

Glimpses of My Dermatological Life: Working in Sweden 1961–1966 and Then Back to Finland

PAUL-ERIK UGGELDAHL

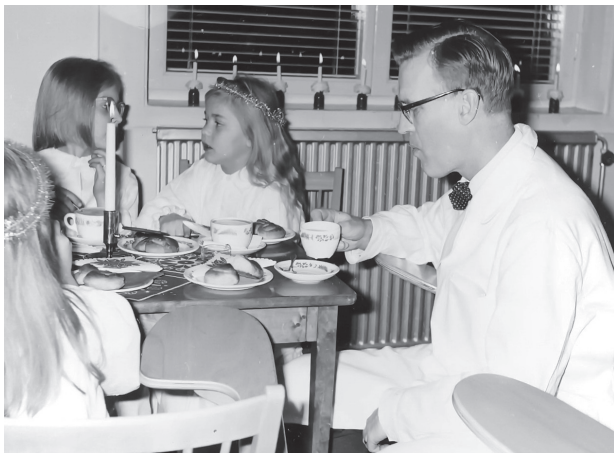
Suvikatu 8, FI-80200 Joensuu, Finland. E-mail: pe.uggeldahl@gmail.com

Paul-Erik Uggeldahl is now retired but his long dermatological active life contains many interesting episodes. After being invited to share some of his memories he wrote the following.



To my great astonishment I thought I saw a picture of my father in the Forum for Nordic Dermato-Venereology (No. 3–4, Vol. 19, p. 74, 2014). The photo of Sven Hellerström could have been my father; the only difference being that my dad was bald.

I met *Sven Hellerström* in 1964 at the third Hellerström Memorial lecture at Karolinska Institutet. That year I had the opportunity of working at the Department of Dermatology, University Hospital, Uppsala, when Nils Thyresson was Professor and Chair, and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Uppsala University. Nils asked me if I was interested in joining him to drive to Karolinska, where “your countryman Professor *Tauno Putkonen* is speaking about the Herxheimer reaction in syphilis”. I remember the lecture well. For the first time ever, Putkonen, whom I knew well, appeared to be strained when reading his paper. His Swedish was good, but the jokes he used to tell when lecturing were not successful on this occasion, and this made him feel uneasy. However, he was greatly astonished and delighted to observe me in the audience; the only Finn present.



Professor Nils Thyresson during a Lucia celebration in the late 1950s at the Uppsala University Hospital. Photo: Hudkliniken, Akademiska sjukhuset, Uppsala.

Despite being short-lived, my work at the University Hospital in Uppsala half a century ago, was of striking importance to me, especially so because I met so many interesting people within the field of dermatology: *Nils “Nisse” Thyresson, Lennart Juhlin, Sture Lidén, Sven Öhman, Ove Groth, Gerd Michaelsson, Holger Hansson*, and once, visiting, *Gunnar Swanbeck*.

One of Professor Thyresson’s duties was giving lectures to medical students, and I assisted on these occasions. It soon became obvious to me how difficult it is for an uninitiated person to describe a rash or dermatosis, or to explain treatments. The questions were: “What does the candidate see? What does the candidate do?”

Concerning treatment, a significant one I learned was: intense expectance.

*“Besides the noble art of getting things done,
There is the noble art of leaving things undone.
The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials.”*
(Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living*)

Another of the Swedish dermatologists who impressed me was *Marcus Skogh*. In August to September 1981 there was an “explosion” of a new rash-arthritis-fever disease in northern Europe. More precisely, in Sweden, Finland and Soviet Karelia. This rash disease was first observed and reported by Marcus Skogh in 1967, who saw 3 cases from the village of Ockelbo, whilst working in Gävle. Marcus named the disease “August–September fever”. Epidemics occur at 7-year intervals. The next epidemic occurred consequently in 1974, when cases were also observed in North Karelia, Finland. But something like the outbreak in 1981 never happened again. Later, Marcus assisted in determining the aetiology of this disease: Sindbis virus transmitted via mosquitoes. The present names of this disease are: Ockelbo disease in Sweden, Pogosta disease in Finland and Karelian fever in Russia (former Soviet Union).

