



## FROM "MY GRANDMOTHER, LYDIA LINDMAN, nee Andrén, 1860-1936"

By Gösta Wennberg

### Part 2

#### IN LUND

*November 29, 1909.* It is now many years since I wrote in this little book. I have now moved with my children to Lund, for them to continue their studies here. [...] The past years have not been very joyful or encouraging. I feel like an overworked horse that can still stumble along a few more years before collapsing. One does not get carried by someone's hands; one gets whipped forwards along a bumpy way. -

Down here I have a nice and pleasant home with my girls, the Ek boys<sup>1</sup> and Signe Wennberg<sup>2</sup>. Greta is now 17 years old and has begun her first term at the Institute for Gymnastics. Karin is 16 years old and preparing herself for the training college next year. Kerstin is 14 years old and in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the Rönström school where she is doing really well. It was good for her to finish the school in Jönköping. - Anna helps Gustaf L<sup>3</sup> at his office but is visiting us right now. She and Gustaf surprised us by coming Saturday night, which was very pleasant. G. is very nice and helpful and gives strong support, which you really need sometimes.



Daughter Kerstin

*Greta's stubborn mind gives me a lot of concerns. Hope it will weaken some time.*

*Aug. 20, 1911 [...]* The youngest child now worries me the most. Oh this relationship with Hel-lius (Hellichius was his name. Kerstin is now 16 years old!) I know nothing about this, but I can see that she is sometimes so unhappy, crying, so concerned. They must be separated this winter, otherwise it will not work --

*Oct. 13, 1911.* Now things have worked out as I wanted to with Kerstin and her friend. He comes here visiting her and they don't go out in the evenings. He is so nice and sweet and I think that he is very much attached to Kerstin. Could she only appreciate having him loving her and take care of his love. Sometimes I am so worried about Kerstin - (In the margin of this page is written, August 4, 1933: "How could I be so blind!")

*-- My heart is filled with anxiety about my children who are going in self-chosen bad directions ways. Härved (Hellichius) is a fine young man of firm character, already influencing my girl in a good way. - (In the margin, September 28, 1931: "How could I be so blind! God help us!")*

<sup>1</sup> The Ek boys were Lydia's nephews.

<sup>2</sup> Signe Wennberg (1888-1977) was a sister of Helge Wennberg and later on principal of the Higher Elementary School for girls in Helsingborg.

<sup>3</sup> Gustaf Lindman, Salomon's brother.

From mom's stories we know that Hellichius unscrupulously made Kerstin pregnant, which resulted in an abortion.

*Aug 14, 1913 at Rosenlund today my oldest daughter Anna celebrated her wedding to Helge Wennberg. All in the family were invited and it was really pleasant, I cannot say anything else. But it could have been different. Ever since the girls grew up they have gone their own ways; I am now so far away from them. I walk alone heading the end of the journey. What I do, I do because I have to, for not starving to death. I really have to work for this salary. Nothing can make me feel glad. The children I love lead lives, which are full of in cheating and deception. Might be that they don't lie to their friends but for sure they lie to me.*

*September 21, 1913. Today I had a telegram from Greta and Christian, telling me that their wedding will take place at Wednesday the 24. - I wish them happiness. Financially she will be doing well in every way.*

By this time grandma begins her job as matron of Thomander's students hostel in Lund. About this mom has told us that there often were conflicts between grandma and the students, and that this was not really a good choice of work for such a quick-tempered person.

I have an anecdote about this. 1951-52 I had my first employment as a teacher at the



elementary school in Kristianstad. At this place I had a colleague, a senior Master of religion named Gustav Olavi, a very nice and fine man who was close to retirement. He told me that he had lived at Thomander's and I asked him: "Was this during the time of Mrs. Lindman?" "Yes it was. "So how was she?" I asked him. "A real shrew" he said. I waited a second and said: "She was my grandmother". Poor Olavi felt really embarrassed, until I added: "But she was!" - That was a mean thing to do!

Thomander's student's hostel

BUT. The following day he came with a book, a volume of a journal called "From the research of our time", which had belonged to my grandfather (Salomon); Olavi had "borrowed" it but never given it back. Now I got it. According to mom, the student's were stealing quite a lot from grandma's bookshelf. Grandpa was very interested in popular science, and this journal he had annually bound [...]

In a jubilee publication called "Johan Henrik Thomander's Students Hostel 1895 - 1945" which can be found in the university library in Uppsala, a former student living at the hostel, Yngve Plym Forshell, has written about his memories from this place:

(It is important to have in mind that there was a world war going on, with a shortage of food, and that being a matron couldn't have been easy.)

