

The 75-year interview (transcript).

April 26, 2021, some days ahead of King Carl Gustaf's 75th birthday, the "Värvet" podcast, Kristoffer Triumf [KT], published an hour-long interview from the Stockholm Castle. It is unclear who took the initiative. It was not a journalistic interview, but more of a conversation or monologue, where Carl Gustaf spoke from the heart. The original interview is in Swedish and not published here, but translated into English. The transcript has been edited to make it easier to read. In the original interview, Carl Gustaf makes digressions, which have been largely excluded here: The Bark Beetle's harmful effects on the pine forest, etc.

It is not a good interview. Carl Gustaf's profession is a mixture of politics, tradition & representation. The interview is mainly about royal everyday life. The ambition seems to have been to portray Carl Gustaf's "true" personality, supposedly hidden by his professional role. According to Triumf the "true" Carl Gustaf is like you and me. Somebody forced into this position and wanting an out in the manner described by Thomas Sjöberg in his biography "The Reluctant Monarch".

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CG: It's been busy all the time. There are new situations, new tasks, new areas. You meet new people every day. And that means it never becomes stereotyped. There are always new questions and new answers.

KT: Sometimes it is said about celebrities that they are so well known that they need no introduction. But has it ever been more accurate than with today's guest? Carl XVI Gustaf was a media concern already when he was born. His parents, Prince Gustav Adolf and Princess Sibylla, had four daughters, and then what so many at the time were waiting for happened.

XX: Extra newscast from TT. Princess Sibylla came down this morning with a son. The lucky event took place at Haga. The newborn prince was greeted with a salute: 84 shots in two batches of 42 each.

KT: Yes, he was born at Haga Castle on April 30, 1946. In 1973 he became King of Sweden and since 2018 he is the regent who has sat the longest on the throne throughout the country's history. Today, he divides his everyday life between three places. Mainly the residence Drottningholm Castle, the estate Stenhammar, where he runs organic farming and the office at the Royal Castle in Gamla Stan, where this interview was also conducted. My name is Kristoffer Triumf, and on the occasion of the king's 75th birthday, I have the great honour of presenting the podcast Värvet with His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf.

CG: First, I want to start by saying that we are sitting in the Stockholm Castle and in a room that is, in a way, very dear to me. For those of you who may not have been here before, it is wallpapered with red fabric. But in my time it wasn't like that, but it was raw unplanned planks. Which was because it was once Gustaf V's writing room. And when the silver pieces, etc. were removed, there was nothing left. There was also a cast iron spiral staircase and a tiled stove. But in my time, when it was a hobby room, I had my electric train here and a ping-pong table, and now it's a dining room with red walls, nice furniture that also serves as a meeting room. It can be fun to know because Stockholm's castle is constantly changing. The outside is as it is, but inside each generation refurbishes. During the pandemic, I have been here a lot.

KT: Isn't it also the case that the king has had a lot of digital meetings instead of physical ones?

CG: Yes, that's what happens when you can't travel. That is what is so fantastic about modern technology, that we can socialize digitally. It felt a little unnatural at first, but now I'm used to it. A certain technique is required: Not too close and not a messy background. The computer has a wide-angle lens, so there can be funny perspectives. You can think of it as a photo opportunity.

KT: Yes, photographs will be taken here afterwards as well. Everyone has to think about looking good. Speaking of something similar. Normally, I assume the royal couple would have been at Prince Philip's funeral. How does the king remember him?

CG: The TV coverage was amazing. It was a very emotional and beautiful funeral. Age takes its toll, but he still lived to be almost a hundred years old. I met him for the first time when I was 16 years old. We were out sailing together – Me, him, Prince Charles, Princess Ann and a few others in his sailboat Bloodhound through the Caledonian Canal up to Lochness, but we didn't see the beast. Then I lived with the family for a week. It is something that you do not forget.

KT: No, of course, but what was he like as a person?

CG: He was a lovely person. Warm and cordial, always with a good word for everyone, very humorous and always with a point. I can't help but think of something that I've probably told a thousand times. He would laugh at this that I will say now: I remember so well when Prince Charles and Ann and I stood at the rail of the sailboat each of us holding a fender because we were in a lock. And these locks are 3-4 meters high and several in a row. And we stood there holding our fenders so the boat didn't scrape against the walls. At the same time, people took notice that it was Prince Philip who had entered the canal. Then, of course, tourists and the like came to stand on the edge all around us and kind of look down on us. There we stood and there they stood. And then Prince Philip says to me “Now I know how it feels to be a butterfly in a museum“. If you know what a butterfly museum looks like. There, the little butterflies sit on their pins and everyone puts their nose down and looks at them. I have carried this story with me as a special memory.

