

Entrance # 13

Please find the webcast at <http://www.nrk.no/fordypning/oppgang13/>



(Text on picture)

Scary neighbors.

In **entrance number 13**, Selma (9) is growing up amongst bloody hypodermic needles, threatening neighbors and wild parties.

(Audioslides 1)

(Selma) When I go to sleep, I try to bring up good memories. But I can't fall asleep peacefully, and then I have to stay awake really late. It frightens me that people lay down in the stairs and scream. I get pictures in my head, for example of a bloody knife, as if they are coming for me, to do something wrong. And sometimes, there are those big people that come with their dogs, even without leash, and then they bark really loud and come towards you. Then you get very scared and start to shiver all over, and....(Music)

(Text)

Selma and her parents and three younger siblings live in a municipal tenement building in eastern Oslo. She is one of the more than 20,000 children in Norway who live in apartments the council allots to families. Many of them grow up surrounded by intoxicated and seriously mentally ill neighbors – a reality children according to Norwegian law are supposed to be protected from.

Anniken lives in the same walk up entrance. When the family arrived three years ago, she welcomed them. At present Anniken is trying both to keep some order in the walk up as well as to protect Selma and her siblings from the other neighbors.



(Audioslide 2)

(Music)(Anniken) It looks like the landfill Grønmo; garbage and syringes and everything just piled up. Things are crushed, things are broken. It stinks when they open the door. So when people say "Hell", I say "Yes, that's here."

(Anniken giggles, and continue) There ain't many people who eat meatballs and live a normal life around here! So many people hereabouts have got no independent living skills, I was gonna say, or.... They should be living under supervision. But the social housing office just delivers the keys and say: "Here you go, this is where you'll live. Good luck. This will work out well."

(Sound of children. Door locks.)

(Anniken) I have told you before that it's a good idea to take off that handset and let it just hang straight down. Then at least you won't have to be awakened by the doorbell. And when you're going to school you need sleep, right?

(Selma) Yes, well, eh, sometimes I think that when the doorbell rings several times, then all the time "beep-beep-beep" It's totally beepy.

(Anniken) Mm, annoying, isn't it?

(Selma) Yes. (giggles a little)

(Anniken) Well, I promised I'd fix the nameplates on all the doorbells afterwards.

(Selma) Mmm. Well, eh, it's been happening some of those things again downstairs. Today, we were going down to go to school, and then it smelled a little disgusting again.

(Anniken) Somebody peed a little again?

(Selma) Yes, eh...

(Anniken) Yak! I'll pour over some ammonia. I really have got a few things to do today, don't I? Caretakers work. (laughs)

(Selma) Yes, ok, but....

(Anniken) Then I just pour over some, and then it will smell really strong for a while.

(Selma) Yes, but, really... After all, it will happen again. That's really what is so stupid. If you just do it once, as good as you can, but then it will happen again and again. And then, it doesn't help.... you know....

(Sound of rustling keys)

(Anniken) Absolutely, but we can't just let it smell like that.

(Selma) No, first they have, you know, peed, but then they come back. If you're gonna clean it up, they'll just be back again!

(Anniken) I know.

(Selma) So they won't stop!

(Anniken) But we just can't give in!

(Selma) No.

(Anniken) We have to keep it tidy.

(Selma) Yes., (both laugh).

(Anniken) You know, we can't let the lunatics take over!

(Text)

Often at night, Selma's neighbors have unwelcome visitors. At a time when a 9-year-old needs to sleep before a new school day dawns, she is constantly awakened by trouble in the hallway. It is not uncommon the police arrive after drug related quarrels, stabbings or shooting incidents. On this night it is a woman who over and over is hammering on her neighbor's door hunting for pills.



(Audioslides 3)

(Young woman in stairway) I've got money and beer.

Hello!

I've got 200. I'd like to buy some tablets.

Hello!?

(Sound of knocking on the door)

(Young woman in stairway) We're not enemies, are we!?

Oh...

I'll just be about half an hour.

(Sound of knocking on the door)

(Young woman in stairway) Hey you!

Hello?

(Sound of door opening)

(Young woman in stairway) Hello?

(Sound of shouting from inside)

(Woman from inside) What?

(Young woman in stairway) Hello, honey... I've got money and beer. What's going on?

(Sound of mumbling conversation)

*(Young woman in stairway) What the f*ck are you saying? Did someone kick in the door?*

(Woman from inside) Your ex-boyfriend. He wrecked the door.