*Part of the complaining (about the food) was addressed to the matron Mrs. Lindman, who was disrespectfully called "The Girl". She was not really able to cope with the lack of material resources, and despite her charm and social competence she lacked something very important*

*in dealing with a group of students: an understanding and indulgent sense of humor. Dealing with our matron, I am sorry to say, we often didn't follow gentlemen's agreement. In other words, both parties were at fault, and it is for certain that this obvious division was not advancing the fundamental ideas and values of the hostel.*

Another chronicle tells us about the farewell dinner for Mrs. Lindman, during which the speakers showed their appreciation, which seemed to please her.

Poor grandma! Mom tells us about her bad temper and lack of humor, in describing the emancipation years of the girls, as she had constant conflict at home with Greta and Kerstin.

*Lund, April 10, 1921. I haven't written in this book for a long time. July 7, 1920, Kerstin had her wedding in Chicago with her Reginald (Ring). They now live in New York where Reg. Ring is employed at an office, earning 53 dollars per week; that is approximately 270 SEK. (According to my table of inflation, this is approximately 3700 SEK or 15000 SEK per month.)*

*Reg. has written several nice letters in which he expresses his delight with Kerstin. "She is a wonderful little wife". I thank God who has made life so safe for my thoughtless little girl. She is now 25 years old and before she got married, she had three years of training to be a nurse; she has also worked at this job for a year.*



Daughter Greta

#### ABOUT GRETA (GRANDMA NOW LIVES IN VÄRNAMO)

*Värnamo, February 24, 1924. Today I received the sudden and devastating news that Greta died January 17,<sup>4</sup> after giving birth to twins. Two hours after delivery everything was over. She leaves, in loss and despair, her husband and the four children Robert, 10 years old, Margaret, 5 years old, and the little twins Chris and Elsie.*

In Värnamo, for some years, grandma shared an apartment with her sister Ellen. 1929 she moved to Karlshamn, where she shared apartment with her daughter Karin (my aunt), who was employed at the girls school in this town.<sup>5</sup> Grandma has now returned to the area where she lived as a child - Asarum is very close to Karlshamn.

#### IN KARLSHAMN

*[...] January 30, 1931 - Today was a really sad day. I'm putting the documents in my big storage bin in order and I found, among other things, my correspondence from 32 years ago. What letters! I also found letters from friends and from my husband. All are dead, disappeared, gone! I almost feel like a relic.*

<sup>4</sup> The day for Greta's death is said to be January 17. Still the official birth date for the twins was January 15. One of the dates must, in other words, be wrong.

<sup>5</sup> Karin shared an apartment with her mother until 1935 when she had her employment in Ljungby.

*[...] January 12, 1932 -- God – has taken Christian An.<sup>6</sup> away from me. My best, beloved, loved more than a son! Bobby sent a telegram December 19<sub>2</sub> - How will life be for the children who neither have a father nor a mother?<sup>9</sup> - I mourn him more than any other friend. He was so sweet, so tactful, so generous. How will everything turn out?<sup>9</sup> Karin is nice but a little difficult. I shouldn't be a burden to her. --*

*Moreover I am quite lonely. Everyone sticks together and I have nothing to say. When I think about H. Wennberg's funny peculiar religion, I must tremble but also wonder. What do these people believe in?<sup>9</sup> They believe in themselves, the poor creatures. - And so one sits there, feeling 100 years old while still having faith in the wonderful childhood preaching about Jesus Christ, saviour of the world!*

*Febr. 15, 1932 - The will of my dear Son in law in America has assured me 20 dollars per month as long as I live.*

H. Wennberg mentioned earlier was my dad who was totally irreligious. Even though he was a nice person, he had an insensitive and inconsiderate way of joking, which also was the case in his relation to Ann-Marie, my mother in law. In the same way, he would make critical comments to sensitive people.

*Aug. 8, 1932 - It was a long time ago since it felt so wonderful being with the children, as it did this week by Vidöstern [a lake outside Värnamo]. Little Anna is so sweet and Helge! - I really didn't recognize him. Gösta is the sweetest child, the most dashing boy I know. We slept in Karin's cottage and I asked him to turn to the wall while I did my toilet. Of course he did so, while talking so nicely to his grandma.*

This was in our summerhome in Östrahult (Åminne bruk), 6 kilometers from Värnamo. [...] Aunt Kerstin spent one summer there [in the 40's] while we lived at Skeda. It was very lonely and sad for her there; according to mom she made an attempt of suicide. Because of the war and the travel restrictions, she couldn't return to Canada and Reg. even though he had gotten back on his feet.

