

ULOBA 30th Anniversary

Independent living festival, Oslo, June 2021

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Hi everybody, I'm Adolf Ratzka. I'm sitting in my electric wheelchair in my comfortable study in our house in Stockholm. I'm surrounded by shelves full of books and plants.

Congratulations on ULOBA's 30th anniversary! I would like to share with you a few memories of events leading up to the origin of ULOBA.

When I think of the beginnings of ULOBA I think of Bente Skansgård. Forty years ago, in 1981, I met Bente in Gothenburg at an international conference on universal design in housing. I had just returned from a trip to California, and Bente asked me a lot of questions. How come I had moved from Germany to California? How do people live there who need assistance? How are the services organized, who pays for them? How did I manage to live without relatives in the US for over 7 years, and then move to Sweden? How could somebody with my disability without relatives, study, work, travel, meet friends, have girlfriends? My answer to these questions was personal assistance and direct payments. Bente had lived with her parents all her life. Depending on parents or living in an institution - those were the alternatives she knew. To her, I was a rare bird. She was very skeptical of my emphasis on cash, cash to hire, train, and fire my assistants.

That was the start of a long and close friendship. We visited each other many times in Stockholm and Oslo. We met at conferences abroad. I got to know her parents Gerd and Ola. Later on, I became friends with her husband Björn. As I see it, her devoted parents and her resourceful and multi-talented Björn helped Bente to become the woman we remember.

I close with a true story that you may not have heard. In 1985, while I had a fellowship at WID in Berkeley, Bente and Ola also visited Berkeley, on a Fulbright Scholarship, and spent a few weeks there. They stayed in the house of a woman who had a wheelchair and a few cats. After a week, they noticed a strange smell in the house that got worse every day. Ola finally found a dead cat on the floor among piles of rubbish in one of the rooms. The cat was decomposing and Ola had to scratch the almost liquid body off the carpet with a knife.

IL is a fantastic trip. It can set us free, free to experience all kinds of adventures - including dead smelly cats! I wish your organization many more good years! May ULOBA continue to prosper and spread its great work throughout Norway and beyond!