KT: And if you've ever sluiced, you know it's a core. It's a lot of adrenaline.

CG: Yeah, it's exciting. I had gone to sailing school, but this was the first time for real. Sailing in a canal is rather like sailing on dry land. A nature experience rather than a sea experience.

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KT: What is it like for the king to work during such a crisis as the corona pandemic has been anyway.

CG: It's complicated because of all the restrictions. I have received my two syringes and am keeping a safe distance. When I meet politicians, governors and others, we sit on opposite sides of the conference table. They talk about their counties. I tell them that people are actually grateful for all the work they put in. So much is done without it becoming known. By healthcare professionals and others.

KT: I think there were many who appreciated the King's speech regarding the Corona crisis.

CG: Thank you. I really hope so. It is difficult to reach out with everything you want to say. How grateful all of us citizens are to those who go all in and really neglect themselves and their families to be able to help people.

KT: I think that Your Majesty is our main symbol of the country. As such, what has it been like to endure this time.

CG: Everyone suffers in different ways, but for me it's more about compassion. Many people have been affected. Many have not even been able to say goodbye to their loved ones. And it's not just individuals who are affected. Entire companies and industries have had a hard time. The tourism industry, the restaurant industry, small family businesses with poor margins. But thank God we have escaped a total lockdown. Society slows down, but we manage. For example, the estate Stenhammar has done well. If it feels too confined, you can go out into nature. Hold on and persevere. Everything has an end.

KT: Does the king have contact with his colleagues, so to speak, out in the world?

CG: No, not really. Every country has its culture and tradition, its politics and its integrity. Everyone is an expert.

KT: Your Majesty has taken a particular interest in the forest issue? Or?

CG: Yeah, yeah. I have always been interested in nature and forests. I don't know where it comes from. It is difficult to answer. I grew up with it. A lot has probably been through the scouts. It was also because my father, mother and even grandmother were very amused by hiking. All three hunted a lot, were out in the woods a lot, and after my father's death my mother tried to pass the interest on to me. You have grown up with it. My grandmother shot her last deer when she was 80 years old! I'll try to be a notch worse.

KT: Does the king remember his first hunt?

CG: My first hunt? Well, not exactly of course, but I started quite early. At 15, 16 years old like that. It was some hare, I guess.

KT: Does the king remember his latest hunt?

CG: It was about a year ago. I don't do it as much now. I used to be out hunting until January. You sit by yourself in the forest and wait. It is peaceful. You have time to think: What you did, what you should have done, what you have to do the next, some speech you have to give. Unfortunately, by the time you are back you have forgotten your brilliant phrasing. My brain works better outdoors.

KT: But sitting still in a hunting tower or on a stump for several hours, the king has no problem with that?

CG: I would love to, but maybe not for too long. In Norrland it happens that you get to sit for a whole afternoon. That's probably a little much.

KT: Does the king have a favourite forest?

CG: Well... what is a favourite forest? Not so easy to answer. Maybe a tall pine forest on sandy ground with some heather and dry dry pine needles on a summer day. If it is a dry and warm and soft and it has a special scent. It is not a real production forest for a forest owner, but an experience forest. Like a church, a cathedral and a lovely atmosphere.

KT: Where do you find that forest then?

CG: That's a good question, but of course I won't tell you. You can search yourself. Often these are coastal locations.

KT: We have met once before, the king and I and then we discussed the Bark Beetle. I have understood that the king takes an interest in it.

CG: Yeah, not just me. We are many land and forest owners in Sweden who share that feeling. It has killed billions worth of forest. It is a nuisance. [...A long exposition on the harmful effects of the Bark Beetle has been excluded.]

KT: What does the king think about the climate crisis?

CG: That is a very difficult question that we are all now struggling with. I don't know how many seminars I've attended. Everything must be renewable. The forest is Sweden's most renewable resource. [...A long exposition about the circular society has been excluded.]

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KT: How much does Your Majesty control his own time?

CG: Normally it is the case that we get invitations to different events. As time permits, we also take our own initiatives. People are always eager to show what they have accomplished. You get to hear fantastic stories about everything.

KT: It sounds like the king is still curious?

