

Chapter 83 : Sigvard Bernadotte (1907-2002) – ”The Designer Prince”.

The Swedish heir Prince Sigvard Oscar Fredrik, until March 8, 1934, Duke of Uppland, was born June 7, 1907, at Drottningholm Castle and died February 4, 2002, in Stockholm, as Sigvard Bernadotte af Wisborg. His father was Crown Prince Gustaf (VI) Adolf (1882-1973). His mother the English princess Margaret of Connaught (1882-1920). Sigvard was married three times: 1st time 1934-1943 with German Erica Patzek (1911-2007). 2nd time 1943-1961 with Danish Sonja Robbert (1909-2004). 3rd time 1961-2002 with Swedish Marianne Lindberg-Tchang (1924-?).

There has been little interest in Sigvard as a person. He has written his memoirs (Bernadotte 1975), he appears in the chronicles (Elgklou 1978: ss. 188-189; Ohlmarks 1980: ss. 135-136; Skott 1996: ss. 368-380; Sundberg 2004: ss. 260-261; Lindqvist 2010: ss. 119-121; Norlin 2015: ss. 245-248) and his abdication was widely recorded. There are also some special studies about his time in Hollywood (Holgersson 1998) & design work (Bernadotte 1953; Johansson & Reventlow 1955; Anonymous red. 1977; Kulling-Nyqvist 1984 & 2004; Bernadotte 1997; Gyllenstierna 2006; Lindblad 2010; Tornhave 2013; Samer 2016: ss. 12-13).

Sigvard's biography below highlights his social position. His stay abroad in 1933-1961 is described in brief. The emphasis is on how he is excluded from the royal house, adapts to a bourgeois existence, exploits his birth & the conflicts surrounding his efforts to regain his title.

*

Sigvard and his brother Edmund (1906-1947) had a similar upbringing until their baccalaureate. First the prince school at the castle. Then Lundsbergs boarding school. In 1919, Sigvard underwent surgery for appendicitis. In 1921 he caught pneumonia, was near death & spent the convalescence at a sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland. Possibly he had tuberculosis. Sigvard was accompanied by his father's adjutant Göran Posse, who gave him the basics in drawing and painting. Sigvard seems also to have stopped believing in God during his stay. In the summer of 1922 the two brothers reunited. They had joint religious education for Archbishop Nathan Söderblom. Sigvard was uninterested in the Christian message, but listened carefully to Söderblom's philosophical expositions. On March 29 the following year, the brothers and their cousin Astrid entered the chapel to be confirmed.

Edmund & Sigvard argued to the extent that during the high school years they did not socialize. Until graduation Sigvard shared a room with Nils-Fredrik Ankarcrona. He was bad at sports, but actually managed to become the team leader of the dorm Gransäter's football team, of which he was very proud. In the summer of 1925 he was on a language trip in France with board and lodging. Two years of French at Lundsberg was not very helpful at the dinner table, but he had a (silent) romance with the daughter. The Baccalaureate the following year went well. Sigvard like Edmund received A in English. The other grades were so-so. During the summer it was social life in London – the first & only time.

Sigvard was hardly a party animal - he is usually described as sober - but was good at whistling and used to entertain the circle with ”concerts” with his brother Bertil. His other characteristics are unclear - the memoirs are redacted - but at least he was stubborn.

*

Sigvard had initially intended to become an actor, but instead it became a B.A. in the odd combination of art history (August Hahr), political science (Axel Brusewitz) & English. The studies began in 1926. He was not very supervised - only meals with the governor Göran Posse and his inquisitive wife - and participated quite unhindered in Uppsala's student life. Unlike Edmund, he used to spend hours with newly found friends and turn himself inside out. He met several girls, more than seems reasonable. They must have searched him out. Eventually it dawned on him that the student life was not as straightforward as he thought:

Tuesday March 8, 1927

You can go crazy! That no one can be trusted! That you never know when someone likes you for your own sake. You have to ask yourself about every person: Does he or she like me for my own sake, or is it because you are a prince? Prince, prince should not be that strange. It does have its advantages to be who you are, but at the same time you curse the fate that allowed you to be born a prince...¹

The acting was performed at a student theatre. Sigvard also continued drawing and painting - mostly watercolours - and with such success that in the summer of 1927 he was recommended to attend the Academy of Art or something similar. The requirement from home was that he first finish his degree. In the autumn of 1927, his father invited him to Italy. They visited attractions, a number of museums and Grandma Victoria in her villa on Capri. Victoria was very weak, bedridden and only received short visits. More spirit than body, Sigvard thought, but was impressed by her charisma: "You saw she was a queen." In 1927/28 he painted oils for the artist Olle Hjortzberg. In April 1928, he completed a shortened military service, five months in the infantry & was appointed lieutenant in Svea Livgarde (Royal guard). He then participated with Edmund in Folke Bernadotte's American wedding. In 1929 he completed his degree. The effective duration of his studies appears to have been two years.

