

She examines and describes, analytically and poetically, how the family can both shape and alienate a developing person.

*Stina Hindström, Lic. Psychologist, Specialist Child & Adolescents,  
Gothenburg, Sweden*

The author provides valuable knowledge by interjecting psychological explanations for traumatic phenomena in the family. Through this, the book becomes an illustrative textbook, told through the adult child's painful memories.

*Lill Wennström, Lic. Psychologist & Lic. Psychotherapist. Lund, Sweden*

I found it hard to stop once I started reading. I recognised my own situation and upbringing, although in our case it was my father who was the psychopath and my mother who was codependent. We were there for our adult parents just as Susanna describes it. This book has helped me understand that I am not alone in having grown up in a dysfunctional family. Thank you, Susanna, for sharing your life with us.

*Kristin Lassbo, Tailor, Sweden*

Susanna has a distinct ability to write so that you are there when it happens, which means that the reader's own soul life comes into motion and the associations flow. A rare, sincere and vivid portrayal of a budding human being that also offers well-substantiated psychological views and places the story in a broader human context.

*Dan Anders Palmquist, Ph.D. Lund, Sweden*

This book is an acquaintance I really appreciated. Recognition to some extent, but above all Susanna's personal way of writing. So unique! Rarely have I felt so close to the person who formulated the text. Many thanks!

*Susanne Ellbin, M.Sc. Lic. Psychologist*

# **Mother Was a Psychopath**

*I Became a Psychologist*

By

**Susanna Carolusson**

Mother Was a Psychopath: I Became a Psychologist

By Susanna Carolusson

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## Prologue: The Agony of Writing this Book

"What do you want the book to achieve?" my kindheartedly challenging husband asked again, as he sat in his favourite chair proofreading my manuscript. He had asked the same question several times so far and each time I had replied that I just wanted to share my psychologically formative and educational experiences. Wasn't that enough?

I knew that most editors would answer that question with a "no". As a writer, I am well aware of publishers' unanimous call to weave the text around a main thread, and write for a specific audience. As a psychologist, I felt obliged to share my professional reflections. How would I keep those threads together in one? My life and my legacy became the nerve of the book. The legacy that influenced who and how I became. How I've freed myself from destructive family patterns through painfully acquired insights, which in turn, influenced my professional orientation and choice of approaches. Insights that have made me critical of the popular advice to "forget and forgive", "look forward" and "not dig into the past".

It took a while before I allowed myself to write. My inner critic stood fiercely in my way. Is my psychological heritage really of general interest? Also, my husband's humble question, "Is this going to be some kind of "The Sun"-text, gossiping about our privacy?" made me think "Who do I think I am?" These doubts were drowned out by other people's comments such as: "Your books are so captivating; you write so well. When will you publish your next book?" "You've been through so much. You must write about it!"

In order to release my flow in the process of writing, I allowed myself to listen to the intense traffic of thoughts that always pass through my head, write down and save, and correct later. That is why my purpose and the main thread, didn't become discernible until I was close to the end of writing. Maybe I knew all the time, subconsciously. At the closure of this writing process, I could respond to my husband's initial question about my purpose, that is: I hope to reveal the patterns of systematic manipulation and abuse, exerted by a mother and disguised behind seductive charm. I also hope to encourage other victims of psychopathic parents, to break the social heritage of destructivity.

In producing academic teaching and writing we are expected to have a purpose. I find that bothersome. My long teaching career taught me that students/readers are in different stages of their lives, they have different needs and motivations, so they perceive what they read in different ways. One hundred readers of this book will have one hundred different experiences of the content, no matter how well I formulate a purpose.

And the target readers? Well, the target chooses itself! The terms psychopath and psychologist in the book's title will attract and deter in unequal measures. The applicability of the psychopath diagnosis is disputed, and many experts would rather opt for the term "narcissistic personality disorder." Regardless of your personal preference and taste, my mother met the criteria for psychopathy, according to Hare's checklist, PCL.<sup>1 2</sup>

Ask yourself "How many people have or have had mothers who also meet the criteria for psychopathy? How many unrecorded cases are there? Why are so few women diagnosed as psychopaths?"