CG: Sure! Every day is an experience. Sometimes the morning paper is pure shock!

KT: Are there aspects of the daily work that the King doesn't find so fun?

CG: Yes, there is. But of course I'm not talking about that. Perhaps long lectures on some subject that does not interest me. But I usually follow Queen Ingrid's advice: If you are bored you should listen more carefully, because there are always interesting aspects to everything.

KT: Yes, it feels like the king must be incredibly well-educated at this point.

CG: I don't know. I've certainly had the privilege of participating and learning a lot. No two days are alike.

KT: That sounds like a pretty fun job.

CG: Yes, it's a fantastic privilege in that particular part, to be able to take part in so much innovation; to visit a university and get almost "private tuition" on the latest. But it is not easy.

KT: I suppose learning Nanotechnology is about as complicated as learning French.

CG: It is. It is. You have to spend time on it.

KT: The problem with French is also that it is quite far from our language and then you hear it so rarely in everyday life.

CG: I can only agree. Think of the royal court of old. Back then it was nice to speak French. But I myself have given up on it. I was on a state visit to France in the 80s. I gave a long speech in Versailles, the very Mecca of France, but I will never do that again. I don't really know what I said then.

KT: We were a bit into what the king decides about his own time. I have thought about the fact that there are several residences. When was the last time the king slept over in Stockholm's castle.

CG: It was a long time ago. I have my old floor here in the castle. I grew up in the castle. Moved here when I was 4-5 years old. We stayed in the south wing. My mother, me and my four sisters. In a rather insanely boring floor. It was like a hotel with doors leading to a long corridor. My mother lived in a room that faced the National Museum, but in 1972 I moved to another part of the castle that faced the opera. On top of the library. And I still have that floor. Our first two children were born there. Madeleine was born on Drottningholm.

KT: But the king has been sleeping here ever since?

CG: Yes, a few times. But I'm here pretty much every day. I have my office downstairs.

TK: Does the king have to pack a bag when he changes residences, or is there a wardrobe in each castle?

CG: I perform my public duties at Stockholm Palace. I have a coat and jacket there and maybe a uniform. I receive the diplomats in uniform, the official meetings are in jackets and the big dinners in tailcoats.

TK: But the suitcase then? For example, if the king is going to Stenhammar.

CG: I have my country clothes there.

TK: As I understand it, the king has a certain interest in clothing.

CG: I don't want to say that. But I dress according to the circumstances. In the forest you have hunting clothes, wilderness clothes, etc. In the context of golf, golf clothes. It signals a group affiliation. How you behave is how you are treated. One must avoid being unkempt and dishevelled. It does not give a good impression.

TK: I was on the verge of walking here in a black suit when we first met. Then I spoke to a stylish friend who said that you should absolutely not do that. He guessed that the king didn't even own a black suit. How about that?

CG: Of course I have a black suit. I use it for funerals. But you are very elegant in your blue suit today.

TK: Thank you thank you. The same friend Filip also thought that I should wear the same suit both times, because the king would appreciate that. Now I didn't do that, but is it so that the king thinks that the clothes should last a long time.

CG: No, but if I can wear them for a long time, I will. Sometimes, for various reasons, they no longer fit. Then you have to accept that. I have old clothes lying around that I sometimes use.

TK: I ask because I read that Prince Charles has an old pair of shoes from 1971 that he still uses. So they turn 50 this year. Does the king have similar garments?

CG: I can imagine that. They are beautiful handmade shoes, and they actually last so long. At Stenhammar, I have a leather jacket that is probably so old. Yes actually older. It is from my school days in 1962.

TK: Next year it will be 50 years since Your Majesty became King and ascended the throne. When Olof Palme was prime minister. Can the king say anything about how Sweden has changed during this time?

GC: Both Sweden and the world have changed. Now I am of course thinking about the development for the better that has taken place. The general standard of living has increased in the world, although there are dire areas of overpopulation and poverty and and drought. And all is not well. But overall, it has actually gotten better. We must not forget that. And in Sweden, there has been a fantastically exciting development. [...A long exposition about the future Swedish export industry has been excluded.]

KT: Does the king see any areas of concern with Sweden's development?

CG: No, none tangible. But we are influenced by the outside world, so who knows? You hedge your bets. The pandemic is still not over. Who expected that? You always ignore unpleasant scenarios.

KT: Now we have talked about Sweden's development during these 48 years with you on the throne. How has the king himself evolved?

