

Chapter 2 : “1908/72 – ... and his bride”

When Edmund had finished his studies, his sister Ingrid began to correspond with her friends about a suitable bride. Edmund's mother was dead, and neither his father nor his new wife, the English princess Louise Mountbatten (1889-1965), appears to have interfered. In Ingrid's opinion, the best choice was her “cousin” the German princess Sibylla Calma Marie Alice Bathildis Feodora of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1908-1972) who had both beauty and ancestry.¹ She was the daughter of the English prince Charles Edward of Albany (1884-1954) and the German princess Victoria Adelheid of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg (1885-1970).

Ingrid and Sibylla were both bridesmaids when Lady May Cambridge married Captain Abel Smith in London on October 24, 1931. Among the guests was Edmund. Ingrid introduced him and Sibylla to each other and love arose. In February the following year, Sibylla was invited to visit Ingrid in Stockholm and stay at the castle. Edmund was her escort. There is no information about the proposal, but since they were two royal children in the same situation, two equals, they probably understood each other without too much talk. Edmund even claimed afterwards that it had been enough that he had proposed Sibylla in Esperanto. Then the necessary diplomacy took place.

The bride-to-be was very difficult to interview. “Ask Mom!” was her standing answer whatever the journalists asked. Gustaf V's birthday on June 16 they got engaged. It was known in advance in Coburg but in Sweden it came as a surprise. On October 19, Coburg was the venue of a civil wedding with 40,000 spectators and military honours. Her father made a small speech: “My beloved daughter, who has been my family's sun. You shall now dedicate yourself to your new fatherland and in self sacrificing love follow the man of your choice to his Nordic home.”² The next day it was church wedding. Sibylla wore her sister-in-law's Carrickmacross embroidery: Lilies, clover, forest stars and orange flowers. However, all the Swedish kin did not participate in the wedding, as Gustaf V had to remain in the country. Afterwards, they honeymooned a month incognito in Switzerland and South of France as the “Count couple of Haga” with a detour to Egypt. Upon returning to Coburg, Sibylla packed her belongings, about a railway wagon full, and entered her new homeland. The official reception was magnificent. She was received at the castle by King Gustaf V on his throne and by 1,300 notables. People's sympathies were more divided. There were protests from day one.

*

As an old school dynastic marriage, the choice of Sibylla was very successful. As a political marriage under the new era's requirements, due to her mother's kinship with William II and her father's Nazi sympathies, it was a hard-to-surpass error.

Sibylla's father was English but through his German grandfather he inherited the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, which he ruled from 1905 to 1918. In 1905, half of Coburg's properties were transferred to the state. During World War I, he had to choose allegiance, and chose Germany, which meant that he lost all his English titles. With the revolution in Germany in November 1918 (when Emperor Wilhelm II was forced to abdicate and the legal rights of the nobility were abolished) he was also stripped of his position as German duke. He was allowed to keep some of his properties but the privileges were gone. In 1930

¹ Roger Lundgren. Sibylla – en biografi. Albert Bonniers förlag, 2007.

² Torsten Brandt. Intervju av filmreportern Gustaf Boge. Hemmets veckotidning, 1958:2.

he became involved in the Nazi movement, became an important figurehead as a member of the Reichstag and chairman of the German Red Cross and was imprisoned after the war. He was taken directly from the dining room table and when the Americans were there, they took the opportunity to also trash his wardrobe. Small revenge is also revenge.

Her father was detained for 18 months, but no serious information was found. In the hearings, he regretted nothing and refused to believe that any mass killings of Jews or other ethnic groups had taken place. In 1950, he was sentenced to 18 months' work duty (which was equalized for the period of detention) and to pay a compensation of DMK 5000. In 1954 he died of cancer. The Swedish court held 14 days of mourning.^{3,4,5,6} Afterwards the politics of the duke was redacted. He had shown "poor political judgment" but after the war he was "exonerated from the Nazi charges".⁷ His daughter Caroline was more blunt. "Hitler had good use for his father. He needed him. To make an impression abroad. That is why he appointed him president of the Red Cross. Then he sent him twice around the world. My father was Hitler's propaganda machine. It was very cunning. My father wanted to distance himself from the situation at home and was eager to travel."⁸ CGs comments on this in 2010 did not exactly clarify the matter:

Yes, one way or another [his grandfather had links to the Nazi Party]. Everyone was involved, the whole society was so integrated with it all and it was very difficult to, so to speak, avoid... it was very difficult to stand and say "No, I don't want to be involved". Then I think you would have disappeared [into oblivion]. I can imagine it was a matter of survival. I would not like to say that this was the family, but many of them lived in a vacuum and you have to believe in something. You were manipulated. The whole German people was manipulated, of course, and then you too got involved. It was very difficult to recognize the terrible things that happened all along.⁹

Edmund's marriage to the daughter of Nazi has caused discomfort to the Swedish monarchy right up to the present today. It was the last time that a Bernadotte considered ancestry the most important qualifications of a marriage.

*

Princess Sibylla had style and mastered German and English (with a German accent). Her French wasn't so good. From four until the age of 15, she was educated at home by a governess, Baroness von Senden, but graduated annually at Alexandrinenschule (the Higher Girls' School in Coburg) to show that she followed the curriculum.¹⁰ The teaching of literature and history of religion was conducted by her Confirmation priest, court preacher Schanzer. She received music lessons and learned to play the piano. She liked to draw and paint and after her confirmation studied art craft for six months at Kunstgewerbeschule in Weimar, an education in pattern drawing of wallpaper and textiles. She also studied literature and art history. She was not very literary minded, but later read many biographies, especially Victorian such. She completed a one-year course in household science in Coburg and

³ Charles Edward, Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Wikipedia.

⁴ Fiona Cotter Craig. [Hitler's favourite royal](#). BBC Channel 4, 2007. [Dokumentär om prins Karl Edvard].

⁵ Thomas Sjöberg, Deanne Rauscher & Tove Meyer. Den motvillige monarken. Lind & Co, 2010.

⁶ Roger Lundgren. Sibylla – en biografi. Albert Bonniers förlag, 2007.

⁷ Hemmets Journal, 1972:22.

⁸ Allers, 1971:26.

⁹ Gregor Nowinski. Familjen Bernadotte. Sex avsnitt som sändes i tv4. Första avsnittet sändes 2010-04-29.

¹⁰ Tyra Öhrvall. Prinsessan på Haga, del 1. Året Runt, 1951:22.

Bayrisch Gmain. When the kitchen staff at the castle had time off Sibylla had to step in and show what she had learned. Long afterwards, she claimed that if forced into a bourgeois profession, she would have chosen to become an artist or interior designer.¹¹

Sibylla would rather play with her brothers than with her dolls. When they did not want to, she chose children from the surrounding farms and work places. She had a vivid imagination. Once upon hearing H.C. Andersen's story, she trashed a rosebud to find the fairy. She had her own pony and was interested in hunting. During the holidays she was often in Italy looking at art. She also spent a winter in 1928/29 in Cape Town with her aunt Princess Alice of Athlone, whose husband was vice king there from 1924 to 1931, her "finishing school". She is said to have been involved in lion hunting and other exciting activities. Upon her return, she engaged in her mother's extensive charity work and served as the castle's vice-hostess. She visited her relatives in France, England and Copenhagen. With her younger sister Caroline (1912-1983) she had a contentious relationship. Sibylla was calm, beautiful and compliant, her parents' favourite. Caroline, on the other hand, seemed prepared for anything. Her way of spitting on her privileges while exploiting them eventually led to a total split between the two.

To orient her in Swedish society and also to teach her a little of the Swedish language, Edmund sent her a girl companion, Brita Sjögreen, to Callenberg, Saxony. The teaching didn't go too well because Sjögreen had read languages but had no prior pedagogical experience. The course literature was *Sörgården* and Nils Holgersson (two children's books about an idealised Sweden), then daily and weekly newspapers. The bride's interests were confined to theatre, film, pets and floral care. She also took driving lessons to learn to handle the engagement present, a Bugatti that Edmund and Ingrid drove down to Coburg themselves.¹² Edmund and Ingrid were able drivers and so became Sibylla.

The lessons continued after arriving in Sweden in the form of a study circle in Swedish history, the Monday Club, together with some friends that Edmund had chosen for her. During the war, the students switched to knitting, first for Finland, then for the national service. They took turns to host it and offer tea and sandwich. The club had a history. It had been started by Ingrid's mother Crown Princess Margaretha, then it was led by Ingrid herself and now by Princess Sibylla. The club also had subdivisions.

