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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

What to Blame for the Atmosphere Change in Re-enactment Camps? Personal View

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Lately, I have been seeing quite a few posts by friends announcing that they are quitting the Viking Re-enactment hobby. This is sad and worrisome. Apparently, the reasons for leaving are due to a lack of authenticity, show fight, and atmosphere. I think they are overlooking the main contributing factor: the hobby is not changing, the people are, and consequently, so have those saying farewell to the hobby.

“ Nevertheless, the issue of authenticity will always remain a heated debate: how far are we willing to go, how far should we go and how far can we go?

When comparing the situation of today with that of 25 years ago, I see three substantial changes.

First of all, back then, the average age of the participants was below 25; now it has become above 40. Back then, we (meaning my husband and myself) were about the only participants with young children; nowadays, many have started a family. Moreover, almost every participant belonged to a large group, whereas nowadays most belong to either a very small group or single families.

Secondly, people forget how demanding this hobby can be, and if you have done it for many years, sometimes even quite intensively, at some point in time, you become re-enactment 'weary'.

With regards to lack of atmosphere, in the old days, what was considered great atmosphere was sitting around a campfire with 30 people, singing Irish songs and getting drunk. Well, I can tell you, there are a number of good reasons why this is not done anymore. It was not all roses. There was a lot of quarrelling going on and that is the main reason why most large groups have fallen apart. People were unhappy with the group politics.

I believe that is one of the reasons why the average age of participants has increased (if we do not count all the babies, of course). Most groups are very reluctant to take in new members (if they are complete strangers) and participants are even more reluctant to become a newbie's mentor to teach them the ropes. So there is hardly any influx of youngsters.

Where authenticity is concerned, I do believe there is room for improvement. However, overall, comparing most of today's events with the events from 25 years ago, the level of authenticity has considerably gone up. I could name a dozen examples, but that would exceed the scope of this article. I only need to look at the old pictures or my first kit (yes, I still have it) to know this to be true. Becoming more lax and lazy about authenticity is logical if you do this for a long time and this is something we should constantly battle against, but overall, I am not that dissatisfied.

Nevertheless, the issue of authenticity will always remain a heated debate: how far are we *willing* to go, how far *should* we go and how far *can* we go? If an event has a higher power above (owner of the land, museum director, town municipality) and paying public, the need to meet the requirements of both public and higher power is very high. We exist by the grace of both paying visitors and those facilitating an encampment, and we cannot just brush their demands aside.

And what about people just starting with this expensive, time-consuming and study-demanding hobby? Should we be slacker towards newbies or demand a high level from the start? It is an ongoing discussion, that is for sure.

Somehow, one can never do it right. We have people no longer wanting to come to our events due to either too high demands of authenticity or too low authenticity. Should handbooks be provided clearly stating the exact requirements, a form of guidelines of where our boundaries are? I remember an event from 15 years ago having done this; within 3 years the event was dead, since no one wanted to come on that basis, everyone thought it was killing the fun. Well, not everyone, but most.

Another ongoing debate and not a new one either is show fight. This debate had already started 15 years ago. The truth is that the majority of fighters want competitive fighting and keep away if it is only a show fight. Even fighters who claim they are in favour of show fight, often do not practice it once on the battlefield. I think it is in our DNA to rather win than entertain.

What about the level of training? Yes, this is also an ongoing debate. So, fighters among you, start training the untrained! Do not just complain, but do something about it. And if a newbie or untrained person refuses your training, inform the organizers, so they can ban the untrained fighters from the battlefield. Do not lay back and expect the organization to handle everything on their own.

I must say, there is some hypocrisy going on here. I have been around for a while and I have heard a lot of complaining about this. But how can someone complain about an insufficiently trained fighter being a danger on the battlefield, and in the same time taking up arms on the same battlefield after a long and heavy night of drinking? Do these complainants with a hangover and sleep deprivation not also pose a danger to themselves and others on the battlefield? Should alcohol be banned to fighters? Or allow only those who pass a breath alcohol test into the arena?

More fun? I must say that the evenings have indeed changed. We have tried in the past to bring it back by organizing something new, but we see that many people prefer staying in front of their own tent, with just a few friends, enjoying the quiet night. The reasons are mostly due to having little children, dogs, and also to tiredness. Which brings us back to the beginning: we all have changed.

We have children now that demand our care. Instead of the one or two dogs in camp in the old days, now those without a dog are the exception and some dogs are not really fit for camps, so the owners have to stay with them by the tent. Our bodies are no longer capable of partying into the wee hours and still be relatively fresh when the event opens to the public and do our duties. We have hectic lives and jobs, and love the quiet evenings without

telephone, TV, and other modern distractions. We have built up very long and often very deep friendships with a selective few fellow reenactors whom we have known for a quarter of a century, and would rather spend our limited time with them than with a large group of others we superficially know.

Last but not least, there is this invisible, lethal monster called re-enactment-weariness. It slowly creeps up on you and only a few recognize it for what it is. Especially if you are really committed and travel to more than a few events a year, this hobby can become very time-consuming, expensive, harsh on the body and emotionally demanding. It does eventually wear you down, slowly but certainly. You are caught up by your own enthusiasm.

There comes this point in life when you start feeling the need to spend more time and money on other things, on family, non-re-enactment friends, new hobbies, or perhaps a career, on your house, on holidays to destinations other than Viking camps. Your subconsciousness starts sabotaging your desire to go to an event. It starts finding excuses like 'it is too cold', 'it is too wet', or 'it is no longer fun'. This happens especially to those who in the beginning are super enthusiastic about the hobby, actively participate in a lot of events, and do not take breaks. Unfortunately, these are now burnt up.

We have become older and if you expect this hobby to remain unchanged, that is a utopia. Atmosphere is something an event cannot create for you; you have to create it yourselves. If you show up with an attitude of 'blaah', I had no lust whatsoever to come but here I am anyway', you can never expect the event to become attractive.

In conclusion, yes, the hobby has changed, since we have changed. However, we can change it back again.

If you have any suggestions on what we, personally, could do to improve our own events, we are willing to listen. The only hurdle to come up with initiatives to keep this hobby viable, is you, yourselves. Unless you have changed too much...

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