

Chapter 91 : Princess Margaretha (I) (b. 1934).

Princess Margaretha Désirée Victoria of Sweden was born October 31, 1934, at Haga Castle. Her father was Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden (1906-1947). Her mother was Princess Sibylla of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1932-1972). June 30, 1964, she married the businessman John Ambler (1964-2008) and with him 1965-1969 had three children.

The literature about Margaretha consists of short biographies (Holmgren red. 1968; Elgklou 1978: ss. 216-217; Ohlmarks 1979: ss. 136-137; Skott 1996: s. 293; Lindqvist 2010: ss. 141-142; Norlin 2015: ss. 273-275) & a large number of newspaper articles. See also Chapter 90.

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This is how Margaretha grew up:

Margaretha was raised in the traditional way. Went to Castle school [1941-1950] together with a few select girls, never got to go alone on the town. She is the only one of the sisters who still does not say “you” to their friends nor do they. In the old way, they address each other in the third person.¹ [She is addressed as “Sessan” , the familiar form of *princesse*.]

To be a little mean, you can say that Margaretha both wanted to eat the cake and keep it. She wanted to avoid all the duties she did not like or could not manage, but at the same time preserve the unquestionable privileges of a royal title.

Margaretha was allowed to continue at the Castle school because of her word blindness. It deprived her of any contact with ordinary children. She was picked on for her height and started to walk curled up. [She and three equally long friends were known as the “poplar-avenue”.²] The parents did their best to help her, which made her extremely dependent on them. She had a hard time keeping a straight face. When something scared or bored her, she couldn't hide it. She also had poor self-restraint and a passionate temperament and feuded with her younger sisters [Birgitta and Désirée].

She was totally indifferent to such things as clothes, hairstyle, make-up and other things.^{3,4} [That seems like a misconception however. Margaretha, like Sibylla, was careful with her makeup and dresses when was necessary but otherwise relaxed.⁵ For everyday life it was almost never lipstick, rarely nail polish and just a little black on the eyelashes. The hair was ash-blond and self-curly. The hairdresser came at most once a week.⁶]

At the Castle School, Princess Margaretha has studied the same courses as other Swedish children, with some additional literature and art history. She understands all conversation in English and German.

¹ Christina Franzén. Kungen och hans flickor. Svensk Damtidning, 1972:25.

² Svensk Damtidning, 1994:43.

³ Anita Nyman. Allt om kärleken i Margarethas liv. Svensk Damtidning, 1973:25.

⁴ Christina Franzén. Kungen och hans flickor. Svensk Damtidning, 1972:25.

⁵ Greta Olsson-Wright. Prinsessornas nya liv, del 2. Året Runt, 1965:2.

⁶ Barbro Alving. Min vän Margaretha. Vecko Revyn, 1964:13.

She will now read some more language, art and literature history, as well as increase her knowledge in social science, economics and history. It is part of good general education and above all part of her royal duties. A young princess must learn to speak to strangers with different interests, and that is what one must aspire to.⁷

(The fact that Margaretha was allowed to continue at the Castle school because of her dyslexia is probably untrue but has not been possible to unravel. The first year she received the same type of home education with an informant as her mother. She missed out on classmates. During the breaks, she used to go down to the kitchen for company. Later she had female class-mates selected from her parents acquaintances. Their teacher was Ulla Werner – earlier at Lyceum (a girls school) – who was also responsible for the kindergarten. Margaretha tried to overcome her word blindness through hard work. Eventually she was able to read *Anne of Green Gables*, *Polyanna*, *Seven Little Australians* and the like. Given Margaretha's troubles, it seems strange that Sibylla would later have been unaware of the reasons for Carl Gustaf's reading and writing difficulties. You can sense some kind of wishful thinking.)

After Edmund's death, Sibylla seems to have changed her mind about how to educate her daughters: They would learn something real, “maybe a profession, at least an occupation, where they can develop their individual talents.”⁸ In the summer of 1950, she discussed the matter with friends in England. These would try to find a board and lodging for Margaretha so that she could learn the language and broaden her horizons.