The companions, especially Folke Bernadotte's wife Estelle Bernadotte, seem to have felt that Sibylla, with her sensitive and impulsive orientation, was not particularly suitable as queen. But she rose to the challenge. It was her fate and nobility requires sacrifices. A journalist later summed it up as: "There is a rational and unsentimental feature of Princess Sibylla that disarms. She alternates between business and duty."¹³

The Coburg Court was said to have "been a good preparatory princess school with old-fashioned education in loving rigour."¹⁴ This seems nonsense. Although at the time of her marriage she was 24 years old, she had never performed in public. She was ill-prepared and unsure of herself and her abilities. Sometimes she started laughing uncontrollably at public events that she found ridiculous and couldn't stop. At her performances, she looked so hard-set that her lady-in-waiting had orders to remind her "Smile a little, her Royal Highness, smile". The flattering treatment she received on arrival did not improve matters. "I missed

¹¹ Roger Lundgren. *Sibylla – en biografi*. Albert Bonniers förlag, 2007.

¹² Brita Lundquist. *Jag lärde prinsessan tala svenska*. Vecko Journalen, 1964:3.

¹³ Bertil Torekull. *Äntligen hemma, sa Sibylla*. Vecko Journalen, 1966:31.

¹⁴ Margit Vinberg. *Prinsessan Sibylla: Så är det att vara tittobjekt, symbol och fembarnsmamma*. Vecko Journalen, 1965:30.

my old girlfriends who were sincere and who liked me for my own sake and with whom I had so much in common. Here I was met with a conventional courtesy that was sometimes so exaggerated that I didn't know how to act. I couldn't relax.”¹⁵ - “When the newly married Princess Sibylla started speaking Swedish, no one in her surroundings considered themselves fit to correct her - who criticises royal people? On the contrary, one thought, or at least pretended to think, that it sounded piquant and funny with errors in pronunciation and grammar, one even copied it out of some kind of courtesy.”¹⁶ This could maybe work in private life but not when she gave a public speech! Her Swedish was for a long time so bad that she and Edmund preferred English. Over time, her grammar improved through reading, she was, for example, fond of Vilhelm Moberg, and she hired a speech teacher. However, she never got rid of her German “r” and she refused radio and television interviews. The children later had a guilty conscience for teasing her about it.

As a married woman, Sibylla concentrated on domestic life at Haga Castle, on her children, and on following Edmund in his rounds of representation and competition. She was incredibly shy at first but overcame it. Her first round of representation with Edmund took place in Västerbotten on 20-28 February 1933. The visit was a meticulous display of Swedish misery and poor housing conditions. Lubbe Nordström's “lortsverige” (swedish squalor). They visited schools, school homes, work cottages and other facilities for children, and Sibylla handed out candy to the children. When there were roads, they went by car. In the mountains when they visited Lapland, there was a sledge. The children thanked her for the candy with choral singing of “bä, bä white lamb” and the like, very appropriate due to Sibylla's white lamb fur. After Edmund's death, Sibylla returned every two years and was finally quite warmly received. Her first assignment was as patron of the Swedish Girl Scouts. She went in for the task, took all the necessary tests and participated in Scout camps both within and abroad. Her nickname as a Girl Scout was Håkåå (her royal highness). She was also involved in the foundation “De dövas väl” (welfare for the deaf) and stood in the stalls and sold.

Eventually, Princesses Margaretha (1934-), Birgitta (1937-), Desirée (1938-) known as the Haga princesses or Hagasessorna, were born, and then Christina (1943-) and CG (1946-). The children did not know anything about Sibylla's family. The silence was so compact that it was not until her teens that Princess Christina began to wonder about her mother's origin. It came as a surprise to both her and CG when they realized how large their German family was. Sibylla was the second oldest of five siblings. They had three uncles, one aunt and 13 cousins on her side. (Their Swedish family consisted of two uncles, one aunt and six cousins.)

