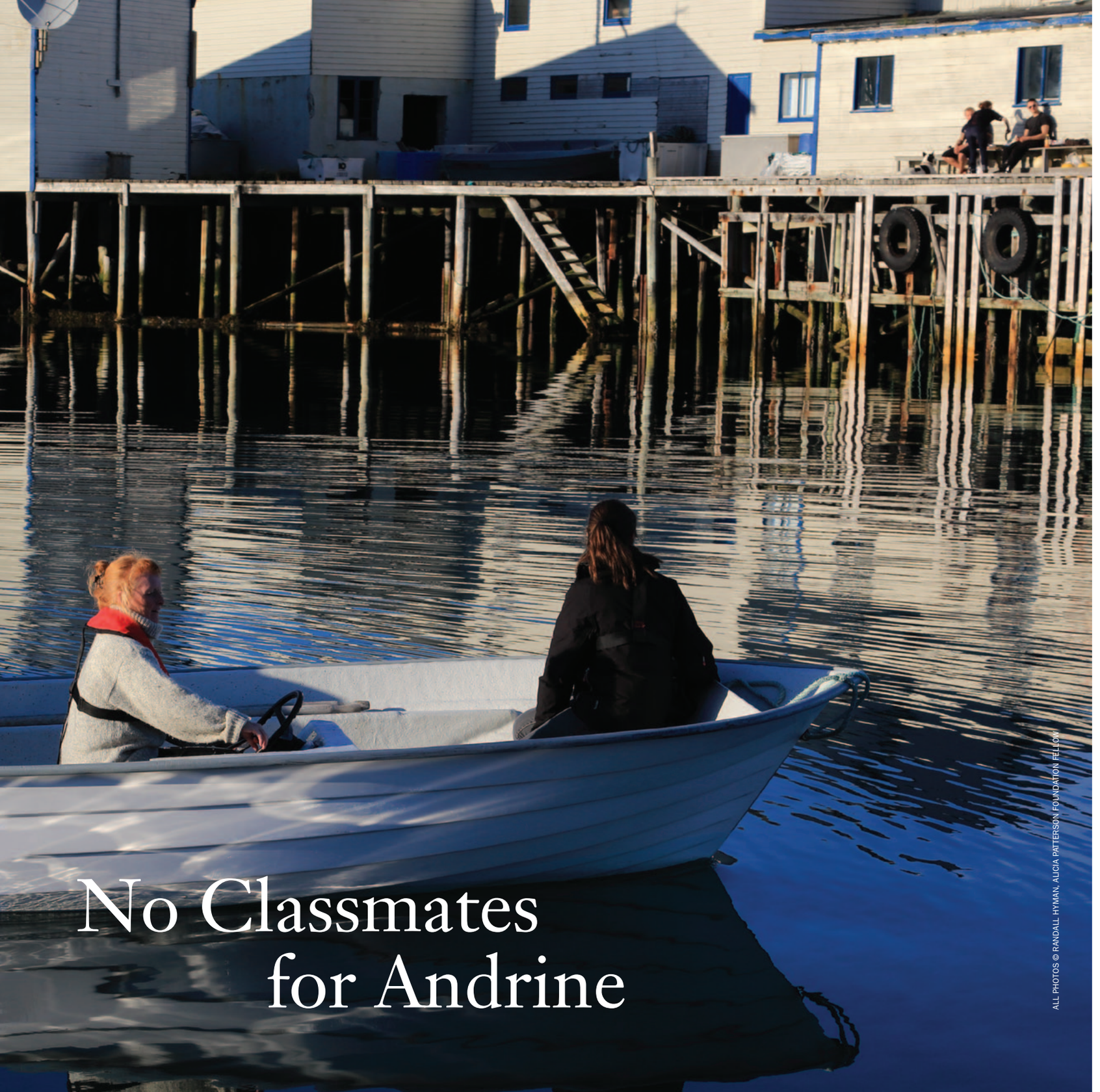

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Andrine, in the bow, and her teacher setting off after school to fish a cod for supper. Her father is a fisherman, and her mother runs the local fish factory.

