grocery store, but primarily as a wine shop, but not at all with the same quality as father had, and he didn't have the same knowledge of wine as father.

The sale of the store wasn't because business wasn't going well, but he couldn't get people who would accept the working hours, and a commission salary was probably nothing to brag about either.

I don't think dad got much out of the business, and I think we mostly lived off my mom's salary. She was a home nurse.

Father had very little self-esteem and did not think that he had made it to anything in life, but a few years after he had sold the business I asked him one day: "Which business do you think people will remember? Din, Karners, Plejdrups or Houmøller's?"

He didn't answer, but it was clear that he had never thought of it like that before. He had only thought of them making more money than him, but it clearly gave him satisfaction to think of it that way.

Father got a job as an accountant and clerk in a white goods store on Marius Jensen's road, and it undoubtedly extended his life by a number of years that he came there and had normal working conditions and time to look after his allotment garden, which he made into a model garden.

He died on 18.07.2002, when the doctors at Skive Hospital took his life by overlooking that he had an intestinal loop.

About the author:

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