Susanne Strand, Doctor of Health Sciences, responds by claiming that women drink, fight and commit crimes to a lesser extent than men. They develop other psychopathic behaviours, such as exercising psychological violence, lying, and deceiving<sup>3</sup>. Most of these women don't get any diagnosis at all. It is likely, that more women than is known, resort to physical violence, with no witnesses but the family.

Women's violence, psychological or physical, is not debated in the media to the same extent as men's. Violent mothers and wives, unconsciously transfer their anxiety onto partners and children, who become symptom carriers. Sometimes these men or children are the identified patients and receive both diagnoses and treatments. The perpetrator builds walls of

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<sup>1</sup> Cooke, D. J., Michie, C., Hart, S. D., & Hare, R. D. (1999). Evaluating the Screening Version of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL:SV): An item response theory analysis. *Psychological Assessment*, 11(1), 3–13

<sup>2</sup> Hare, Robert D. The PCL-R Assessment of Psychopathy. In: (Eds) Felthous, A., & Sass, H. (2020) *The Wiley International Handbook on Psychopathic Disorders and the Law*. pp. 63-106.

<sup>3</sup> S. Strand, in: Dahlsegg, A., & Wesche, I. (2009). *Psykopatens grepp*. Optimal Förlag. p 79.

denial and loyalty around the domestic territory. I want to reveal how that can happen, from an experiential perspective; the Child's.

The psychologist in me has also researched the roots of madness in our family. I found family secrets of previous generations of a kind which, when silenced, tend to proliferate. They were passed down to my mother and, in some respects, to me. I made sure to bring them back to her and set myself free, with some professional help.

It took me a few years to get to a finished script. Writing has been enlightening and I hope my writing can provide some measure of hope and enlightenment for my readers too.

I wish you an interesting, engaging, and educational reading experience.

### **Thank You to Contributors**

Tore, for your thoughtful, difficult but important questions that made me think, again and again. Thanks to my cousins who have contributed with memories and seen the value of revealing our unhealthy heritage. Thanks to my colleagues, worldwide, who encouraged me to translate the book to English. Thanks to Ethics Press editors, who believed in the value of an English version. And finally, I want to thank you, Doctor Paul Butler, who came in my way by serendipity. We had never met before when you visited Brännö Island, saw the Swedish version of this book for sale near my house, and volunteered to proofread the English manuscript. With an unusual generosity you helped me transform my dry school-English into a more fluent and reader-friendly English.



# Lack of Attachment

"In the beginning, the word was", so it says in the Bible. For human survival though, before we had a verbal language, there were relationships. According to developmental child psychology, a connection with a safe caregiver lays the foundation for the development of life-saving trust.

I was born the first of December 1952 in Gothenburg, Sweden. My mother was only nineteen and didn't really want any children. When my father found out that he had made her pregnant, he saw it as his chance to become a stable breadwinner and "have something to live for". My mother told me this, well before I was ready for that type of information, while at the same time she was also informing me that she herself would have preferred abortion.

To others it may seem a cruel piece of information, but I didn't know anything else. This was to be my normality and that's what my mother was like. I accepted whatever she told me, but I don't remember taking it personally.

Mum's breast milk wouldn't flow, so we didn't get any contact through breastfeeding, she didn't bottle-feed me herself either. Just to further complicate things, we were even in different places too. She was discharged from the maternity ward two weeks after I was born. A full two weeks later, they let me out of the incubator. It was New Year's Eve 1952, and I was one month young.

At the time of my release from the incubator, my mother was in bed at home, and sick. It is unclear in what way she was sick. In her medical records, there are only notes of heavy bleeding and pain in one groin. My grandmother took care of me during the day and my father took care of me in the evenings and nights. Later in life, my mother told me that I had turned away from her but accepted my father. My rejection didn't seem to have bothered her.

What a huge responsibility to attribute to a baby! Responsibility really was something I "received with my mother's milk", a saying with modifications. I have every reason to believe I felt safe with my grandmother. My earliest memory of her even reappeared in a dream when I was doing my self-therapy, as part of the training to become a licensed psychotherapist.



*Me and grandmother 1953. My first attachment? I look content and so does she*

In the dream, I am in the home of my mother's parents. I am looking upwards from the stairs leading to the second floor of the house under its sloping roof. Up there, Grandma is sitting on a chair outside a closed bedroom door. She shushes a finger in front of her mouth and points to the door. I understand that Mum is in there and must not be disturbed. I dreamt this several years before my father told me in passing, that he and my grandmother had shared the care of me and that Mum had been sick that whole winter.

