



FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH BIRGITTA MOSSBERG

Compiled by Hans Teke

ABOUT DAD

Birgitta: Now, great grandmother, I will ask you about the first recollection that you have from your childhood, or about any early recollection.

Anna: One of my first recollections is when I went with my dad into town [Jönköping] to take private lessons from one of my female teachers, so that I wouldn't have to go to school. I went with him and he left me at her place, where I spent some hours. And since my grandmother lived nearby, I was probably at her place for the rest of the day.



Father Salomon

Birgitta: How old could you have been?

Anna: Well, I was about six years old, I was very young. I recall that I sat in my father's office. He never worked in the store; he just handled the necessary office work. So I sat in his office waiting for him to go home. And one day he had forgotten about me and someone came running to pick me up [...] and the train was waiting for me.

Birgitta: You were very fond of your dad, weren't you?

Anna: Yes, I was fond of my dad and he was fond of me. I was the oldest [...]. I recall the last year of his life when we sat in the lounge downstairs, where he sat on a chair and I on a stool, and I read aloud from a book by Zacharias Topelius. He was so delighted by me being able to read!

Birgitta: It must have been very difficult for you when your father passed away?

Anna: Yes but I was so young, I didn't understand it all in the beginning... so much that changed right away. We lived on a big farm...

Birgitta: That was Österängen?

Anna: Yes, and there were a lot of animals, including some 100 cows and many horses. Children of the servants with whom we played and ducks and turkeys on a lake, plus a wonderful pond which cut through the whole garden. When Kerstin was only one and half years old she fell in it and nearly drowned. [...]

Yes about my father's death. He suffered from cirrhosis of the kidneys and went to both Kassel and Marienbad for treatment. They were gone for a couple of months, which was very difficult for mom since Kerstin wasn't quite a year old.

Birgitta: So they went to Germany and left you in Sweden?

Anna: She had to go with him, and his condition worsened. When he left he could sit by himself and walk, but when he came back he was confined to a wheelchair. [...] And in those days they couldn't handle this kind of illness... He sat in that wheelchair for half a year... I don't want to talk about his illness. [...]

ABOUT LOVE

Birgitta: How old were you when you met Helge?

Anna: I had my 16th birthday during the summer we met. It started with all the Wennbergs coming over to visit us; they lived on the one side of the lake and we lived on the other. And I went fishing with him... but then he got a bad mark in French, so Uncle Gustaf took care of him, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to continue his education [...] So he wasn't at home very much that summer, but we fell in love anyway. And then we were seeing each other all through the winter, as the boys and girls met at Storgatan [in Jönköping] and then went out for a walk.

Birgitta: You also met one another in the context of being family, since he was your first cousin.

Anna: Yes, we met in that context at Rosenlund where Uncle Gustaf lived.

Birgitta: Was he the only one for you? Didn't you ever fall in love with anyone else among all the nice boys?



Cousin Gunnar Serner

Anna: I had been in love with Sigge Bergh¹ since I was 10 years old, but fortunately it had stopped by then. I was unhappily in love with him.

Birgitta: There were more boys who were in love with you. [...] I know from photos that you were very pretty.

Anna: Maybe I was, I didn't think so myself. [...]

The same summer that Helge and I fell in love, Frank Heller, i.e. Gunnar Serner² lived with us at Björkenäs. And he was more demanding than Helge.

¹ Sigge Bergh (1886-1951), first cousin on Lydia's side, later on a journalist working for Dagens Nyheter.

² Gunnar Serner (1886-1947), first cousin on Salomon's side. Using the pseudonym Frank Heller he was, during the first part of the 20th century, Sweden's most successful writer of adventure novels.

When we were out on a walk, we sat down on a stone talking, and he wanted to kiss me! “No” I said, “I don’t want to kiss you [...] I’m in love with someone else, so I don’t want to kiss you. And I wouldn’t do it anyway, because I would not have done it until I met someone that I like.”

But we had a very good time together and he had a marvelous memory! So in the evenings when we sat upstairs in Björkenäs and talked before we parted, he could recite any poem by Fröding by heart. [...]