CG: I'm not the one to answer that. I am passed retirement age. I haven't stepped down. But due to the pandemic, this year has been the calmest ever. I have had time to think both forward and backward. I was very young when I took office. Only 27! I was always the youngest. Now it's just the opposite. I was advised by my grandfather to take everything with a pinch of salt. Nothing is forever. Neither the good, nor the bad.

KT: What does the king think of his successors? Is she ready for work?

CG: Crown Princess Victoria?

KT: Yes.

CG: When do you become ready for a job? I was 27. I passed with a prayer. She's 44. She should be better prepared. But as I said at the beginning, there are always new things coming. She takes her task seriously. It's not a job. It is a calling. It has been the same with me. You can compare us to a family business – a corporation or a family farm. History, tradition and responsibility are important to us. To pass something on. A memory or something more concrete. We are our own history. We are also Swedish history. We have a responsibility to live up to. We are apolitical, but we are a catalyst. We have influence on society, but remain who we are.

KT: But, has the king always enjoyed his work?

CG: I probably have. It is difficult to answer. It has been busy all the time. There are new situations, new tasks, new areas. You meet new people every day. And that means it never becomes stereotyped. There are always new questions and new answers.

KT: Now the king has touched on this. I think that many people with me find it fascinating that Your Majesty and your children are among the only, perhaps the only ones in our country, who have not been allowed to choose their profession. What does the king think about that?

CG: That's not how we think. It is rather that we have been given a task in this life, we have been brought up to it, we are proud of it, we take it very seriously, we try to carry on the family tradition, we are Swedish history. How we behave is not our private business.

KT: But meeting friends who could choose what they wanted in life? Has the king never been jealous of them?

CG: I've probably never thought along those lines. Being king is a calling. To carry on the history and tradition. We, I, are part of the culture that holds society together, that moves society forward. I often think about when the Soviet Union collapsed [in 1991] and the Baltic states re-emerged. The first thing they tackled was building up the culture, renovating old houses, cities, and in that way get their history back, which had literally been stolen by the communists. To build a society there must be a base. This base is society's historical heritage, its culture, and on that everything rests. If you destroy the base there is nothing left. It was so tangible right then. The Baltic states have since prospered and there is trust, but everything rests on culture.

KT: But I can imagine a flip side. If we go back to that scene, when you were like butterflies in a lock. Everyone always eyeing you and you always having to think on someone taking a picture or something. It must be extremely tiring, right?

CG: It's really hard. It is. It eats you. But I'm not alone in that situation. Everyone in a leading position, CEOs, politicians, etc. experience to the same thing. You never know what is coming. It's heavy. It is tiring. It's hard to explain. But I've noticed it, for example, when I have an incoming state visit by a president or someone. Then I go a notch behind to mark that he or she is the main character. I myself usually know all the people, institutions, etc. from

before. Everything is hunky dory. But being on the front lines when you don't know anything about the situation and everything you say, do or look at can go wrong...

KT: Are there places in the world where the king likes to travel to be anonymous?

CG: I guess places are the wrong way to put it. I retreat to some meadow in the forest. But not to exaggeration. I am not a hermit.

KT: I was going to ask Your Majesty how he refuelled. But then it is in the forest.

CG: Refuel my personal energy? Yes, maybe I do that. I don't know, I haven't really thought along those lines. I'm not particularly good at philosophy. It's nice to go for a walk or a boat trip. Variety is the spice of life. 25 years ago, some friends and I were hiking in Bhutan. But there was no philosophy then either. In the evenings, everyone was tired, frozen and wanted to sleep.

KT: The king will excuse me if I get annoying, but I think that this feeling of being allowed to be anyone, to be ignored or to be scolded for some parking error. Does it happens?

CG: Not very often. I have a story that is both exciting, calming and dramatic. It takes place on Gotska Sandön, which I often visit. It was many years ago. I went ashore at French Bay. It is a couple of kilometers wide. I ran a little and then rested. It was wonderful to be completely alone. But then some tourists came and asked if they could take pictures. I felt like a seal, whom they would photograph to show at home what they had seen and experienced. I answered them: No, not really. I wanted to be alone.

KT: I've been thinking about this thing of resting. What do the king's holidays usually look like?

CG: We take vacations when we can. In the summers, we usually spend a number of weeks at Öland, at Solliden, a wonderful place. I inherited it from Gustaf V. I have been there every summer since I was 5-6 years old.

