



FROM "ABOUT DAD"

By Gösta Wennberg

Essay 1

It is strange that you can live such a long time with a person who you are in fact a part of, and still don't know anything of what happened inside of him when he was alive. Of course I know a lot about his habits, his opinions, his tiredness, his bad moods which were likely caused by feeling tired. Perhaps he was disposed towards melancholia, which he did not realize. I still know nothing about his thought processes or how he experienced the surrounding world.

The gap between us was made so much deeper because my father was a person who lacked awareness in many ways and one who did not reflect on matters. I have considered my situation ever since I was a child, been aware of myself and my situation, and been aware of and analyzed other people.

But he, who otherwise was a rational and clear-thinking man, was unaware about his own problems in these regards. And he was very insensitive about the delicate relations between human beings. He did not understand people having a different make-up at all. By the time he could accept my interests because I took them seriously, but he could not understand them. Great parts of intellectual life were closed to him. What the artist is trying to reach beyond the very picture of the painting (to him art was just representation) or what the poet is trying to convey, that was terra incognita¹ to him.



Yet he had a quick and alert perception of nature, an always inquiring, critical and tireless passion to learn. Surely he would have partly understood author Harry Martinson. But he would never have understood what Eyvind Johnson has written about hunting: "and experience the limbs that took the shock and were torn apart (it could be wings that tried to fly but was unable to) - and the scream, that maybe wasn't really a scream but a squeak, where death penetrates life..."

Helge with his hunting partners.

Maybe he was right in his spontaneous views, but his stubborn convictions which led him to appear supercilious about the opinions of others, were painful to those people. This attitude helped to give me a lack of self esteem and it took me many years to partially get over this feeling. That lack of sensitivity caused him to fail to understand that people who have diametrically opposite values in life were needed and were just as important. He felt safe within this limitation, causing him to come across as supercilious and a bit of a bully. As he was a rational, fair and nice man he never became a tyrant; but as mom and I were abnormally sensitive the effects of it were yet disastrous.

¹ Latin term for *unknown land*.

That feeling of being far apart on important issues was almost gone at the time just before his death. But the feeling of estrangement was as strong, maybe stronger. That didn't at all exclude a feeling of solidarity and tenderness, quite the opposite. But I knew that we could never meet in essential areas of life, just in the less essential. The areas of life that I consider important and rather would have liked to talk about I could only touch on. And nature, that we really had in common - that is something ambivalent in my life. Maybe I acquired my interest in nature totally from him, both by heritage and influence. I have devoted my life to that study. But I have always had other interests, and they have absorbed me much more, when I have entered them deeply, felt them touching the very soul of my personality. When I have been drawing, writing, thinking, I have felt alive. And I have always had a bad conscience for not entering deeply into science, for not putting my heart and soul into botanic and zoological studies as my friends do, for not being out watching nature as often and purposeful as I should. [...]

What's left is that when he was dead I really didn't know anything about him. What life was for him, what he thought was making it worth living, whether he was happy or unhappy, that's inaccessible. There was and remains a gap between my father and me.