(Young woman in stairway) No, you're joking.

(Woman from inside) He wrecked the door.

(Young woman in stairway) He can just sod off!

(Text)

Scared children have for at least 15 years been telling about creepy neighbors in social housing estates, according to searches that NRK has conducted in news archives.

Politicians have made new promises almost at every turn. Two parliamentary white papers have been published over the past ten years. Both state the same: Children are to live safely and well – even in council housing. Despite promises many of the children are still afraid.



(Facsimiles with sound, click on the three text titles down to the left)

(Text on picture)

Homes not suitable for children: The Oslo council has nothing better to offer neither Selma nor any of the other 5000 children living in the capitol's social estates.

- **(Text) Read Aftenposten (The Evening News): Neighbors threatened.**
 (News presenter reads) *Aftenposten February 2002: "Many elderly people are terrified of their neighbors in the social estates, and hardly dare move outside the door. Children are getting needlestick injuries from syringes in the hallways and residents feel threatened by drug abusers. »*
- **(Text) Read Dagsavisen (The Daily Paper): The Ombudsman for Children is concerned.**
 (News presenter reads) *Dagsavisen January 2010: «In the council housing in Oslo you find people just released from prison, seriously mentally ill people and drug addicts—living amongst 5000 children. The Ombudsman for Children is very concerned.»*
- **(Text) Read VG: Drugs and psychiatry.**
 (News presenter reads) *VG April 2006: «Drug sales in apartments. Psychiatric patients who howl at night. (...) These are the hard facts that many of the 11.000 tenants living in social housing estates in Oslo's Inner East precinct have to brush shoulders with daily. At the same time there is an ever growing number of children, elderly and refugees living in social housing amidst drug abusers and psychiatric patients.»*

(Text)

In 2008, the Auditor General described the poor living environment in the most deprived council estates in Oslo, with hypodermic needles, urine, rubbish and illegal residence in the buildings. In the same report half of the larger municipalities in Norway admitted that families with children often or sometimes were placed together with the substance abusers and the mentally ill.

Selma is one of the children growing up the way the politicians have promised that no one should have to.



(Audioslides 4)

(Selma) Well, yesterday, there was someone upstairs knocking and there was someone who was very angry. And then a woman came up to him, and then they started to quarrel and yell. And then they started to fight and so on, so that the window broke, and when we were going to school it was blood stains in the stairway. And then my little brother was a little scared, 'cause he thinks that it's a lot more frightening than it is. And a week or two later, the blood was still there. After that, there was something else happening, so that when we were going down to the basement, it was syringes there, and a person that had done something on our sledges and so on.

(Anniken) This is really traumatic to them, I think. 'Cause they experience fear. And scary stuff not even adults can stand. Its shootings and stabbings with sword just right next to here. It's overdosing to death in the stairways. It's not nice when the kids get back from school and there are ambulances and a police car outside the entrance.

(Text)

The family has the past year received two rejections of their applications for a better dwelling. The town precinct they live in writes that the family meets the requirements for new housing, but that there is not enough council accommodation.

Because the wait is about one year, the family is not on the waiting list, either. At the end of the letter the precinct council writes that there wasn't anyone else either who was granted or changed to a 3-room council apartment at that time. But Selma's father complained yet once more - hoping to get an a little bit safer and larger apartment.

Anniken has helped to fill out the moving applications for the family. She is sad that the district cannot offer Selma and her siblings a better childhood.



(Audioslides 5)

(Anniken) The social housing office understands a little of their situation, that they live too cramped and so on, but they simply conclude that several families are worse off than them, so sorry, too bad...

(Anne) What do you think about that?

(Anniken) I think it's totally crazy, but very typical of Oslo council. I don't think they're that familiar with computers, actually. I don't think they know how to take anyone out of the housing queue and so on, 'cause then they haven't got a clue on how to get them back into the computer system again!

(Anne) Have you tried to find yourself a new place to live?

(Anniken) Well, I've tried to swap apartment too. After all, I was shot at in another flat in first floor here. Six, seven shots just ten centimeters (4 inches) from my shoulder, from a 3 meter (10 ft) distance. Just like that, sort of, just 'cause it was fun. All of a sudden he just pulls up his gas pistol and shoots at me.

(Text)

Sometimes neighbors Mona and Arne who live in the same close pass by Anniken for a smoke and chat in the evening. Mona hasn't always had a place to live. But with methadone and residence in entrance number 13 she managed to stay sober for almost a year.

