

IN CONVERSATION WITH MARGARETA TEKE

Hans: You grew up in quite well ordered home with your father Bertil who was a graduate engineer and your mother Brita who was a housewife. Were there any particular elements in that home that influenced you?

Margareta: It was very safe and nice. Brita has said that the only occasion when she had to fight with me was when she wanted me to wear woolen stockings and I refused (I still cannot wear woolen). Brita and Bertil never fought, at least not so that we kids could hear.



The Sjögren family 1954: Anniqa, Brita, Margareta, Bertil, grandma Anna and Birgitta

I believe Brita was diplomatic and got things her way in important, controversial issues, without any confrontation. Also, Bertil trusted Brita's judgment. In economic issues Bertil made the decisions; it was that time and he was the provider.

Brita was a sociable, empathic, harmonious person which influenced the atmosphere of the home. She was warm and spontaneous, and most people found her easy to like. Her scourges was recurring migraine attacks, but I cannot recall that she ever took that out on us kids. Bertil was a person with high moral demands on himself and the world around him. One should fulfill one's duties and not make use of non-deserved advantages. Bertil's scourges was, I guess, the anxiety he felt when had to make tough decisions, for example discharge staff. He always embraced objectivity and logics, partly at the expense of spontaneity.

And I have traits of both. By the years, I have acquired Brita's warmness and spontaneity without losing the sense of logics which I embrace highly. I guess that I am relatively harmonious (but avoid strains, I am not a bit adventure-loving).

Hans: You have two sisters: Anniqa (who is three years older) and Birgitta (who is three years younger). Where you similar as kids?

Margareta: In appearance we were very different. Especially Anniqa and I."Imagine, one so dark and one so blonde", the ladies said. Gittan we called "rat-coloured" in a mean sister-way. Apart from the colors, we were not so different. Anniqa and I had so similar voices that we

could even fool our parents about who were answering the telephone. In personality we were quite similar too: ambitious, competent and well-behaved. There were some differences though. Believe it or not, but Gittan was rather quiet, especially during the teens. Anniqua was annoyed over the fact that I was not annoyed over things. And my opinion was that she got stuck over little things. She was “crying over spilled milk” and I wasn’t. I guess that frustration lessens for her if she talks about it; for me it is the opposite.

Hans: Have the three of you become more and more similar, or more and more different, over the years?

Margareta: Both. Our professional lives have affected us in different ways. I think that all three of us have had an inner balance throughout our lives; not really any depressive traits. We have kept being loyal and industrious, with a slightly different amount of energy. Gittan has been the most energetic. That’s the feeling I remember the most, I cannot describe it better: she is always active. Anniqua is also active but she expresses more clearly that she becomes tired. And I guess I am somewhere in between.

Hans: Bertil and Brita lived at many places when you grew up: Linköping, Södertälje, Gävle and Danderyd. From which one of these places do you have the strongest memories?

Margareta: I was born in Linköping as my sisters. I was three when we moved to Södertälje. Yet I have some recollections from Linköping, for example when we brought Brita back from the maternity ward when Gittan was born and when Anniqua had thrown her three-wheeler in the brook Tinnerbäcken.

Södertälje is the childhood town that has always shone brightly in my memory. We lived in a new built apartment house with a big backyard and many families with children. There was always someone to play with. The move to Gävle when I was ten was the second biggest crisis in my life. (The first one was when my grandfather Helge died in a car accident in 1953. I didn’t know him well but experienced strongly the adults being sad and upset.) The worst thing about the move was probably that I had to leave my best friend Birgitta Andersson.

We lived in Gävle for 7 years, and there I went to primary, lower and upper secondary school. During the spare time I was part of a girl’s gang (having in common that we didn’t have a strong appeal on boys), by voluntary gymnastics and swimming, and not the least scouting. And we went to ice hockey. In Danderyd I took my upper secondary school degree, had my first real job as a nurse’s assistant, and studied at the university one year before I moved to Lund and the social studies there.

Hans: Was it natural for you to get into a profession where you worked with other people’s problems? You started as a social inspector during the seventies and after a few years you changed over to family counselling.

Margareta: Well, I also had animals on my mind. I wrote in a paper in primary school that I



was going to be a farmer at Skeda. I considered to become a veterinary or an agronomist before I decided on either a psychologist or a social worker. The fact that I chose the social studies was probably mostly caused by them accepting me. I viewed myself as rational, calm and harmonious, which I believed to be a resource when working with people. I didn't have a clear picture of what it would mean exactly but I still think I made the right decision. Especially when I became a family counsellor and later an authorized psychotherapist. The social service was tough, especially having to take care of children by force.

