

## **Chapter 93 : Princess Birgitta (b. 1937).**

Princess Birgitta Ingeborg Alice of Sweden, "Tuss" among friends, "Dittan" with sister Desirée, was born January 19, 1937, at Haga Castle. Her father was Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden (1906-1947). Her mother was Princess Sibylla of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1932-1972). May 25 & 30, 1961, she married Johann Georg von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1961-2016), PhD, museum director & head of family, and with him 1962-1966 had three children. Since de Gotha stated that "Hansi" was a legal party, Birgitta was granted the princess title.

The literature about Birgitta consists of short biographies (Holmgren red. 1968; Elgklou 1978: ss. 216-217; Ohlmarks 1979: ss. 138-139; Skott 1996: ss. 293-296; Lindqvist 2010: ss. 142-144; Norlin 2015: ss. 275-276) & a large number of newspaper articles. See also Chapter 90. She has written her memoirs (Birgitta & König 1997).

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Birgitta attended the Castle school four years until 1950 and then the French school where she graduated in 1954. She then spent half a year at a Swiss finishing school for society debutants "Clos des Abeilles" where she studied French, German, domestic science and drawing and received the necessary polish by studying with millionaire daughters. She gained weight (10 kilos in six months!) and dieted hard on her return home. Part of the weight loss was fluid deficiency. It ended by her having to be watered up with injections.

Birgitta never came to the French school without her governess, Ingrid Björnberg, lady-in-waiting Maj Vicander or any other apron. She and the other royal children, including Carl Gustaf, were picked up by car during the lunch break to eat food at home and meet Sibylla who ate late breakfast. Carl Gustaf commented long after that Sibylla was a real "chicken mother". The food was served 11-13 because the children's schedule varied. Their English governess accompanied them. Maybe to dampen the feelings because it was always lively at the table. Birgitta wanted to ride a tram but it was not considered appropriate. There must have been some lunch breaks spent at school, however, because Birgitta tells in her memoirs how the girls exchanged sandwiches with each other. The classmates found the royal cold cut exciting. Birgitta thought it was exciting with loaf and sausage.

Christmas and summer holidays, the boys from Lundsberg and Sigtuna boarding schools participated in the parties. These were increasingly formalized during the last years of school. If you received an invitation card with the time 19:25 it meant that Princess Birgitta arrived at 19:30. The girls knixed for her as the convention required but the mood quickly eased. Not entirely though. At first Birgitta and Desirée had separate dance clubs but they always attended each other's dances so the clubs were merged. The dances took place at the participants' apartments. The arrangements were simple. Barbecue sausage, soft drinks or juices and gramophone music. The dance teacher was Holger Rosenqvist. Sessorna also (when young) trained ballet for Brita Geijerstam.

1955/56, Birgitta attended Märthaskolan to learn sewing and cutting and twice a week Borgarskolan to improve her English. She also took a driving license. In 1956, she joined the Gymnastics school (GCI) as an extra student. The education there was two years. In order to obtain a degree, she required a high school qualification in mathematics, physics and chemistry, which she had previously skipped, but now had to cram. Her physique was

mediocre and she trained intensively. The first year at GCI was thus very hectic. Birgitta had originally intended to become a physiotherapist, but this would mean giving strangers massages, which Gustaf VI and Sibylla considered unthinkable. Teaching was acceptable however. A journalist who wanted to know why all this effort? was fobbed off with "If the republic arrives, I will have a bourgeois profession as a gymnastics teacher to fall back on."<sup>1</sup> The education included taking the skipper degree and getting acquainted with various sports. Carl Gustaf insisted on joining her for the boxing match between Ingemar Johansson and Henry Cooper at Johanneshov athletics stadium. It was a bloody affair that Birgitta tried to explain away with the fact that it was lingonberry jam in the gloves.

Birgitta finished 4th in a class of 28. In 1958 she practised as a gymnastics teacher at Broms school to get her certificate. Due to the legislation, she was not allowed to collect any wages for her work. All the students, including Carl Gustaf, were very excited to have a real princess as a teacher. Birgitta countered with a harsh regime: Students were either too busy with the gymnastics or too tired to make any trouble. There were rumours that she had a love story. The elect was Sven "Tumba" Johansson, a classmate and ice hockey player, who also was an extra student. The relationship started the last semester and lasted 1.5 years.

Over the years, I have been asked the same question a thousand million times: "Hey, did something happen between you and Princess Birgitta, really?" For the first time, I will tell you, and I will do it with the princess's permission. In fact, I called her before I wrote this and asked her if I use it. She had no objection, and she has carefully read through the account and approved it. I will start with the princess's own short version. Here's how she looks back on our love story:

"Sven Tumba was my first love. Like me, he was very interested in sport. It wasn't so strange in the days of youth that you got to like each other. Sven was for me a charming, fun and humorous guy, which I in youthful dizziness fell for. I was not used to being as intensely courted in my circles as I was in such a natural and unimpeded way. That's why I and Nenne and his whole family are still very good friends. Golf is now a common denominator."

