

News from Sweden #2
Nyheter från Sverige
23 July 2020

As conveyed by friends across the pond we made the right decision, original intentions with different circumstances aside, now very different from an unfolding world dynamic, an incomprehensible boiling global pot seemingly inescapable.

Those following Carl's Facebook site have seen photos of the beautiful area where we reside and events we've attended. Outside this fairytale lifestyle full of music concerts, shopping runs, wooded strolls, summer cottages (stugas), vegetable and flower gardens, and meeting in person newly DNA-discovered cousins, surges a world so incredibility dynamic meaning swirls bewildering and horrific.

Since our last visit things have changed. Midsummer (Midsommar), Sweden's most popular and exciting country-wide holiday has passed, celebrated in small groups and usually only family. At our little pad we were three, comparatively quiet and civilized, unfortunately rather un-Swedish in that regard. We sang snaps visor mostly off key. The food was really good Mrs. E.: new potatoes, gravlax, a variety of sill, smoked sik, Norrlands ljus beer, tunnbröd with butter so rich it's sinful, and an aquavit from Holland province made from fläder (elderberry). Princess tårta topped it all off amid a summer day for the memory book. Covid-19 changed everything. It is unreal. We are, despite the hovering dread, having a great time, keeping the humor.

The after-effect of the changing light and dark cycle is powerful, starting imperceptibly at first but now quite

noticeable: on arrival we had 18 hours and 15 minutes of light. Today we will experience 17 hours and 23 minutes of light. These periods are separated by an ever-lengthening and dimishing twilight and by late August we will have a nighttime. Temperatures have ranged from 10-28 C here and in the more northern regions reached 35 C a temperature at which Swedes become uncomfortable. Water is warm at 20C (they say). We reminisced of Hawaii.

After arriving we were dealing with jet lag and the day-night differences made it rather tough to sleep and shift body time by 9-hours backward or forward, whichever way 'they' finally decided to go. I love the long days and do not want to sleep, making it all the tougher. In summer Swedes use blackout curtains reminiscent of WW II. For a while we didn't know what day it was and occasionally have to check the phone to be sure. The smart phone is essential here. Absolutely ones' entire social and economic life is controlled by using the smart phone or smart watch, iPad. or computer loaded with app for every organization or occasion. It is a cashless society, and if you have some, people won't take it. This is very hard for us to appreciate.

The most common conversational topic, other than the pandemic and an occasion brief mention of the status of the USA, is the weather, speaking of which has been all over the place. We love it, especially the occasional summer rains called 'enstaka skurar' here. Carl's early days-of-summers in Cleveland were brought to mind. The rains are not a deterrent to Swedes. An umbrella and some type of cover is part of daily clothing. This is a country where the weather 'is as it is'. Så där (so there). This habit we are still trying to learn, experiencing more than once weather changes within

minutes: caught in a horrific rainstorm while leaving a store recently I mentioned to the young women standing next to me in typical California bravado, 'in California we call this liquid sunshine'. She quickly replied, 'In Sweden we call this Summer'. The sky, always exciting, is almost never just clear and blue as Californians are accustomed to.

The USA is seldom covered in the newspapers and not much, if at all, on TV. The EU and the Pandemic is the big topic. Immigration and refugee policy are very hot political topics here. The Covid-19 numbers in Sweden have fallen dramatically from a high infectious rate around Midsummer to almost none at all now. As mentioned in a previous article the 'herd' theory is still being discussed and evaluated. It was based on no knowledge of this novel virus and the known viral theory. A big difference here is the politicians' stay out of it and only enter the game when policies or recommendations are to be announced. The decisions are made by the Country's Chief Scientist for Epidemiology in conjunction with other scientists and medical specialists. Sweden had a pandemic plan drawn up in 2006 but never updated it. In Europe the five countries reporting most cases and deaths are Russia (783 328), United Kingdom (295 817), Spain (266 194), Italy (244 752) and Germany (202 799).

It pays to do your homework. While most of our legal integration into the social system has been moderately smooth and straight forward, other acts of normal, civilized living have not. One can not do anything without a personal number (Swedish social security number). Ingrid has one but still had to activate her citizenship and PN. Once that was done it became somewhat easier. Carl is now a legal resident, has

the Swedish equivalent of a green card (uppehållstillstånd), has a personal number (card in the mail) and is in the 'system'.

Getting vehicle insurance and setting up the internet and TV has ranged from tense to nightmarish. The Swedish system and various supporting subsystems are extremely complex based on a theory derived from Heller's book 'Catch 22'. The security overreach for banking, TV access, or anything else has taken the most time and energy. It is unnecessarily complicated, and Swedes openly complain, a characteristic stereotype.

Oh! did we forget to tell you; it is summertime in Sweden and the living is done in the outdoors and in the countryside. Summer hours are in effect (means not working or maybe working), students work in the stores and seldom know anything. As the summer rolls on they do improve. We actually had one the other day that knew where to locate the milk. We asked the sweet thing at the bank how to do an online item, and she said, "you have to do it yourself". Swedes are a self-reliant tribe.

så där är det (so there it is)

Calle o Ingrid