

Swedish Rotaryklubb Rolls Out Red Carpet

Maryalice Knecht Hears Of Swedish Trolls, Flits From Simrishamn to Italy, Back Again



Maryalice Knecht, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Knecht, Dallas, is the only one of the Dallas Rotary Club foreign exchange students who did not finish at Westmoreland High School. Maryalice is taking her senior year work at Simrishamn, Sweden. Since arriving there, she has had a trip to Milan, Italy, and has been entertained by the Simrishamn Rotary Club, which has taken her under its wing and is giving her as varied an experience as possible during her year in Sweden.

August 12 and 13. There was a carnival in town Saturday night and Sunday. It was very much like a small town fair at home with the usual concession stands and a few rides. There were bands which played each night for dancing. On Saturday night Eva Davidson was crowned queen of the Carnival and everything got under way. Sunday afternoon was the Carnival parade in which half of "us Davidsons" participated— including me! Eva, of course, rode around in a carriage decorated with flowers. Barbro and Helena were "Trolls" along with about half a dozen other little children. They wore burlap bags with bright patches and rope tails. Barbro wore a yellow wig with braids that stuck straight out and Helena had her hair all messed up and their faces were painted. They were really cute. I played a nut! (I know what you are going to say—type Casting!) Actually I was a member of this

TV-crazy family and I sat there on the float staring at a big cardboard TV set (with a man inside it impersonating a Swedish star) and doing silly things like pouring coffee on the rest of the family instead of in the cups, and "eating" saucers when I reached for a pastry and all the time staring at the TV set. There were quite a few floats in the parade, some representing television programs like "Bonanza," and some of Swedish things. It was quite different from the parades I have been in with the Keyettes. "Trolls" are from Scandinavian folklore. They are a race of supernatural beings, sometimes giants, sometimes dwarfs, sometimes good, sometimes evil. Many Swedish people have small carved trolls for keepsakes, much as we have figurines of china.

August 26. Saturday morning Eva and I got up at 6 A. M. and Wendell took us to Kristianstad where we got a plane to Stockholm. It was really a neat plane although it was not very big. I took some pictures from it and I hope they turn out because the scenery is so beautiful with many lakes and forests. We got to Stockholm about 9:30 A. M. and went to Eva's Grandmother's where we stayed. We took the trolley to the downtown area and did some sightseeing. What a beautiful city! Almost every street has trees and it is the cleanest city I have ever seen. The Palace and Parliament buildings are very impressive. There is a big park not far from the center of things where they have all sorts of old, old houses and buildings from long ago. There is a sweet little Church there and while we were there a couple were married. All the attendants were in native costume. I hope the pictures of it turn out so you can see how colorful it was. We spent at least two hours in the Nordic Museum and we only saw about half of the things displayed there. There was so much historical stuff there, many of the things dating from the time of Gustavus Adolphus and the Thirty Years Wars. There was also a section containing toys and doll houses that were very old. It is a very interesting place to see. Saturday night we went to the Royal Opera and saw "Carmen." It was quite impressive but Swedish seen is harder to understand than Swedish spoken. Sunday we took a hour long boatride around the canals and saw the American and British embassies, Ingrid Bergman's former home, the first automatic lighthouse in the world and many other things.

September 10. Marianne, Helena, Barbro and I got up at 5:00 A. M. to catch a train for Stockholm. We arrived in Stockholm about 1:20 P. M. It was a beautiful trip by train and I got a closer view of the lakes this time. We came to celebrate Uncle Erik's 60th birthday. He is Papa Davidson's brother-in-law. (Mr. and Mrs. Davidson want me to call them Mama and Papa, so I am using it in my letters to keep in practice.) Over a hundred people came to wish Uncle Erik a happy birthday, and forty-eight bouquets were sent to him in addition to the ones which people brought in with them. There were twelve of us for dinner (served by a butler who looked just

like something out of the movies). Although we would probably have enjoyed hamburgers at the Ranch Wagon almost as much, it is fun to say you have eaten:

- Caviar hors d'oeuvres
Turtle soup
Squab
Pate de foie Gras
Tossed Salad
Ice Cream

Sunday afternoon we toured around the "old" town—a really quaint section with tiny, tiny streets and old, old houses built very close together. There are lots of funny little shops and many of the artists live in this section. Monday Marianne and I went shopping at a beautiful department store, very modern and so many lovely things to buy!

