

if the weather is not too bad, you should walk - It takes about 15 minutes



a day with
K. Frank Jensen (dk)



Came to an end. Last stop being
Scandinavia, Denmark, Roskilde. Small
Town 30 kilometers from Copenhagen.
Here she spent 12 hours + looking at
a very small part of the travel diary w
which the years had compiled them
... A very pleasant
... who...

october 2011



The *K. Frank Jensen* Interview

Lyn Howarth-Olds interviewed by t. Art (2011)

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Auckland, New Zealand

On the 10 October 2011,
Lyn Howarth-Olds visited K. Frank Jensen
at his home in Roskilde, Denmark.

On her return to New Zealand
an interview took place -
a transcript follows on these pages.

tA: Rather unconventionally, you have approached me to conduct an interview with you in regard to your visit with K. Frank Jensen. Would you spend a minute or two reflecting on this request?

LHO: I guess it may appear a little odd! I will try to explain. People who knew about my trip to Denmark enquired about its success. To simply write in a quick email and say 'yeah, thanks, it was great!', did not feel right. The trip (albeit a brief one) demanded a little more than the mere stroke of a few keys in a passing email. I thought an interview would be the best forum in which to share the experience.

tA: Why did you think I would be the best person to conduct the interview?

LHO: I hesitate to admit this, but truth be told, you were not my first choice! Can I say that without offending you? I certainly don't mean to. I had initially hoped that *Asta Erte* would conduct the interview. She of course has interviewed KFJ on a number of occasions; the *Fake Mail Interview* (1997), *What Happened in Roskilde, Denmark October 2000*. I really liked her interviewing style. Unfortunately she was unavailable so you were recommended to me in her place.

tA: I am not offended. Thank you for the explanation. Right, to the task at hand. I guess first and foremost people will be wondering how the opportunity to visit KFJ in Denmark came about. Can you explain?

LHO: I had approached KFJ earlier in the year (2011) to take part in a tarot project I was involved with called *Letters to the Past*. It was an international tarot project where participants were requested to write a letter to a person of interest with tarot being the focus of the letter. The 'catch' was, the person the letter was addressed to needed to be deceased (hence the 'past' connection). 22 tarot folk from all over the world, including KFJ, got involved. The letters submitted became an exhibition which opened at the (Tarot) Southern Symposium in Auckland, New Zealand, June 2011. Following the Symposium we took the exhibition to the ATS conference in Ste Suzanne, France in the September and then on to the Museo dei Tarocchi, Riola, Italy where it appeared as part of the European Heritage Days exhibits. (And for the record, it looks like Canada and London might be future destinations also.)

I had arranged to put together a limited edition, hand crafted 'book' version of the collection of letters. The opportunity to secure one of these books was offered to each contributor, and KFJ put his hand up to receive one.

As I was travelling to France to attend the ATS convention and then going on to Northern Italy I offered to carry the book with me and post it from Europe. KFJ suggested in one of our email correspondences that I might like to 'hand deliver' the book. Truth be told he was just joking, but I convinced myself it could be taken as an invitation so I suggested a visit! We corresponded back and forth – I went about amending flights and we made the necessary arrangements.

tA: How long did you stay in Roskilde?

LHO: Sadly only about 24 hours. Being a very last minute thing – the window of opportunity I had available to me was quite small. I left my Milan hotel at 4:00am on a Monday morning in order to get on a 6:30am flight to Copenhagen. I arrived at *Spilkammeret* at around 10:30am and left around 1/2 past midnight. I had a flight out of Copenhagen that next day.

tA: *Spilkammeret*?

LHO: Yes, the name of the house Frank and his wife Witta live. It means '*The Chamber of Games*'.

tA: Can you describe this '*Chamber of Games*'?

