

Chapter 75 : Lennart Bernadotte (1909-2004).

Prince Gustaf Lennart Nicolaus Paul Bernadotte, Duke of Småland, was born in Stockholm on May 8, 1909, at about 23:30 and died at his castle Mainau December 21, 2004. Between 1932 and 1972 he was married to the Swede Karin Nissvandt (1911-1991) and had with her three daughters and a son. In 1972 he married German Sonja Haunz (1944-2008) and had with her three daughters and two sons. Upon his marriage with Karin Nissvandt March 11, 1932, Lennart lost all his titles and was given the civil name Lennart Bernadotte. July 2, 1951, after Gustaf's death, he was knighted by his relative Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxembourg and given the same title as Prince Oscar, Count of Wisborg.

The main sources of the story are a German biography and the memoirs of Lennart and Son (Bernadotte 1966; Bernadotte 1985; Orlik 2002; Bernadotte 2006). Add some short biographies and memories (af Klercker 1944: ss. 272-277; Swahn 1930: ss. 185-197; Pavlovna 1933: ss. 155-168; Elgklou 1978: ss. 186-187; Norlin 2015: ss. 223-228) and a number of features.

Lennart was very bitter about the way he was treated by the family but I have downplayed that aspect. He was also very proud of his business, but I have downplayed that aspect too.

*

Lennart's birth and first year has been described in detail by Maria's lady-in-waiting Cecilia af Klercker.¹ There is no record that his father Prince Wilhelm was present at birth - possibly he was on duty - but Crown Princess Margaret appears to have assisted. On accession to the throne, Victoria changed the ceremonials so that the birth witnesses were not physically present but waited in a neighbouring room. At the time Victoria was in Baden, but Gustaf seems to have been present. Maria wanted to breast-feed Lennart but did not have enough milk. Lennart shouted all night, possibly because of this, and the nurse Mrs. Gibson gave him sleeping pills. When this was discovered, she was dismissed. In order for nothing to come out, Mrs. Gibson was escorted down to the train station and back to England. The successor was Olga Sjöberg (1868-1942; "Nenne" called), from Mönsterås in Småland. Lennart also had an English nanny. At the baptism June 6, Lennart received a number of godparents - all his Russian, German and Greek relatives including the Tsar and Tsaritsa. Until his parents' divorce, he accompanied his mother on her visits to Russia and to her father in Paris. After the divorce, his grandmother Victoria took care of him 1914-1916 while Wilhelm was busy with his military duties. Lennart's version of the three years with Victoria was that she gave him the same upbringing that she once gave his father. Since Lennart's memories were not published until 50 years later, and Wilhelm in the meantime published his own memories, it is difficult to say whose memories Lennart actually refers to. He did not begin to write a detailed diary until 1926.² At the time of Victoria's death, Lennart's (or rather the court's) description of his upbringing was as follows:

Prince Lennart became almost like the Queen's own child, and his strongest impression from childhood and youth was her warm love and firm leadership. For her, high-borns had greater responsibilities than others, and the qualities of character

¹ af Klercker 1944: ss. 272-277.

² Bernadotte 1966: s. 225.

and heart, will power and righteousness, were the most important parts of her educational program.³

Lennart's own book had a prehistory:

In the autumn, loyal to the family tradition, he lectures on the Y.M.C.A.'s activities. It is his way of supporting an organization to which he admittedly does not belong, but whose work has his sympathies. Some lectures in different parts of southern Sweden "Glimpses from the diary of my life", apparently have struck a note. They will be repeated before leaving for Mainau the next month. Mr. Lennart Bernadotte speaks freely from memory - the memory probably refreshed by rereading his diary - gives quick sketches from a childhood visit to Moscow, tells of war memories in Karlsruhe - there were no air raids and bombings of the Grand Ducal castle, where Queen Victoria and then Prince Lennart stayed - and his present life at Mainau. The latter part of the presentation is illustrated by film shots from Lake Nemis, the Roman campagna, the Monte Carlos tennis courts with King Gustaf in action and Mainau.⁴

