

Chapter 90 : “The Haga princesses” (II) (1934-1974).

Sibylla's children came in two litters. The first litter was Princess Margaretha, Princess Birgitta and Princess Desirée. Then there was a delay of five years until Princess Christina and Carl Gustaf. The first three were severely raised, disappeared into their marriages and are mostly remembered as “The Haga princesses”. It was the two youngest who became responsible for the survival of the Swedish monarchy. This is not a book about Carl Gustaf's sisters but it is a book about the monarchy's adaptation to new times. The adaptation included the creation of a new view of the royal house as more “folksy” and democratic, and in this respect the Haga princesses had an important role.

*

The entourage admired the bourgeois idyll that Sibylla created around her. Haga Castle became a kind of high-level version of Carl Larsson's Sundborn. Castle is perhaps too much said. It contained only 22 rooms. The bathroom was in the attic. The idyll was documented by Gustaf Vs valet - later Edmunds chauffeur & handyman - Engelberth Bengtsson, amateur photographer and later something of an official court photographer. The first film was Margaretha's debut skiing trip in 1937. Edmund and Sibylla thought the result was so successful that they asked him to continue. In 1940, Bengtsson completed two films “Haga Idylls” and “Summer Castle”, later expanded and renamed to “Once Upon a Time There Where Three Little Princesses” and “A Summer Tale of the Fairy Castle”. In connection with that he also took a number of stills of the children (or - the picture quality seems mediocre - he made paper copies from the film negatives). These were published as “Three Little Princesses : An Album about the Princesses Margaretha, Birgitta and Desirée” with a foreword by Sibylla.¹ The project eventually grew to six thousand meters film and 60 thousand stills.

In 1940, Swedish Film Industry (SF) made a film “Fjäril vingad” (Butterflies at Haga) directed by Gösta Roosling. He was one of SF's most prolific journal photographers, and he and Edmund had met several times. The only condition was that Edmund received a copy of the film for the family archive. Similar newsreels and pictures became a regular feature throughout the 1940s. At the end of the period, Christina was also included. The last films were:

Gösta Roosling, Swedish Film Industry, “Christmas at Haga” (1948). Carl Gustaf was afraid of the buzz, so he first got to play with the camera. Christina bribed him with gingerbread when he protested the direction. The recording went without a hitch. It actually took only four hours.

Bertil Edgren, Europafilm, “With Great Grandpa at Solliden. With the Children of Haga on Summer Holidays” (1949).

Nils-Gustaf Holmquist, Europafilm, “The Haga children at Solliden” (1950). Holmquist and the princesses including Carl Gustaf worked hard for three weeks from seven in the morning to six in the evening with a one-hour lunch break. Carl Gustaf was not in his best mood and would rather play with his pedal car. “Holmquist then took out a teddy, pushed it into the hands of the heir to the throne and roared:

¹Lund & Bengtsson 1940.

Play, kid, play! And the kid played nicely!”² The film premiered as a pre-film in theatres the week before Christmas. “The purpose of the film is to show that these children live, play and work and are brought up just like all other Swedish children. And for other children they are actually role models, not because they are royal, but because they are so well-educated and pleasant, so hard working and conscientious, that they are worth it. ... Swedish children will recognize themselves as comrades with the five siblings.”³ In the film, the princesses began their day by milking the cows and continued in the same jaunty style.

Gösta Roosling “Summer Break at Solliden” (1951). This took a month to complete because Carl Gustaf would rather play with his newest pedal car. The film featured a dance sequence with sister Christina. Carl Gustaf sneaked up during the recording and watched it big-eyed.

In connection with his retirement, Bengtsson showed his entire production of Haga home movies at the Stockholm concert hall and then travelled the country showing them to school classes. The proceeds went to charity.⁴ The commercial films were distributed as school films. The images of these well-dressed, well-scrubbed, hard-working girls in corkscrew curls – think Shirley Temple – made a lasting impression on a whole generation of young women. As monarchist propaganda, these newsreels, photographs, documentaries, picture books and memories of the Haga princesses' summer holidays are all too reminiscent of President Sukarno's sarcasm: “The best political film is the American film because it keeps the spectators out of politics.” Sibylla took an active part in all of these films, served as assistant director and insisted on final cut. If she didn't like a sequence it didn't survive.