Nothing came of it. During the summer, Margaretha contracted pneumonia and was hospitalized for three weeks. She then developed a long-lasting cold with bronchitis. In the first half of 1951 she convalesced three months in Italy. She was there incognito and thought it was very exciting not to be recognized. She then spent time with Queen Ingrid in Copenhagen where she studied art history and language and also attended courses at *Handarbejdets Fremme* (handicraft) in binding and embroidery. The stay in England was postponed for a year.

In the autumn of 1951, she took a physiotherapy course at the *Norrbackainstitut* and practised at Crown Princess Lovisa's Children's Hospital. In the spring of 1952, she joined a civil defence course and in October she entered a household school in England, *Seer Green House* in Beaconsfield halfway between London and Oxford, where she spent six months under the express order of Sibylla that she should be treated like any other pupil, a very unfamiliar experience. However in 1953, she was still placid, yielding, dependent on Sibylla and Ingrid Björnberg and too shy to speak her mind or assert an opinion in front of foreign persons.^{9,10} At the formal opening of the Parliament that year, she accompanied her mother into the courtroom in a formal dress. Apparently she made an impression because for several years, she every Friday at 14 a.m. received a pair of red roses. There was speculation about an admirer who was too shy to propose.

She continued her professional practice at St Görans children's day nursery. In the autumn of the following year, there was a four-month course at “*Sällskapet barnavård*” (childcare) in Stadshagen where she learned to care for children and scrub floors and then a course in dress stitching at *Märthaskolan*, driving license and a one-year evening course in fine cooking at

⁷ Brita Hiort af Ornäs. *Prinsessan Margaretha*. *Vecko Journalen*, 1950:43.

⁸ Martin Siwertz. *Intervju med Sibylla. Okänd källa*. Citerat i: *Husmodern*, 1949:17.

⁹ *Året Runt*, 1953:24.

¹⁰ *Sibyllas familj*, del 2. *Året Runt*, 1960:36.

Stockholm City's vocational schools. As a seamstress, she was good enough to sew everything except the prom dresses. Märthaskolan assisted with the cutting of the cloth and then she sewed. She used to get the fabrics as a gift. One advantage of being the eldest was that she had first choice on the dress colour at the balls and none of the sisters were allowed to have the same.

In the autumn of 1955, she improved her French at the convent school “Maria's Ascension” in Paris. The school had 300 students, of which 35 had board and lodging:

The day began with bedding and cleaning. At 10 o'clock it was French lessons with 10 classmates. Everyone was from famous families but only Margaretha was royal. At 14:30-16:30 a teacher took them to museums, exhibitions, famous places etc. At 18 they had to be back for homework etc. At weekends it was cinema and theatre. A lady-in-waiting made sure she didn't escape her confines in the manner of Audrey Hepburn in the movie Roman Holiday, one of Margaretha's favourites.¹¹

[“Maria's Ascension” was a so-called finishing school, at this time more or less compulsory for upper-class girls. Most of them had a restricted upbringing, had received home education or attended private schools and were not very accustomed to real world challenges. Here they got to meet others in the same situation and exchange experiences before their society debut. It was a kind of vocational school for society ladies. The schedule included language, shorthand, typing, sewing, cooking, bridge and museum visits. The office skills were there for a possible job while waiting for Mr Right.]

In between there was representation: “Margaretha began to 'appear' as a thin and slightly moody teenager as she assisted mother at inaugurations and swung around in the first Cadet balls. Then we saw her quite sporadically for a few years, that was when language studies abroad took place.”¹² Margaretha's first cadet ball in 1954 at Karlberg (Sweden's West Point) was like this:

After curtsying and bowing for the commandants, colonels and majors etc., with wives, everyone eventually gathered in something that I think is called the pillar hall and practised curtseys. In the meantime, a whole army of photographers buzzed around and occupied strategic positions at all angles and crannies. Suddenly trumpets announced the royal entry and the flashbulbs stood like northern light. Then the princess entered [in green lace and tons of strengthened petticoats] in the hall at the arm of “her” cadet and lightly bent her head towards us who were lined up against the walls, and we curtsied and bowed deeply. It was deathly quiet, so the weak rustle that arose when all the dresses swept down over the floor, appeared as a solemn sound effect.¹³

Came 1956. Margaretha was 22 years old, a healthy young beauty interested in gymnastics, horseback riding, outdoor life, handicraft, Harlequin novels and cooking, perhaps not the sharpest knife in the box but ready for something new.