When I am among certain scents, I get nostalgic. Dad probably smelled like mint even then. He had recently bought a candy factory, where he produced peppermints. That mint scent was usually reassuring, but sometimes it was unsettling. I'll come back to that worry later on, but first I want to tell you about my relationship with my father, what I know about his life in the nineteen fifties, and how I perceived him.

For as long as I can remember, I have always been proud of my father's fearlessness and his adventurous spirit. Before he married my mother, he worked as a machinist, a welder, and a sheet metal worker. In his capacity as a winter swimmer, he was given the risky task of welding boat hulls under water. It was a newly invented part of hull welding; it meant that the welding could take place without the expense of time in a floating dock. Perhaps he was among the first in the world to weld under water? I don't know for sure.

In the Aquarium at the Maritime Museum there used to be a crocodile named "Smiler", due to the upwards angled corners of its mouth. Dad forged the cage that came to be poor Smiler's home for the rest of her life.

As a welder, Dad quickly even made it a heavenly career. From his underwater mode to reptile level and then to wuthering heights. He had the honour of assembling the church rooster on the tower of the Masthuggs Church in Gothenburg during the late nineteen forties.

When my father found out that his sperm had made it past my mother's inserted contraceptive pessary, he resisted her desire for an abortion. To provide employment stability for his forthcoming family and through my grandmother's parents' circle of friends, my father got a job at Bergman's confectionery. There he learnt how to make peppermint candies by hand,

with copper vessels, a funnel, and a stick. Pretty quickly, my father took over the confectionary company and stayed there for the next forty years. He titled himself in an ancient Swedish word that sounds like the German “Kaufmann”, a concept that is never used nowadays.



*Mrs Bergman at her coffee shop, before the candy production started*

## **Psychological reflections**

Attachment theory is a well-established psychological model that describes a child's need for secure relationships. The founders of this theory have studied children's relationship with their mothers and how the child relates to them when they are safe, when insecure, or when confused.

Two reactions that may well indicate insecure attachment are anxiety and avoidance behaviour. When anxiety overwhelms a child, the child cannot stand the isolation, but becomes, when the mother returns after a short absence, clingy and at the same time difficult to comfort. If the child does not get the right help at this stage, a state of insecurity is entrenched.

When a child with such attachment wounds becomes an adult, this lack of security can take the form of an inability to cope with strong emotions and an unreasonable need for access to other adults who can handle the emotional cravings; somebody who can hold them, who doesn't abandon them, who validates feelings, and comforts, until they calm down.

Psychodynamic psychotherapists are trained to offer such a holding capacity, but nowadays their time is usually limited to one or two sessions a week, and in public health care, rarely more than a few months. In private practice, the therapist can offer an open-ended treatment, and a secure attachment can be created, given that the therapist's availability and engagement is perceived as reliable.

Those adults with insecure attachment, who instead of clinginess have developed avoidance as a defence, often approach therapy with mistrust, and the therapist must patiently and empathetically earn their trust. They need time before they dare to open themselves in all their vulnerability, which can be incredibly frightening.

I recognise in myself the avoidance of closeness. I didn't realise that, until I started opening myself to my own therapist. By that time, I was thirty-plus and experiencing for the first or possibly second time, if I include my grandmother, the yearning for love by a mother figure. Only then did I understand that what I had experienced as something normal, namely my deeper lack of trust, especially in women, was actually a serious injury.

I realised how I had always avoided having a dependency on other people. I realised that I had been denying my own emotional pain, by quickly banishing frightening experiences from my memory. I had completely forgotten all the agonizing crying spells, that had made my stomach, chest, and throat heave in a bottomless despair, I had denied the pain. When I was twenty and my little brother was twelve, he refused to go to school. The psychologist ascribed a diagnostic term for his condition; it was called "Anxiety". My immediate response to that new word was: "I've never had that!"

Regarding attachment, the theory says that the avoidant personality denies their anxiety and refuses to need anyone. They become self-sufficient. My constant infatuations as a child and as a young teenager made me anxious and restless with longing, but I did not think of that as anxiety. The same could be said of my binge eating of cookies, chocolate, and ice cream. Or even my difficulty in settling down in the evenings when I had moved away from my childhood home.