In 1933, as we now, the Nazis with Hitler came into power in Germany. About this grandma makes a comment:

*May 27, 1933. The events in Germany are grand and I am a great admirer of this Hitler. In his articles in Svenska Dagbladet [the daily newspaper], Böök seems also very impressed by Hitler. He does not at all seem ambitious for power or people's support; he just uses his means for a noble end. He is really intent on what he is doing, and when one reads what Böök writes about him, one gets the impression of a fair, religious and energetic man, which is just what Germany need right now. And Sweden. What will happen to us with this easy-going Bolshevik-government, which doesn't spoil the workers but their trade unions. - Even an ignorant person as I can see that poor Sweden is facing a hard time. Where is our Hitler?<sup>9</sup>*

Gosh, what a bad prediction and how wrong she was in her judgment about Hitler! Poor grandma having such a poor insight and lack of ability to judge peoples' characters. [...]

During the summer of 1933, Margaret Andersen<sup>7</sup> comes to Sweden, followed by her stepmother Mildred.

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<sup>6</sup> Christian Andersen was Greta's widower, remarried to Mildred.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret was Greta's second child.

Margaret (my beloved cousin Andy) was going to have her education here, living with us for a start. She came like a breeze with her jazz records, funny American songs (which still amuse me) and a cheerful temperament.

Mildred, who was by this time a widow of Christian Andersen, the hotel manager of Hot Springs [later Chicago] was a difficult and demanding stepmother. Else should write down the story of her. - Else and Chris came to us in 1937. Margaret was 15 years old when she arrived, the twins were 13.



Granddaughter Margaret

*August 2, 1933. Been three weeks Anna's Vidöstern place. Margaret Andersen came as was agreed on. But how peculiar! She didn't show a bit of joy meeting us. She seems cold and reserved, just like Greta but so unlike Christian.*

Margaret comes to a group of relatives that she doesn't know at all, with the Atlantic Ocean separating her from her siblings, followed by a mean stepmother (who was part of the reason for her coming to us). - Here grandma's lack of reading people is clearly revealed. [...]



Grandson Dick

*January 10, 1936. - Kerstin came to us in November (1935) with three children. She is impoverished. They live with Anna and Helge. Kerstin is so nice and sweet but the children are very spoiled. My poor girl has been treated brutally and I'm afraid that her husband hasn't been noble to her. - Kerstin is apathetic and very weak; still she is quite like she used to, sweet and pleasant. - It was so fun having her and Dickie here before Christmas. The boy is so adorably cute and nice too.*

Grandma's impressions here equate to mine. Aunt Kerstin was a person whom you spontaneously liked. Her children were spoiled but not very difficult to deal with. The weakest of them was Sylvia; she was very, very anxious. "Are you mad at me?" she kept saying all the time.

*January 25, 1936. Woke up early in contemplative mood, felt concerned and discouraged, thought about Kerstin and her children, everything seemed so dark. How can Anna with all her cares still cope? So I put on my radio and heard Sagner singing "Day by day and with each passing moment". - God can make everything well. He is mighty and our Father. - Leave everything in his care.*

This is grandma's last note. Later in 1936 she was found dead from heart failure in her apartment in Karlshamn. She was 76 years old.

The picture of grandma is not completed unless one emphasizes her deep religiousness, which seemed not at all superficial. It is very real and never questioned. In her diaries there are certain days when she only dealt with religion. In a passage she talks about a sermon that she has heard in Karlshamn during the past years - and says that the same theme was used by clergyman so-and-so in Lund many years earlier. This made a great impression on her. [...]

I've been giving grandma's religious life, which is so alien to me, a lot of thought. The Christian faith she expresses in her diaries is not a judgmental or rough one; to me it deals with the essence of our shortcomings, and what the sacrificing death of Jesus really means to a Christian. In her diaries she never talks about rules of ethics or punishment. Her faith gives her comfort, and helps her to understand and accept the many difficulties of her life, and her own imperfections, of which she was well aware.



Still it seems like she surrounded herself by a fine-meshed set of rules, which she never questioned. These were a function of the environment in which she lived during her childhood. To her they seem natural.

And one might wonder if her lack of reading people totally stems from her personality, or if it might be caused partly by her parent's religious life, which they never questioned, and the ecclesiastic way by which she was brought up. The Lindman home and Salomon were just as religious [...].

Still her daughters grew up in the same environment and came to be so entirely different. Mom's diaries do not at all have this religious theme running through them. Could it be a change in society's way of thinking and reacting that is being reflected?