KT: I don't know if it's too private, but the last time we met, the king also told me that there will be the occasional road trips. Or that the king likes to drive across Europe.

CG: I hope we get the opportunity to do that sometime again in the future. I think it's a lot of fun to drive. It is among the best things I know. Perhaps it's the freedom. I can steer where I want. Discovering Europe is amazing. In the beginning it was a straight track A to B. Now it is more zigzagging between sights: castles, castles, vineyards, views. There is so much to visit. I can no longer cope with lying on a beach, sunbathing, doing nothing. You just burn yourself and get skin cancer. Useless.

KT: I have a theory. The king thrives on the sea and behind the wheel. There he can drive as he wants. When you are king, with a very controlled everyday life, it's nice to feel that freedom.

CG: Well, that could be true. You are on your own.

KT: When it comes to cars, it's not just the king who likes them, does he have a theory about

why it's great to drive fast?

CG: No, not really. Some want to climb mountains, others want to jump with a parachute. I like cars. I can't give a good answer. As long as you have control, it's fun. For example, I have vertigo. This causes problems, because the finest hotel suite is always at the top. The hotel manager is always showing the view, and that's the worst thing I know. In such places I stick to the toilet. A safe and pleasant cubbyhole. But flying is fine.

KT: Has the king considered going to therapy for that?

CG: No, actually I haven't. But of course it's hard sometimes. For example, when you go skiing in the Alps, but I'm not particularly amused by that.

KT: Will there be any skiing nowadays?

CG: Not in the last year. But I will try to go there in the future.

KT: Isn't the king in very good shape?

CG: I have so I manage. You don't get any younger with age, and you have to accept that. I take it cautiously. I like to walk in the forest. But that's it. The worst is with the balance. You don't jump over ditches any more, because you can't.

KT: This podcast has a standing feature that is normally called Questions You Haven't Been Asked Before, but today I call it Questions Your Majesty Hasn't Been Asked before. And the questions are:

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KT: What song is the first the King remembers?

CG: Spontaneously, it's probably Mr. Bojangles. [Nitty Gritty Dirt Band; Jerry Jeff Walker; big hit c. 1971.] I "rediscovered" it a few years ago, found the record at someone's home. I hadn't heard it in years. It is quite old. I think it's fantastic. He himself was a great personality, a wonderful self-irony, a tap-dancer, a great mimic, and so his songs. I actually met him once, in Las Vegas, when he was singing this Mr. Bojangles song.

KT: Which sock to put on first?

CG: My Lord! I believe it's the right.

KT: Wrong! It's the left! How should a potato chip be flavoured?

CG: I have discovered that there are some that taste like truffles. Yummy! Truffles can now be found on Gotland. I have tried to grow them on Öland. No success yet though. But we have them in our garden in the park in secret places.

KT: Does the king have a truffle dog?

CG: No, but our gardener has a Labrador who sniffs them out.

KT: What's the best thing about the moon?

CG: That it exists, of course. Moonlight in the ski mountains is extremely cool. Moonlight + Northern lights is even cooler. Bright as day & everything sparkles. I've gone skiing with friends in the middle of night just to experience it fully. Absolutely magical.

KT: What is the best board game of all time?

CG: That was a long time ago. In the 60s we played a strange card game called Cucumber, a kind of poor man's bridge.

KT: But there was no trivial pursuit period?

CG: No. But I have played a lot of Canasta at Drottningholm with my grandfather. That was also in the 60s. Maybe I have been missing something.

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KT: Then we close this section of Questions Your Majesty Never Received, but I have two bonus questions left. Basically I managed not to address the King informally. But how many are at first name basis with the king?

CG: I don't really know. But it's probably my childhood friends from early school age. But most of my acquaintances simply call me the king. Instead of the first name. The address was important when I was young at the throne and had to emphasize the seriousness of it all.

KT: It remains to thank Your Majesty for all the time, and I want to take the opportunity to offer my birthday congratulations.

CG: Ugh. Do you have to turn me a year older again? The years pass quickly now a days. I hardly have time to notice them.

KT: But the king has no problem with ageing.

CG: You never know. Problems lurk in every corner.

KT: I forgot to ask how the birthday would be celebrated.

CG: The pandemic has put obstacles in the way. It will be like last year, a minimal birthday. No public celebration, but within the family.

KT: Does the king have a wish list?

CG: No. At my age, you don't usually have that. But if someone wants to help someone else, it will make me happy. Give to the city mission!