One evening, I was nineteen at the time, I confided to my then boyfriend and future husband Tore, who I had started to bond with, that *I just had to do* something, because it was completely impossible to sit down and rest or lie down to sleep. I choose to reproduce this memory in the present tense:

I am restlessly anxious, and Tore suggests that we take a ride on his Vespa (white Vespa Touring 150 cc). He will drive me wherever I want to go. "Go south," I say. So, he drives out of the town, southward into the countryside and beyond. "Tell me when you want me to stop!" shouts Tore. He drives us towards the city of Varberg. South of Varberg, I get tired of sitting motionless in the wind on the pillion and ask him to stop at a gas station. There he buys me chocolate. Ten rolls with caramel flavour. Now I'm getting tired and we turn back to my place.

I have come to realise that I would have needed psychotherapy then. I needed help to endure. To face my anxiety. I should have dared myself to break down and to be held together (contained) by another person. Tore, in all his love, tried to help, but he reinforced my habit to escape from myself.

## Social and Biological Heritage: Polly Talks

My first word was “Daddy.” It is imprinted in beautiful handwriting in the baby book where the real mothers of the fifties were supposed to document their baby’s development, to save as a Memento for the future. Pre-printed sheets with cute baby motifs, dashed lines to write on, and weight tables to fill in. Mum was admitted to the maternity ward on the first of December 1952 at 3:00 p.m. I was born at 4:00 p.m.

I was beautifully tanned, something that my mother proudly told me repeatedly. The fact that the pigmentation was due to jaundice, apparently did not detract her from admiring my tan. She was just as happy to tell everyone who would listen, and everyone else for that matter, that I was in a hurry to get out into the world. Premature or not, you couldn’t help but see her pride, as she described her first birth as unexpectedly easy, that I just flew out and “sat like a postage stamp on the wall”. I heard her tell that metaphor so many times, and it is not until now I realise how distant such a description of my birth sounds.

It was probably fortunate for her that I was born prematurely because the distance between her iliac tips and iliac crests was only twenty-five and twenty-eight centimetres, respectively. Perhaps I experienced her womb as an inhospitable place, where I did not want to stay any longer than was necessary. Is it possible that children can sense their mother’s moods even before they are born?

I was forty-six centimetres tall and weighed 2240 grams, normal for a four-week premature infant. They made sure to baptize me quickly, already on the eighth of December, through a so called “Emergency baptism”. Back then, in the fifties, it was urgent to have the baby christened while it was still alive. After all, the blessing of baptism was supposed to protect against the “original sin”. Who knows, without the power of baptism, dead babies might end up in hell? Absurd thought, yet a conviction in some circles.

I was named Susanne Elisabeth. Sixteen years later, to get my first passport, I had to present a pastor’s certificate from my local parish. “Susanna” it said, with an “a” at the end. “Yes, but I’ve known that all along,” Mum said. “We actually baptised you as Susanna.”

Dad said "No, Susanne is the name we told the priest. You were christened Susanne." Mum didn't give up. I didn't care which but fancied the idea of having a more unusual name. So, I continued calling myself Susanna, starting in high school.

The next time I needed a certificate from the pastor's office was for my marriage, in 1972. This time I had to get a certificate from my birth parish, and there my name turned out to be Susanne. I and everyone around me, had got used to knowing me as "Susanna", and I liked that, so I arranged for a name change. I'm telling you this, so you understand why I call myself Susanne in all events that happened before the age of sixteen.

In the maternity ward, my mother was encouraged to breastfeed me, but she couldn't produce any milk. The staff could give me formula, but Dad preferred to pay extra for real breast milk. I lost weight to 1880 grams. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, Mum was discharged, but I was kept in the warm incubator until New Year's Eve. By then I had reached a stable weight of 2540 grams and was able to be brought home to my grandparents. There we all lived together; Dad, Mum, Grandma, Grandpa, and I, during my first six months of life. One day, recently, I stopped at the gate and presented myself to the contemporary inhabitant, who was out gardening. She told me that this house used to be called the "Moonlight house", because at nighttime, the silvered moonlight seeped in between the wall panels illuminating the room.



