

When I followed my NATO spouse to Norway, I had to learn to thrive through resilience – and gained a new outlook on life itself.

Growing Into a New Home

by Amanda Eden

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ELEVEN YEARS AGO, I fastened my six-month-old daughter, Emily, into a car seat, squeezed my two-and-a-half-year-old son, Tommy, into a puffy coat he hated, and let the Lisbon sun slip behind the clouds of memory. My husband's new post with NATO was waiting in Stavanger, Norway; however, my own award-stamped career in a global advertising agency was not. I still remember my last visit to my favourite neighbourhood café, thinking, "This might be the last time I hear my mother tongue every day."

Resilience, that word people toss around like a paper aeroplane, suddenly felt heavy as a lump of metal in my pocket.

I won't lie. Norway wasted no time to strip away illusions. November rain arrived sideways. The sky came in only two colours: black and graphite. The sun became a collection of photos from my last summer in the Algarve, and my confident professional veneer dissolved in supermarket aisles where I couldn't pronounce *rømmegrøt*.

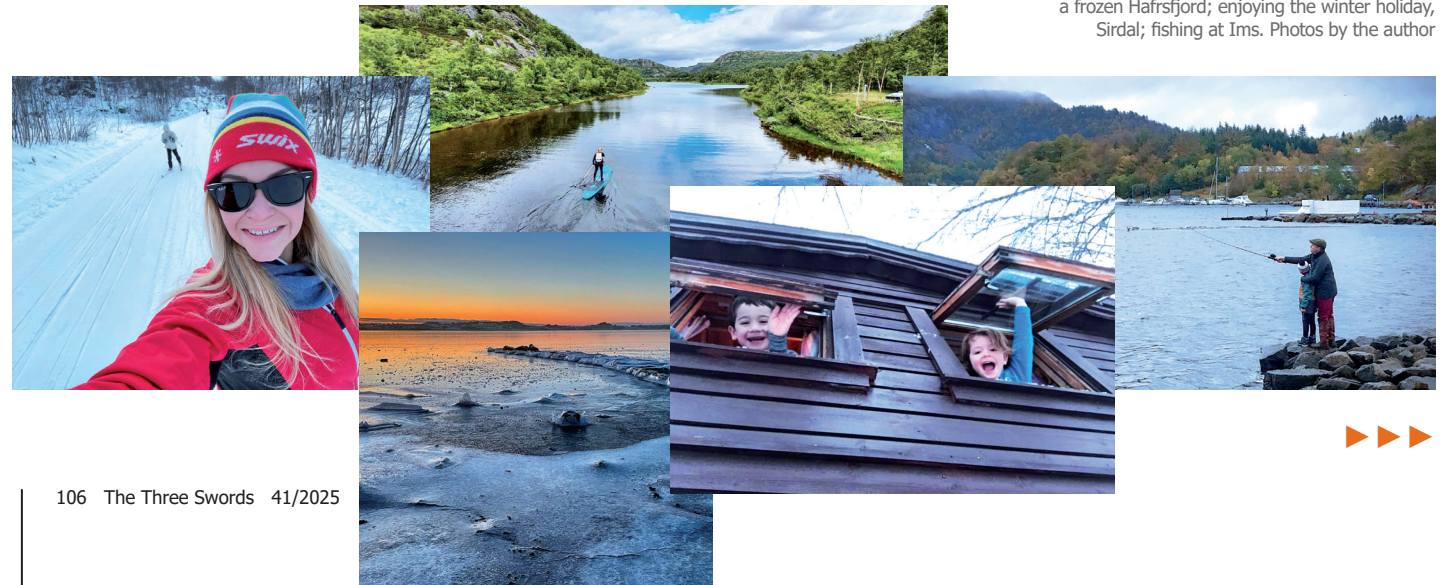
I missed the lazy clatter of espresso cups in Lisbon cafés, the laughter of colleagues sharing a glass of wine during work lunches, and the city noise. I missed feeling competent.