In the autumn he was accepted by the Academy of Fine Arts - the Decorative Line under the leadership of Olle Hjortzberg - where he studied until spring 1931. Sigvard is silent about entrance tests and such, so one must assume that he was admitted at an explicit request from above. His internship at the Stockholm Exhibition 1930 - the breakthrough of functionalism in Sweden - left a deep marks. He designed some silver items for the NK department store, which the following year led to a contract with Danish firm Georg Jensen's Sölvsmiede.

In 1928, Sigvard was asked by his father whether he was interested in marrying Princess Juliana of Holland. He wasn't. Several Swedish princes were asked. The details are reported in Prince Carl Jr's biography, chapter 56. Instead, Sigvard fell in love with Swedish "Marianne", medical student & of good family, but was persuaded by his father to abstain and 1931 sent abroad to forget her.² Sigvard was bitter, despised himself & during the trip was undiplomatically outspoken about his family. The Dutch court, in a new inventory of prince consorts that year, emphasized how generally unpleasant he was considered. In compensation for his compliance, he was allowed to attend a four-month school of theatre painting in Munich, "Staatsschule für Angewandte Kunst", under Professor Emil Preetorius. Upon returning to Sweden, he began to receive assignments, but was seriously uncomfortable with his continued economic dependence on the family. He still met "Marianne" but the relationship had no future.

¹ Bernadotte 1975: s. 8. [Ur dagboken.]

² Bernadotte 1975: ss. 109-111; Skott 1996: s. 369.

1933-1937, he made an unsuccessful attempt to establish himself as a director at UFA & American MGM. He worked as an assistant director, learned the profession, but did not receive any assignments. He auditioned, but the result was not good. The inspiration for this dead-end effort seems to have been his Uppsala friend Wilhelm Sörensen (1906-1965) who tried something similar.

My best friend at that time was Wilhelm Sörensen. His father owned the so-called Sörensenska huset on Blasieholmen, formerly the Fersen Palace, and the family lived at the top floor with a wonderful view of the castle and opera. Wilhelm was an extremely charming young man, with fine manners and a low, almost whispering voice that could be very enticing and convincing. He was effeminate and unfortunately - it turned out - conniving. The girls loved and trusted him, and he betrayed their confidences. Apparently, the rumours of his intrigues and homosexuality found its way to the castle, for finally I was forbidden by my father to meet him. Which I promised, but didn't hold. He was too important to me. He flattered me and made me feel interesting and talented. Another reason for liking him was that like me he was interested in theatre and film. We read all about the stars in Hollywood and we thought we would be famous and celebrated.³

Sigvard's derogatory judgments about Sörensen are typical. In the memoirs there are scapegoats for virtually all of Sigvard's belly flops.

*

In 1934, Sigvard married the German Erica Patzek, lost his 4,000 kronor appanage, but was maintained by his father-in-law. In 1938 he settled in Denmark and resumed the silver work for Georg Jensen. The work was well reviewed & the advertising value of his background made it sell well. He was often invited to his sister Ingrid, who had meanwhile become Crown Princess of Denmark. Ingrid was moderately pleased to have yet another German in the family, but kept quiet about it. In 1942 Sigvard returned to Sweden, May-August attended additional reserve officer training and finished off with four months in the education and entertainment detail (I1). He has never given any explanation for his short service. Perhaps it was his German wife. Perhaps something else. Afterwards, he was involved in film & theatrical stage design in alternately Stockholm & Copenhagen and exhibited interior design work: furniture, fabrics, glass, carpets, bindings & silver. He divorced Patzek & married a Dane.

In 1949, he also began industrial design work with architect Acton Björn. As the business grew, Sigvard became more of an executive and front man than an industrial designer, but one must assume that it was his intentions that were realized. His greatest significance has been that virtually all of the Swedish & Danish industrial design elite "went to school" with him. Sigvard therefore acquired a central position in the industry. His positions:

- Artistic associate of Georg Jensen's silversmithy since 1930.
- Owner of the firm Bernadotte & Björn (Stockholm and Copenhagen) 1949-1963.
- CEO of Bernadotte Design AB (1964-1972) and then Bernadotte International AB (1972-?) for the copyrights, etc.
- Chairman of the Association of Swedish Industrial Designers 1961-1963 and then honorary member.
- President of the International Council of Industrial Design 1961-1963.

³ Bernadotte 1975: ss. 78-79.

- Board member of AB Svenska Telegrambyrån; Georg Jensens Sølvsmiede, Copenhagen; Dansk-norsk dampskilsselskap; Danske tapetfabrik & Georg Jensen Silver AB, Stockholm.