*West of Gothenburg. My grandparents rent the second floor, under the sloping roof*



The fact that I exist at all is thanks to my father. Mother told me gladly and several times, that she was too young to be a mother, which is why she treated me more like a sister. She thought I should be grateful for that because it made us equals. My father was very pleased with this unplanned pregnancy. So, at the age of twenty-four, he begins his second marriage. Mum is nineteen years old.



*1952. My parent's wedding*

When they brought me home from the maternity ward, Mum interprets my behaviour towards her as me rejecting her. Only my dad will do for me. This is crucial for my continued development. My mum "knew" right from the start that I was a "Daddys girl".

"That girl will have an easy time in life", Grandmother Alba is quoted to have said. Otherwise, she hardly ever said anything. She mainly sat on a

chair in the kitchen and smiled kindly. When she did speak, it was taken almost as prophecy and words of wisdom, that is how I remember her; highly respected by everyone, including my grandfather who was four years younger, immature and with "bad nerves", as it was called then.

So, the admiration of my grandmother became a practice of setting her high on a pedestal, so that Grandpa could take centre stage. I remember his elated Gothenburg exclamation "Joggene!" when he was told something that amused him, and then he would slam a clenched fist into an open palm, while he took a few dance steps.

Mum often bragged about how funny, energetic, and bubbly her dad was. In the next breath she could tell me how he had often beaten her older sister "black and blue". I never saw any sign that such recollections detracted from the excellence she attributed to the same man, "but he certainly didn't hit me," she was sure to add! Mum would then explain that she knew the art of twisting him around her little finger. She interpreted this art and other manipulative quirks as a psychological skill. Mum often explained to me that it was from her I had inherited my talent for the profession of psychology. I can't confirm this because I have never seen that talent in her.

On the contrary, she did not know the art of listening, but instead felt that she understood everyone else better than they understood themselves. This was also true for us children and especially for my little brother. Mother told us our opinions and what kind of persons we were. Sometimes she described me as sweet and kind; a daughter who never made a fuss, sometimes she would shout epithets that I only remember in my nightmares. No, Mum was not a psychologist. She was just incredibly beautiful and incredibly ingratiating to everyone except those closest to her. Her self-esteem hinged on these two qualities throughout her life: her beauty and her ability towards ingratiation.

How did she become so insanely selfish? I search for my answers in my maternal grandparents' history.

That my grandmother was angelic and calm, this was one of the few things on which both of my parents could agree. Grandfather was her opposite; according to my mother, he was a fun-loving, youthful bundle of energy.

According to my dad, his father-in-law wasn't funny at all. He was just insanely selfish.

When Dad, in the old-fashioned way, asked Gun's father Gunnar for permission to propose to his daughter, the future father-in-law made his agreement conditional: "Then you must bring me a bottle of vodka, whenever you come to visit!"

Grandmother Alba, the angel, earned her living as a seamstress. Every day she took the tram into the city, where the sewing studio was located.



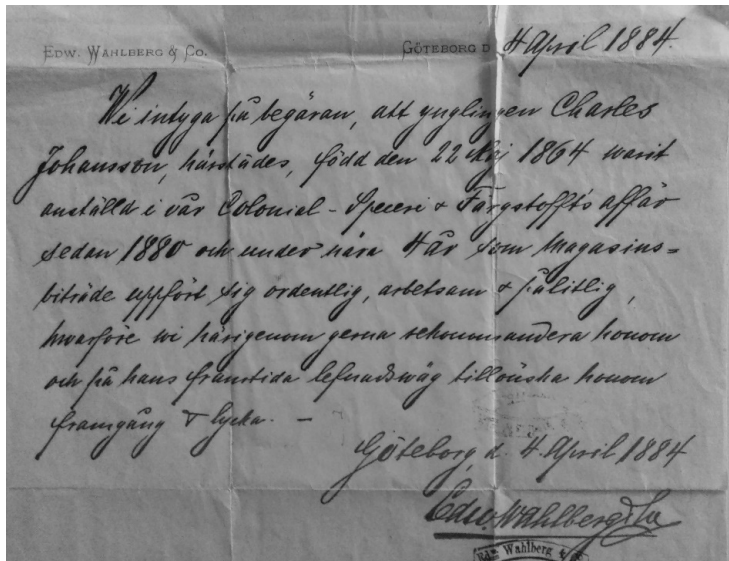
*End station for the tram. Location of the tailoring*

When I was born, my grandparents still rented the attic in that turn-of-the-century "Moon-light house", west of the city. At that time, this area was a separate municipal community, outside the city limits. Nowadays it has become an exclusive residential area within the municipality of Gothenburg.