September 18. This morning (my Birthday) I received presents from everyone in the family and dinner tonight will be my choice of food. This is one of the birthday privileges and I requested that we have Wiener Schnitzel, it is delicious. After school some friends brought me flowers and we sampled my birthday cake. It was a huge round one with pale green icing under which were two layers of cake separated by whipped cream and jelly "yum." My name, two pink rosettes and seventeen pink and green candles completed the decorations.

About 8:30 P. M. Mr. and Mrs. Gidlund and the President of the Rotaryklubb came down. The president presented me with a lovely travel clock and an envelope with 100 krona in it, and the Gidlunds gave me a beautiful ring. I had such a wonderful birthday, did you ever hear of anyone so lucky as I am? I do hope you will be able to meet Karin Gidlund while she is in Clarks Summit as an exchange student. Her parents are just wonderful to me.

September 25. We got back from Italy about noon today. I will start at the beginning of the trip and tell you about it. Thursday night we got the "Malmö"-Copenhagen plane. The airport at Copenhagen is ultra-modern. After an hour lay over there we got aboard a DC 7 for Milan, this was about 10:30 P. M. We were to land in Milan about 2:00 A. M. but one of the engines wasn't working right so we stopped at Zurich, Switzerland about 2:15 A. M. and we stayed there about an hour and a half. We started off again in a Caravelle and finally arrived in Milan. After customs and getting settled at the hotel it was 5:45 and we had to get up at 7:30 to get the train for Pisa. We traveled by way of Bologna and Florence and there are the most gorgeous mountains and scenery in that region. From Florence to Pisa the land is rather flat. Italy is really hot about 76 to 85 and very humid. We stayed at a nice but old fashioned hotel I right in the center of town on the bank of the Arno River. After lunch, which included first of all spaghetti and then meat and potatoes (easily two meals here in Sweden or at home) we met some of the exchange students. There were representatives from Italy, France, Belgium, England, Holland, Austria, Switzerland and Germany. There were also adults

from each of these countries and also from Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Portugal. We had some interesting discussions. In the late afternoon (Saturday) we visited the Baptistery, the Cathedral, the Cemetery and, of course the famous Leaning Tower. These four are all on the one square. We climbed the tower right to the very absolute top at sunset and I took some pictures which should be fabulous. Early Sunday morning we took our bus to Lucca which is up in the mountains and very beautiful. I never saw so many Churches in such a small place. There was a wedding at one of the Churches while we were there. All the people were dressed in black just like at a funeral, and all the time the priest was talking a photographer was moving around inside the rail taking pictures. Some of the group went to the seashore for a swim but we could not go because we had to catch a train for Milan. It was cloudy the next morning at six A.M. when we took off from Milan but we climbed above the clouds and it was beautiful. The Alps were a breathtaking sight from the plane, and the villages look just like clusters of doll houses.