On January 1, 1939, Ingrid Björnberg (1913-1994) was hired as a nanny. She belonged to the lesser nobility. Her father died while she and her siblings were small and the family lost their entailed estate. The family moved to Skara where she attended a girls' school, graduated in 1932, and aimed for a career as social worker. In 1934, she applied to the Barnavärn Foundation in Gothenburg (childcare) and then practised at a Swedish diplomatic family in Washington. She was recommended by Folke Bernadotte to apply for the like position at Edmund. When Carl Gustaf in 1953 began at Broms elementary school she intended to resign and devote herself to social care in one form or another, but instead became more of a companion for Sibylla and ended up as responsible for the daily cleaning of the Stockholm Castle - 608 rooms. The only personal information that can be found about her is that she took her holidays in the Austrian Alps and allowed her siblings' children to play with Carl Gustaf. In 1953 she attended English courses perhaps to be able to follow Carl Gustaf and the princesses abroad. Like many faithful servants she remained unmarried. However, the reward was not to complain about.

Ingrid Björnberg was nicknamed “Nenne” by princess Desirée supposedly because she always said “no” to everything that was fun and sloppy. Ingrid Björnberg also played a major role in the reputation of the Haga princesses. She kept a diary and this diary was published in 1975 before Carl Gustaf's wedding as “Diary from Haga” ghosted by Året Runt's journalist Anna Nyman.⁵ It is unclear on whose initiative. The diaries remained in a safe deposit box until 1973, and the book was originally intended as her memoirs. When push came to pull

² Vinberg 1996.

³ Filmen om Hagabarnen. Svensk Damtidning, 1950:53.

⁴ Engelberth Bengtsson. 'Får jag filja', sa prinsen. Året Runt, 1953:44.

⁵ Björnberg 1975.

however, she did not want to out either herself or the Bernadotte family. What remained in the book was an idyll. (Perhaps not idyllic enough for Carl Gustaf who in any case avoided to medal her. Details are missing. Queen Elisabeth II's governess Marion Crawford had published a similar book in 1950, of which Elisabeth took offence.) Björnberg's book and supplementary interviews formed the basis for a play the following year about "The Haga Princesses" written by Per Lysander and Suzanne Osten. It was a satire but an extremely benevolent one.

Anyone looking for pictures of Carl Gustaf as a child is referred to the book "Carl Gustaf, the Child Prince of Haga" from 1950 where they are guaranteed to get their fill. The good mood of Carl Gustaf and the princesses in the photographs is usually attributed to Nenne. "It doesn't show on the Christmas pictures, but Nenne is lying on the floor playing the monkey so that the children will laugh."

*

The "Haga Diary" has been regularly used as a source of the Haga children's childhood. Given the origin, that it is actually a biased propaganda script, one should probably be a little careful with it. A common feature of all alternative depictions is that the idyll was not as compact as it appears in the diary. Edmund may have occasionally played with his children, but neither he nor Sibylla had any close relationship with them. They were raised by the servants. Sibylla read evening prayers with her children and received reports of how they behaved.

Children must learn to behave in company, move about, exchange greetings, converse with strangers, hide their shyness. I [Princess Sibylla] couldn't tell the girls, "don't imagine anyone looking at you; As long as you behave correctly, no one will notice you". Because that's exactly what they do: staring, listening, noticing, photographing, maybe filming TV movies.⁶

Sibylla devoted a lot of thought to Carl Gustaf's education. The daughters were treated much more pro forma. She and King Gustaf VI decided jointly (and apparently over the girls' head) that after the Castle school they would study at the French School and then receive some form of housewife education so that they understood what the servants were doing. The exception was Margaretha, who both stammered and suffered from dyslexia and was allowed to attend the Castle school until her 16th anniversary in 1950. In the aftermath, Sibylla felt that it had been a big mistake. She became "too royal". Another mistake was not to give the daughters more freedom. They were followed everywhere by their own lady companions: Their governors Dényse de Muralt and Patricia (?) Hamilton, handy-woman Miss Birgitta Wijkander and later some lady-in-waiting.^{7,8} Sibylla afterwards had a guilty conscience:

In her upbringing of the children, she has tried to compromise between the old royal continental upbringing, the only one she knew, and the modern view of democratic Sweden.

- Perhaps I was too strict, she has said afterwards. But I didn't think I could let the girls walk alone in town like their comrades did and as they themselves wanted. They must always be accompanied by a lady-in-waiting, and they hated that.

⁶ Margareta Vinberg. Prinsessan Sibylla: "Så har barnen varit mina bästa kritiker". Vecko Journalen, 1965:13.

⁷ Svenska Dagbladet, 1948-02-16.

⁸ Tyra Öhrvall. Där en prins är bollkalle. Året Runt, 1952:1.