LHO: Well, the pleasure is actually seeing it for oneself, but I will give it a go. One arrives at the house after a short walk from the Roskilde train station, via the town. The house was built in the 1880s but KFJ tells me it has undergone many changes over the years. Greeting you on your left as you enter the front door are large floor to ceiling glass fronted cabinets housing an array of game paraphernalia. Game boards, dice, playing cards . . . Buttons with playing card imagery, hand painted tiles (tarot card imagery), divination tools . . . it was hard to tear myself away – the content was so fascinating.

There are a couple of rooms leading off from the front passageway. All incredibly orderly.

In what looks like it is probably *HQ*, tall cabinets of narrow drawers house what I believe to be thousands of playing and tarot card decks. Bookshelves filled with texts in numerous languages line the walls. Clearly marked boxes are stacked neatly so that their contents can be easily identified.

Rooms on the ground floor lead to other rooms. Each one, an 'Aladdin's Cave' of treasures.

Antique cards share the limelight with a human skull. Yes, a skull! I couldn't help wondering who it might belong to. A deer paw (a flea market acquisition) doesn't look the slightest bit out of place. More rooms. More cards. More game paraphernalia. For some reason a collection of hopscotch discs really fascinated me – they were an 'accessory' I had never seen before. I actually tried to find out more about them when I got home, but couldn't even find an image of one. Perhaps they were more of a European thing? Maybe they have a special name?

In another room more orderly kept boxes contain mail art collections and neatly filed editions of tarot newsletters – coming out of a time before e-newsletters and everyday access to colour photocopiers.

The highly recognisable faces of tarot history hang on the walls. Coleman-Smith, Waite, Crowley, Mathers.

The rooms are lighter upstairs due to the abundance of natural light. Large artworks hang. Old wooden Chinese and Indian puppets dangle from ceiling beams. Wooden masks cover the hallway walls. More cabinets. Another skull.

October 10th. Midnight

Lyn's European Tarot Tour
came to an end. Last stop being
Scandinavia, Denmark, Roskilde. Small
Town 30 kilometres from Copenhagen.
Here she spent 12 hours + looking at
a very small part of the tarot decks which
during the years had compiled themselves in
this time. A very pleasant day for the
collector, who got the possibility to
see decks which had not been together for
decades. Thanks for the pleasurable visit!