*

After the war, Sibylla had a bad reputation. In a way, it is easy to understand: She was German (her own explanation¹⁷). She stayed neutral. She refused to criticize her father. What she did during the war to earn her anonymous hate letters with titles such as “betrayers”, “bloody German”, “don't come here again” and unpleasant books about the German concentration camps etc. is unclear despite two biographies & a long interview with daughter Christina: Per Svensson's biography “Han som aldrig fick bli kung” (He that never became king) (that also describes Sibylla) from 2006, Roger Lundgren's biography “Sibylla, en

¹⁵ Margit Vinberg. Prinsessan Sibylla: Så är det att vara tittobjekt, symbol och fembarnsmamma. Vecko Journalen, 1965:30.

¹⁶ Margit Vinberg. Prinsessan Sibylla: Så är det att vara tittobjekt, symbol och fembarnsmamma. Vecko Journalen, 1965:30.

¹⁷ Ebba Samuelsson. Prinsessan Sibylla. Svensk Damtidning, 1972:39.

biografi” (Sibylla, a biography) from 2007 and Lena Rainer's article “Sibylla – Prinsessa på undantag” (Sibylla – An exceptional princess) in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* on 2 November 1997. She did some concrete work. On 1 May 1942, she became honorary chairman of the Swedish Women's Car Corps (SKBR). Chairwoman Irma Ulrich later said: “If Princess Sibylla had not had the courage to be the public face of the corps, we would simply not have existed. The princess made an historic contribution for which we all admire her. The idea - that women should drive a truck and participate in the voluntary defence effort behind the wheel - first seemed ridiculous. But the princess levelled all resistance and the organization has since proved itself.”¹⁸

However, it is clear that at the end of the war Sibylla still had feelings for Germany. The two oldest children took part in the victory celebrations inside Stockholm. She herself shut herself up in her room. As soon as possible, she visited Coburg incognito and stayed there for a few weeks, helping her parents who were barred from the castle. It became a habit. Her father died in 1954, her mother in 1970. It took until 1965 for her to publicly distance herself from her father's actions. “We all believed then that he [Adolf Hitler] would be able to help Germany get on its feet ... one let oneself be deceived by the dynamism of his appearance and was impressed that he created a kind of order out of chaos. You were bewitched, hypnotized, you didn't understand what was going on under the surface. Only from a distance could you see and think clearly, then you understood, then you came to your senses”.¹⁹ It seems to have been under pressure. Queen Louise died in 1965 and Sibylla became first lady of the kingdom. As such, she could not defend a Nazi, even if he was her father.

With all this criticism, Sibylla seems to have lost faith in the future. She withdrew within her shell, chose her interactions with the utmost care and occupied herself with her representation and her children. The aggressiveness she sometimes showed gave her an undeserved reputation for being thick skinned.²⁰ In private it could sound like: “Not only have the Nazis destroyed my life in Germany - now they have done the same in Sweden.”²¹ Her friend Estelle Bernadotte described her mood as “a soft strength and a hard prickliness that hurt her herself more than others”. Be that as it may, Sibylla had a short fuse and expected to be obeyed by both children and servants. “She has a way of saying it without words that is very effective. The eyes shrink, the lips tighten and the voice becomes tense.”²² When someone opposed her it could sound like: “Bengt-Herman shall be silent.” I fell silent. Her eyes flashed in a dark colour, then brightened and with a smile and she continued, “and in addition I hope that Bengt-Herman has a nice day”.²³ Or when she would excuse herself to the nanny Ingrid Björnberg: “But I guess Nenne knows I didn't mean anything.” - Well, I always used to answer - I was scared anyway!²⁴

Sibylla never became popular but possibly respected: “What Princess Sibylla is for those closest to her, only the closest know. For the Swedish people, she is primarily handsome, with all that this word means. Style also requires a certain hardening. ... She knows her profession. Dog exhibitions and homelessness exhibitions and car exhibitions and blue wings

¹⁸ Gunnel Hessel. Den personliga lyckan har fått komma i andra hand. Artikel 2. *Svensk Damtidning*, 1965:15. [Intervju med förbundsordf för Sveriges kvinnliga bilkårers riksförbund Irma Ulrich.]

¹⁹ Margit Vinberg. Prinsessan Sibylla: Så är det att vara tittoobjekt, symbol och fembarnsmamma. *Vecko Journalen*, 1965:30.