Arne has many years at sea and in the construction industry behind him, and is one of those who have lived the longest in number 13. He has seen the environment in the walk up become much worse since he moved in 20 years ago.



(Audioslides 6)

(Mona) *The mum and dad, I must say, - they're some wonderful people. How they have managed to protect those kids from everything that happens around here. Yeah, they're some really, really sweet kids. I've seen quite a bit of life, here and there... Twice they have applied for a new apartment, twice they have been rejected. I applied, and got a positive answer the first time. You know, it's like, that apartment; I really want to give it to them, right? I mean, I'm half a century old, but what about those kids that have got the entire life ahead of them!?*
(Sound of lightening fire to a cigarette)

(Arne) *It's absolutely hopeless. Everyone's really got to understand that.*

(Mona.) *Absolutely!*

(Arne) *This is not even a place for grown up people if they are a bit nervous, you know.*

(Mona) *That's true, Arne. And even on the playground, Arne.*

(Arne) *Yes, that I heard.*

(Sound of rolling cigarette)

(Arne continue) *No, it's obvious that at least there can't be children aged 2-9 years living here! No, for the 25 years I've been living here, entrance number 13 have changed completely. We did have two children here before as well, my neighbor's children. They have moved now, but they lived here until they were old enough to...*

(Mona) *... to take care of themselves.*

(Both giggling.)

(Arne) (Lighting his cigarette) *In general, we didn't have police visiting knocking doors with a battering ram. Nor was it normal to have overdose deaths in the stairway. Nothing of that kind. Before, this was totally unknown around here.*

(Text)

According to police there are large unknowns as to how much of what happens in council buildings is reported – in part because residents dare not report out of fear of reprisals.

A report to the Government in 2011 points out both that there are too few council houses, and that an «accumulation of council housing can prevent social inclusion and lead to poor living environments that are particularly stressful for children».

For «Selma» frightening experiences are common. She and her siblings no longer dare to go out and play in the grassy backyard.



(Audioslides 7)

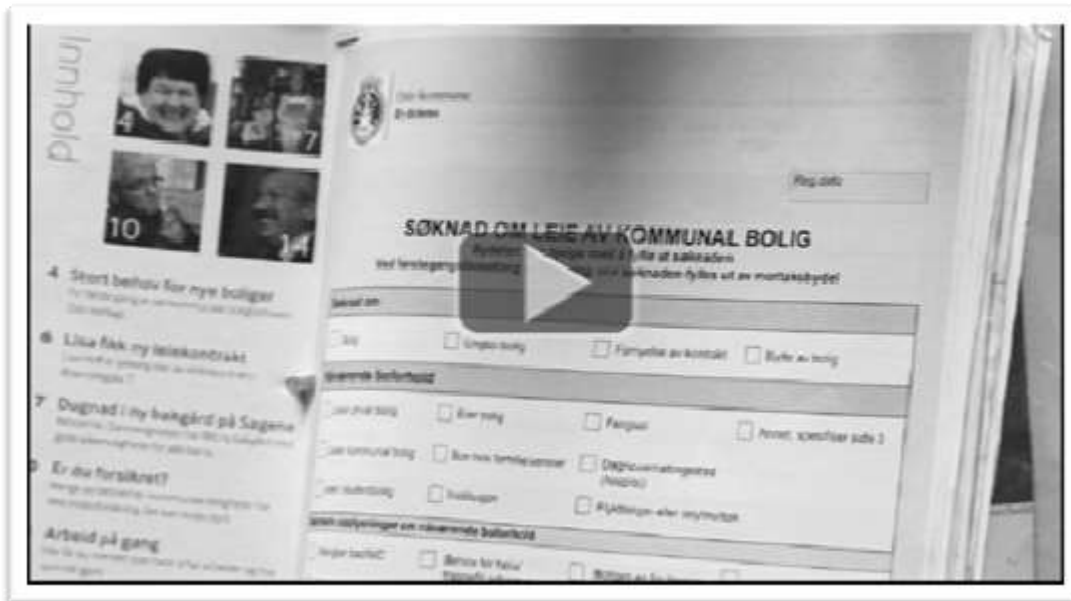
(Selma) Me and my sister were playing here. And then, after we were home from school, it was like..., then a man ... came with a knife and just stood there. And then he talked to us. He said he was going to kill us, and then he just left right away. I found it really scary. So therefore me and my sister and little brother and the others don't come here to play anymore.