¹¹ Lena de Faramond. Jag älskar kajerna längs Seine. Vecko Revyn, 1955:29.

¹² Svensk Damtidning, 1957:24.

¹³ Renée Holger. En bal, min bal. Husmodern, 1954:8.

She “is really handsome. She is one and eighty tall with a smooth and beautiful figure, and she knows it. She moves with the adorable gracious grace that only a tall girl can bring about and that in an instant turns into absolute grace.” She is a product of the most sophisticated of the Scandinavian courts. In addition to attending art school and listening to jazz music, she enjoys riding, dancing, sailing and skiing, but also devotes a significant part of her time to such “good work” as nursing courses. She is an enterprising, independent youth who ensures that she gets the most out of the hard-fought democratization of the royal family and treasures nothing higher than her independence.^{14,15} The Swedish princesses have a freedom that many other royals in the world can envy them. They have received a democratic education, they largely choose their friends themselves, they have freedom in choice of clothes as well, and they are allowed to travel and take walks without the whole staff of courtiers following in their heels.¹⁶

The flip side of the whitewash was that Margaretha was shy, insecure, extremely sensitive, took offence at everything and encountering adversity fell apart, cried and was depressed for days on end. She was extremely careful in her choice of friends, meaning that they could never criticize her, not the easiest thing, because she was “secretive all the way down to her toes”. Foreign people frightened her. She was most at ease with babies, home furnishings and dogs. The façade was impeccable however. Never has a Swedish princess looked so good in pictures.

Then came September 1956. Margaretha was in London to improve her English, living in Hampstead with friends of Sibylla, Mr. and Mrs. Desmond Boyle, an English businessman and his Swedish-born wife. During the day, she took the subway back and forth to where she practised as a play leader in the children's ward of “Middlesex Hospital” with the daughter of the house Carina Boyle. The family had promised to look after her, but left this to their daughter. A mistake. Margaretha entered into an inappropriate relationship with the impoverished noble Robin Douglas-Home. The reader is referred to the next chapter for all the interesting details.

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After the dissolution of the romance, Margaretha continued her studies. She wanted to accompany Prince Bertil on his public relations trip to America in the summer of 1958, but was not allowed. In the winter of 1958/59, she practised briefly at Karolinska Hospital as an assistant occupational therapist without pay. However, the hospital work had lost its appeal. Apparently, she had to interrupt her practice when another person was seeking the job. She continued with a two-year education in silver work etc. at the Nyckelviksskolan 1960-1962. She finally started to mature:

Margaret likes to represent. [In 1959 she became the patron of My Summer Child. The following year, she made a long trip to America with Princess Astrid of Norway and Danish cousin Margrethe.] “If she can only show what she can do and is appreciated for it, then she can handle things with flying colours”, was the judgment. She has a relaxed way of talking to people and makes even the most grumpy politician relax.

¹⁴ Svenska Dagbladet, 1958-05-06.

¹⁵ Svenska Dagbladet, 1960-06-02. Newsweek om prinsessan Margaretha.

¹⁶ Maria Ek. Inte längre rädd. Svensk Damtidning, 1960:16.

Margaretha is very much a Princess Alone. She is more isolated than her sisters. She was raised as a queen, an heir to the throne, while the sisters tumbled about as “little princesses”. She keeps her distance, is followed by a lady-in-waiting. If she is forced to answer any question on a subject where she is unsure, she can state by virtue of her royal dignity that “it is so, because that is what I have said”. In this, she resembles her father, she is the sibling who most resembles him, stubborn, caring, reserved, often submerged in dreams and lost to the world. Always has a portrait of her father on the night stand.¹⁷

In early 1959, Margaretha entered a new relationship with Hans-Ulrich von der Esch (1928-2009). Before he was formally invited to her daughter's 25th birthday ball on October 31 Sibylla interrogated him about his finances, future plans etc. Esch replied that in his current economic situation he could not afford to marry a princess. Sibylla concluded that he was more interested in the publicity than in Margaretha as a person and forbade her from inviting him. Margaretha then canceled the ball.¹⁸ The relationship did not survive this. Sibylla's comment long after was: “If you understand that your children will be unhappy with a certain person, then you avert the marriage. So do all parents.¹⁹ But life goes on...