Parts of the lecture - the part about the summers in Baden - were published in the *Vecko Journalen*:

They tried to make me a courtier. That was achieved to some extent. The surface was probably quite decent! It was not easy to make mischief, when you always had to walk around in white sailor clothes! On such occasions, I endeavoured to put into practice the kind of fawning that I observed around me. Then it could happen that little Lennart got praise for behaving nicely, and there were proud glances at him from grandmother and great grandmother, glances that he unfortunately too often took notice of!⁵

Contemporary reports - from Victoria's driver - on the contrary indicated, she encouraged royal misbehaviour:

Prince Lennart, son of Prince Wilhelm, was without a mother due to his parents' divorce and would spend the summers with his grandmother at Solliden. The Queen did everything possible to ensure that his budding royal misbehaviour would develop as fully as possible, and the eight-year-old Prince in the summer [of 1917] with his grandmother's help developed into the most despotic little rascal I ever had the bad fortune to meet. He was allowed to command old ladies-in-waiting to crawl on their knees to play with him and old servants to fetch his toys several stairs up, all with the queen's high approval.⁶

Probably all the descriptions are true. Victoria had been brought up with a mixture of high ideals, rigid court discipline in the presence of her parents and indulgence from the employees who were unsure of how to behave. Her upbringing of Lennart was that she tried to explain the consequences of his social position - that with privileges follow obligations and that the Swedish people expected him to follow a code of conduct. This seems never to have been achieved, however. Both Lennart and his father believed that Victoria lacked contact with

³ [Om prins Lennart.] *Vecko Journalen* 1931:5, ss. 23,28-29.

⁴ [Om Lennart Bernadotte & familj.] "Lyckliga, vanliga människor." *Vecko Journalen* 1935:3.

⁵ Bernadotte, Lennart. "Rackartyg och hovetikett." *Vecko Journalen* 1937:23, ss. 14-15,44,52.

⁶ Stenson 1977: s. 119.

modern society and could be ignored. What Lennart as a young boy found most outdated was her religion and her views on a court culture where one acted diplomatically and spoke polite language. As an adult, he understood better what she was talking about: "I came to realize that [etiquette] is basically about something purely human: respect, style and consideration. Especially respect for people's self-esteem and expectations."⁷

Long afterwards, Lennart claimed that Victoria's upbringing had the effect of making him deeply uncertain. In his autobiography, Lennart devotes a whole chapter to her peculiarities⁸, and blames her for his (and his father's) outlook on life: "I learned to dissimulate to avoid unpleasant clashes, which I always lost: I was wrong. Everyone else was right." In high school Lennart's greatest desire was to escape the "matriarchate" = Victoria and her envoy "Nenne".

In 1914 a kindergarten was organized at the castle where he, the cousins and some other children attended. Spring 1915 to spring 1919 he attended the castle school together with Margareta Uggla, Karin Thott, Fredrik af Klercker, Nils Fredrik von Essen, Fredrik Piper and several others. The teacher was Miss Ingrid Bolin. During his stay in Germany he was taught by "Nenne" and he also had a German nanny. In 1917 and 1918 he spent the summer holidays with his uncle Gusty at Sofiero where the atmosphere was much freer than in Karlsruhe. Autumn 1917 to autumn 1919 he had a tutor, court of appeal clerk Ivar Åkfeldt. Åkfeldt. He and Wilhelm were of the same opinion that Lennart would receive a bourgeois education adapted to his person, not a "prince education" as Victoria advocated. This was probably for the best as Lennart was only 6th in the line of succession but it came to have drastic consequences.

In 1919 Lennart started in the 2nd class of Sofi Almquist's mixed skola at Nybrogatan 13. "Nenne" followed him to and fro all the way up to high school and questioned him about how his day was. The Almquist School was a reformist school with mixed classes of no more than 20 pupils and individualized teaching. The school days were short but intense. The basic foreign language was English. Few details are known about Lennart's schooling there: He was accompanied by two boys from the castle school. The teachers expected him as a prince to set a good example. He was good in language, bad in mathematics, gymnastics and drawing, so-so on the piano. Outside of school, he socialized with the cousins, their companions and children of court employees.

