

Chapter 113 : Carl XVI Gustaf & Silvia Sommerlath – A Marriage.

Since Carl Gustaf and Silvia had had four years to learn each other's peculiarities, there were no surprises during the wedding night. What created conflicts from day one was that Silvia presented herself as a bourgeois professional rather than a housewife. This was so contrary to Carl Gustaf's earlier and later statements about the male-female relationship that it came to dominate the writings:

* What do you think about equality? Is full equality feasible?

- Hard to say. I do not really understand how it would happen. It's a great idea and it sounds good in every way possible. But in practice? I do not see how it can be implemented. To a certain extent, yes - so that there are not too many differences. But all people have different capacities.

* What do you think about gender equality then? Do you think it can go any further?

- If there is anyone who thinks it's fun it's okay by me. I myself do not think so. I think a woman should be a woman and do what she is supposed to do, raise children and take care of the home. Of course, if she wants a job, she shall have it. But to insist that there should be equality of the sexes is, in my view, a little exaggerated. I want a wife who's at home looking after things.

* Then women are best suited to raising children?

- Yeah, well, somebody's gotta do it. And a mother's feelings – I suppose she is born with it.

* If you had sons and daughters, would you give them a different upbringing? Should the girls be prepared for female chores?

- Yes, I wouldn't send my daughter out and look at industries and things to the extent that I have done. Unless she was especially interested in such things and insisted.¹

* How does the Crown Prince view the position of women in today's society?

- Yes... I'm old-fashioned about this. In my opinion, a woman should remain at home by the stove. Of course, if she's interested in a field, she should seek employment. But it is important that those who have the opportunity remain at home looking after home and children. Not every woman wants to work.²

But women were free to get ahead as long as it didn't interfere with male privileges: “I like girls who stand on their own two feet. Being sweet and pretty is not enough.”³ Such statements should not be interpreted as Carl Gustaf having changed his opinion on the matter: “Feminism has been misinterpreted, it is not agitation [for equality], it is understanding of differences. Confrontation is to be avoided.”⁴ Silvia's position was identical. The emancipation of women would not be at the expense of men or by imitating them. Easier said than done though. Carl Gustaf's motto “For Sweden - in our time” was a double edged sword.

Once the marriage ceremonies were over, Carl Gustaf was asked about his own role: “You have to help each other out, so I'll be there to watch the kids.”⁵ Carl Gustaf has, however, never changed diapers and it was Silvia who until 1982 stayed at home to raise the children. This was her own idea. She believed that a mother could contribute to the children's

¹ Elisabeth Frankl. Intervju med kronprins Carl Gustaf. Expressen, 1969-12-14.

² Kirstio Kallio. Kvinnan ska stanna vid spisen. Svensk Damtidning, 1972:31.

³ Rainer, 1996. [Citat från 1967.]

⁴ Mats Nyström: Kung i tiden - Intervju med Carl XIV Gustaf inför 60-årsdagen. SVT1, 2006-04-30, kl 20:15.

⁵ Svensk Damtidning, 1976:11.

development in a way that the father could not.⁶ Eventually, however, it emerged that Silvia had help of both nurse and nanny to cope with her work schedule and that Carl Gustaf stayed away from it all. (For more information on Silvia's outlook on life see chapter 22 : “The Professional”; she is a feminist, but of the bourgeois Zonta variety.)

The rest of the 1980s discussion is hard to summarize. When Carl Gustaf & Silvia married, Queen Louise had been dead for 11 years. Silvia did not feel bound by the traditional role of Queen. She was a modern queen. In 1984, she even took courses to learn more about the armed forces. The response was somewhat lack lustre, however:

* Do we journalists preserve gender-based thinking by often asking the Queen questions about home, children, childcare and charity?

- Yes, it emerges very clearly in meetings with the press, when we are both involved. It is clear, that just such questions are put to me, while the king gets quite different questions.

* Does the Queen believe that people want you and the King on a pedestal? Is it in the nature of the monarchy?

- I have often thought about it. They want to see us as everyday people. Over and over again, one asks, if we cook our food when we can, clean, make our bed, take care of our children and change diapers ourselves. But then, when it's a state visit, a Nobel party or whatever, then we'll be king and queen. Then they want us to represent Sweden in a dignified way and not... in our socks. We should be both ordinary and royal, but not take our royalty too seriously. The combination is difficult.

* Does the Queen want to maintain a distance [between the personal and the symbolic]?

- In wider official contexts, yes. Then it is necessary. But otherwise we want to be as natural as possible.⁷

Carl Gustaf later interfered in the upbringing of the children. His work ethic has made it hard for them. As long as they stood on their own two feet they were “healthy” and had to stagger off to school. There has never been any corporal punishment, however. Carl Gustaf's experience from his own upbringing was that such was meaningless. It only made children afraid and aggressive. He wanted to give them the kind of upbringing he himself had wished for. But the day to day business was left to the women to handle.

This of Carl Gustaf and Silvia avoiding taking a position on the male-female relationship had consequences in the debate about female succession. Their statements were so muddled that it is still debated where they stood on the issue. As the feminists are fond of saying: “The private is political” and not least in royal families.