Mum spent her entire childhood in this house. When I arrived, her brother and four sisters had already moved out of the house and had married. Maybe the brother was admitted to the town's mental hospital, his mental health was always masked in obscurity; "bad nerves", is what they said about both him and my grandfather. Any actual details were silenced and

never talked about. I do know that my grandfather was on a disability pension throughout his life with Alba. There must have been strong reasons for retiring such a “bundle of energy”, that were kept as secrets. Secrets is the wrong word because you know you have them. Mum and her siblings denied the less flattering truths; that is different from keeping secrets.

My mum was all the prouder to regale me about her mother’s fine upbringing. Mum’s maternal grandfather, Alba’s father, Charles Herold Johansson, was a bookkeeper at the Carnegie Mill & Brewery, where sugar and porter was produced. In my research I found that he seems to have been a reliably decent fellow. As a sixteen-year-old, he was registered in central Gothenburg, with his mother, the widow Johanna. For four years, until the age of twenty, he was a warehouse assistant and then he trained as a bookkeeper. His employment, education, and a personal letter of recommendation from the prominent Gothenburg citizen Oscar Ekman, qualified him for a position as a bookkeeper at Carnegie Mill. All three of the documents are dated 1884.



We certify on request, that the young Charles Johansson, here, born on May 22, 1864, has been employed in our Colonial-Grocery and Dye Shop since 1880 and for nearly 4 years as a Warehouse Assistant behaved properly, industrious and reliable, wherefore we hereby gladly recommend him and on his future life path wish him success and happiness. Gothenburg, Sweden, April 4, 1884,

Edw. Wahlberg, Jr.

På begäran får jag härmed  
intyga att jag känner ynglingen  
Charles Johansson att ifrån hans  
yngre år och att jag funnit att han  
alltid sökt förbättra sig: kunskaper  
och ärovaldigt ett gott och redligt  
uppförande. Göteborg den 22 Juli 1884  
Oscar Ekman

On request, I hereby certify that I know the young Charles Johansson from his junior years and that I have found that he has always tried to improve his knowledge and demonstrated good and honest conduct. Gothenburg, July 22, 1884. Oscar Ekman.

Att Herr Charles H. Johansson, som  
i Göteborgs Handelsskola genomgått en kurs i  
dubbla Italienska Bokhålleriet och därunder inhem-  
tat sättet att upplägga, föra och avsluta kontors-  
böcker enligt det dubbla systemet, äger en god  
uppfattning i förening med arbetsförmåga och  
ordningssinne, samt har under sitt vistande vid  
skolan fört en ordentlig och hedrande van-  
del, vacker härmed intygadt.  
Göteborg den 5 Augusti 1884  
För GÖTEBORGS HANDELSSKOLA  
Oscar Ekman

*That Mr. Charles H. Johansson, who in the Gothenburg Business School has taken a course in double Italian Bookkeeping, and during that time learned the way of arranging, keeping and closing office books according to the dual system, has a good opinion in combination with the ability to work and a sense of order, and has during his stay at the school conducted a proper and honorable conduct, is hereby attested. Gothenburg, August 5, 1884, for the Gothenburg business school Ossian Svensson.*

In 1885, at the age of twenty-one, Charles married Matilda Hansson, who was four years his senior. Between 1888 and 1898, they had four beautiful, healthy daughters and unfortunately a sickly son. It is fascinating that my maternal grandmother Alba repeated her own mother's fate of marrying a man four years her junior, and having four beautiful daughters and one son, with rheumatic disease in the first case, nerve disease in the second. Charles, with his family first lived in the Carnegie Mill area.



*Charles Johansson's first job residence*

In 1908, they moved to the newly built staff villa, "Oscar Valley 1". The girls grew up to be what looks like society ladies in the photos. Their father Charles regularly attended the Opera House's concerts with his beautiful daughters. The fact that these daughters, my mother's aunts, became pregnant and then continued to live at home under their father Charles' protection, is a story that Mum told me, with an overtone of romantic shimmer.

