Henrik Nor-Hansen

Deadline. A Portrayal of Violence in Norway

Translated by Matt Bagguley  
Extract

In the early ‘90s, Norway entered a period of long-term economic growth. Property prices rose. In Stavanger and Sandnes, it became increasingly difficult to enter the housing market. Many young people looked to the surrounding rural areas. Hommersåk was one of the smaller villages which experienced an influx. The demography changed rapidly. One could see the agricultural land change into a suburb, with improved connections by road and sea. The entire period was characterized by a high level of activity on the Norwegian continental shelf. Growth in the oil and gas industry propagated further into local business. There were huge socio-economic ripple effects.

In this presentation we follow Kjetil Tuestad, who in spring 1998 married Ann Elisabet Larsen. They had bought a house at Hommersåk. Kjetil was 26 years old. He worked as an electrician at Rosenberg Shipyard in Stavanger. On midsummer night of that same year he was found severely beaten on the outskirts of Hommersåk. Kjetil was unconscious when the doctor arrived. After a quick examination, he was transported by air ambulance to the emergency room at Stavanger University Hospital. They detected concussion, facial fractures, and breakages to the ribcage. Kjetil remained under observation for several hours. The head injuries were said to be serious. He regained consciousness the following morning.

Ann Elisabet Larsen says that the spouse was found just before midnight. The police had obtained his personal details. Ann Elisabet then drove to the hospital in Stavanger. She says it was a long night in the waiting room. The information was supposedly inadequate. Finally she was allowed to go in. At that point the spouse appeared barely recognizable. His face was disfigured by bruising and swelling. She does not believe that Kjetil understood the situation. They said he was nauseous. Shortly afterwards he threw up. Ann Elisabet says she couldn’t bear to be there. She later recalls being joined by Kjetil's parents in the waiting room. They had apparently requested to speak to a clinical. A man had come out and informed them calmly of the damage to Kjetil’s facial skeleton, with three of the fractures being in the jaw. There was extensive dental damage. Many teeth were turned in towards the palate. The parents were also told that their son had blood in his middle ear, which would impair his hearing. The outcome of the concussion was still uncertain.

Today Kjetil Tuestad says that he recalls little of the first hour. Waking up was painful. Kjetil can remember that he eventually developed an unusual headache. They had wheeled him down to the radiology department. The images had shown cerebral hemorrhaging. A surgical drain was considered. Kjetil thinks he perhaps lay in the corridor for a while. Later they possibly wheeled the bed into a nearby room. Here, Kjetil reportedly experienced a number of visual disturbances. We know that he was concerned about the people around him. He says they tried to get into his oral cavity. Then he was left alone for a while. A doctor came and asked for his name and address. The doctor left.

The breakages to the jaw and right cheekbone were operated on. Kjetil was apparently confused when he woke from the anesthetic. He has no complete memory from this day. He says it became night. They had wheeled the bed over to the window of a six-patient room. During the night he was woken by lights and coughing. A nurse spoke quietly behind a curtain. Later, Kjetil reportedly called for help himself. But it’s unclear what he wanted. He lay for a while listening to heavy breathing and analgesia pumps. Kjetil thinks he may have slept. The next morning he was seen by a new nurse who had a wash-cloth and a nutritional drink. She explained to him about the jaw-brace. It would be six weeks before he could eat normally.

Kjetil Tuestad was bedridden for four days. He received no more news during the doctor’s visits. He understood that his body would largely heal itself. After a while the nurse placed a wheelchair by the bed. She removed his urinary catheter at the same time. Kjetil had to find the way to the toilet on his own. He says it was difficult to move in and out of the wheelchair. He had stabbing pains in his chest. At first, he also needed help getting onto the toilet seat. He explains how toilet visits could trigger discomfort and anxiety. His urine had smelled of penicillin. It was supposedly difficult to recognize himself in his own emotional life.

Kjetil Tuestad was admitted to the Neurosurgical Department at Stavanger University Hospital for two weeks. The parents had brought flowers and a box of chocolates. It was difficult to make conversation, he often sat in silence during visits. Over time he became gradually more indisposed. The spouse says he seemed disoriented, he had no focus to read books or newspapers. It is otherwise known that Kjetil apparently avoided his fellow patients. He had experienced sleeping problems. He says there was a lot of uncertainty surrounding his own future.

The investigation appeared to be low priority. Throughout the summer, the family began to lose hope that the case would be solved. In August, the assault became of interest again when a six-year-old boy was almost stoned to death. An attempt had been made to spare the public, most of which never understood the seriousness of the offense. Nevertheless, it was said that the boys own peers had allegedly turned on him with kicks and punches. Eventually he was dragged into a ditch. He was later found in a very bad state, bleeding heavily. It was assumed that the boy would have permanent injuries. The stoning had taken place during the day, in a quiet residential area. People now believed that Hommersåk was losing its innocence. Sandnes Council reportedly involved the Health and Social Department. Various measures were considered. It was concluded that the children wanted to test their own reality. They had all just started school that year.