No Classmates for Andrine

Young Andrine Klausen is the sole—and last—pupil attending a school in remote northern Norway slated to be closed for good in June.

By Randall Hyman

ON THE SMALL island of Ingøya, eleven miles by ocean ferry from the northernmost coast of Norway, going to school has never been easy, but this year is like none other. In June, Ingøy School, one of the last remote island schools in Norway, will close its doors forever. When I visited at the beginning of the academic year last August,

15-year-old Andrine Klausen seemed unfazed by her unique status as the school's last pupil. She was more focused on just making it through her last year of *ungdomsskole*, akin to junior high school in the United States.

"Lucky I'm heavier than a rock," she quipped, referring to the fierce ocean gales that rake across the island for weeks at a time. Klausen's slender frame belies her tough nature. Villagers can actually be cast into sea, but Klausen seems undaunted. Never mind being the last student left on the island—just getting to school takes courage. Each winter, islanders brace for 40–50 days of gales with 70-mph winds and no connection to the mainland for weeks.

"IT'S ROUGH," EXPLAINED KIRSTEN WOLLAN, ANDRINE'S only teacher. As Wollan gazed from the classroom window overlooking colorful fishing boats and a white church that reflected like a postcard in the glassy harbor, she described a starkly different scene in winter.

"You hear the sound of the wind," Wollan reflected, "and it comes from the west, back of the school, and you hear like *RRRRrrrrrr*. And then suddenly you cringe, like, now it's coming. So sometimes Andrine has to be followed to school so she won't blow away."

Ingøya sits at the threshold of the Barents Sea, gateway to the Arctic Ocean, with nary a scrap of land between it and the North Pole, save the Svalbard archipelago. The island's only village, Ingøy, population 23, once numbered 400, and the present schoolhouse was once the school's dormitory, housing as many as 50 students.

Andrine and her teacher, Kirsten Wollan, outside the Ingøy schoolhouse.

Then, as now, commercial fisheries were the main draw. Andrine's own mother runs the island fish factory and her father is a fisherman. After the Nazi scorch-and-burn retreat from the advancing Russian army in 1944, during which the entire population of northernmost Norway was deported to southern counties, island life never quite recovered.

According to school principal, Erik Næss, a towering man who looks as much fisherman as school rector in sweater and jeans, one horse survived that lonely winter of 1944 and lived one year past the end of the war to greet villagers brave enough to return to the devastated wasteland that was once their home. All was cinder and rubble, with only the church burial house left standing.

"From autumn 1945, people came back more and more," Næss explained, "but never as much as it was before the war. By 1960 there were maybe 150, but then it started decreasing due to the politics of centralization."

The island's only village, Ingøy, population 23, once numbered 400.

A map of northern Scandinavia with Ingøya as an inset.

This view shows the entire town of Ingøy, with the school building in the lower right corner.

Last year, some picked up to 300 kilos [of cloudberries] per person during the season.

Although the town had recovered nearly half its former population, the thinly-stretched Norwegian government began actively discouraging resettlement in difficult-to-reach places. Gradually the town of Ingøy withered, leaving today's last student as the symbol of a bygone era.

When mainland authorities sought to close the school in 2012, Næss was a vocal opponent, arguing that Andrine should be allowed to finish junior high on her home turf, and not as a boarding student on the mainland.

A diligent pupil keeps busy at her desk.

"I like that there are a lot of mountains here," Andrine innocently told the Norwegian broadcasting company (NRK), "and I hate forest!" When this contest between providing rural schooling and the excessive costs involved attracted national attention, authorities hired Wollan to shepherd Klausen through her last two years of *ungdomsskole*.

"In the old days, only the czar's children had a private teacher," Wollan jokingly told me. "So she is lucky! And like today, when the weather is so nice, we just have to go outside, because we don't know how long it will last. So today we went to the top of Ingøy mountain—and we found some very nice cloudberries!"