My grandmother Alba also became pregnant before she was married, Mum claimed. Who could the father have been? With pride in her voice, Mum often spoke about the fine gentlemen who admired the beautiful young Alba. A few sophisticated love letters had been saved, for me to inherit eventually. Later, when I asked Mum about these letters, she showed a stingy side: "I don't know what to do, I've been thinking about selling them. I can get a lot for antique letters." When she died, I found the letters. I am grateful she had not sold them.

The sender behind most of the letters is a Bachelor of Arts, author and poet, Axel Felldin, alias Luki, who lived on a desert island outside Gothenburg: Stora Varholmen. From 1911 to 1921, he courted the much younger Alba with love letters from his island. A few letters were sent from an upper-class holiday resort, Stenungsön, during the summer of 1914, where he worked as one of eighteen gardeners.



*Alba*



*Axel Felldin*

Of course I'm curious about this cavalier, so I searched the archives. Axel was sixteen years older than Alba, born 1875, not far from Alba's grandmother Johanna's home. Axel's father Wilhelm was, just like Alba's father Charles, a bookkeeper. Even Axel was registered as a bookkeeper until he, in the 1910 census of population, at the age of 35, was registered as "former bookkeeper".

Why the bachelor Axel lives, as he himself describes, in solitude on that island from 1911 to 1921 is a mystery, and he can't be found as ever registered there. The only person you find is the owner of the island, Frans Oskar Levander, who managed a cran-cooking house. Had he taken Axel



into his service? Frans Oskar's son Hadar, at the age of seventy, says in an interview in 1970: *"it was known that he (Levander) lived a Robinson Crusoe life out on the island. And the old man – Robinson that is, of course had his Friday, his real name was Alm, I think."*

No, it wasn't. Axel Felldin was Mr Levander's "Friday".

Well, judging by his letters, Alba's admirer Axel does not appear to have had any sexual relations with Alba. He probably wasn't involved in Alba's pregnancy in 1923, despite my mother's belief.

Although my English translation cannot do justice to the poems written in archaic Swedish, some extracts can give us hints of their platonic romance.

In a letter from Januari 1912, Axel writes:

*"I wish to draw your attention to the fact that I do not know when these lines may be sent; Ice barriers make it very difficult for us to communicate with the outside world."*

From letters 1914:

*"Well, it was damned nice of you to let me hear from you so soon; yes, I fell in love with you again (...) So you've got your home repaired now, it was a damn mess, wasn't it, and you've got red wallpaper; the colour of love, huh? But speaking of love, you do not seem to want to answer my question who is the happy one at the present time, who has found favour for your eyes (...) greet all; first and last, you are greeted with a little kiss from your old Luki. Write soon! You've got the shirts, don't you, in case I need to go to town?"*

In a letter from August of the same year, Axel comments on the war:

*"Thoughts come and thoughts go. They go to the struggling millions down there. Arrogance. False human dreams. They go to those who may have to sacrifice everything that gives value to their lives for a bullet hurled perhaps at random. The irony of fate."*

In September 1914, he apparently has asked Alba to send him tranquillizers:

*" (...) My dear ugly thing!*

*Bravo Abbis! I suspected that you might find the matter unpleasant; Honor your energy. (...) I have not yet had reason to use artificial stuff, It is very dangerous to become a slave to them (...) they are at hand in case of emergency, provide security and peace. I hope we meet soon so that I can give you a kiss for the trouble, a kiss yes, which of course you value a damn lot, especially when it comes from such a beautiful and lovable fairytale prince as undersigned.*

*You are sad and melancholic, I knew this, and why? You, more than most people, have a need of love, but of a love that rises above Materia and everyday life, you want to be loved for the sake of your soul and feel your whole existence being merged into another's and in your love, you want to stand with one foot in a better world, where nothing of selfish gain exists, where there is nothing to do or take in order for this love to last, you want to dwell on the sea of lovemaking dreams and sink to earth just a second now and then, to see and feel its pain only that thy declared heaven may shine in double splendour; with a higher love you want to meet an even higher one, but alas, my child, I have also dreamed, but the illusions swayed in the bitterness of life, the tale never became the truth, earthbound we are all, we all walk down here with the mark of Cain on our foreheads, And so it shall remain, we long from the dust to the light, to the great love, But we long in vain, and this is what is melancholy.*

*After this long diagnosis, he adds: Have I understood you? Now good night, a kiss, even if you don't want any from me (...) Probably it won't be long before I see you again, be well until then, my concubine."*

Finally, it seems like Alba has ended the communication:

*"Was that all?*

*Was this all you offered, parsimonious life?*

*A masquerade with nothing but faded characters;*

*From glasses raised in the pastime of lies, the stale dregs on the parquet drip.*

*Was this the shadows of good and evil*

*that swept past in the drenched flames of the ramp?*

*Then you were life, a bad fool only;*

*A foreign soul has no more questions.*

*A – F-n."*

Not "Luki" this time, just the name, not even fully written.