Due to Victoria's visits abroad in the 1920s, her influence waned. Wilhelm was also much abroad and he and Lennart met only during the summer months at Stenhammar. These months, Lennart was treated quite differently than at the castle and even socialized with the neighbouring children. He later claimed that he during his school years had been torn between two educational systems: During the terms the "matriarchy's" coercion under threat. During the summer holidays the father's freedom under responsibility. However, he felt that he had some support from Gustaf who sometimes defended him or pulled some "between us men" stunt. Lennart had mixed literary and technical interests. In 1924, he participated in the Märklin-Meccano contest of the National Museum of Science and Technology, with a complicated traverse transport system that he had worked with for the last three years. The 1927 Baccalaureate on the New Language Line was successful. Afterwards he did military service in the cavalry. During this, he was seriously ill and had to make three long stays that he spent abroad. During these he studied French, literary history and agricultural

⁷ Bernadotte 1995: s. 97.

⁸ Bernadotte 1966: ss. 27-54.

management. In 1930, he graduated as a reserve officer, 43rd out of 102 students. He seems to have had no representation beyond attending family celebrations.

*

It was a long time before Lennart had any girlfriend. He does not seem to have had any contact with his female classmates outside school, but he played with them during breaks. In 1925 he fell in love with Karin Nissvandt. February 2, 1931, they became engaged and March 11, 1932, they married. The road ahead was difficult, but it was made easier by Lennart's economic independence. His mother had given him the residence of Oakhill, which 1926 was sold to the Italian government. In 1930 he inherited Victoria's summer castle Mainau - formally not until after Wilhelm's death, however. Wilhelm paid the inheritance tax but this was negligible due to the need for renovation. "I had a feeling that the authorities felt sorry for us, who had inherited a crow's nest for a castle and a jungle for a park, and wanted to help us out."⁹ Mainau came to be Lennart's mission in life.

Karin Nissvand (1911-1991) was the daughter of the certified accountant Sven Nissvand and his wife in the 2nd marriage Anna-Lisa Lindberg. Her half-sister, Gertrud, was married into nobility and involved in Wilhelm's activities. In 1924, Gertrud took Karin to Stenhammar. In 1925, Lennart thought of her like this: "She was like a cloud of softness and warmth, and she moved like a young doe over flower meadows towards a creek."¹⁰ There were many attempts to avert the relationship. His mother hoped that it would end in an experience - not a wife. In 1928, before a visit abroad, Gusty instructed Lennart's travelling companion - probably on Gustaf's initiative - to make sure that Lennart amused himself so thoroughly that he forgot her. Even Karin's mother thought the relationship unsuitable.

Boxing Day 1930, Uncle Gusty wanted to know Lennart's plans for the future, especially regarding Karin Nissvandt. Lennart told him as it was. Gusty reciprocated with all the privileges he would lose, especially the fact that he would not be allowed to take over Stenhammar. A rather empty threat, however, because the return on the property was poor, last year 70 SEK. Gusty then turned to maligning the Nissvandt family as a collection of fortune seekers and ended up calling for him to be loyal to the royal house. Two more meetings took place. One with Gusty the next day. One with Gustaf New Year's Day. January 12, Lennart was to have sworn his oath of allegiance to Gustaf, but was not present. By now, the newspapers had learned of the conflict - unclear how - and all positions were locked. Gustaf called Lennart to a final meeting and explained that a marriage with Karin Nissvandt actually contravened the order of succession which was a binding part of the constitution. Lennart would lose everything. Lennart told him he was aware of all that. Gustaf kissed him on the cheek and left. Wilhelm later wanted an explanation for the denigration of the Nissvandt family. Gustaf refused to answer, and Gusty claimed to be misquoted.