²⁰ ”Året Runts medarbetare.” Om Sibylla. *Året Runt*, 1964:19.

²¹ Roger Lundgren. Prinsessan Sibylla – ett kungligt livsöde. *Kungliga magasinet*, 2013:1.

²² Bertil Lagerström. Hurdan är hon egentligen Sibylla? *Året Runt*, 1957:15.

²³ Bengt-Herman Nilsson. *Skidspår och stickspår : memoarer*. 2007.

²⁴ Elisabeth Reich. Intervju med Ingrid Björnberg om prinsessan Sibylla. *Husmodern*, 1979:2-3.

(junior girl scouts; brownies), city museums, Västerbotten's household schools, lotteries and Nobel dinners, she manages perfectly. Perhaps the enthusiasm is not always total, but she is always courteously attentive.”²⁵

Her 40th anniversary in 1948 was a quiet family affair in Haga Castle. The servants paid their respects. She was courted by her organizations. First 300 Girl Scouts cheered and sang in her honour, and she received 10 candleholders in brass symbolizing the Scout Law's 10 points. It was cold and Sibylla was bareheaded. Her breath stood like smoke among the outdoor torches. The candleholders were handed over one by one in mutual salute.²⁶ The 50th anniversary in 1958 she chose to spend abroad in an unknown location. The day before departure, the family had a private party and CG gave her his first speech ever. It didn't go well but everyone was finally so moved by the effort that they cried together. From 1948, Sibylla used to visit the Riviera every year. Perhaps at the invitation of Prince Bertil who had bought a villa there to spend time with his mistress Lilian Craig. More about her later.

Previously Edmund had always stepped in when there were problems. It was believed that she matured and deepened during the first years of the 1950s when she was forced to face the difficulties herself. This was an experience that she tried to pass on to the children: “That everybody must overcome his or hers own problems, however difficult they may be, and not burden somebody else.”²⁷

The Republican debate caused Sibylla some unexpected concerns. Her daughter Desirée was to be confirmed on July 20, 1954. It would be on the mainland and Sibylla was in a hurry to the ferry that was to depart from Färjestaden on Öland. When you go in a car from Solliden you pass a barrier about 75 meters from the railway station that is controlled from the station house about 50 meters away. The red warning lights flash when the booms are dropped. Sibylla honked and continued straight ahead under the bars. This angered the Republican-minded station inspector George Thurfors at Färjestaden railway station, to the point that he reported the incident to the police. The sentence was 1500 kronor for negligence in traffic. The reason for the urgency was alleged to be that Sibylla had been misinformed about the departure time. She was used to board as the first car and didn't want the other cars to be forced to wait for her arrival.

Since this was the first time ever that a royal was tried before a public court, the case caused great controversy. The royal courts excuses were met with mockery. All of Sibylla's previous misdemeanours were brought to light. November 13, 1949, her Cadillac had collided with an Opel, unclear whether it was Sibylla or the chauffeur at the wheel, and both cars had been pretty hard scratched. On December 10, 1951, her chauffeur had refused to stop for a police officer despite being hailed three times because they were late for the Nobel Party. The incident ended so unfortunately that they hit him. The royal court wrote several letters of apology and the charges were apparently dropped. Journalist Staffan Skott has later produced further episodes - a number of metal injuries - as evidence of Sibylla's shortcomings as a driver.²⁸

*

²⁵ Knut Hagberg. Sanningen om Sibylla. Vecko Journalen, 1954:46.

²⁶ Svensk Damtidning, 1948:5.

²⁷ Året Runt, 1958:3.

²⁸ Staffan Skott. Alla dess Bernadottar. 1996.

There were rumours about the enormous fortune that Sibylla would inherit from her mother. According to rumour her father had been one of the richest men in Germany. However, there was no clear division between state and private property in the duchy. When he abdicated in 1918, he lost almost everything and “lived in misery”. Probably an exaggeration but he was forced into things like making the recipients pay themselves for their orders of distinction. In 1928 after extensive litigation he regained those properties that were considered private.

