

Kari's Story

INTRODUCTION BY DAVID RANSOM

Many PISG members will remember Kari Boye Young as their first contact on Pitcairn Island when she was their stamp supplier, sending first day covers and new mint stamps to her 50 customers, including our own David Ward. Kari has also been a busy Ham Radio operator with several printed QSL cards to her name that are sought after by collectors around the world. She is now an assistant to Julie Christian, the editor of 'Dem Tull', the independent on-line news magazine for Pitcairn Island – www.demtullpitcairn.com. Being a bit of an old romantic, I was fascinated by her story of how she met her husband Brian, a direct descendant of the mutineer Edward Young. Kari has kindly agreed to tell her story to readers of the 'UK Log'.

When I was young (45 years ago) it was not unusual for women to go to sea in the Norwegian merchant marine, so I had made up my mind when I was 12 to be a sailor after reading Nordhoff and Hall's trilogy about the mutiny on the *Bounty* and the settling of Pitcairn. The story of the *Bounty* is fantastic on its own, and with the additional wonders of the remoteness and uniqueness of Pitcairn, I was absolutely fascinated and not to be diverted. My parents never tried to stop me either, but made me aware that these days discontented sailors consulted their trade unions instead of instigating mutiny. They supported me when I went on to the radio maritime school after my college graduation.

I sailed altogether seven years as radio officer all over the world, coming back to Norway in between assignments and worked for up to six months as substitute teacher in primary and middle school to live a landlubber's life for a while, and spend time with parents and siblings.

It was a good life at sea in those days, there were always other women working onboard, and we used to have exercise classes and handicraft evenings, and when docked, shopping expeditions together ashore. My work was interesting, talking by morse key to coast stations all over the world, sending and receiving telegrams,

receiving weather forecast and being responsible for the crew's monthly accounts with their wages and expenses. Even the Persian Gulf was a safe place then, and the tankers very often went to ports in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates to load up for Japan, Australia, the States or Europe.

Going through the Suez Canal in convoy was always exciting, a whole day with sand dunes and small villages on both sides of the ship, something else than the ocean to watch. Once we spent almost two months at sea without seeing land, from Baton Rouge in Louisiana to Visakhapatnam in India, and ran out of lots of food items. The steward even tried to make butter by churning milk – unsuccessfully – for we only had milk from the "iron cow" in those days, the machine in the galley that mixed the milk powder.

When I finally came to Pitcairn in 1973, it was as a passenger on a cargo ship bringing supplies from England. I really did not know what to expect, as there was no Google then to satisfy one's curiosity, and books and magazine articles were not as plentiful on the subject as they are now. My accommodation was arranged with a local family, and I felt at home, enjoying the lifestyle and the freedom of the island. Though the way of life and the community spirit has changed hugely, it still is a beautiful island with wonderful scenery, exciting valleys and hills to explore, and more isolated than ever from the rest of the world, in spite of Internet and phone, where before we only had ham radio and telegrams by morse code.

When I met Brian, we realized we had a lot in common, in spite of being "born on the opposite sides of the sea", but I wasn't quite sure I was ready to settle on Pitcairn forever. It took some years – I sailed on one more ship and worked as a secretary in Oslo – until finally, in 1978, I arrived with my dog and boxes of personal belongings to settle for good, and married Brian. We

built our house up in the Adamstown hills, a two room primitive shack, and cooked over open fire till we got a woodstove the next year. Our toilet was the traditional “duncan”, a longdrop, but we had no bathroom, so we washed up behind the pulau trees by spilling a bucket of hot water over each other. It seems pretty primitive now, when new houseowners here have flush toilet, showers and sink before they even move in, but we still think about the first years as “the good old days”. It was wonderful to get a woodrange after the first year, and then later on an electric range. We got a proper



Kari with husband Brian and son Tim, photographed about 1980

KARI'S SHIPS

The English “Mataura” brought me as a passenger to Pitcairn in 1973, almost a month from London to Pitcairn.

I met Brian for the first time on the ship that brought me to Pitcairn for the second time, in 1975. My first landing on Pitcairn was in 1973, but he was in New Zealand at that time. He had just returned in 1975, and came out to the ship with all the other Pitcairners on arrival, the ship was a Norwegian ship of the Wilhelmsen Line, the Wilhelmsen ships were in the trade Europe-Panama-NZ at the time, and stopped often. I travelled with the ship from Genoa, Italy, as a “workaway”.

My third voyage to Pitcairn was with Bj.Ruud-Pedersen's shipping company, the “Essi Kari” in 1978. The Norwegian Essi ships stopped frequently on their way south, and always carried passengers to NZ for free. In 1981 Brian, Tim (3 years old) and I travelled on the Essi Silje all the way from Pitcairn to Germany as workaways to celebrate Christmas with my family in Oslo and give birth to Anette.

While I was sailing as radio officer, it was in the Sigurd Herlofson shipping company, Sigurd being my father's cousin, so my parents felt reassured by that fact when they saw me off to Suez in 1965. The Herlofson company had tankers, bulk, obo and oldfashioned freighters, travelling all over the world, but none of them ever came to Pitcairn, so I travelled as passenger or “workaway” from Europe on my three visits to Pitcairn before I settled here.

bathroom with shower and bathtub – a far cry from our buckets up under the pulau trees. Today our house is everything we could wish for, large and roomy, with most of the comforts of the outside world.

Evidently it was different to live here as a ‘real’ Pitcairner instead of as a tourist, but I was very enthusiastic and continued loving it. Of course love made me blind to the inconveniences and hardships, and I felt privileged to be a part of this unique community.

My first job was cleaning up at the Edge for \$8 a month, just raking and burning leaves. Later on I worked as operator at the radio station for about ten years, and also as assistant in the Post office. I was elected as member of our Council twice after Brian's terms as mayor – we had agreed that two members of the same household in Council should be avoided.

We have two children, Tim (now living in Australia) and Anette (living in Norway), and we lived in New Zealand for several years while they got their education. As we are getting older, and Brian has a couple of serious health conditions – with me prone to bonebreaking accidents – we are planning to leave the island in a couple of years and settle closer to family and hospitals. ■