(Text)

Selma is often at home. Like so many other children in council buildings she wishes that she once in a while could bring a friend home with her.

But even though her mother cooks delicious food, and her father is smiling and welcoming, she never knows what the neighbors might get up to.

This is also the way it was for Anniken's children. Twenty years ago she moved into the top floor apartment with her daughter and son. First, glad to have a place to live. Later afraid for what the kids are going to meet on the stairs on their way home from school.



(Audioslides 8)

(Anniken) My children, they grew up here. At that time, it was kinda nice here, really. But not nice enough for the children to bring friends home for playdates, since they never knew what to expect. But now - my grandchild can't even visit me here, because they are sort of afraid of what might happen at nighttime. And you never really know, So those children, they don't belong here. This should all be a psychiatric ward - the whole thing. With a big fence around. Then the ones that eat meatballs and so on should be allowed to move. Somewhere else. One gets altered by this. One really does.

(Text)

Child psychologist Ellen Dahlen Flaaten states that it is harmful to children when hardly a day passes without them being afraid.

Selma's little brother has been so scared by one of the neighbors in the hallway that he returned to school to wait for his sister. He didn't dare go up the stairs alone to get home.

In Oslo they have no record of how many children are in the same predicament as Selma and her siblings. After several inquiries to Oslo Council's agencies and departments, Boligbygg, the regional construction administration checks with the Population registry, Folkeregisteret, and discovers there are more than 70 children living in the same tenement.

Selma would like to become a doctor. The nine-year-old gets a good breather at school. There she feels safe.



(Audioslides 9)

(Selma) When I'm at school, I never think about any of this. Because I feel a lot more - more homework and sometimes in the breaks with my friends. For example at school I feel much more quiet and better. At school - there are people that will talk to you and play with you. When I'm alone, then maybe I write short stories sometimes. Well, then I maybe do it at school, it's a lot to write about. That's really fun.

(Text)

The Ombudsman for Children Anne Lindboe believes guarantees must be introduced so that children have a right to move within a deadline if they are living in council housing in hazardous living environments. In addition, she calls for national standards for what sort of living environments children should grow up in.

It is the local government minister who eventually would have to take the initiative for such changes. Permanent Secretary Anne Beathe Tvinnereim (Center Party) does not rule out that it might be an idea to introduce deadlines.

Meanwhile, more people are trying to make Selma's daily life as safe as possible. Caretaker Celestino Salazar is familiar with the garbage, debris, urine and blood in the hallways.



(Audioslides 10)

(Anniken) There comes the caretaker. We'd like to talk with you!

(Anne) Hi.

(Beate) Hi!

(Anne) Hello, caretaker.

(sound of laughing)

(Beate) Hi, my name is Beate. We come from NRK.

(Salazaar, with a strong foreign accent) From NRK? On the third floor we have some girls that are very nice, that I know a little. So when I see them, I have a chat with them. Their problem is that people around here don't behave as adults should in front of children, you know. Last winter they had a sledge, and then they started to pee on it, you know. So they complained to me, you know, so I had to yell at them. This is not suitable for a family with children. That's my point of view. The children shouldn't be here. Alcoholics, drug addicts, people coming and going and... We've got it all here!

(Text)

The Office of the Auditor General believes the state lacks sufficient overview of housing needs for disadvantaged families. The Government too, has pointed to the fact that several residents with substance abuse and psychiatric problems make it difficult to sustain good housing environments.

It is not only the children who are afraid at number 13. A solitary young man reacts to the deprived environment in this hallway.



(Audioslides 11)

(Doors in the stairways slams)

(Anniken) Hi! Have you got two minutes?

(Neighbor with slight accent) One minute!

(Anniken) One minute, ok. This is the neighbor on the second floor. He's very nice. It's regarding what you think about families with children. Whether you think they should live here?

(Neighbor) Not exactly the right place for kids to live right here in this neighborhood, ok. Actually I'm trying to buy myself a flat, but then I'm struggling, ok. It's about some loans and stuff, ok. Otherwise I had a better life before moving here, ok. People are afraid, ok. Think I'm doing drugs and stuff, ok. Half of my friends haven't even visited. I hardly get any chicks visiting. Not one chick. Three years after I moved here. Not one chick visiting. No chicks dare come on visit here. That's all I can say, really.

(Text)

Selma feels unsafe also outside of number 13. Like the children who in 2012 told the The Ombudsman for Children about how it is to grow up in council tenements. Adjacent outdoor areas are often the scariest places for kids to be.