“Sibylla is iron hard”, it is said.⁹

Sibylla's severity towards her daughters was widely noted abroad. She was referred to as both “the Iron Princess” and “the German Junker”. Perhaps the princesses had complained. Their everyday life was full of unwritten rules: You never go outside without a lady in waiting. You never touch money - it is the lady-in-waiting who pays. You're always in line. You don't look for bargains when buying. In restaurants, a married older couple should sit at the same table. You dance according to a fixed schedule. You don't smoke in public. Your acquaintances must be approved by the Court. “But they are used to this and do not complain.” Princess Christina prided herself on being the first of the sisters with a “modern” upbringing, but she did not take any excessive liberties either. When her fiancé Tord Magnusson was in America in 1970, she lived as a hermit and saw neither sun nor moon. No discotheques. No cinema. Only official events. Carl Gustaf flatly refused to comply with such a thing.

*

There was a general feeling that the Haga children were unusually shy and late developed. According to Sibylla a Bernadotte family trait. The worst was allegedly for the two “royally raised” Margaretha and Carl Gustaf. This was explained by their special situation: To be constantly looked at, exposed to unfamiliar situations and receive special treatment. It took time to get used to. The problem was that no one opposed you. They did not associate with such people. The pedagogy does not seem to have been the best. There was a notion, especially from Edmund, that royalty could manage anything and if they could not, they were not royal enough. Pampering was forbidden. If any of the girls started crying, Edmund could say: Does it hurt? No? All right, then! What's the problem? After his death, the upbringing became less military: More of gradual habitation, less of being thrown into the water unprepared.

The main problem for the Haga children is said to have been understanding their social position as a prince or princess. Edmund's view was that “people must be bent early to become crooked for real.” When you were a king, it was a question of living up to the demands, “noblesse oblige” from the cradle which was the way he himself was raised. Sibylla's opinion was that the later in life they realized their position with the demands it put on them, the better it was for them. They became too premature otherwise. Birgitta and Desirée did not even go to Castle school the first years, but were home taught by a governess. They were to be protected. Later in life, however, the demands increased.

Obviously there was a lot of discussion at home about what was a suitable upbringing. It was rumoured that Margaretha's lack of self-confidence later in life was due to her being “a pedagogic project”. Hard to know what is meant. Maybe there were too many chefs on the recipe. One of the chefs appears to have been Edmund's friend and chief of court 1932-1936 (according to other information 1934-1937 or 1934-1940) Folke Bernadotte. In his 1940 book, *Boys and Scouting*, he wrote: “My own upbringing was strict and consistent but never hard. What made it, however, in the best sense of the word, superior was that we children always felt the great fund of love that was behind the severity. Nothing can create the right respect like the dualism rigour - love.” Folke Bernadotte also had opinions on corporal punishment: It was to be exercised only against boys, not against girls, and it was not to be carried out in haste. “If the boy finds out that the father repents, the situation may worsen.” Parents must also be in agreement. It could be fatal otherwise.

⁹ Ebba Samuelsson. *Prinsessan Sibylla*. Svensk Damtidning, 1972:39.

As the whole family was involved in the Scout movement, the Scout ideals were important. About Sibylla it was said: “She had the Scout's approach to discipline: discipline of his or her own free will, not for the sake of discipline itself.”¹⁰ Or, as one said in earlier times: “Obedient children need no punishment. They punish themselves.”

When Birgitta later raised her own children, she wanted to revive the Haga education: “[I demand self-discipline and obedience!] Neither my husband nor I believe in the so-called free raising of children. We are convinced that a small child needs to feel a will that is stronger than its own. I am totally against the system of the father being the punisher. I will never tell my children to wait until their father comes home, then you will be spanked for disobeying. Instead, I deal with the problem when it is fresh, then it does the most good. Daddy shouldn't have to feel like the tough in the house! When he comes home from work, both he and the children should feel that it is a party time!”¹¹ A bad experience of the Haga method was that Nenne became too much a part of the family. Birgitta and her siblings would rather run to her to be consoled than to mother or father, which allegedly made Sibylla jealous. Birgitta avoided such things by having her own children cared for by short-term au pair girls.¹²

Sibylla and Ingrid Björnberg performed the discipline: slaps, pulling hair, and admonitions, but no corporal punishment. Both had a guilty conscience afterwards for being too harsh. The emphasis was on the children's duties, not on their privileges. They only slowly realized their privileges. The domestic people were apparently unsure how to behave in the face of all this sham democracy. But obviously it was not all sham. The only time Edmund got really angry was when the girls tried to exploit the domestic people for their own comfort. Why else were they there? Apparently Edmund had difficulties answering.