HIGHLY-PRIZED CLOUDBERRIES, THE TANGY EDIBLE embodiment of an Arctic summer, are at their best on Ingøya, where the perfect soil, precipitation and temperature combine to make the golden berries worth over $15 per pound on the mainland. Thousand-foot mountains dominate the island's treeless tundra, ringed by rocky shore from which sportsmen cast off for deep-sea fishing along the continental shelf. In late summer, cloudberry pickers go toe-to-toe with goose hunters, who must stalk their web-footed prey between 5:30 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. to avoid bagging a wayward berry picker instead of a loose goose.

"Last year some picked up to 300 kilos per person during the season," said Wollan. "It's the gold of the Arctic. It's possible to make a month's salary in a

good season. There's a little bit of fighting, like, 'Oh you're in my space, you shouldn't be there!,'" she laughed, "but most of the time it's okay."

Cloudberries and mountain hikes aside, most school days are serious business. On any given day, Andrine and Wollan may cover everything from math to art, with science, social studies, Norwegian, English, French, religion and music in between. According to Wollan, Andrine is unstoppable.

"Often we start on something in the morning and I say, 'Andrine, do you want a break?' and she says, 'No, it's ok, it's ok, I'm writing,' and then suddenly it's lunchtime. If we have one subject and get going, it's really nice to just concentrate on it."

WHEN SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS VISITED LAST YEAR FOR an inspection, the duo treated them to more than academics. They sent them to the northernmost lighthouse in the world, Fruholmen, a small neighboring island accessible only in calm weather, and then fed them local fare and arranged a concert.

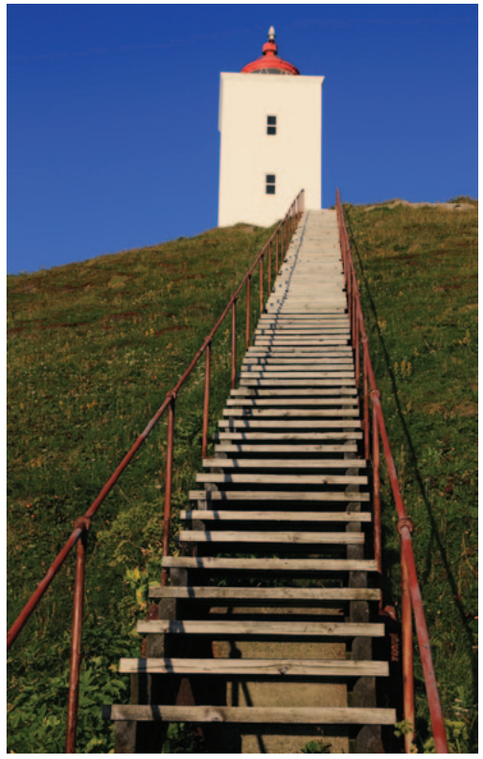
"It kind of goes from island to island," explained Wollan. "So this time it was our turn to have them visiting us at the school. Andrine made *vaffelkake* for breakfast and then told them the story about the lighthhouse, when it was built, what it was made of, the storms that just took everything and the little girl, in 1933, Åse, on December 21st, who was swept away."

A rockface below the lighthouse bears the name of the 1933 keeper's daughter, carved there by her heartbroken father after a rogue wave ripped

The island's goose hunters must be on the alert for avid cloudberry pickers harvesting the abundant berries that are an expensive delicacy throughout Norway.

Of her original 48 eggs, only two survived the incubation to become laying hens.

her from shore while she was playing. According to legend, Fruholmen is named after a 16th-century Danish king's mistress, banished to the tiny isle, where now sits the lighthouse, north of Ingøya. She lived with her servants as a virtual prisoner for 31 years and visited the village church once a year for Christmas. On her last visit, she drowned when her rowboat capsized in a storm as she returned to Fruholmen.



As with many lighthouses, Fruholmen Lighthouse requires a lot of climbing to reach the top. It's actually on a small neighboring island and is the northernmost lighthouse in the world.

After the lighthouse was built in 1866, keepers began living on Fruholmen with their families, but life was hard. In 1882, a vicious gale demolished the entire station, and as recently as 1975, a violent storm smashed the boathouses and destroyed the concrete road. The board members' recent visit was poignant since, at one point, the lighthouse itself served 15 children with one teacher, much like Ingøy School today.