But contrast, I discovered, is a masterful teacher. Stavanger's gloom made every shaft of light sacred: that first pastel sunrise at 10 a.m.

in January, the gold coin of August dusk skimming a fjord, the fierce glitter of fresh snow under streetlamps.

Norwegians have a word, *kos*, for the cosy satisfaction of candles against a storm. I adopted it like a stray cat. *Kos* in our home became nightly board game marathons, multicultural parent potlucks that transcended language (thanks to the wonderful opportunity to join an international school), and wool jumpers that felt like quiet hugs.

Below, from left to right
Cross-country skiing in Suleskard, Sirdal;
Paddleboarding on Fidjelandsvatnet, Sirdal;
a frozen Hafrsfjord; enjoying the winter holiday,
Sirdal; fishing at Ims. Photos by the author



Little by little, I rewrote belonging. Nature became our playground. Hiking was our favourite weekend pastime, and we found picnic spots that looked computer-generated in their flawless splendour. I learnt that silence is an important part of the conversation. Norwegians speak sparingly; their pauses aren't awkward — they're generous. So, I learned to let silence finish my sentences. And best of all, I understood the weather as an equalizer. Everyone, from CEOs to bus drivers, checks the same forecast and owns the same rain gear. In other words, I'd never felt social equality so viscerally.

As the kids grew older, I began to feel the itch of unfinished ambition. I had spent some years pouring my energy into building a life from scratch in a new country, learning the ropes of motherhood, and embracing a culture so different from my own. But now, it was time to reclaim a part of me I had carefully tucked away. Re-entering the workforce after a long break is daunting enough. Doing it in a second language is on another level. But instead of fear, I felt something else: readiness.

When I first moved to Norway, people warned me: "You'll never get a good job if you're not Norwegian." Even for an ordinary role, they said, you had to speak the language fluently.

Well, I'm not Norwegian. My closest tie to local tradition is an unwavering love of cod. And while I can order coffee and navigate a *dugnad* (a community volunteering effort), I'm far from fluent. But I couldn't let that stop me.

Because here's what I've learned: the world doesn't need you to be perfect; it needs you to be authentic. To show up with your own voice, your experience, your point of view. I had a solid career behind me, a creative mind that hadn't gone quiet, a deep desire to contribute, and a belief, however fragile, that I still had something original to offer. That was enough.

So, I stopped waiting for permission. I chose not to settle, not to shrink my experience to fit other people's expectations. And that choice changed everything.

Today, I'm Director of Marketing for a global Norwegian engineering company. Proof that careers aren't lost — they're rerouted. They may take detours, yes, but those detours often lead to the most beautiful destinations.

And if there's one thing I hope you take from this part of my story, it's this: don't let anyone define what's possible for you. Keep believing, keep showing up, and trust that the right doors will open. Even if you have to knock a little louder to be heard.

After 11 Norwegian winters, I've learned a lot. I've learned that home is plural.

Lisbon didn't shrink when I left; my heart simply made another room. Belonging is an active verb: show up — at neighbourhood *dugnads*, school parties, office waffle Fridays — and roots will follow. Light is a mindset. Buy the therapy lamp, yes, but also learn to hunt for luminosity in conversation, in craft, and in the glow of kids' cheeks after sledding. Difference is a two-way mirror. The more I explained Portuguese hospitality, the more I understood Norwegian directness. Careers can hibernate. Dormant does not mean dead; it means gathering strength beneath the snow.

There are still mornings when the sky forgets to brighten. But resilience is now less a weight in my pocket and more a rhythm between what was and what is becoming.

Lisbon taught me to savour life; Norway taught me to endure it.

Together, they teach me to celebrate it, whatever the forecast. If you ever find yourself trading sunshine for drizzle, remember: the very differences that unsettle you may be the ones that remake you. So put on your waterproofs, and step outside. The rain won't wait — and neither should you. ✦



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Clockwise
 Fabulous Orrestranda; building shelters in Melshei; on top of the world at Preikestolen; camping at Alsvik. Photos by the author