SM: There is one thing I do not understand: Why is the king against the succession of women?

CG: Because I think it's a difficult situation for a woman to be a monarch. It is not easy.

SM: Why is it harder [for a woman] than for a man?

CG: First of all, the male hereditary family line disappears. The family is fragmented. Today, you can take any name, but the real [genealogical] line disappears.

⁶ Expressen, 1979-12-23.

⁷ Åhman, 1987: ss. 103-115.

SM: Would Prince Carl Philip be a better regent than Crown Princess Victoria, precisely because he is a man?

CG: No, but I think it's easier for a man in that position. Women can do very well, we can see good examples of this in Europe, both in Denmark and in Holland. Queen Margrethe, my dear cousin, is brilliant! She really has all the talents. But at the same time it is not easy for her. It is a difficult position.

SM: So Carl Philip would be a better regent than Crown Princess Victoria?

CG: I don't want to put it as being better or worse... The Crown Princess will be an excellent queen, she is already doing a fantastic job. But there are many situations where you travel and represent that become very difficult for a woman. Moreover, Carl Philip was born a crown prince, we must not forget that. The order of succession was not yet changed and he was Crown Prince for eight months. Then it changed.

SM: Would the King have wished that Carl Philip remained Crown Prince?

CG: Yes, because he was! It is strange with a retroactive constitutions.

SM: Would Crown Princess Victoria have been happier if she could have avoided it?

CG: (Laughs) It is a hypothetical question, but... (sits silent)

SM: You were overruled by the government...

CG: Yeah, yeah. We discussed the issue from different points of departure.⁸

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The first years of their marriage, in the hiatus between the old and the new republican association, they could relax. It was apparent to outsiders how much they liked each other. For example, this interview during a visit to America in 1981:

She wore a red dress, a chignon, black patent pumps. She had folded her hands to her lap. He wore a dark suit, his curly hair slicked back. It was a picture of monarchical timelessness reminiscent of other queen and kings and other postage stamps. But when they finally relaxed, when the King crossed his legs and joked and the Queen leaned forward and laughed, they could have been mistaken for almost any other upper-middleclass European couple. On her right wrist she wore a gold Cartier..., his cigarette lighter in the other. He is 35. She is 37. They have two children. They banter with each other. They protectively correct each other's speech. ... Are they prepared for their daughter to marry a commoner, as the King has done? "Yes," said the King. "The times have changed. You can see a living example of that right here." – "He is always making jokes," said the Queen.⁹

In 1982 the family moved to Drottningholm Castle. The daily routine was that Carl Gustaf & Silvia had breakfast amid intense newspaper reading and scheduling discussions. Carl Gustaf had a cup of tea without sugar or milk and ate three sandwiches, one with cheese, one with ham and one with marmalade. Absolutely no juice! At first, Carl Gustaf used to get up early and take a walk or even hunt before he took the car to his office in the Stockholm castle. Silvia had her own drivers license, but would rather be driven.

Their joint activities, around 50%, were planned jointly. To be two on all decisions certainly prolonged the decision-making process, but the results were better when everything was thoroughly discussed. Silvia came from a world apart from him and had healthy views on most things. Carl Gustaf thought it was a privilege to work with his wife, they shared what

⁸ Stephan Mehr. Intervju med kung Carl XVI Gustaf. *MånadsJournalen*, 1996:5.

⁹ John Duka. *Royal Couple: Private Lives in Public Eye*. The New York Times, 1981-11-23.

was important, but they were both stubborn. Fortunately, they had separate offices so they could retreat and catch their breath when necessary.¹⁰

[CG:] She has always been my most important interlocutor and sounding board. As a person, she is extremely meticulous, diligent and hard-working, very purposeful. She always does research and is structured and methodical, and she is happy to write lists of everything we should do. Especially in recent years, when so much has happened in the family, her lists have been of great help to us. ... I am very proud of the Queen. She has made great efforts for Sweden, but she is also an important voice in the world on the issues she is passionate about. ... We in the family are extremely impressed by everything she undertakes.¹¹

With time they grew somewhat apart. Carl Gustaf's partying, his choice of friends and their different interests. Silvia avoided hunting, fishing, nature, cars and outdoor life. When Carl Gustaf tried to force something on her, there were conflicts. Carl Gustaf could push her, but she always bounced back. Carl Gustaf's relationship with Camilla Henemark couldn't possibly have been suffered in silence, but it was in both their interests to down-play its importance. Divorce was not an option.

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There is no information about their marital problems, however. What I have found doesn't even pretend to reality:

In the autumn of 1993, the Icelandic medium Völvan predicted that Carl Gustaf & Silvia would divorce.

In connection with Carl Gustaf's 50th anniversary in 1996, TV3 commissioned an opinion poll of what the Swedish people believed about Carl Gustaf's and Silvia's marriage: 28 percent thought they were very happy, 45 percent quite happy, 20 percent neither-nor, 4 percent quite unhappy, 1 percent very unhappy.¹²

¹⁰ Christina Magnergård Bjers. Ett arbetsäktenskap. Metro, 2001-06-19.

¹¹ Lundgren, 2013.

¹² Expressen, 1996-04-08.