At first, Kjetil Tuestad lived with his parents in Stavanger. It is said that he didn’t want any visits from the spouse. They spoke only rarely on the phone. These were apparently tiresome conversations, which led nowhere. Kjetil recalls nothing of midsummer night, and nothing of the violence. He would not talk about it. One could observe Kjetil's behavior as a reaction. The mother took food, water and broth and then pulped everything in a Mixmaster. Kjetil did not eat enough. He lost a lot of weight. It is known that he was often dizzy. His coordination failed, he needed help getting around the house. During this period, Kjetil regularly visited the Department of Rehabilitation and Neuropsychology. They described the possibility of a reduced function in the central nervous system. In the middle of the summer holiday, he fainted in the living room. Once again he was admitted to the Neurosurgical Department. They said he was somewhat dehydrated. Otherwise, they found no real explanation. Kjetil Tuestad was kept there over the weekend. It was supposedly few patients at the hospital. Saturday morning he sat alone in the canteen for a long time. He was eventually joined by a woman with long greasy hair. They watched a documentary about reindeer. Kjetil experienced various aversions. He then wheeled himself around the department. He claimed to have experienced a range of negative impressions. It is believed that the hospitalization may have been a burden mentally. Kjetil envisioned patients in red and blue dressing-gowns made of faded towelling. He had felt disoriented. He took the elevator up several floors. It is believed that this may have been late Sunday evening. The departments were in darkness and dimmed lights.

Kjetil Tuestad had a new appointment in August. They removed the jaw-brace and made a few adjustments to the upper palate. A gradual improvement was seen in Kjetil's overall condition. He had been recommended further physical training. He apparently began taking daily walks using the walking frame. The mother followed him along the asphalted path by the residential area. Later, Kjetil was able to walk alone to the shop. He also used the walking frame to visit friends in the neighborhood. They played computer games. Nevertheless it was easy to see that he felt dejected. Kjetil Tuestad failed to socialize with others in a meaningful manner. It was said that he was reserved and humourless. Cognitive tests still showed memory loss around the time of the assault. There was a reduced imaginative capability. Of even more concern was that Kjetil sometimes failed to understand his own life situation. This had raised a few questions. The doctor wanted a new evaluation. However, there never was a new evaluation. The treatment ended in mid-August, when Kjetil returned for a check-up. The doctor had prescribed Apodorm for the sleep disorders. They talked briefly about the way ahead.

Rolf Tuestad was in regular telephone contact with Sandnes police station. They had rarely seen this kind of violence at Hommersåk. A lack of witnesses made the case difficult. It was crucial that people came forward. The police believed that the Tuestad family should not keep any high expectations. Cases of random violence were hard to solve.

Kjetil Tuestad reportedly moved to his own place in late August. It was a basement flat in Bjergsted. We know that he called his parents and spouse. He had apparently said that he needed time alone. They displayed understanding. In hindsight, this approach has been questioned. The immediate family were perhaps not good enough at recognizing changes in Kjetil's personality. He remembers very little from this period. In many respects he still required help. The flat never quite came together, there were pictures and cardboard boxes along the walls. The walking frame occupied a lot of floor space. Kjetil was dependent on support points. He also had a new wheel walker, which is said to have stood on the gravel by the basement stairs. He used the wheel walker to get to the nearest shop.

In September, Kjetil Tuestad had several appointments with the dentist. He took the bus the short distance beyond Bjergsted towards Stavanger city-centre. It involved small adjustments of dental implants and further cosmetic works. The chronic pain had supposedly lessened gradually during summer and autumn. Kjetil says he used fewer painkillers. Balance and coordination were nevertheless only slightly improved. Kjetil had been offered a physiotherapist, as well as rehabilitation training under the direction of the hospital. He had apparently trained with stroke patients and those recovering from cardiac surgery. Kjetil does not have much to say about it. People had been lying on their backs on evenly spaced gym mats. The air was stagnant. After training had finished it’s understood that he used the wheel walker to reach the bus stop in Armauer Hansens Street.

It emerges that Kjetil Tuestad spent a lot of time in the flat. He had problems concentrating. In his words, the days just passed. We know that he occasionally had the company of a white cat. He says the cat would come to the basement window. Kjetil recalls that he fed it liver pate. He believes it may have been the neighbour's cat. In October, Kjetil was visited by the spouse, Ann Elisabet Larsen. They stood talking in the doorway at first. It is known that she now understood that Kjetil had changed. She also told him so. Kjetil replied that he had recently taken a nap. They had apparently stared uncomprehending at each other. Kjetil asked if she wanted a coffee. Yes, thank you, she had answered. He then apparently supported himself on the furniture for a while. He wanted to know if she took sugar. Ann Elisabet remembers that she laughed a little nervously. Kjetil seemed unmoved. He took some sugar from the kitchen cabinet. It was unusual behavior. Kjetil had talked noticably slower than before. He gave a more monotone impression.

We know that Kjetil Tuestad has thought a lot about the meeting with the spouse. He recalls perhaps, first and foremost, the difficulty of being natural. He was afraid that she would notice this. They had drunk coffee at a low table in front of the TV. The TV was off, Kjetil recalls occasionally looking at the dark gray screen. Ann Elisabet wanted to know if he had contacted the Victim Compensation Office. “Yes,” he answered, he would do that. Kjetil then supposedly looked at her.2 He asked if she had become more involved in the local community. Ann Elisabet had reacted to the spouse speaking so strangely. *More involved in the local community?* It’s understood they sat for a considerable time in silence. In the end Kjetil had asked if she wanted to watch tv. He stepped forward and turned on the TV.

Ann Elisabet Larsen claims today that the conversation ended into nothing. She did not persuade the spouse to come home to Hommersåk. She felt that he needed more time alone. Kjetil recalls following her to the door. He assumed that they would never meet again. They supposedly gave each other a hug.