We got very little sleep on our trip, and we ate too much, but it was a very interesting and unforgettable experience. I never expected to get to Italy, it was really more than I could have hoped for. I have already seen so much and the year is just beginning for me. I have been having a wonderful time since July. Our boat trip abroad the Q. S. S. Arkadia gave us the opportunity to meet many new and interesting people. Although the weather was cold and the sea choppy, we survived quite well. Sleep was an unheard of item but we had lots of fun losing it. In Amsterdam I stayed overnight with Joan Mumford (an exchange student from Scranton) and her very charming Dutch hosts, Dr. & Mrs. Von Enst. Their home in a tiny suburb called Loenen on the Vecht was built in the year 1620 and it is extremely beautiful. The next day Dr. Von Enst showed us Utrecht and part of Amsterdam before putting me on the night train to Copenhagen. I was met in Copenhagen by Mrs. Davidson, my new "Mother," and we saw some of that very beautiful city before taking the ferry to Malmö and Sweden. From Malmö to Simrishamn it is about sixty miles, straight across Skane, the southernmost province of Sweden. This is a wealthy farming region and the U-shaped one-story buildings which combine both house and barn are very picturesque. Skane is a rather flat country; even the largest hill in the province would make a poor showing next to Pennsylvania's beautiful hills and mountains. Simrishamn is lovely. We are right on the Baltic Sea and the harbor and fishing fleet would tempt any artist. Fishing is a rather flat here and Simrishamn ranks third in Sweden in size of the catch. The population is a little less than that of Dallas, but the town seems larger at first glance because it is more centralized, there are no country residential sections like Shrine Acres or New Goss Manor. The Davidson home is about four blocks from the central square around which is the main business and shopping district. Dominating the square is the beautiful twelfth-century Church of St. Nikolais, patron of the sailors. The only Church in town, it is Lutheran, the state religion of Sweden.

Our house is of necessity large; I have five sisters. Eva, 16, was in East Sroudsburg last year as an exchange student. Marianne is 14 and has spent the last two summers in Israel where she hopes one day to live. Helena, a shy nine year old; Barbro, a seven year old tomboy; and Lotia, a darling baby of a year and a half complete the list. The three youngest, of course, don't speak English and the first few weeks our "conversations" were unique. Fortunately we are now able to get most of our ideas across. Mrs. Davidson does her own housework, cooking, washing and ironing and all. She has a lady come in in the morning and again after lunch to help her, but she works right along with her. I take care of my own room, and help with dishes and table setting sometimes, but we girls are not expected to do too much. Mr. Davidson is the Disponent (managing-director) of a shoe last factory which does international business and he travels a great deal in connection with his work. He is very interesting to talk with. I like my family very much. At the factory there are always a few foreign technicians who are very much a part of the family. We have a very nice big brother from Jamaica. He has been in Denmark and Sweden for several years and speaks both languages. The day I arrived, a Finnish boy was leaving and for the past eight weeks an Israeli Chemistry student has been here. At other times boys from the Philippines, India, Sudan and Ghana have been included. Quite an international family!

Rotary. The Simrishamn Rotaryklubb, my host for the year, has approximately thirty members. Meetings are conducted in the same manner as at home, however, the Swedes are much more formal than we are in America. Before the dinner each member solemnly greets every other member with a bow, a handshake,

and a formal "God Dag, God Dag." This custom would look a little out of place at home but it is very common here. The Rotaryklubb just last week started a new program for me which I am enjoying very much. They feel that living with just one or two families will not present a complete picture of life in Simrishamn. Therefore, each member will have me as a guest for a day, an afternoon or an evening. Some of the visits may be special, a trip or theater party for example, while others will just be a day with the family.

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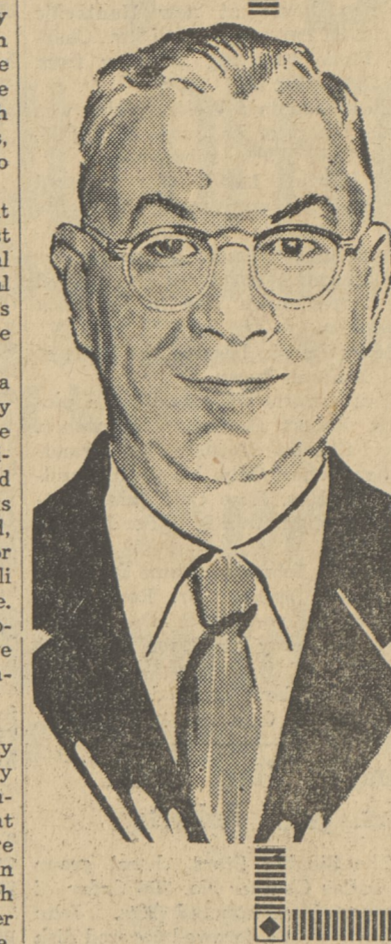
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