fra

This is
the
REAL THING

Aug 8/10





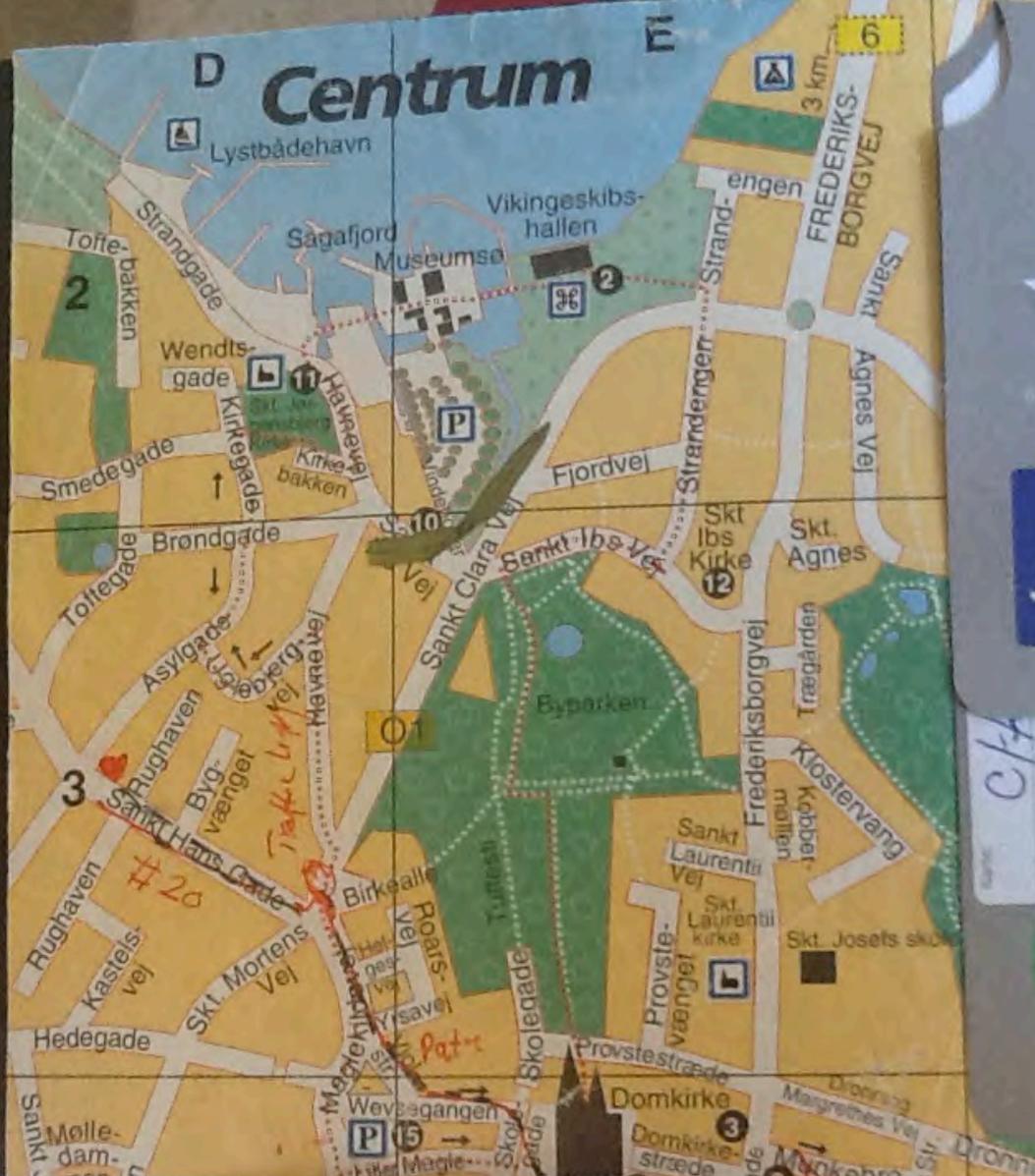


. . . and did you know that your name 'Lyn' is the danish word for lightning? Wittu



walk - It takes about 15 minutes

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De har sat med / You have been walking to



C/F

A large dining room table is the place we sit for hours, 'chewing the fat' as the saying goes – talking about all things tarot . . . and lots that is not. We feast on lovingly prepared meals featuring local produce (including tiny potatoes that were the best I have ever tasted!). We share local beers and delicious wine. Witta is the most gracious hostess and had clearly spent a lot of time preparing the most wonderful meals. I try things I have never tried before – typical Danish fare. It was wonderful. In between meals we move from upstairs to downstairs . . . from downstairs to up.

It was very early on in the proceedings the realisation dawned, I was going to eat extremely well, but was only ever going to scratch the surface of the collection.

tA: Talk a little about the collection.

LHO: I hesitate here as I don't believe I can even begin to do it justice. I really only got a glimpse at a very small portion of it.

tA: Something, anything . . .

LHO: As I have already mentioned, the one thing that is very apparent is the enormity of this collection. It is possibly even a little deceiving at first. The orderly fashion in which it is kept results I feel in a misconception as much is hidden from view in the drawers and boxes. But it is not long before one realises that an abundance of material is held within the rooms.

Obviously it was exciting to hold and look through the old Waite-Smith decks. Just knowing these are highly coveted is enough to remind oneself one is handling an important piece of tarot history.

But even more appealing to me personally were the older decks in the collection. Decks of cards in beautiful old boxes from much earlier

times . . . I cant begin to explain how that felt. There was something very special about these decks in particular. What a treat it would be to stumble across such an item in a junk shop somewhere.

I was quite taken too with the newsletter collections. Especially *Manteia*. To see these publications available in a format today would be fantastic. I pulled a few of the catalogues at random . . . flicked through them. The information found within their pages is timeless. These really need to be republished. A new generation of tarot enthusiasts should not miss out!