"When they returned from Fruholmen," Wollan recalled, "Andrine prepared a special fish dinner, her own recipe. They were just in heaven. I took them to the church, lit some candles in the aisle and sang four songs before they went home."

BESIDES THE STANDARD REQUIRED SUBJECTS, EVERY TENTH-grade student in Norway must complete an entrepreneurial project to graduate from *ungdomsskole*. Andrine chose the egg business. Of her original 48 eggs, only two survived the incubator to become laying hens. She proudly showed them to me after school, tucked in a small pen behind her house. As we talked, her dog pressed his face to the cage with rapt attentiveness that wavered between overprotectiveness and a wistful appetite.

"I call the black one Merry and the white one Pippin," Andrine announced with a twinkle in her eye. "That's for the hobbits Meriadoc Brandybuck and Peregrin Took in *Lord of the Rings*," she added with a laugh. "I love to read. I have 112 books at home and love the Percy Jackson series, Cassandra Clare and John Green."

At 71 degrees north latitude, Andrine reckoned she owns the world's northernmost egg farm. Last May, she and Wollan also harvested and sold seagull eggs to raise money for their spring trip to Svalbard, where they plan to dog sled. With the "class" trip planned for April, they must also plan for graduation in June.

Andrine chose the egg business for her entrepreneurial project at school. Her dog was fascinated—or maybe hungry.

"WE PLAN TO MAKE IT A SPECIAL DAY!" SAID WOLLAN. "We'll invite people from the community, and we'll have some surprises, but there will be a lot of tears."

Andrine knows she will have to leave behind a few books and a very special teacher when she graduates, but she's looking forward to life on the mainland where she will join friends graduating from other island schools.

"This is my tenth grade, then three more years in *videregående skole* in Alta," Andrine told me. "I'll have to go away from home, but it's not so far. And there's one perk: I can't be blown away!"

WHY WAS I AT INGØYA?

My trail to Ingøya started with a search for clams that can live over 500 years. The humble mollusk, *Arctica islandica,* lives longer than any non-colonial animal on Earth. Accompanying scientists studying a treasure trove of the clams at Ingøya, I met Andrine, Kirsten and Principal Erik Næss one sunny August afternoon at the start of Ingøy School's final year.

The presence of *Arctica islandica* (above) this far north was unknown until about 15 years ago when marine ecologist Michael Carroll discovered an ancient bed of the mollusks on dry land while surveying Ingøya. Carroll knew that if there were shells on dry land, they were likely off shore as well. He also had a hunch that the presence of the clam at this critical juncture between the North Atlantic and Barents Sea might help unlock mysteries of ancient climate change.

A few years later, paleoclimatologist Al Wanamaker of Iowa State University targeted *Arctica islandica* off the coast of Iceland as living timekeepers of ancient climate. By counting shell growth increments like tree rings, Wanamaker calculated the age of one living clam at over 500 years. Going one step farther, he and colleagues from Bangor University overlapped the "bar codes" of living and dead clams and extended the timeline back 1000 years. Finally, by measuring the radiocarbon content of successive growth increments, Wanamaker showed that the warming climate of the Viking era, which allowed Erik the Red to settle Greenland, was related to a shift in ocean currents unlike modern global warming.

Last year, Wanamaker, Carroll and oceanographer Will Ambrose of Bates College teamed up with colleagues from Norway, the Netherlands and the U.S. to expand on the Iceland success. Having sailed with Ambrose along the Arctic Ocean ice pack in 2013, I was invited on a National Science Foundation grant with the team to report on their work.

— Randall Hyman

Randall Hyman has traveled the globe on magazine assignments for three decades covering natural history and travel topics from Northern Europe to South America to Asia to Africa. His photo essays and articles have appeared in *Smithsonian*, *Discover*, *National Wildlife*, *American History*, *British Heritage* and various *National Geographic* publications. He was recently named a Fellow of the distinguished Alicia Patterson Foundation.