Margaretha seems to be quite happy with being a bachelor girl. “Do not interfere with my plans. I'm doing well and have no thought of getting married right now.” Her height, 176 in her stockings, no longer worries her. “I'm proud to be this tall...” Sibylla is reportedly positive about her marrying a Swedish commoner.

Margaretha prepares herself by reading before meeting people in official contexts. For example, a large part of John Steinbeck's production [before the Nobel-ceremony]. She responds to marriage proposals with a friendly no. She has a drivers license, but it took many lessons [21 to be exact]. As a child, she was called “Mimmi”, now it is “Sessan Margaretha” (princess M). She has opinions on most things, for example Kristina Michaneck's debating book [“Jungfrutro och dubbelmoral” (1962) about free love], greasers, boxing, Mallorca sins etc. At parties the cavaliers change, usually the last dance is with the host. If he is too short, she usually kicks off her shoes. At official dinners, she is accompanied by her lady-in-waiting Dagmar Nyblaeus.²⁰

She loves masquerades. Most times, she dresses as a vamp in a skirt that is torn up over her knees, long black hair, false eyelashes and war paint. ... At Birgitta's hen party [1960], Margaretha made sure that everyone dressed in baby clothes. She dressed Birgitta in play clothes and put her in a playpen with a potty and toys. She herself came in big bow, nightgown and teddy. Then there was baby talk all night, you drank juice cobbles in straws, sat on the floor and ate meatballs with mashed potatoes and had fun. ... She's a night owl. For example, loves to sit with a bottle of red wine after the theatre and discuss the play, directing, actors etc. She can keep going until 3 in the morning. The only times she doesn't hang out with us friends is when she knows Mom Sibylla is alone at home. Since her father's death - she adored Prince Gustaf Adolf - they were very close. ... She likes to watch TV: Sport, Panorama & The Flintstones. She plays bridge and always wins.²¹

¹⁷ Sibyllas familj, del 2. Året Runt, 1960:36.

¹⁸ Sibyllas familj, del 2. Året Runt, 1960:36.

¹⁹ Ebba Samuelsson. Prinsessan Sibylla. Svensk Damtidning, 1972:39.

²⁰ Bertil Häggström. Sibyllas döttrar, del 1. Vad krävs för att bli Sibyllas svärson? Året Runt, 1963:1.

²¹ Barbro Alving. Min vän Margaretha. Vecko Revyn, 1964:13.

People who meet her fleetingly have sometimes been offend by her manners. Her friends have over the years stood up for her and explained what a lovely person she is deep inside, soft, warm, with a good heart. But she's not smooth. She defends her opinion in a discussion to *the bitter end*. To adapt she just doesn't know what that is.

This is a typical situation for Princess Margaretha. Attending an event they discussed a film and everyone thought it was charming and praised it in lyrical terms. Then, Sessan - as her friends always called her – out of the blue suddenly objected and continued in detail to explain her dislike. She loved to throw herself right into a discussion.

Sometimes Sessan looks morose. This is due to a complete inability to dissimulate. If she is not 100 percent she will force you to take notice.²²

In October 1963, Margaretha visited her friend Carina Boyle, now married Maitland, and brought businessman John Ambler to the table. He visited the castle secretly to be approved by Sibylla. Margaretha and Ambler married in 1964. Nobody knew at first who this Ambler was. When their first child, a daughter, was born, it was made clear:

The main thing is that the girl does not become a blue stocking. I can't stand this kind of woman. I firmly believe that a woman's happiness in life consists above all in becoming a wife and mother. Look at my wife... I can't tell how well she's doing. ... I'm not sure that ambition and a razor-sharp intellect are the best equipment for a young lady, sex appeal and money I think is a better combination. And then it is always nice if she can take life with a pinch of humour, above all you have to be able to laugh at yourself.²³

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Margaretha then disappeared under the radar, only to denounce the divorce rumours. These seem to have had to do with Ambler investing her money in the firm, not so good when it started to go bad, and they had to sell their mansion. In 1996 they separated. Margaretha for some time lived at Drottningholm Castle, but moved back when she inherited. In 2013, Expressen visited her in an anonymous stone cottage outside Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire, England. Margaretha cut the visit short: "I've never done an interview. And I will not do so now either."

²² Husmodern, 1964:15.

²³ Husmodern, 1965:46.