

Gry Alfredsen

The place I grew up here in Norway is called [Ytre Enebakk](#) and in English it translates into something like “Outer Nowhere”. My house is in a small group of houses populated more or less by close relatives. The houses are situated on a lake and surrounded by forest. This was a paradise as a child (although I did not think so as a teenager). Nowadays the same families live



here, only the next generation. Yes, we are a bit skeptical of strangers. No, nobody plays the banjo. As a child the neighborhood kids my age were all boys. This was not a problem since I was the oldest and age overruled physical strength at that age. I never had

any interest in playing with dolls. I enjoyed fishing. My parents dragged my younger brother and me out on forest hikes, berry picking or cross country skiing every weekend – a very typical Norwegian lifestyle.



I went to high school in Oslo and moved to Oslo when I started at the University. I never really had a plan those first years, but I loved going to the university although maybe not for all the right reasons. I discovered people with the same interests as me, and I discovered the fun of going to concerts. I still like punk rock, not heavy metal as some of you, wrongly, seem to think. Most of you do however, correctly, know that I cannot dance.



I started to find my way academically when I took a course in biochemistry. Then I started biology and it was a done deal. The choice of mycology was more random. I wanted a Master’s thesis that involved some cool field work. The coolest thing I found was

arctic-alpine mycology in front of a glacier. The location was [Finse](#) (no trees at all). Even if the name Finse does not ring any bells for you I believe the ice planet Hoth in Star Wars episode IV might be familiar to most of you (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3acC49W3yQk>). This is the place where I did my field

work in front of the mountains you see in that movie. My master thesis also took me on a course in arctic-alpine biology at Svalbard. This is the most beautiful place I have ever been. I was assigned to a project where three of us travelled by a small boat between small islands to



count nesting birds and the number of eggs. On one island we came across a polar bear. Extremely cool, and I am happy we lived to tell the story. The same summer two people were killed by a polar bear on Svalbard.

I took my time with my Master's thesis - partly because I joined a voluntary organisation that worked with biodiversity and endangered forest species. Many in this organisation will now claim I have joined the dark side... The timing was great, forest owner associations paid us to run around in the forest all summer looking for areas that should be protected from logging! And three of us spent a winter writing a book about the methods we used. At some point I finally handed in my Master thesis. Then I spent nearly a year working odd jobs and saving up for backpacking trips to South East Asia. At the time I thought it was very radical, now not so much... Yes, I had henna colored hair, even a shaved head, but I never had dreadlocks. Then I got a call from Halvor Solheim at Norwegian Institute of Forest Research. Four name changes and two fusions later I am still there – now named the Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research (NIBIO).



I started working within the Forest Pathology group, mainly working with fungal cultures and identification. I was happy with the job and had no further ambitions. Then the Wood Technology people called me and asked me to come to a meeting that turned out to be a job interview. They wanted to expand into wood protection. I helped out with an application that in the end turned out to include a PhD for me. While writing the application I was shipped abroad together with Morten Eikenes to IRG33 in Cardiff in 2002. The aim was to figure out what this wood protection thing was all about. It was mind blowing! Everybody was so smart and had all this very deep knowledge, not only about wood protection but also about fungi. And they were very friendly even if we had no clue at all. We could not believe our luck when the very cool Slovenian (Franci Poleven, Marko Petric and Miha Humar) and German (Andreas Rapp and Christian Welchbacker) wood scientists went out for dinner with us. And then they even wanted to go to a bar with us afterwards. Wow!



Per Otto Flæte, Morten and I had no adults to rely on for guidance within the area of wood protection at our institute. Luckily Fred Evans and Holger Militz got involved at an early stage. Without their very patient guidance we most likely would have got lost. I will forever be grateful for this! Due to Holger we also found Erik and Andreas and together we slowly tried to build up a wood protection group. Later Lone (now our IRGWP VP) and Katrin joined. Just so you know, our group is a truly great place to work.



Another major influence has been IRGWP. I have attended every meeting since the one in Cardiff. It is a great place to catch up with what is going on within the wood protection area and a place to find new friends. Even a boyfriend if you are desperate (Jeff Lloyd). Barry Goodell and Jody

Jellison played an important part there, but that is a story for another time... It is also important for me to mention that IRGWP also has resulted in some academic output, half of my papers tend to be with Christian Brischke, Linda Veltrup-Meyer and Miha Humar. Other life changing IRG memories include: Andreas, Erik and I got VERY close to a grizzly bear with three cubs while hiking at the meeting in Wyoming; in Bangalore, India, Miha and I escaped from a never ending session on natural durability to visit a temple in a [tuk-tuk](#) and were millimeters away from being hit by a big truck.



I am not a person with a long bucket list, I believe in finding small things to enjoy every single day and to gather them to comprise a full and memorable life. To end where I started: four years ago I moved back to 'Outer Nowhere' to my grandparents old house. Here I can hike for hours in the forest and meet no one. Paradise once more.