ABOUT GRETA AND HER CHILDREN

Anna: Ever since I was young I have thought that one should try to do something for other human beings, not just looking after oneself. I have always believed that, but it hasn’t always been easy. [...] I’ve tried to take care of my nieces and nephews.



The twins Chris and Else, born 1924

Birgitta: Yes, do tell us about that, I think it so fantastic that you took care of all those children who came here. It was Greta’s children first.

Anna: My sister Greta got married and lived in Hot Springs, US. First she had a boy, then she had a girl, and then she had twins. And in those days they didn’t go to hospital when they gave birth; they stayed at home. She didn’t have any trouble when she gave birth to her eldest children, but when the twins were born she bled to death. Since there wasn’t anyone around who had the knowledge to help her, she died and left all her children without a mother. And after a while they got a stepmother who gave them quite a lot of trouble.

And their guardian [after their father had died as well] sent me a letter and asked me if I wanted to take care of them. The oldest girl was Margaret... and I wanted to do that. [...] So she came to Sweden [1933]. And I remember that I telegraphed to her stepmother who wanted to go with her, to tell her that she didn’t have to come. But she came anyway, because she [her stepmother] had the chance to travel by a first class ticket and amuse herself all the way.

And I took care of Margaret, who was with me in the summer [...] and she was lively and fun and she really enjoyed the freedom which she had never had with her stepmother [...]

Birgitta: You were very delighted by her?

Anna: Very. She was very nice and fun and we had a great time with her. Her cousins had a great time with her too. [...]

Then [...] two of her siblings came. They had been through a horrible time with their stepmother and they had been to court telling about what their stepmother had done to them. They had a guardian taking care of their capital, who wrote to me and asked me if I could take care of them [...] and that worked out well.

Birgitta: This was Else and Christian. They were teenagers as well when they came?

Anna: Yes, they were 13. They were very fond of each other but they fought a lot. He was very violent. And he was so thirsting for affection that he was hanging around my neck most of the time. And he was so jealous when we were visiting friends.

Birgitta: Maybe he was like a *small* child?

Anna: Just like a small child. He needed someone to love him all the time,

Birgitta: And Else?

Anna: Else was stronger. She was much stronger than him. All that time she had taken care of him although she was as badly treated by the stepmother as he was [...]

Birgitta: Maybe they lived with you for six or seven years?

Anna: Yes, it was during all their school years.

ABOUT KERSTIN AND HER CHILDREN

Birgitta: And then another group of siblings arrived, namely your sister Kerstin and three of her children. She had immigrated to America as well and had a difficult time [financially]. [...] She had four children and Louise, the eldest, had stayed in America with her father [...]. And Sylvia wasn't well because of the trouble they had gone through.

Anna: Sylvia was very neurotic; she had been through several accidents, been hit on the road resulting in a concussion... I took her to Dr Widfeldt. She always shouted at me: "Are you mad at me Auntie Anna, are you mad at me Auntie Anna?" I thought that was a little strange so I got some sedative medicine for her.

Birgitta: Had they been mean to her, or did they just not have the strength to care about her?

Anna: Probably they didn't. I think Kerstin mostly cared for Dick. [...]

Birgitta: He was the one who managed the best when he grew up, wasn't he?

Anna: Yes he was. He went back to the US when he was five [should be: Canada when he was 15].



Kerstin, Dick and Ted, 1938.

Birgitta: I know that Sylvia became mentally ill when she grew up.

Anna: She became mentally ill as she already was in Sweden. She got some medicine but she said to me "I gave it away, because I didn't care to take it". She was very troublesome and talked behind my back... I sewed a beautiful dress for her and still she went to school in old rags... she wasn't healthy.³

³ Later in life Sylvia was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Birgitta: But Ted and Dick were very delighted by you, weren't they? But they were still difficult to deal with?