The family counselling gave me possibilities to work in an equal dialogue with the clients. The people that I met came voluntarily and would just return if they found the conversation meaningful. It may sound strange but I have never wanted to interfere with other people's lives.

Hans: What has been your mission, then?

Margareta: I believe it has been to listen very carefully to what people actually say and be as non-judgmental as possible. It requires concentration and is much easier when I'm in my professional role. In everyday life it often happens that I don't hear what people actually say until the conversation is over. Sometimes I can then return and say "I've been thinking about what you said...", but I far from always find the right occasion for that.

Hans: You mentioned your grandfather Helge. After his death and during all your childhood and adolescence your grandmother Anna lived with you (she moved permanently to Skeda in 1976). How did that work? How did she influence the atmosphere in your home?

Margareta: In Södertälje she lived in a small apartment on her own, in about a five minutes walking distance from us. Gittan spent a lot of time with her, she felt alone. So things became probably better for her when we came to Gävle and she lived with us. She helped us with the household and was an extra mother, especially for Gittan. I have understood afterwards that she sometimes was tormented by anxiety and that Brita was her support in these situations. As children we never noticed this; to us they were just two mothers that placed our needs above all.

During the summers when she "governed" Skeda, I understood the degree to which she adjusted to us. I remember mostly that our wooden shoes should be in order, not in a mess in the hallway. But otherwise we lived in great freedom, never having to do anything else than going to the country shop, which we did joyfully (salesman Carlsson always gave us candy).

A strong recollection from adulthood, when we lived together at Skeda, was when she said: "Margareta, you must never be annoyed over material things" (a sparkler had just burnt a hole

in a table cloth). I now understand that it had to do with all the sorrows and troubles she had gone through, not the least with her sisters and their children. Another typical utterance: “Here you have 50 kronor (much too much at that time) for driving me to Alvesta and, oh yes, you should also have 25 öre for the onion you bought.” She kept helping out, sat on a stool in the kitchen and made pancakes for you and Larz when you came home from school. Both her grandchildren and great grandchildren she taught children’s songs.

The most important thing she taught us was probably that it was possible to live several generations together. A precondition for this, we understood, was that the older generation as far as possible stands back for the younger; a tradition that Brita fulfilled as well. As young, we experienced the big relief of getting some help with the children. And how much it means for children when older people have time for them.

Hans: Were you good in school?

Margareta: The first four years, in the primary school, I was a star – quickly fading though when I came to the higher classes. After that I had to put up with being mediocre (Ba, Ab in most subjects). In the mathematics part of the upper secondary school exam though, I received an A (which may have been a bit of luck).

The consolation for being mediocre in school is that the competition was hard; we who took the upper secondary school degree in the 1960’s were only 15% of an age group. At the 50 years celebration in 2014, we noticed that there were four of us who had become professors in a class of approximately 25.

Hans: Myself I have always had the problem in school that my mind has been wandering a lot during lessons. Have you ever had that problem?

Margareta: Oh yes, and sometimes I wonder if anything ever stuck that I learned during lessons. I have always preferred to read myself and thereby being able to focus what I am interested in and skip the boring parts. To me, the point of education is mostly to get reading tips. I am nowadays quite critical and want to question what the lecturer says, which also helps me to stay alert and focused.

Hans: Who is the best lecturer that you have ever heard?

Margareta: Hard to tell. I know I have been fascinated after lectures – but I am not sure that I would be as fascinated if I heard the same lecture again. One becomes more mature and raises one’s standards and nowadays I am mostly critical. So the answer would be that some of them have been clearly approved but many haven’t been even that. I am allergic to those who appeal to the laughers at the expense of fine differences and substance.

Hans: How did you experience your university studies? Were you an inquiring student?



Margareta: At the university I somewhat became a star again. I wasn't a critical student though, more of a good girl who passed the examinations. More dutiful than inquiring. I have probably become much more inquiring by the years when I have been able to connect knowledge with needs in my profession. I have been mostly interested in knowledge about how one reaches people in a dialogue. At the university I learnt nothing about conversation. The most things I have learnt during my meetings with clients at the family counselling.

Margareta and Björn in 1971

All together, the years at the university in Lund was a fun and important period. I started to be politically aware. I met Björn; we lived at the same student's corridor. It wasn't love at first sight, rather an affinity growing stronger. I am glad that I was accepted at the school of social studies in Lund and thereby had to move from home and make it on my own for a while before I got my own family.

Hans: In the 60's it was pretty close that Skeda got sold, wasn't it?