In his case, however, the resignation of the throne was in accordance with the consensus, and the state of Coburg proved very generous to him at the time of the “divorce”. He was granted free access to Veste Coburg and the family established themselves there in a housing wing, “Fürstenbau”. In addition, he received the castle of Callenberg with domains and the Swiss Rosenau along with one million gold marks in cash. Gotha, which after the revolution joined Thuringia, bailed out the duke by allocating him Schmalhalden's vast forests, valued at around fifteen million marks. He also owned the Cariburg castle in Austria and the Hinterriss castle in Tyrol. The Duke was thus a very wealthy man, and the family - except in formal terms - came to occupy almost the same position for many years to come as before the revolution. They lived court life with court marshals, master of ceremonies, chamberlains and ladies-in-waiting, and this was still the position at Princess Sibylla's engagement in 1932.²⁹

The many castles with estates and art collections were organized as foundations. Representatives of the family were part of the boards and if there were any profit from the business it would go to the family. After the end of the war, the East German properties were confiscated. Residual properties in West Germany and Austria gave Sibylla 10-15 thousand kronor per year. The inheritance in 1970 from her mother was estimated at 100 thousand kronor. The financial situation was difficult enough for her sister Caroline to 1966 open a lawsuit. The sister had been married three times, was now penniless and cohabited with her former driver at 700 kronor a month from the foundations, not subsistence level but meagre. In the newspapers, Sibylla appeared heartless as well as stingy. The process paid off so that Caroline raised her dividend 10-fold. In 1979, she also made money of her princesses title by adopting an American businessman as her son. The pleasure of becoming a prince cost one million. Half to Caroline, half to her agent. CG's cousin Prince Andrew tried to reclaim some of the properties in former East Germany on behalf of the foundations, but this seems to have failed. In any event, CG and the siblings have renounced all claims. Queen Louise too claimed to have confiscated properties in Eastern Europe.

According to unofficial data, Sibylla's Swedish wealth amounted to SEK 4-5 million, most of it through inheritance. This was an exaggeration, as most of it was possessed by Sibylla for a limited time and would be transferred to CG on his 21st birthday. Her own money was her widow's pension, an inheritance of 400 thousand from Gustaf V, a sports cottage on Ingarö that she had received as a gift from Edmund and various inventory.³⁰ The proceeds, including her mother's inheritance, were according to the estate inventory about one million.³¹ There were also four millions that Edmund had locked in secret funds. While Edmund was alive, Sibylla had no personal appanage. She received 100,000 per year. Her total income was about 180 thousand per year, which should suffice for 15-20 people. There

²⁹ Så blev hon prinsessa av Sverige. Hemmets veckotidning, 1956:4.

³⁰ Michael Jägerblom. Sanningen om Sibyllas rikedomar. Vecko Journalen, 1970:43.

³¹ Svensk Damtidning, 1973:24.

is a report that at one point she sold off some of her jewellery to cope with the situation. The children inherited clothes after their mother and each other and there was no question of any excesses.

As the children grew up, Sibylla was forced into the daylight as a person. There was much speculation as to why she did not remarry. There were many who were willing. She reportedly maintained a relationship with a friend of the family, banker Kjell Hägglöf, whose wife baroness Gunvor Rålamb was disabled after a car accident. In which case, they possibly met in hotels during Sibylla's many car trips to the continent. Edmund's adjutant Malcolm Murray is also mentioned. Maybe because he remained a bachelor all his life. Both were her escorts in social life which was nice if exhausting. Sibylla was witty, beautiful and happy to dance into the early hours.

The following is claimed as to why she remained unmarried: (1) By marrying a commoner, she would have been forced to renounce her princesses' title and thus the right to raise CG.³² (2) As a princess and royal mother, she would become the first lady of the kingdom and have a not insignificant influence.³³ (3) As a remarried woman, she would have been forced to renounce the money after Edmund. The will was formulated so that she received the return on his fortune, in today's monetary value about 50 million, but only as long as she was unmarried. (4) She had begun to get used to running her own life.

Sibylla had a choice in about 1950 and she chose freedom, social position and economic independence. A not so wild guess is that it was this rather than her German nature that was behind much of the latter hostility. It ain't easy being a princess in the Kingdom of Sweden.

³² Prinsessan Sibylla sa nej till friare. Året Runt, 1967:5.

³³ Roger Lundgren. Sibylla – en biografi. Albert Bonniers förlag, 2007.