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Dear little Auntie and the cousins!

An 1948 letter from Sweden tells about daily life there

SUBMITTED BY JULIANNA JANSSEN

*Rosinge, Sweden¹
7 April, 1948*

First I want to tell you that my conscience is bothering me that I have not written before, but now I wish to thank you so heartfelt for everything that was in that welcome box you sent me for Christmas. It arrived on the last day of January, so sometimes it takes a long time (to get here). I hope you are all well. We are in health, as well as is Father. Well, I feel sick sometimes, but that is just my migraine, it passes in one or two days.

Oh how good that coffee tasted, it arrived just in time, I have celebrated my 40th birthday with relatives and friends, and I served them food and coffee from America; I saved the lump sugar for this occasion. My husband gave me a nice wristwatch, my sister in Torshälla and her children gave me a dozen toilet towels, and other relatives and friends gave me money and flowers. I don't need to tell you my wish that you could all have come. It is very strange to have just one aunt and she is so far away that it is too expensive to see each other. Don't you have a photo of yourself, Auntie, taken in a close-up? I wish to see your eyes and your features.

Today we have very bleak weather, there is both snow and rain, but during the last days of March we almost had summer, one could sit outside and soak up the sunshine. But the weather in April can be very capricious. Soon it is time to sow and plant; I have just re-planted my friends the (potted) plants in fresh dirt. I have an amaryllis that was in bloom right about on Easter, with giant red flower-cups. Just now I have

a passion flower (*Hoya carnosa* is its Latin name) that has buds, I have counted up to 21 bunches. You probably also have nice flowers, Auntie. What was the name of the flowers that you sent me seeds from?

Yesterday I had a letter from Frida, a very sweet and interesting letter. I only have some trouble sometimes in understanding the letters, probably depending on my not knowing the language, she probably knows a lot of Swedish from the club where she is a member. I have read that much is done in the U.S.A. to keep up the Swedishness, so if one of my cousins will become rich in the future and come over here they will probably do well with the language. But they might become disappointed with Sweden, there might be too many beautiful stories told about our old country. But how exciting it would be to see the famous rush that only exists in the U.S.A. Rush hour I think exists everywhere, lots of time is lost in standing in line for groceries. If a farmer comes to market with fresh eggs and good potatoes, then a lot of people gather; well it is not fun to be a housewife many times.

Right now I am craving a nice cup of coffee, but I don't have a bean in my can, will not get any more until April 12th; I had the last drop the day before yesterday². But I do have an empty can from the U.S.A., soon I will sniff in that. You may now be able to smile a little smile [when you read this]. My sister Anna's coffee lasts well, but she has six [ration] cards to buy with.

But I should not complain, it can



"Auntie Anna" Anna Elida Charlotta Sundberg (b. 1870 in Stockholm), married to Axel Björkman.

get worse, it doesn't look too good when reading the news. The smoke from one war doesn't disperse before they talk about another one. Marta once wrote about the Russians, and they have not become better; Stalin and Hitler might be related or were so. If all people were like brothers and sisters, I might add good ones.

Well, time is passing and we will soon be into May, and you will have your birthday again, Auntie, and I am sending my heartfelt congratulations, and I hope you will be keeping well, Auntie, for many years still, and

be able to write your letters to me.

[Upside down: Greet Frida when she comes home now, that the book has arrived, and it is just us that have not written.]

Anna seems to have some photo of herself and her family that she would give you, Auntie. Perhaps she has already sent it, I do not know. The pictures I am sending today were taken last summer when we had picked some lilies-of-the-valley. My sister and brother-in-law in Torshälla have a summer cottage, a ½ hour sea voyage by motor boat away. There on the little islands there are many lilies-of-the-valley; we often stay with them during the summer and spend our weekends there.

Right now Anita comes home; she is out in all kinds of weather, she wants to be outside at all times. I have to tell you that she has just learnt to ride a bike, she reads and writes and counts, and she is best at mental arithmetic. She is always active, she will be 7 years on 25th April, a little lass with spirit. On Sundays they go to Sunday School in Brotsta, but there are not many children there, sadly. The teacher is very sweet. They get little pictures of Jesus to paste in a book. I am writing on childish paper today, but

had nothing else at home, and it is best to write when one feels like doing it. I end with the dearest greetings from all of us to you.

Elsa

Endnotes:

- 1) Rosinge is probably the house where Elsa and her family lived, in the Eskilstuna area in Södermanland province. The envelope of this letter is missing and the date is based on Elsa's story about her 40th birthday.
- 2) Coffee was rationed in Sweden during World War II, and evidently still in 1948.