The symptoms of the disease in these countries are similar.

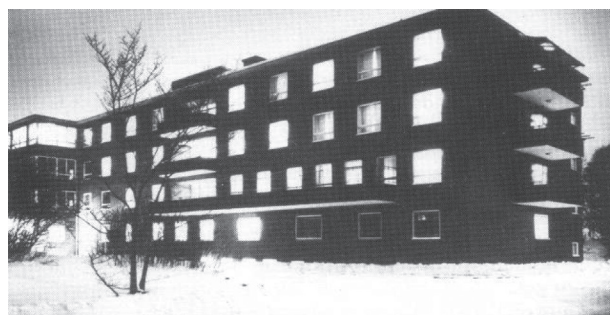
From mosquito-borne to tick-borne diseases, above all Lyme borreliosis (Lyme disease). Almost 30 years since our first contact, in 1987 in San Antonio Texas, USA (at an American Academy of Dermatology meeting), Drs *Eva Åsbrink and Anders Hovmark*, who carried out pioneering work on spirochaetal aetiology of the disease in Stockholm in the 1980s, have been my patient tutors in borreliosis, and more than that, close friends.



Carl Eric Sonck and – dandelions: Back in Finland, I was in contact with Professor Sonck at the time he was Professor of Dermatology and Venereology in Åbo (Turku) and later when he was retired and lived in Helsinki. Carl Eric started his work as a physician 1933 in the North Karelian city of Lieksa (first Brahea). He was both a doctor and a

botanist from the beginning, but also a painter and musician. His main botanical interest was in dandelions: “Maskros” in Swedish, “voikukka”, or butterflower in Finnish. I learned that there are 3,000 species of this “weed”. In our last telephone call Sonck told me that a potential new dandelion species had been found near the city of Lappeenranta in southeast Finland and that he was going to inspect it in a few months time. He was then approximately 95 years of age.

A famous Swedish internist, and friend of Sonck, whom I once met during my stay in Uppsala in 1964 was Professor *Erik Ask-Upmark*. This meeting happened in the dining-room at Uppsala University Hospital. From a table behind me I heard a loud voice saying: “It was extremely cold, -40°C ; the snow was a metre deep, and the Soviets 100 m from our posts, shooting sharp”. “Asken” was there as a volunteer in the Finnish winter war, 1939–1940. The “audience” was listening in deep silence. Sonck once related about his friendship with Ask-Upmark. I don’t remember how it started, but the essential activity was sending Christmas cards to each others. After years Carl Eric proposed to his friend that they should stop this “habit”, but that upset Erik A-U: “How can you, my best friend, suggest anything like this!” “So I had no alternative, just to continue as before”, sighed Carl Eric.



Departments of Dermatology and ENT, Regional Hospital, Linköping, inaugurated in 1951. Photo: Länslasarettet, Linköping 1895–1960”, Editor Lars Olofsson, 1994.

Another dermatologist who became a close friend was *Ove Groth*. Ove possessed that rare property, an easygoing nature, through which contacts develop. For a time he was the best-known Swedish dermatologist among Finnish colleagues. I once asked Ove how contacts worked in Sweden between university clinics and central hospitals. Ove was then Professor of Dermatology and Venereology in Linköping. He answered shortly that collaboration was good; something I have missed here in Finland.

During my “Swedish years”, 1961–1966, mostly at the Department of Dermatology in Linköping, I learned much about local treatment of dermatoses, especially eczema. I had 2 heads, both experienced practitioners, *Torsten Bjarke and Gunnar Brundin*. The latter insisted that I work at Uppsala University Hospital, where he himself had learned a great deal. Luckily, as already mentioned, I had the opportunity to work in Uppsala in 1964.

Before that I had an excellent opportunity to learn diagnostics at the Helsinki Skin Clinic, which was one of world’s largest in 1960. In fact, there were 2 clinics and I worked for some time in both of them; a total of 180 beds! However, there was only one other clinic at that time, the university hospital in Turku (Åbo) in Finland.