Margareta: That's right. A contract with Värnamo municipality was written but not signed when Björn and I convinced Brita and Bertil to buy Skeda from Brita's siblings. I have a very clear memory of standing in the barn when Alvar Fäldt, the leaseholder, asks whether Skeda is to be sold and I answer that I haven't heard about it. So I called my home directly and found out. Then Björn and I made our critical decision to settle down at Skeda. In 1967, the Sjögren family celebrated Christmas for the first time at the estate that they owned.

Christmas at Skeda in 1967: Anniqua, great aunt Karin, Bertil and Brita

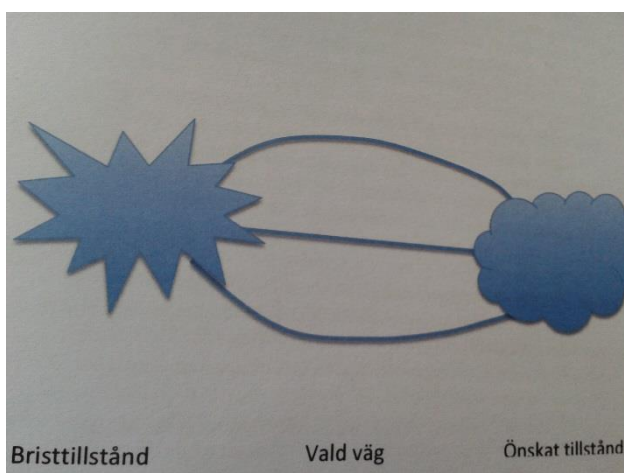
Hans: Besides your profession you have also, during nearly 30 years, been active in the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society. Can you say anything about what made you devoted to this engagement?

Margareta: I have always felt privileged, believing that I had a “surplus” that I should share with other. For a long time I looked for a non-profit engagement to invest my time in. Swedish Peace felt like coming home. I liked their uncompromising ways of checking facts in combination with their creative ways of making a political impact. The first “activity” I was a part of was the calling of the embassy to protest when a country had made a nuclear test.

The engagement in the Swedish Peace resulted in my becoming more politically knowledgeable. Also, it was easier for me to put up with the misery of the world when there where something to do. My still consistent interest is due to the fact that it became more and more obvious to me how conflicts in everyday life and in the world are related to each other. My professional life and my non-profit work aligned with each other, resulting in my strong belief in the power and possibilities of the conversation, the dialogue. And in the insight about how difficult it can be.

The last year I have also been engaged as chairman of the women’s aid in Värnamo, which is also an enterprise aiming to oppose violence. There I advocate the thesis that violence in close relationships can be prevented to a certain degree, if we systematically encourage parents to train themselves and their children in making a dialogue.

Hans: You have recently compiled a great deal of your experiences and insights in a book, *Samtalets magi – när alla i familjen får komma till tals*. (The magic of the dialogue.) At page 36 there is a model that I know you have often used and which I like a lot, “The star and the cloud”. Can you say something about how it can be applied, in family therapy and work for peace?



Margareta: From the beginning, the model was named “the three aspects of need” and I made it to get a better understanding of the concept of need. When I recognized the three aspects – the undesirable condition (bristtillstånd), featuring how we don’t want things to be; the desirable condition (önskat tillstånd), featuring how we want things to be; and the way to reach it (vald väg), which is always more than one – I found needs much easier to talk about.

Controversies and conflicts are often about clashing needs. If you talk about what you want to *obtain* rather than what you want to avoid, the conversation will run more smoothly. What you want to avoid often implicates accusations (easy resulting in counter accusations). What you want to obtain implicates good intentions. Often one agrees about the desirable condition,

while disagreeing about the way of obtaining it. And when one recognizes that “we want the same goal to be obtained but are divided about how to obtain it”, it becomes more possible to solve the antagonisms by dialogue.

We want to live in a peaceful world where human rights are being respected, how do we obtain that? We want to live in a family where all members are allowed to express their opinions and satisfy their needs in a sensible way, how do we obtain that? Often one is very quick to attribute bad intentions to the counterpart, which drastically lessens the possibility to solve a controversy.

The model can also remind us that life varies; even when we have problems there may be (exceptional) moments when it is better, when we experience minor desirable conditions. Then it is constructive to ask oneself what may have contributed to the exception. We then seek the root of the good instead of the evil.



Hans: Now you turn 70. How should you say that life changes when one becomes older?

Margareta: I clean away everything unnecessary, both material things and ambitions. The energy is limited and has to be used for the right endeavors. Nature and the children (especially the grandchildren of course) become the big source of healing. One becomes better at being here and now since life is so obviously finite. Besides this, the big difference is that you have time, just as when you were a child. In contrast to the childhood, though, one also has resources and autonomy. On the whole, the difference between how I use my time now compared to when I was younger is not so big; possibly I am better now at not, unnecessarily, miss or shorten the “wonderful moments” occurring now and then.