Who were these people?

This story starts with the dyer (*färgare*) Ludvig Fredrik Sundberg, born 1839 May 1 in Kalmar city, and who moved to Stockholm in the 1860s, where he worked in his craft. He married 1866 Oct. 9 in Riala, north of Stockholm, to the servant woman (*tjänarinna*) Maria Charlotta Lindgren, born 1833 Nov. 23 in Filipstad, and now working at Ekeby in Riala. The Sundberg family lived for some years in the Hedvig Eleonora parish in Stockholm, and then moved in 1877 to Katarina parish, also in

Stockholm, where his wife died in 1880 Aug. 3 of pneumonia.

Their children were:

d. *Emma* Hedvig Lovisa, b. 1867 Jul 23 in Hedvig Eleonora, Stockholm.

d. *Anna* Elida Charlotta, b. 1870 May 11 in the same parish.

s. *Herman Fredrik*, b. 1878 Jan. 9 in Katarina, Stockholm, died there 1878 Jul. 27 of some stomach illness.

After the death of his wife Ludvig Fredrik moved to Brännkyrka parish, just south of Stockholm, where he died on 1909 Jan. 1.

Emma's life

Daughter *Emma* became a foster child in the Herman Gustaf Björkman family, where the father was born 1855 Jul. 30 in Filipstad, possibly a relative of Emma's mother. In 1883, at age 16, she started to work as a *piga* in Stockholm. In 1885 she moved to Kjula parish in Södermanland, where she lived for many years. She died 1947 Feb. 13 in Kloster, Eskilstuna.

During her time in Kjula she gave birth to two children out of wedlock with no known father. Then in 1896 she became the housekeeper to the



This picture is from the Ersta orphanage, probably in the late 1800s. The deaconesses are teaching sewing to the girls.

The orphanage was founded in the 1860s and by 1884 they had about 30 children, which they regarded as too many. They thought about 20 would be enough to give the children a family feeling.

The orphanage closed in 1950.

farm overseer (*rättare*) Axel Karlsson, born 1872 Sep. 14 in Kjöla, who had lost his wife in 1896. Axel died 1951 Feb. 12 in Kloster, Eskilstuna. Emma and Axel started a relation quite soon, but never married. They had six children, and one of them was the letter-writer, *Elsa*, who was born 1908 Feb. 13 in Kjöla, and died 1991 May 29 in Eskilstuna.

Elsa was married in 1933 Oct. 22 to Sven Gustafsson, born 1911 Feb. 15 in Ärla (Sörm.), he died 1982 Oct. 24 in Husby-Rekarne (Sörm.). Elsa and Sven had two children, Anita, born 1941, and Håkan, born 1949.

Anna's life

Daughter *Anna* had a different fate. After the death of her mother she was placed in an orphanage, run by the deaconesses of the Ersta deaconess school in Katarina parish.

She stayed at the orphanage until 1889, when she moved to Jakob parish, also in Stockholm, where she worked as a domestic. In 1890 she moved to Nacka, a town just southeast of Stockholm. From then on she worked at many different places around Stockholm.

In 1902 Sep. 22 she married *Axel* Fredrik Björkman, born 1871 Jan. 23 in Nicolai parish in Stockholm. Axel's mother was Anna Viktoria Björkman, born 1844 in Filipstad, an older sis-



Axel and Anna Björkman in Merrill, Wisconsin.

ter to Herman Gustaf Björkman, who was Emma's foster father for a few years. The couple were married in the chapel of the Ersta institution, which probably indicates that Anna had been well treated in the orphanage.

Axel was a tanner and lived in Linköping (Östg.), so Anna moved there shortly. In 1903 Oct. 7 their daughter Birgitta *Frida* Maria was born there.

In 1904 Mar. 10 the little family left

Linköping to go to Merrill in Wisconsin, where they settled. In Merrill more children were born: Edythe (mother of Julianna, who has the letter), Anna, and Frederick.

Addendum by Elisabeth Thorsell

The submitter of the letter is Julianna Janssen, of Merrill, WI
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A picture from October 1941 of the Emmanuel Covenant Church in Merrill, Wisconsin, where the Björkman family were members. The church is now a non-denominational church.

The older records for this church, which was founded in 1894, are now kept at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center in Rock Island, Illinois. The archive contains minutes (in Swedish) from 1922-1931, 70 pages. Also church member records and records of ministerial acts (such as baptism, confirmation, weddings, funerals, etc.) from 1892-1928, 105 pages.