
PROFILE

Anne-Marie Langvall Olsen

Dialogue With an Adventist Professor in Norway



Anne-Marie Langvall Olsen teaches English at the University of Trondheim—the second largest in Norway, located in a city founded by the Viking King Olav Trygvason in

997. She comes from a distinguished line of Norwegian Seventh-day Adventist educators.

Following her graduation from junior college with a major in English, she attended Newbold College in England. She also spent a year in the United States studying English on a Fulbright grant, before returning to Norway to enter the University of Oslo. In 1968 she received a graduate degree in English language, with minors in German and linguistics.

After teaching English in the state college of education in Bergen, West Norway, she joined the University of Trondheim in 1969. There she has taught phonetics, English grammar, and the history of the English lan-

guage ever since—except for a study leave to pursue doctoral studies in London. During that period she married Palle Olsen, a Danish minister, and later spent a year in Jerusalem where he was called to be a pastor. They have two daughters, Elisabeth and Christel.

Although she isn't employed in an Adventist university, Anne-Marie has been involved in the Adventist educational system. At present she is a member of the Newbold College Board of Governors. Her service in that capacity has been much appreciated. Perhaps providence ordained that she, a staunch Seventh-day Adventist, should serve professionally outside the church.

Please tell us about your Adventist background.

As a third generation Adventist, I was "born into the church." My parents both taught at our Adventist secondary school in Norway; my father also served as principal and academic dean. I was baptized by my Bible teacher, V. Norskov Olsen, while attending the Danish Adventist junior college. I can truly say that my dedicated parents, together with Christian teachers, gave me a professional and Christian vision.

What made you choose English language teaching as a profession?

Reading Ellen G. White's books from an early age, first in Norwegian, then in Danish and Swedish, because of the limited number of books translated into Norwegian, I soon wanted to read them in the original language. This whetted my appetite for closer study of that language and for English Bible versions. In fact my thesis at the University of Oslo dealt with some aspects of the lan-

guage in the King James Version of 1611 and the New English Bible of 1961.

Everybody, even you yourself, expected that you would end up teaching in an Adventist college, but you did not. Why?

While I was a graduate student at the University of Oslo, a teaching position at our Adventist junior college in Norway became vacant and everyone seemed to take for granted that I would fill that vacancy. Meanwhile, another Adventist graduate, with approximately the same area of studies and a family to feed, finished his course of study a few months ahead of me and filled that position. However, when I was approached by my professors during final exams about a university teaching position, I felt not only free but almost obliged to consider

that completely unexpected opening. It was a road which was so different from the one I had intended to travel, that I felt there was a divine hand in all this. And I still believe I have been placed here for a purpose.

What was college and university life like for you as a young Adventist?

During student days I was so involved in the activities of the young people in my church that I did not have any problems with the social aspects of student life; but I did have some problems with classes and exams scheduled for Sabbath hours. There were some courses I badly wanted to take but could not because they were scheduled for Friday evening or Sabbath morning. However, one professor was so concerned that I would have to miss his double lecture every Friday evening, that he kindly offered to repeat the gist of his lecture every Monday morning for me for a whole term. And this he did without any kind of remuneration.

To avoid the problem of Sabbath exams I notified the exam office early in the term, indicating which ones I was planning to sit for. They always managed to work things out for me, until my final term, which was in the autumn, with its short Friday afternoons.

We had several exam days of eight and ten hours. It proved impossible for the department to schedule all their exams in the time allotted without making use of either Friday or Saturday. But how does one schedule a 10-hour exam on an autumn Friday when the sun sets so early?

What did you do?

The Lord did open a way that year. For my sake the exam office personnel volunteered to arrive more than an hour early, to let me into their office to start answering the exam paper there before moving over to the exam room after the other students had settled down at nine in the morning. It was an odd feeling to walk out of the exam room more than three hours before the allotted time was up, but that extra hour in the morning gave me a chance to finish my paper. (The exam office people were very proud when they received the results of my final exams.) As a student, I found that when people realize that you are sincere and try to do your best they will go out of their way to help solve this kind of problem.

What advice would you give to Adventist students in a state university regarding Sabbath and Sabbath exams?

Be faithful and consistent. If one Adventist student accepts sitting for a single exam on Sabbath, it is so much more difficult to convince professors and exam office personnel that other Adventist students are not prepared to do the same. Show consideration for the amount of work involved in moving an exam date; don't withdraw the day before the exam, as one of our students did. Some church members have many tales to tell of how they have been harassed and discriminated against

in state schools because of their beliefs. I have been fortunate never to have had that experience. But I think that often we ourselves are the cause of our difficulties. I feel that there is a lot we can do to make life easier for ourselves, and for other people, when we have to ask for special privileges and arrangements because of our faith.

Do your colleagues and students know about your religious convictions?

Yes, many of them do, although most of the time I have been the only Adventist in this institution. They have asked me many questions, and some colleagues faithfully contribute to our mission in-gathering campaign every autumn, some even thanking me for the privilege to do so.

One way I have found to avoid Friday afternoon classes and Sabbath exams is to volunteer to work out the timetable and the exam schedule for the department. I also seek to foster goodwill by being prepared to do a little more than being expected to do.

How do you balance your professional life with your home life?

I give priority to my family, and I am prepared to sacrifice all professional activity outside strict working hours while our girls are still in grade school. When they are in bed in the evening, I often have to go back to my books or to correcting student papers. However, the key to survival for me has been a strong home partnership with a husband who is prepared to do more than his share of looking after the children and of the household chores. All these years we have been working shifts at home—he leaves when I come home in the afternoon, except for one year when two Adventist ladies alternated in looking after the girls during my working hours.

I feel it is important to get your priorities right. The children are in our care for such a short period of time! If we neglect them, we will never have a chance to make up for it.

Have you been involved in Adventist education as a professional?

Before entering the university I taught for one year at our junior college in Norway, where I have also served on the evaluation committee together with representatives from the Trans-European Division and the General Conference. I am the chairperson of our local church school board, and for more than five years I have been a member of the Newbold College Board of Governors. My experience from a rather wide range of boards and committees on various levels in a non-Adventist setting has been a useful background for this service.

How do you relate to the life of your congregation?

A close church relationship and, in particular, active participation in the Sabbath School, have been of the greatest importance, particularly during my student days. It has been essential to my personal development and to help me keep my balance as a person and as a Christian. Also in my professional life I need the church, and particularly the Sabbath School, to charge my batteries for another week in a demanding professional climate.

Looking back, what do you consider vital for staying within the church?

A basic commitment to the faith and value concerns of the church. Students must be encouraged to play an active part in church life in order to feel that they belong. God has a place and a task for everyone, and one needs to discover one's role.

Birthe Bayer

Birthe Bayer, also a teacher, serves as associate director of education for the West Nordic Union in Oslo, Norway.