

For the Love of Cod: A Father and Son's Search for Norwegian Happiness

Eric Dregni

Eric Dregni, Translator

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In *For the Love of Cod*, Eric Dregni goes on a quest to discover why Norway—with its long, dark winters, reserved citizens, and no native word for “happy”—often tops the “Happiest Country in the World” charts.

Eager to introduce his Norwegian-born teenage son, Eilif, to his heritage, Dregni, an American of Norwegian descent, decided that the best way to learn about Norway was to go there together, hear from its citizens whether or not they were happy, and unearth the country’s dark side, if there was one to be found.

What they learned astounded them. Some of it made the US look backward: Norwegians get generous vacation time—even farmers take off and head south in the winter as substitutes care for their flocks and crops. New parents get a year’s parental leave at full pay. Norwegian parents believe in “free upbringing;” they disapprove of scolding, and their kids roam freely. Women feel safe walking alone at night. And while Norway is one of the most expensive countries in the world, generous social services mean that Norwegians experience the highest quality of life. No one fears going bankrupt over medical services or student loan debt; hospital treatment and education are free. Take a deep breath. Imagine what living without those stresses would feel like.

But Dregni learned that it isn’t just less stress that makes Norway’s citizens happy. He expresses delight that Norwegians always began their answers to his questions with “we” rather than “I.” Instead of basing their happiness on how well they are doing compared to others, he says, Norwegians are happy when everyone is doing well. Take another breath. Imagine that.

Honest, funny, and down to earth, *For the Love of Cod* is an eye-opening look at how Norway discovered the key to real happiness.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2021)

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