*

In order to understand the situation of the Haga princesses when they wanted to use their education for something other than as a conversation piece, one must refer to the Constitution, §45 of the 1809 form of government: “Neither the crown prince and heir princes of the Svea Kingdom nor the princes of the royal house shall have any livgeding [income of personal fiefdom] or civil office.” This meant that the princes had to live on their appanage, wealth, business or military office. The Professor of Law Robert Malmgren (1875-1947) in his comments interpreted the law as also applying to princesses.¹³ In practice, the restrictions were even more severe. Princes and princesses were also not allowed to work in privately owned companies. Moreover, the legal position was so unclear for self owned companies, the exemption from the obligation to declare and pay taxes, the value of advertising vis-à-vis competitors to be royal, etc., that in practice the choice of occupation was limited to gentleman-farmer or artists where there were precedents.

For Margaretha, it went like this: She worked for a while at the Norrbackainstitutes without pay. However, she was not allowed to “stand in the way” of other Swedish citizens in their professional activities. As soon as an applicant came to her post, she had to resign. Her sisters Birgitta and Desirée didn't even get that far. Admittedly, there were propositions that “civil

¹⁰ Barbro Hultman. Det skulle blivit ett julkort till vännerna . Vecko Journalen, 1972:50.

¹¹ Om Birgittas familjeliv. Husmodern, 1965:44.

¹² Prinsessan Birgitta & König 1997.

¹³ Malmgren 1957.

office” should be interpreted as “state civil office” and that they could thus work in public schools or some other municipal positions. They talked about opening their own school and Birgitta had an offer to become a gymnastics teacher in the school for prince children set up by the Margrave of Baden in a wing of his castle Salem near Lake Constance where, for example, Prince Philip had attended.¹⁴ But nothing came out of it and then they married. Their training was not wasted however. Their children were well-raised and their homes were fantastically well-furnished.

Sibylla was bitter: “No matter what my daughters do, it's wrong. If they have no professional work, they are considered anachronistic luxury creatures. If they take a paid job, people think they are receiving a salary that others need better. Unpaid [labour] is wrong too.”¹⁵ Idleness was apparently what was expected of them. Difficult with the Coburg wealth confiscated. Sibylla even started airing feminist views on professional woman. When the issue of the succession of women to the throne was removed from the political agenda in the early 1970s, she even attacked the drafting of the constitution, which she believed discriminated against women.¹⁶

Margaretha, Birgitta and Desirée married 1961-1964 and disappeared into a bourgeois existence. Margaretha found it hardest to adapt. She wanted to be treated according to her rank, addressed as princess and the surroundings to give her honours. At the same time, she had difficulty coping with the contrast between her reclusive life and the attention she attracted as soon as she showed herself. There was a theory that she married an Englishman in order to be able to escape Sweden. She and Birgitta avoided each other. While Margaretha cultivated a royal conservative style, Birgitta blossomed into free love, golf and impetuous remarks. The headlines about her were of the type “The sparkling, blonde, toothy, braless barefoot bimbo Birgitta.”¹⁷ The couple Birgitta & Hansi lived in a 14-room villa with built-in garden and swimming pool where Carl Gustaf often was a guest. Although Hansi was an academic, he also had an upbeat side that appealed to Carl Gustaf: “They joke mercilessly with each other, telling countless not always suitable stories and compete outdoing the other with practical jokes. Diluting the whiskey and withdrawing chairs when the other is about to sit down are among their favourite jokes.”¹⁸

Christina later claimed that all the sisters were expected to marry royally. Sibylla made at least three such attempts: In the summer of 1959, she took Margaretha, Birgitta and Desirée to Greece on what appears to have been an invitation to present them to the Greek Crown Prince Constantine, in 1960 she organized her own castle ball with invited royal youths and in 1962 the princesses were invited to the wedding of Spanish Crown Prince Juan Carlos. The Greek visit (?) appears to have generated an official inquiry by the Shah of Iran (Birgitta, 1959) and an unofficial inquiry by Prince Constantine of Greece (Desirée, 1960). Both were rejected. Since in the Shah's time there was a clause that he could only marry a Muslim woman, there have been some doubts about the proposal taking place but perhaps Birgitta was expected to convert. In any case, the Shah shortly afterwards married Farah Diba. The last possibility of a royal marriage was in 1968 for Christina to marry Norwegian crown prince Harald, but he chose against his fathers will to marry the ex shop assistant Sonja Haraldsen. King Gustaf

¹⁴ Året Runt, 1958:3.

¹⁵ Margit Vinberg. Christina aktiv i Röda kors-hjälpen: Jag har fått en ny världsbild. Vecko Journalen, 1974:12.

¹⁶ Michael Jägerblom. Prinsessan Sibylla till attack mot grundlagsberedningen : Varför duger inte en kvinna på tronen? Vecko Journalen, 1972:38.

¹⁷ Expressen, 1972-01-27.

¹⁸ Året Runt, 1971:5.

Adolf and his Queen attended the wedding but neither Sibylla, Christina or her siblings. The Nordic exchange of princesses was over and evidently there was hard feelings.