After the engagement of February 2, the couple left for Germany to continue their studies. At different places though. They had hoped to marry in Sweden but priests are state officials and the Ecclesiastics Department said no because Gustaf did not give his permission. There was a civil marriage in England instead. For some reason Wilhelm wasn't there. Possibly because Lennart's mother would be present. At the end of the day, she did not attend either because she could not accept a civil marriage. However, the civil ceremony on February 20 was supplemented by a religious ceremony on March 11.

⁹ Bernadotte 1966: s. 220.

¹⁰ Bernadotte 1966: s. 196.

*

After the wedding Gustaf and Lennart reconciled - probably because Gustaf perceived Lennart abdication as honest, he had not sworn any oath of allegiance - but the relationship with Gusty remained frosty. Lennart & Karin were invited to private family parties but not to official gatherings. Wilhelm had a wing renovated on Mainau where they 1932 moved in, but the political situation meant that in 1938 they had to "flee" to Sweden where they stayed until the end of the war. Upon moving to Mainau, Lennart stated that he wanted to be a novelist and photographer. In practice, he devoted himself to renovating Mainau. After returning to Sweden, the couple had no income. Lennart worked as a photojournalist, film maker, editor of the magazine Foto (1939-1953), Children's Day-General (1941-1955), director of the Swedish Scout Association (1949-1951), playwright, "theatre director", actor etc. He published two photo books about his grandfather.¹¹ He made a lot of money, most from the films. 1940-1950 he filmed, directed and produced 50-60 documentary shorts and feature films. Many were heimat-films in collaboration with Wilhelm. In the end, he and Olle Nordemar formed a joint company Artfilm. In 1951, Lennart bought Mainau from Wilhelm. The reason seems to have been criticism from the tax authorities that the income from it went to Lennart only. The following year, Lennart & Karin moved back and turned Mainau into a course and conference centre, restaurant, park, botanical garden and "cultural monument".

For Lennart, the move was not only a matter of money but also a matter of social standing: "I also felt that Mainau and the surrounding area was good for my mental well-being. I was not treated there as a has-been who should be wary of asserting himself. There I was someone and got both respect and appreciation as never before."¹² Here's how the contemporary criticism of his years in Sweden sounded: "He is the enthusiast who gets tired. Vague aspirations, well-intentioned appeals, grand initiatives that result in embarrassed fanfares. He walks in and out of commissions, shallow popularity and publicity as when a child scrapes the sugar from the porridge and leaves the rest, the useful, the boring. His departure from the royal house was the revolt of the weak. He is an ordinary, uncritical, extrovert man who avoids serious business. Ignore him. He should keep silent and not criticize his country of birth and heritage. The name is Bernadotte, a name that obliges."¹³

The success had a reverse side. Karin became mentally ill. The diagnosis is unclear. Lennart's description of the symptoms can be interpreted as paranoid obsessions - unclear if they had a medical cause or if she was not able to cope with her role as a "semi-public" person. Her son Jan Bernadotte (1941-) believed that it was more about his father's indiscretions, his way of governing the family and his mother's weakness and alcohol abuse.¹⁴ On January 27, 1972, they divorced and Lennart April 29 the same year remarried his secretary Sonja Haunz (1944-2008) with whom he had had a relationship since 1965. The father-son Jan relationship was not the best. He worked in the firm as a PR man but was forced to quit in 1972. In 2002 Lennart dismissed him as a good-for-nothing wastrel.¹⁵ After Lennart's death in 2004, his son wrote an autobiography of his own.¹⁶

¹¹ prins Wilhelm & Bernadotte 1943; Bernadotte 1948.

¹² Bernadotte 1995: ss. 152-153.

¹³ Ahlgren, Stig. "Namnet är Bernadotte." Vecko Journalen 1952:40.

¹⁴ Bernadotte 2006: s. 220.

¹⁵ Orlik 2002.

¹⁶ Bernadotte 2006.

Lennart was very proud to have succeeded in working up Mainau from crow's nest to tourist attraction and cultural monument. However, it is clear from the reports that he had great help of his royal background. The conflict with the son Jan can possibly be explained by the fact that he damaged the advertising value of being Bernadotte. Lennart was always closest to himself.