



FROM “RECOLLECTIONS OF AUNT KARIN”

By Gösta Wennberg

Karin was born on May 1 1893 in Jönköping and died peacefully at S:t Sigfrid's Hospital during the night of May 15, 1985, 92 years old. [...]



Her teaching positions:

- 1915-1917 at Anderslöv's Elementary School. Good testimonial from this place. [...]
- 1917-1919 at the Bendtz Brothers' Institute for Language and Trading [...]
- 1919- 1920 at Nyström's Upper Secondary School in Malmö. There she was showing “particularly good zeal and skill, treating the students resolutely but in a friendly manner”.
- 1920-1935 at Karlshamn's Elementary School for Girls. There she also served as a form mistress, and took care of the pupil's lending and reference library almost all the time.

All the school year 1926-1927 she was on leave because of illness after having had an accident in England¹. It was said that she was suffering from a concussion caused by a traffic accident. Mom used to say that Karin's terribly bad temper was (sometimes) a result of this damage to her brain [...]

After Karin's death one of her old pupils wrote a letter to mom, telling her about how the pupils in Karlshamn loved Karin; they called her “our modern teacher”. She was very well-read, widely traveled, independent and also dressed well.

- 1935-1958 at the Junior Secondary School in Ljungby.

[...] During the school year of 1963-1964 I was an adviser in geography and biology in the county of Kronoberg. I then visited the secondary school in Ljungby and was invited to the home of the principal. We got to talk about Karin. He appreciated her as a teacher but told me about the difficulties following a long term conflict between Karin and another female teacher.

When Karin talked about her job, which she seldom did, she used to complain over stupid pupils. “I cannot stand stupid pupils!” My objection was that stupidity is something you can't help, and then she was circumspect for a while. [...]

¹ In 1926 Karin went to England to improve her English in Oxford.

ABOUT KARIN'S ACCIDENT IN ENGLAND²

Miss Lindman was coming here for lunch in company with two other students when as she was crossing the road at a corner, a girl of 15 on a push bicycle ran into her. She was hit somewhere in the middle of her body for she was sore between her breasts. She then fell on her left side with the girl and bicycle on top of her. Her thigh was black and sore from the waist to the knee, and there was a wound of about four inches behind the ear, at the side of the head, but only deep at one part.

Miss Lindman was seen to fall by a friend of ours who happened to be standing outside the Marine Hill House private hotel. He and another man picked her up at once and carried her into a ground floor bedroom in this hotel. She does not remember being knocked down, and was quite unconscious for several hours. Dr Hubert, who has a fine reputation as a doctor came at once and dressed the wound. It bled a lot and she got rather weak and was delirious for a couple of days, though not continuously.

She stayed at the hotel for some days; then she arrived by ambulance to Ravello where her hostess lived. The doctor visited her every day for almost three weeks. - "I fed her with eggs whisked in milk, egg custards - very weak tea, Bovril, Horlick's Milk and ordinary milk every two hours. " - The doctor warned them about leaving her alone because then she might suddenly "jump up or get out of bed, which would have been very dangerous".

The doctor advised that Karin should stay [in England] at least until Christmas or Easter. If she would exert her brain or have worries "she would probably lose her memory permanently or might go off her head" - but if she would stay calm and be taken care of she would be alright. "...whenever she has tried to read or write or think about her salary or work, she has got a raging headache - a sort of feeling as if the inside of hear was empty - and then as if it was all waving about inside. She says she has forgotten the names of her Swedish schoolchildren and she often dreams about her Headmistress that they are fighting each other." [...]

In the later letters, from September 19 forward, it is told that Karin is bleeding from her rectum. October 19 Karin herself writes to Lydia, telling her that her head is almost fine, but that she is still bleeding and weak [...].

A clipping from the Ljungby newspaper on Monday, August 31 in 1981, tells us:

An older woman was slightly wounded when she was hit by a moped at Smedjegatan in Ljungby on Friday afternoon. The woman walked out the street between two parked cars and the moped driver hit her because he didn't see her.

Poor Karin! At that time she was 88 years old, deaf and had been in surgery for cataracts. [...]

THE AUNT

Karin was not always easy to deal with. She had severe black moments which I think was caused by depression. During the summer of 1943 I took two pictures of mom and dad on "my hill" at Skeda. Those belong to the best portraits that I've ever made. In the same series is a picture of Karin at the same place, shrunk up with her arms in her lap and her face lifeless, black and grieving. This was the way that she looked when she had her worst moments or, as people around her would say, when she was in a bad mood. She had no ability to analyze herself and therefore she projected her discomfort on those around her.

² This letter was written by Karin's hostess in England to Lydia, September 4, 1926.

She had other personal traits that were not so pleasant. She was snobbish. She would be arrogant to store clerks. I have two anecdotes which show her brusqueness and snobbishness. When AnnStin [Gösta's wife-to-be] came to the house in Värnamo in the spring of 1941 we all sat down having dinner. [...] Sylvia Ring had left school and been asked to direct the choir, which she told us about. AnnStin said something for fun, like "that's only a matter of following the beat". Karin, seriously and brusquely: "Are YOU competent of judging that!"

When we lived in Lund, and Karin had accepted AnnStin for a long time, she came for a visit from a trip to Italy. We went to Lundagård, a café, where we would sit by a window table eating pastries. A bit further in was a shy, provincial group of people, sitting and doing the same thing. Karin, clearly and loudly: "Ugh, the Swedes are all UGLY! - Italians are so beautiful." The group quietened and left the place - possibly because of Karin. We felt ashamed. [...]

The relationship between the two sisters, mom and Karin, eventually became strained, at least on mom's side. Karin was like a family member, visiting us very often as a welcome guest during the weekends. [...] In the 30's she build a little cottage for herself by our summer home in Östrahult by Vidöstern, which had two bunk beds and one separate bed, three beds in all. Mom had a problem with the fact that Karin considered herself a special guest, inviting herself, but didn't take much part of the housework (from what I can remember).

But that is just one view of her. To us three siblings, the intercourse with Karin was all frictionless when we were kids; to me it was frictionless all her life. She was like an older sister of mine, a natural part of my life; fun, intense and often exiting. In all my adolescence she gave



Two sisters at Skeda in 1978. On Karin's lap: Larz Teke

me books that meant a lot to my development. To those who believe that she would only read detective stories - of which she really read a great deal - I want to tell that she was the one who gave me my first English edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in the 40's. I also remember a book of articles about T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and essays by Virginia Wolf. Perhaps she did not manage to get through *Ulysses* herself, but she had that intention!

During the later years, both Karin and mom had a hearing problem. Once in the 70's AnnStin was at Skeda keeping mom company since she was alone at that moment. Karin had taken the bus from Ljungby to Skeda; they all sat in the sofa as AnnStin went out in the kitchen for making more coffee. Then she hears Karin, saying loudly - both ladies thought that she couldn't hear them - "Does AnnStin wear a wig?" - "No" says mom, just as loudly, "she's got an Afro. Stina has one as well and I do not think it looks good!" [...]

Karin's sense of hearing grew worse. I used to call her every week to check out the crossword in Svenska Dagbladet. It became more and more difficult and eventually it was impossible. We had to write letters instead.