Anna: They were very difficult to deal with. We did something stupid with Ted, which wasn't so good... They lived in our cottage in the summer [by Vidöstern]. He was a very good friend of the boy on the neighboring farm, so he asked us if he could stay and work there. And he did. But she [the wife at the farm] did not understand that he couldn't take care of himself, she didn't take care of his clothes or anything, just cut him adrift, which made him run away. And he walked all the way to Ljungby [...]

Birgitta: Mom said that they were unrestrained, that they could take an object and then just break it. They had, so to say, no feeling for objects.

Anna: No [...] We had picked them up from the boat. Kerstin had a blood poisoning and she telegraphed us that she was very ill. Stina and I went there to pick her [and her children] up, and it was really difficult because no one was allowed to go on board. But I was stubborn! I said that "she has been ill and she cannot take care of herself". And she just sat there and she hadn't packed a single thing. So we just had to pack everything very quickly and then take them ashore.⁴

After that we went to a place where we could have something to eat. They didn't like it and they didn't eat a bit. And when we went home they made a terrible noise at the train. It was awful! They had absolutely no manners.

And the first thing that Dick did, when he came in to the house, was to break my fine antique... [unclear what she says]. But that's the way they were. I couldn't have a drawer open, had to lock every cupboard, every drawer, I had to protect all my property. It was a tough time in the beginning. I said to Helge: "It is really hell to have them around". But somehow it worked out.

Birgitta: So they lived at your place, but later they also lived by themselves?

Anna: Yes [...] I rented an apartment in Värnamo for her. [...]

Birgitta: Kerstin led a very tragic life, didn't she? Mom said that she was so extraordinary pretty when she was young, and all the boys were so fond of her.

Anna: Yes, she led a terribly tragic life. It was a young jurist student who fell in love with her, and she became pregnant while she was still under-age. He sent her to Stockholm where she went through an abortion, by a doctor who could take care of things like that [...]

Birgitta: She also had a child that she gave away for adoption.⁵

Anna: Yes [...] during the last year in school [...] It was Carnival time in Lund and in the Carnival revelry I guess she drank a little too much, was out with a boy and became pregnant. [...] But I had an uncle who was a child welfare officer. He found an outstanding foster home for the boy in Eksjö. [...] But the father paid support for the boy until he was 16, I recall.

⁴ Kerstin had a blood poisoning in a finger, which she had to have amputated.

⁵ The boy, whose name was Torsten, was placed in a foster home (Ljungdahls in Eksjö) but was never adopted.

We had a lot of conversations and he [the boy] was very nice, and I called and asked about him... It was in 1953, the same year that Helge died, and I was just going to invite the boy to visit us, but then all the other things happened and I didn't have the strength... So I was very happy when he called and we could talk, and I got to know how he had managed in life. He had become a master builder and had led a good life [...] had four children.⁶



Kerstin's son Torsten

Birgitta: And then Kerstin moved to the US, where she met Reginald Ring, who had a difficult time keeping a job, and they went through tough times together. So this was the period of time before she came back with her children, three of whom you took care of.

Anna: Yes. [...] Ted and Dick were very musical, maybe also Sylvia. Dick [...] could whistle parts of any opera that he wanted to – but never when he knew that anyone was listening!

ABOUT THE TIME AT ROSENLUND

Birgitta: I was going to ask you Anna, to tell us a little bit about Gustaf Lindman's Rosenlund. You came there directly after school and I guess you didn't really feel comfortable there.

Anna: First year after school I was in Blekinge. [...] And when I was there my aunt got me a



Vice district judge Gustaf Lindman
(1866-1935)

place in Germany because I wanted to learn how to speak German. And when I came back in the autumn, my mother and we children were at a place called Björkenäs, nearby Ören. And one day my uncle, who was the guardian of the whole family, came to us. [...] And he asked me what I was planning to do. So I told him that my aunt had gotten me a place in Germany, and that I would like to learn how to speak German. "No", he said, "I'm your guardian; you are not allowed to go there".

I was very sad of course [...] but I had to do as he said. I was only 17. And then nothing more was said about that. By then we lived in Jönköping in the winter and my sisters went to school there. [...] One day my uncle Gustaf calls and says: "You can come and live at Rosenlund for 14 days." It was in the autumn, all the fruit was mellow, and I thought it was fun so I went there.