KFJ is very perceptive. He summed up very early on the sort of art work that appealed to me, and it was these decks he concentrated on bringing out. The mail art projects he had been involved in over the years was also of particular interest. I wished I had known about it all 10-15 years ago. I would have enjoyed being a part of these collaborative efforts.

tA: Did you have in mind when you got there that you wanted to see specific items?

LHO: To be honest, I was interested mostly in what appealed to KFJ. And, I was keen to see the collaborative projects that he had been involved in. I was interested in how he acquired different items, how long he had had them. That sort of thing. But something I did admire greatly was the KFJ hand-coloured Wirth deck. He describes it as a 'time-consuming work' and I appreciate it is just that. My understanding is three decks are finished and in the hands of others . . . the others are works in progress.

tA: For those that haven't met KFJ - can you describe him in a few words?

LHO: Warm hearted, generous, candid, extremely interesting, a man who doesn't suffer fools . . . and thoughtful. Very thoughtful.

tA: You seem to have emphasised 'thoughtful'.

LHO: Before I had even left New Zealand an envelope arrived to home from KFJ with maps detailing the route from the train station to my hotel and the house. A train ticket was enclosed so I didn't have to concern myself with Danish ticket machines and small change. In email's prior to my departure, information on the baggage storage facility at the airport had been researched and shared . . .

tA: What was the greatest thing you took away from your visit?

LHO: First and foremost – friendship. Not only with KFJ, but with Witta as well. Witta is the most gracious hostess and is a very talented artist I might add!

tA: Anything else?

LHO: About which? What I took away, or Witta?

tA: Both – if you like!

LHO: OK. In reference to what else I took away. If I was to take this literally – part way through the evening KFJ handed me a folder, it was filled to overflowing with copies of his annual 'reports/field studies'. Signed numbered copies of his Artistamps. Tarot Art Newsletters, copies of contributions to mail art projects, mail art documentation . . . it was quite something!

And, as I poured over these items on the long flight home, it afforded me a wonderful insight into a very special man. I reread everything again a week or so later. It was this very documentation that inspired this interview!

With regard to Witta – she shared recipes from some of the dishes she had prepared during my visit including *Artiskokker a la Roskilde* and *No:20 Tomato Special*. And, I had the pleasure of seeing some of her wonderful art, even bringing a taste home with me. Card #1087 from the *Diary of a Danish Housewife* series.

I didn't however get my hands on Frank's 'top secret' Spicy Special Dressing recipe. Maybe another time!

tA: Would you visit again?

LHO: In a heartbeat. Besides, I want that recipe!

tA: My final question. What do you think is the future for the K. Frank Jensen tarot collection? I believe he is thinking about alternatives.

LHO: Gosh, I honestly don't know. This might be a question better suited to the cards themselves . . .

But I can share what I hope for. I hope that an opportunity arises in the not too distant future that will allow KFJ to see his years of hard work be cared for in the hands of a person/s *passionate* in preserving such a wonderful collection. There is no doubt, this collection is very important. As an archive and library, the content is priceless. Historians and researchers (both within and outside the tarot world) will benefit richly from its content.

I do hope too that some of the work he produced finds a way to get republished. I am referring again of course to the *Manteia* newsletters I talked about earlier.

While I was visiting I asked Witta, if she could wave a magic wand and have the perfect outcome manifest for the collection, what would it

be. Without hesitation she replied that she would have Frank live forever so he could administer it himself.

I tend to agree . . . that would be just perfect!

For more information visit about K. Frank Jensen
and his collection visit

www.manteia-online.dk



FOOTNOTE:

This interview was conducted in October 2011. The visuals (due to complete slackness on the part of the publisher), were not added until April 2012. However, the document is now ready for distribution. For those of you who enquired as to how my trip went, all those months ago . . . I hope it is not too late to answer your question!



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