When she goes out to the backyard with the trash she thinks about the time she opened the bin lid – and found an unconscious man inside.



(Audioslides 12)

(Crunching, door snaps in). (Selma) In that trashcan there were a lot of strange things. And first I thought he was dead and he was just lying there. And then it looked like he was a little creepy too. He was a little old. He was wearing black trousers and black shoes. And had a white sweater. And he was lying in the garbage with some bottles of beer all over him. I was very scared by it, so I didn't dare to throw the garbage here anymore.

(Text)

Often in the evenings there are parties at Selma's neighbors in number 13. Loud noise and screaming, banging both on floors and radiator pipes makes it impossible for her to sleep.

Anniken has turned day to night to be in readiness. When the loud noise from neighbors fills her apartment she prepares her weapons and telephone.



(Audioslides 13)

(Party sound in the background)

(Anniken) Now, here I've found my baseball bat. I have used it sometimes. I can hit with it, this I can sort of handle, if I have to. And I often feel like I have to do that around here. And then it's my ice pick. You know, for climbing in the mountains.

(Mona in the background) Personally, I trust words. Really.

(Anniken) And, if you just smash this into the wall next to them, they normally get quiet. I do feel a little more secure with this. Also, I've got the phone ready to call police emergency at 112, so I can just push the button. Mostly. I also keep some gas. If my life is in danger, I wouldn't hesitate using this. I'd rather be the one sitting at the police station, than the one lying at the morgue.

(Party sound in the background)

(Text)

Boligbygg KF, the company responsible for the social housing in Oslo, has hired a private security company that fearful neighbors can call for assistance when conditions get out of hand.

In the evenings and at night a security guard often passes by Selma's apartment building. The watchman himself describes the building as one of the worst in Oslo.

On this night he succeeds in ending the party that has kept the children awake.



(Text on picture, very misspelled)

“Hi Neighbor. I have party birtchday till 2400 hrs”

(Audioslides 14)

(Sound of knocking door)

(The security guard) Hi. Who owns this flat?

(mumble) Yes, some people are going to work tomorrow.

(Man) Yes, sorry.

(small talk)

(Sound door closes at party)

(Security guard) Yes, this is amongst the worst places. Lots of things happen. Neighbors complain. That happen a couple of times a week.

(Sound of keys rattling)

(Text)

The UN-Convention, which also is Norwegian law, affirms «the right of everyone to have an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing».

Researchers from NOVA (Norwegian Institute for Research on Adolescence, Welfare and Aging) have shown that children who live in public housing have significantly poorer housing standards than children from low income families who do not live in social housing.

Selma and the over 70 other children who live in this particular social housing estate do not notice very much concerning UN-Conventions, parliamentary white papers or housing policies. Neighbor Anniken wishes she could get the children away from entrance number 13.



(Text on picture)
Her lives the family...

(Audioslides 15)

(Anniken) So, kids can't be here. And I don't understand why the housing office can't understand that they have to be put somewhere quieter. They're going to school. They've got homework. They need education to get on well with their lives. Not just sort of end up at the cash register at the supermarket. And it's difficult to sleep through a whole night. Then it's difficult to follow lessons at school. I think it's terrible!

I don't give up until they got a now flat or some other place to stay. I just don't give up! I'll go all the way to the King, if I have to.

(Anne) Do you think the King will listen to you?

(Anniken) Yes, he'll just have to. Yes (giggling) The king is so clever that he'll understand what I mean. That you can't live like this. He wouldn't let Princess Märtha and husband Ari Behn and his grandchildren live here!

(Text)

Selma is not the 9-year-old's real name. Out of consideration for the family NRK has chosen to give her another name in this context.

You can hear the story about Selma and the other tenants in her close in the [Radio Documentary](#)... The Program is also available as a [podcast](#).

Further reading:

- [Growing up with knife threats and blood](#)
- [The state lacks an overview of children living in public housing](#)
- [The Ombudsman for Children believes the situation is shameful](#)
- [Children might get a legal right to move](#)
- [Increasing number of poor children in Norway](#)
- [Dreaming of a playdate](#)
- [Oslo Council violates the law](#)

Sound and text: Beate Riiser and Anne Vinding

Photos: Beate Riiser

Design and development: Espen Andersen

Editor in chief: Lars Kristiansen

© NRK, dokumentar og samfunn 2013