His birth was both an impediment & an advantage. Sigvard claims his biggest difficulty was convincing customers that he was serious, and did not run the business as a hobby. On the other hand, he could get an initial meeting with just about anyone. Sigvard was influenced by the "American school" of product design. He knew several of its founders and had made field visits. Posterity wanted to see product design as a form of artistic activity & has therefore looked for Sigvard's personal touch. Sigvard, on the contrary, points out that "form follows function". To the extent that there is a Bernadotte style in the design industry, it belongs to Jacob Jensen with Sigvard as mentor & with the advice to go all out: "Never excuse yourself, never explain yourself! It's a sign of weakness!" That's the deal.

Reviews about Sigvard as a silver & interior designer vary. There are many Swedish eulogies, but also the opposite. "His earliest attempts were mostly minor works, boxes in various materials, toiletries, utility items. But after a break in the early 30s he became firmly attached to the company, his register more extensive and also extended to larger corpus of works, tea and coffee sets, cocktail sets, bowls, jugs and goblets, cutlery, church objects and honorary gifts But right from the start, his style had an austerity and elegance, which has remained his personal signature."⁴ Sigvard's last assignment was the Millenium dinnerware Marianne Royal Blue for the company Fyrklövern. This consisted of 33 porcelain details, 12 silver cutlery, tablecloth, decanter & three crystal glasses for liqueur, schnapps & champagne and was completed the year of his death. The original edition was produced in 500 numbered copies & has become collectibles. The judgment was that it breathed patina & just as well could have been manufactured a century ago for the tsar. Which I suppose proves that everyone, including Sigvard Bernadotte, has an expiration date. Nothing is forever.

*

By his marriage to Erica Patzek, March 8, 1934, Sigvard lost his Prince title & his nobility. Prince Carl Jr had received a Belgian Prince through his brother-in-law. July 2, 1951, following the death of King Gustaf V, the rest of the defected princes, Lennart, Sigvard & Carl Johan, through Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxembourg (at the request of King Gustaf VI) received the same Luxembourg noble title as once Prince Oscar, Count of Wisborg, that under Luxembourg law both applied to the wife and was hereditary. For Sigvard, the title meant that he began to ponder his grievances. This turned worse when he 1961 moved back to Sweden and after his father's inheritance did not have to work any more. From 1972 to 1983, he and his wife Marianne had a "semi-official" position with the agreement of King Carl Gustaf, which I have not been able to sort out. He was treated with a certain ceremonial. As honorary chairman of, for example, the Center for the study of international relations (CSIR; 1971-1985?) he met politicians. He had assignments from the court as a judge at e.g. equestrian competitions at the stadium.

*

In 1976, his brother Bertil married his long-time mistress Lilian Craig. Bertil was allowed to keep his Prince title & Lilian received a princess title. This caused a long-standing dispute between Sigvard, his wife Marianne and the court, where they felt they were unfairly treated. The lack of title (=belonging to the family, but not the ruling house) also had practical consequences, as until 1975 all royal heirs paid inheritance tax at the lower rate from 1941 of

⁴ Johansson & Reventlow 1955.

25 percent, the rest of the population to 36 percent, which meant a significant reduction of the inheritance. After a new conflict in 1983 - this time about his official rank - Sigvard was regarded by the court as a non-person. Sigvard began to call himself Prince and his wife Princess. Sigvard pushed the title issue all the way to the European Court of Human Rights, but died before the case was heard.

The two most extensive descriptions of the title conflict are in the wife Marianne's memoirs⁵ & Staffan Skott's chronicle⁶. King Carl Gustaf discussed the matter with his lawyer Bengt Ljungqvist but ended up with not wanting to annul a cabinet decision "made under another constitution". Probably he feared that all other deposed princes & their descendants would start litigating they too. Sigvard had not been treated worse than the other princes, and so it was.⁷

There are several opinion polls on what the Swedish people thought of Sigvard's title chase. In 1986, the majority believed that he should overcome his annoyance.⁸ As his brother Carl Johan's wife put it: "You should not cry over spilt milk. Especially if you spilled it yourself." In 2001, the opinion had shifted, the majority thought that Sigvard could regain his title.⁹ The issue had by then lost its importance because prince was no longer a noble title, but only an honorary title. Meanwhile, Sigvard approached lawyer Gunnar Brampole for a legal investigation of the issue. It was not too encouraging. Oscar II's attitude seems to have been that the prince title was a birth right, not the person's status under the state, but under Gustaf V no distinction was made. The Court appears to have followed German case law. The more decrepit Gustaf V became, the more drastic the consequences. Brampole, however, pointed out something often overlooked, that the order of succession in 1937 was changed to admitting Swedish princes to marry foreign commoners, which meant that at least Gustav VI's opposition to his son Bertil's marriage to Lilian Craig & to his grandson Carl Gustav's relationship with Milly de Grasset did not have the support of the law, but only served to assert the royal house's exclusive status.

⁵ Bernadotte 1986: ss. 155-188.

⁶ Skott 1996: ss. 375-379.

⁷ Dagens Nyheter, 2001-05-26.

⁸ Sifo & Hänt i Veckan, 1986:5.

⁹ Aftonbladet 2001-05-15, s. 8; Expressen 2001-05-15, s. 16.