Is it possible that Axel ended up as a depressed patient at Lillhagen Mental Hospital? The irony of fate? Alba's loyal admirers were mentally ill. First Axel, then Gunnar, her nervous husband, and eventually her son, who spent a lot of time at Lillhagen.



*Axel at Lillhagen Mental Hospital, second man standing from the right*

I believe that Alba's amiability wasn't just in the eye of the observer. My dad, who was a picky person, also adored her. So did Mum. Alba even managed the impossible feat of awakening something resembling a conscience in my mother, at one point. I only know this because I once asked my mum, "Is there anything you regret in your life?"

In addition to all the missed opportunities for her own pleasure and adventure, which she had always regretted, she related only the following one incident that testifies to any feelings of guilt.

The family lived in poverty. My grandfather was on a disability pension and Alba was the breadwinner, working as a seamstress. The year my

mother turned fifteen, she was going to have a confirmation dress made by her mother.

Gun remembers standing at the sewing machine and trying it out. She puts on the dress and looks in the mirror, the dress is not what she had imagined. She is disappointed and rips it off, and in a rage, she tears apart all the seams. Grandma doesn't say a word, just looks sad. Re-sews the dress. No one else has made my mother feel remorse, ever, as far as I know.



*Gun in her re-sewn confirmation dress. 1948*

Gun's attitude towards confirmation was strange. I experienced that attitude of hers when I was thirteen. In those days, everyone was expected to study for confirmation, to be fulfilled at the age of fourteen. It was an expected tradition to "go and read" with the priest. I had participated in the Church's Juniors in the autumn of 1965, and I enjoyed the tranquillity there. Mother didn't mind at all, but when I brought up the question of my eventual confirmation studies, she showed a different side: "You know what the kids learn there! First, they sit with the priest and look well-behaved. Then they go outside and there, outside the church, they learn to smoke."

So, I had no confirmation. Why didn't I confront her about her lack of logic? I could have pointed out that both she and my well-behaved cousin Lisbeth had remained smoke-free although they both did their confirmation. I didn't confront her because I was pleased. My own reason for refraining from confirmation group was that, as the diligent student I had suddenly become, I was grateful to save the time that would have been required for Bible study, and instead use it for homework.

I return to my mother's claim that her eldest sister had an unknown father. So, why then did the pregnant Alba marry Gunnar? There was no pressure to save the family's honour or reputation. Alba's father, Charles, advised against marriage and suggested that she continue to live as a home-daughter with her child, just as Alba's sisters Signe and Hildur had done, their children had been born in 1914 and 1919. In the register of residents in Oscar Valley 1, Signe's Tor is listed as "son", while Hildur's Gunborg is listed as an "illegitimate daughter". No fathers are named.



*Alba's childhood home Oscarsdal 1. Owner: Carnegie director Oscar Ekman*

Some themes seem to recur within the family. I have found interesting information further back in time, from my grandmother's grandparents' generation. Charles Johansson's mother, Johanna Hansdotter, was born in 1830, a hundred kilometres north of Gothenburg, a parish called Kville.

As a young adult, she was registered as a "vagrant". Female vagrants were often prostitutes; she might have been available at the Kville Guesthouse, a place those days for travelling merchants, to eat and stay overnight, and also to drink: until 1933, the inns had a Swedish liquor monopoly. Maybe it was there she met Carl Johansson, a journeyman tailor. They got married and moved to central Gothenburg, perhaps to get away from bad reputation? I can see a kind of social heritage here: the dependable tailor Carl saved Johanna from vagrancy. In Gothenburg parish records, she was registered as seamstress. As an elderly widow, this former vagrant was even invited to visit the prominent, well-off citizen Oscar Ekman and his wife.