He didn't tell us that he would send his cabbie and get my things, so my mother sent me with a person who carried my carpetbag. My uncle sat on the veranda at Rosenlund and when he

⁶ In all he had six children with his wife Ingrid.

saw me he became angry and said: “This is silly! I have people here who can get your things...” [...] This made me become a little afraid of him. [...]

My uncle was a man of great authority. He had many responsibilities in Jönköping, he was a jurist but he had quit working at the Court of Appeal. He was a chairman of the Liquor Company and of the Savings Bank, among other things. He was involved in many things and was friends with a lot of powerful people. [...]

He lived as a single man in this large house at Rosenlund, at the start my grandmother occupied half of it [...] it was a very big house. And he had a sister living there who was sick with epilepsy. And that was my doom. She had a nurse who gave me a lot of pleasure, since the nurses were very nice and friendly and kept me company. When I came to Rosenlund, Uncle Gustaf got me a teacher who taught me stenography. He wanted me to become his secretary which I also did. [...]

In the beginning everything went well, and it did for almost a year. And probably it would have kept going well if it hadn't happened to me... I thought my aunt's illness was frightful. She had severe epileptic attacks; I had to go away because I felt bad seeing it. My uncle wanted me to take care of the chickens; I had chickens in an incubator and also a hen that incubated. One day it was a chicken whose beak was broken. And I ran out in the kitchen and said: “This is awful! What shall I do?” I fainted, and when I woke up I screamed: “Oh! I have gotten aunt Elin's decease!” [...]



Rosenlund's manor house

Later I was poisoned by the arsenic contained in the wallpapers in my room. This made me feel dizzy; I had a bad depression among other things. And I thought it was strange and wondered why this was happening [...]. This made me become anxious, I had an obsession that I was becoming epileptic. This obsession destroyed my life.

Birgitta: We talked about that, you must have felt lonely at Rosenlund, as you were so young when you were there.

Anna: You see, I had friends in Jönköping, but there was no trolley going out all the way. And I wasn't allowed to walk home alone from town as my uncle was so careful with me. And because of this I never got to meet anyone. [...] My uncle was very nice to me, but I had such a respect for him that time... I thought he was being unfair when I came as he was brusque.

Birgitta: For how long were you at Rosenlund?

Anna: I came there in 1907. [...] But I was at a school of domestic science one winter, namely the Fleuri school near Linköping. But I didn't feel well there either. I acquired two different obsessions from the depression there... and they stuck with me. I either suffered from the one or the other. Otherwise I had a really good time there [...] made many friends with whom I kept in touch [...].

ABOUT SKEDA AND HELGE

As early as 1911, when Helge and I were engaged, he worked for the district surveyor in Värnamo. And then he drove by Skeda many times and fell in love with this place, because of its beauty. And when he was near the age for retirement, he saw some of the old men who wandered around on the streets in Värnamo looking at shop fronts... and he said: "That will never be my life". He loved nature and then Skeda, which he had been in love with for a long time, was for sale [...]. And of course he bought it as soon as he could. By then we had inherited money from my uncle, so we sold the house in Värnamo and moved to Skeda [after using it as a summer house for some years].

Birgitta: Helge was happy but maybe you weren't that happy to leave town.

Anna: No, I didn't find it that nice to move here. The first year we had a tenant who was outstanding, nice and helpful. [...] But that was only for a year as after that they moved. And then we had difficulties with the tenants and that was always troublesome. [...]

Birgitta: But when you were young and fell in love with Helge, do you remember what made you more interested in him than in all the other cousins that chased you?

Anna: I can't tell. He had some charisma; I fell in love with him.



Birgitta: Were you two as much in love during all of your life? Maybe that's a too personal question?

Anna: Well... I was very dependent on him. I was totally lost when he died. I couldn't take care of myself but I had to learn how to do it. [...] And now I can't take care of myself either...

Birgitta: Isn't that understandable when you are 97 years old?

Anna: Yes [...].