The answer to the preliminary question is therefore: YES! We were warmly and deeply in love with each other. Besides, I was actually her first boyfriend.

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I'm sure a lot of people are wondering what it's like to be with a real princess. One thing is clear - it is not easy! But on the other hand very fun... and exciting! Usually you can take your love in your hand and walk out into nature or wherever you want. With a princess, things are different, very different. Everything you do together must be done secretly. It requires cunning, and sometimes even a good portion of luck to not be exposed. The basic strategy for meeting was simple. It involved the princess, or "Sonja", being taken by her private driver - named Alvergård if I remember rightly - to a friend to study. At my friend's house, I picked up Sonja, and then we went to a borrowed apartment or some other place where we could spend time undisturbed. What we did? Just what young people have always done when love strikes and emotions run high. There is nothing strange about that. Even princesses and famous athletes are basically ordinary people. ... Eventually our feelings cooled. These were

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<sup>1</sup> Sibyllas familj, del 3. Prinsessan Birgitta. Året Runt, 1960:37.

difficult circumstances with a lot of hush-hush and secrecy, and it was not easy for any of us.<sup>2</sup>

In her memoirs, Birgitta reports a strange episode with the Expressen journalist Gösta Ollén. He simply entered the apartment uninvited and walked around looking in the rooms and even in the closets for “Tumba”. This seems to be an unpermissible invasion of privacy, but women and children - even royals - apparently had to put up with a lot.

In 1960 Birgitta won the Swedish Championship in fencing. After that she was in Munich to better her German and met her future husband Prince Johan Georg of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (“Hansi” among friends). The family was dethroned in 1918 but still wealthy. They married twice in 1961. Both a Swedish and a German ceremony. Carl Gustaf was best man. Despite the title, Hansi must be considered bourgeois. Princess Astrid of Norway also married a commoner at this time. Arbeiderbladet in Oslo called it the “princess revolution”. Long afterwards Birgitta claimed that she would rather have married her “dream man” from the August/September 1960 Rome Olympics, but that Hansi was a more suitable party.

After her marriage, Birgitta tried to adapt to life as a housewife which did not go well. “It is Hansi who has the last word - the tradition of the Hohenzollerian law says that the man's will is law. Birgitta wants to have fun but he says no.”<sup>3</sup> She started relationships, worked as a model, published a gramophone record for exercise gymnastics, advertised a magnetic bracelet that would be good for your health, wrote her memoirs etc. She summarized her teens as “we should be like all other children, but also royal”:

It was a trying experience to say the least for me to start among other children in French school. But eventually my resilience overcame the shocks, it went better and better and in the end I enjoyed the new environment. For other children, school is a constraint, for us princesses it meant the opposite. A new kind of autonomy, greater independence, a slightly less restricted freedom of movement.

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Teachers have also spoken about another problem : It happened that the girls with whom I became especially good friends and who were invited home to the castle showed tendencies to feel special and even put themselves above others. I did not understand any of this at the time, but it occurred to me that I should distribute my graces.

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We were never permitted to walk between the castle and the school, but were driven both there and home in one of the courts cars. Of course, to use my vocabulary at the time, this was the worst, but as usual we obeyed without much protest. It was particularly sad to never walk the streets with your classmates after school, never go home to good friends and drink tea.

And it felt worse when I arrived at the age when the other girls started going out to the movies or like and meeting boys.

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Those years I started to think about myself and my possible self-worth. I was surprised to wonder if my comrades and cavaliers liked me because I was who I was or if they sought my company because I was a princess.

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<sup>2</sup> Sven ”Tumba” Johansson. Mitt rika liv eller Den nakna sanning. Stockholm: Sellin & Partner, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Husmodern, 1968:20.

When those thoughts first appeared in my brain, it was a nasty sensation - and even today I think it is terrible when I am gripped by that doubt. I get suspicious and stingy when people, excuse the expression, are behave silly just because they know who you are. When they're not themselves, but they become unnatural and mannered just because I happen to be a princess.

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I must admit that there has always been a certain distance between other people and me. My upbringing and my awareness of who I am. There is simply no one I dare to trust completely.<sup>4</sup>

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In 1980, Birgitta opened a store for children's clothing & sports fashion and stayed in shape with skiing & cycling. In 1989 she launched her magnetic bracelet, which did not fare well. She has also launched golf clubs and other items. Her marriage fell apart and the couple separated in 1990 but did not divorce. Birgitta moved to Mallorca where she devoted herself to sports and socializing: Morning golf one or two rounds, afternoon TV about horses & tennis, evening dinner with the neighbours. In 1997 she wrote her memoirs.

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<sup>4</sup> Anita Lagercrantz. Intervju med prinsessan Birgitta. Vecko Journalen, 1964:11-17.